

Use Assessment to Help Students Develop a Christ-centered Worldview

Like you, I want students to develop a Christ-centered worldview. Like you, I want students to understand the importance of connecting what they study and Biblical principles, and I want students to proficiently connect what they study and Biblical principles.

How can you help your students understand the importance of connecting what they study and Biblical principles?

Use the same strategy you use for helping your students know what course content is important—give an assessment. That’s right. Give a Biblical perspective assessment.

This is reasonable. After all, you’ve taught your students a Biblical perspective of what they’re studying. You’re doing the same thing you do with other material you deem important.

By assessing Biblical perspective, you demonstrate that you think it’s important, and you help students think it’s important. Trust me—students correlate what’s assessed with what’s important. (If you don’t assess Biblical perspective, your students will probably conclude that Biblical perspective is as important as other things that come up in class that you don’t assess. Not good.)

How can you help your students proficiently connect what they study and Biblical principles?

Use the same strategy you use for helping your students get proficient at any skill you teach—give your students practice. You know practice helps. Writing essays helps your students improve their writing. Singing in concerts helps your students improve their singing. Giving speeches helps your students improve their speaking skills.

Why am I telling you this? Here’s why: Essays, concerts, and presentations help your students improve. Essays, concerts, and speeches are forms of assessment. Assessment helps your students improve.

What’s the connection? Assessment helps your students connect what they study and Biblical principles. That’s right. Your students will improve their connections as they complete assessments.

What type of assessment can you give your students?

Any type—provided the assessment prompt SCOREs.

What do I mean by “any type”? I mean you can give more than just tests. For example, you can ask your students to write essays, do projects, and give presentations.

What do I mean by “provided the assessment prompt SCOREs”? I mean that the assessment prompt should:

- ★ Be **S**tudent-friendly.
- ★ Require students to **C**onnect what they study, Biblical principle(s), and life.
- ★ Give **O**pportunities for student choice, as appropriate.
- ★ Be **R**igorous.
- ★ Be **E**ven worthy of being taught to.

Let me further explain these 5 characteristics of an effective Biblical perspective assessment.

(1) Your assessment prompt should be Student-friendly. The assessment needs to be student-friendly because your students are taking the assessment. So, use developmentally appropriate vocabulary. For example, you can use “disregard” with 10th graders, but not with 6th graders. Be sure to keep your assessment prompt to 75 words or less. That’s right, 75 words or less. Meaning, 75 words for high schoolers and less for lower grades.

The assessment doesn’t need to be teacher-friendly because the teacher isn’t taking the assessment. What do I mean by teacher friendly? I mean the prompt is written for the teacher. I’ve seen prompts only the teacher could really understand—500 words with no clear point. Remember, the goal is not to have an assessment prompt that makes sense to you, the teacher. The goal is to have an assessment prompt that makes sense to your students.

The following two assessment prompts use developmentally appropriate vocabulary and 75 words or less: Science 8: Presentation—Give a five-minute presentation on a piece of electricity-related technology in which you present the electrical device, the science of how it works, and a response to the following questions: How has this device impacted society? What’s a Biblical perspective of that impact?

English 10: Essay (750 words)—Compare/contrast how 2 characters from Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* illuminate the Biblical concept of shalom and apply that to a current event or personal situation.

Make sure your assessment prompt is student-friendly, not teacher-friendly.

(2) Your assessment prompt should require your students to Connect what they study, Biblical principle(s), and life. Through Christian education, you want your students to connect decisions made by government with Biblical principles regarding justice and peace. You want your students to connect ecology with Biblical principles regarding stewardship and how they dispose of trash. You want your students to connect story themes with Biblical principles regarding love and with the movies they watch.

How can you help your students make connections? By giving assessments that require your students to connect content/skills and Biblical principles or content/skills, Biblical principles, and life. In other words, don’t give an assessment that leaves things disconnected. That’s like putting chocolate chip cookie ingredients (flour, sugar, butter, eggs, vanilla, and chocolate chips) in a bowl, but not stirring them together to make dough. Which would you rather eat: chocolate chip cookie dough or unmixed ingredients?

What does an assessment prompt that requires students to make connections look like? Math 6: Construct a model of the solar system that accurately represents planet size and planet distance from the sun. Next, write a paragraph in response to the following question: What does math have to do with God’s world? In your paragraph, make three connections between the Biblical truths we studied in class and the model you made. Include quotations from two Bible passages.

English 12: Essay (1000 words): Use a Biblical perspective to explain the nature of evil, its relationship to suffering, and what you can do to respond Christianly to both. Support your thinking with literature, Biblical principles, and life experience.

Since Christian education is about helping students connect what they study, Biblical principles, and life, make sure your assessments are, too.

(3) Your assessment prompt should give Opportunities for student choice, as appropriate. Giving your students the opportunity to make choices gets them engaged and unleashes student learning and potential. I've seen this repeatedly. So have you.

On an assessment, how can you give your students opportunities for choices? By giving your students opportunities to choose, for example, the type of project, the topic of a presentation, the examples for an essay, and the color of paper for a poster.

