




## ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES


Understanding the requirements laid out in federal legislation is necessary, but these policies, in and of themselves, do not assure that youth will receive high-quality transition services. Helping all youth to make informed choices and achieve desired outcomes requires a structured, well-defined assessment process. This process should provide a full array of effective practices and coordinate the gathering of helpful planning information. To collect all needed data, assessment activities should include observations, interviews, record reviews, and testing/performance activities.

**Observation** is the process of watching or listening to an individual's behavior and performance and recording relevant information. This process can be structured or unstructured, formal or informal, obtrusive or unobtrusive. Observation has elements of the objective and the subjective, but objectivity should be emphasized. Also, because different observers may come to different conclusions, it may be important to have more than one observer.



**Interviews** are structured or unstructured conversations intended to gather information from an individual through a verbal question-and-answer format. Like observations, interviews can also be formal or informal. An interviewer can quickly gather key information about an individual, while at the same time building trust and a shared vision for the career planning process.

**Record Reviews** incorporate prior assessment results and should include records from schools and care providers, as available. A review of records can provide background information about academic achievement and performance, previous career planning and goals, and family involvement and support systems. Care should be taken that the information is up-to-date and from sources that have properly gathered the data. Legally obtained releases of information are usually required, and confidentiality



is essential when reviewing any assessment data or other protected records.

**Testing and Performance Reviews** account for a large share of the most common assessment activities of youth in transition. Testing “consists of administering a particular set of questions to an individual...to obtain a score” (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 2004, p. 6). Typically, scores are intended to be used for quite specific purposes. This type of data collection is generally more formal and structured and frequently requires specially trained persons to administer and/or score the test.

Performance reviews are activities that look at a whole spectrum of what has been learned and are more subjective, holistic, and qualitative in nature (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 2004, p. 252). Work experiences and related activities often are best evaluated using performance reviews. It is very helpful to have some written, objective standards for individuals to use in measuring behaviors. Observation rating forms are particularly valuable for recording behaviors and outcomes on various tasks and work experiences.

Written organizational procedures should guide the collection and review of available information, including observations, interview data, academic test scores, career interest profiles, work experience and job training histories, relevant disability diagnostic testing, etc. Care should be taken to avoid duplicating assessment activities. Information available from schools, family members, and referring agencies can fill important gaps in each youth’s academic or career planning profile. Appropriate releases must be secured to authorize the receipt and sharing of any confidential data or information. (Exhibit 1.1, at the end of this chapter, is a sample of an interagency release of information form.)

Assessment is not an end unto itself. The following principles should guide each step of the assessment process:

- The purposes and goals of assessment should be clear.
  - Assessment should be integrated into a larger plan of individualized services.
  - Assessment should consider environmental factors affecting the individual.
  - Formal assessment instruments should be carefully chosen with attention to their documented reliability and validity.
  - Formal assessments should be administered and interpreted by qualified personnel.
  - Assessment reports should be written in easily understandable language.
  - Assessment activities should be positive and lead to self-empowerment.
- Self-determination based on informed choices should be an overriding goal of assessment.
  - Assessment is a dynamic intervention process.
  - Assessment facilitates self-discovery of talents, goals, strengths, and needs.