Glossary of Assessment Terms

Standards of Quality

- **Reliability** – Reliability relates to the consistency of an assessment. A reliable assessment is one that consistently achieves the same results with the same or a similar cohort of students. Factors that affect reliability include ambiguous questions, too many options within a question paper, vague marking instructions and poorly trained markers. The reliability of an assessment is based on the following:
  - Temporal stability – Performance on a test is comparable on two or more separate occasions.
  - Form equivalence – Performance among examinees is equivalent on different forms of a test based on the same content.
  - Internal consistency – Responses on a test are consistent across questions.

- **Validity** – A valid assessment is one that measures what it is intended to measure. For example, it would not be valid to assess driving skills through a written test alone. A more valid way of assessing driving skills would be through a combination of tests that help determine what a driver knows and what a driver is able to do. Validity of an assessment is generally gauged through examination of evidence in the following categories:
  - Content – Does the content of the test measure stated objectives?
  - Criterion – Do scores correlate to an outside reference? An example of Criterion evidence would be: Do high scores on a 4th grade reading test accurately predict reading skill in future grades?
  - Construct – Does the assessment correspond to other significant variables? An example of Construct evidence would be: Do ESL students consistently perform differently on a writing exam than native English speakers?
  - Face – Does the item or theory make sense, and is it seemingly correct to the expert reader?

Types of Assessments

- **Initial assessment** – Also referred to as pre-assessment or diagnostic assessment, initial assessments are conducted prior to instruction or intervention to establish a baseline from which individual student growth can be measured. This type of an assessment is used to know what the student's skill level and helps the teacher to explain the material more efficiently. These assessments are not graded.

- **Formative assessment** – Formative assessment is generally carried out throughout a course or project. Formative assessment may take the form of diagnostic, standardized tests, quizzes, or oral questions and are carried out concurrently with instructions. The result may count.

- **Summative assessment** – Summative assessment is generally carried out at the end of a course or project. Summative assessments are typically used to assign students a course grade. Summative assessments may take the form of tests, final exams, or projects and may be used to determine if the student passed or fails the class.

Basis for Comparison of Performance

- **Criterion-referenced assessment** – This assessment measures a student against defined and objective criteria. Criterion-referenced assessment is often, but not always, used to establish a person's competence. An example of a criterion-referenced assessment is the driving test in which learner drivers are measured against a range of explicit criteria to determine their driving competency.

- **Norm-referenced assessment** – This type of assessment is relative to the student body undertaking the assessment. It is effectively a way of comparing students. An example of a norm-referenced assessment is the IQ test in which the IQ of the student is measured against the IQ of the general population. Many entrance tests are norm-referenced, permitting a fixed proportion of students to gain entrance rather than exhibit an explicit level of ability.

- **Ipsative assessment** – This type of assessment compares the present performance against the prior performance of the person being assessed. One place where this might be implemented is in tests used with value-added modeling of teacher performance.

Form of Questioning

- **Objective assessment** – This is a form of questioning which has a single correct answer. Objective question types include true/false answers, multiple choice, and matching questions.

- **Subjective assessment** – This is a form of questioning which may have more than one correct answer or more than one way of expressing the correct answer. Subjective questions include extended-response questions and essays.

Setting Achievement Levels

- **Achievement Levels** – The levels of student achievement based on observed scale scores.

- **Achievement Level Descriptions** – Descriptions of the competencies associated with each level of achievement.

- **Cut Scores** – Scores on an assessment that separate one Achievement Level from another.