Here are two assessment prompts that give students opportunities to make choices: Science 2: Writing—Write a two-paragraph report about a dinosaur of your choice. Include where the dinosaur lived, when it lived, what it ate, what it looked like, its size, how it got its name, who found it, and any other interesting facts you found. Give three examples of how your dinosaur shows God's creativity and power.

Social Studies 6: Presentation (5 minutes)—Teach your classmates about the aspect of ancient Egyptian culture/history you researched. Show what the Bible teaches about it and how it connects to you.

When designing assessments, build in opportunities for student choice.

(4) Your assessment prompt should be Rigorous. A rigorous assessment inspires student learning. In my experience, students enjoy challenging assessments and don't enjoy easy assessments. So, make your Biblical perspective assessment rigorous, not easy.

For example, don't give the following easy presentation assessment: Share something you found interesting (2-3 minutes). Instead, give the following rigorous assessment: Connect to something you studied this semester, develop that connection as your project, connect a Biblical principle to the topic, and connect the Biblical principle to your life in a way you can implement and report on. This may be done as an individual (5-8 min. presentation) or in a group (8-10 min. presentation).

Don't give an easy writing assessment: For one of the short stories you read, describe the theme (paragraph)." Instead, give a rigorous writing assessment: For one of the short stories you read, write a 500-word essay in which you identify a theme, analyze how the author uses literary conventions to communicate it, and evaluate it from a Biblical perspective.

Use rigorous assessments to inspire student learning, to inspire students to connect what they study and what the Bible teaches.

(5) Your assessment prompt should be Even worthy of being taught to. You might be wondering, "Is it really OK to teach to an assessment?" Yes. In fact, teaching to an assessment is an effective practice. When I teach, I look at what my students are supposed to learn, develop an assessment, and teach to it. Be sure to prepare your students by teaching to the assessment—just make sure your assessment is actually worthy of being taught to!

What does a worthy assessment look like? Here is a prompt for a 750-word essay for English 10: Using the poetry analysis skills we practiced, critique the lyrics of a favorite song (what the lyrics say, how they say it, and what God might think of what they say).

Make sure your assessments are worthy of being taught to—then teach to them.

So, what's a Biblical perspective assessment that SCOREs look like?

Here's a prompt for a 750-word essay: How significant a part of what's wrong with the world is the tendency to disregard the human dignity of others, and how should a Christian

respond? Support your answer with (1) examples from literature, history/current events, and your own experience, and (2) the Biblical principles of respecting God's image bearers and loving our neighbors.

Biblical perspective assessments that SCORE will help your students to understand the importance of connecting what they study and Biblical principles and to proficiently connect what they study and Biblical principles.

Biblical perspective assessments that SCORE will help teachers like you teach even more effectively. How? By providing you with assessment data you can use to modify instruction in order to increase student learning.

Just imagine: You're teaching Social Studies 7. You've just finished grading some projects in which you required your students to connect what they studied and Biblical principles. The grades are entered in your grade book, and the feedback sheets are ready to be passed back tomorrow. And now you're thinking about getting ready for your next unit.

Stop: Before you get ready for your next unit, take time to reflect on your assessment results. Take time to reflect on what your students learned, how you feel about it, and how you will modify instruction to increase student learning. This doesn't need to take more than 30 minutes. (And not doing this makes about as much sense as a basketball coach not reviewing game stats to determine what to do in practice.)

So, take time to reflect on your assessment results by yourself or with a partner. I recommend you reflect on a set of questions, for example: What was the assessment? How'd your students do on demonstrating their understanding/application of a Biblical perspective? How'd you prepare your students to demonstrate a Biblical perspective on your assessment? What satisfies/concerns you about how you prepared your students? What excites/challenges you about the assessment results on Biblical perspective? To maintain and/or increase student learning about Biblical perspective, what 2-3 things do you want to keep doing/start doing? Other insights? How will you modify instruction in order to increase student learning?

Here are some sample modifications:

In their projects, your Social Studies 7 students didn't demonstrate depth of understanding regarding the Biblical principles they cited. You think about your next unit. You had planned to have your students do a homework assignment in which they would identify their own principles. Instead, you decide to select 5 key Biblical principles and have your students study them for 2 class periods.

In their presentations, your Science 8 students used object lessons (for example, that Jesus is the light of world) instead of connections between what they studied (for example, light) and Biblical principles regarding God's creative power. You decide to do a lesson on the difference between object lessons and connections between what students study and what the Bible teaches.

In their essays, your English 10 students didn't effectively weave Biblical perspective into their essays. You decide to teach a lesson to help students (1) include Biblical perspective in the topic sentence and (2) state the topic sentence first and then support it with Bible verses.

Bottom line: Help your students further develop a Christ-centered worldview. Use assessment to help your students to understand the importance of connecting what they study and Biblical principles and to proficiently connect what they study and Biblical

principles. Develop a Biblical perspective assessment that SCOREs. Then, teach to your assessment, have your students take it, and use your assessment data to modify instruction.

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