

FRAMES OF REFERENCE FOR ASSESSMENT

(Linda Suskie, *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide*,
3rd ed., 290-7)

Term	Characteristics
Local standard	• Are your students meeting your standards of acceptable performance? • It is also called competency-based or criterion-referenced. • Implement the assessment on a small scale, and then use the results to discuss with colleagues what standards are appropriate. • Examples are a score of 4 on a 5-point rating scale or a score of 80 on a test.
External standard (Benchmark)	• Some disciplinary associations have explicit performance standards. • Tests required for licensure or certification usually have a minimum score. • An example is the Praxis exam for educators.
Peer comparisons	• How do your students compare to peers? • It is also called peer-referenced or norm-referenced or comparative. • Examples include national norms developed for published instruments, peer institutions, and peers within one's own institution. • Peers may be categorized as <i>current</i> or <i>aspirational</i>. • Collect information from those peers and compare your findings against those of your peers. • Published surveys and tests such as the National Survey of Student Engagement or CLA+ provide national norms and peer-referenced norms.
Value-added	• What gains in learning do your students show? • This requires using the same assessment at the beginning of the program and at the end to calculate the gain in knowledge. • It can be helpful if you have too few students to compare with confidence against standards, benchmarks, or norms. • This approach has fallen out of favor in recent years: 1. It can be difficult to motivate students to do their best on pre-assessments 2. Pre-assessments may not be available for students who transfer into the program. 3. The error margin can be large. 4. One cannot be sure whether other factors influenced the results. 5. It requires more work to keep track of the scores and compare them student by student.
Longitudinal (Historical trends)	• Is your program improving? • This approach compares current students against peers in prior classes. • It looks at changes in successive groups of students rather than change within one group or one student. • However, changes from one class to the next may be due to extraneous factors.