

Perspective



# Employing workplace-based assessment as a tool to facilitate learning by strengthening the feedback component

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## Abstract

Workplace-based assessments (WPBA) have been recommended in both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. WPBA tools assess the “does” level in Miller’s framework for assessing clinical competence. In this perspective, we focus on the rationale for and effective use of WPBA tools as part of formative assessment and feedback for learners. WPBA tools are an effective approach to facilitate learning because they ensure that the content of the training program, the intended competencies, and the assessment align with each other.

The learning during the use of WPBA occurs via feedback offered to students; it predominantly informs the students about their progress and the areas in which more focus is required. Moreover, the feedback plays an important role in motivating students to continue learning and advises them on how their learning can be expedited, including the use of appropriate resources. In conclusion, workplace-based assessment tools in medical training should be used not only to conduct an authentic assessment but to also facilitate learning among students. The process of learning is facilitated by giving timely feedback in alignment with the students’ needs, and all faculty members should be encouraged to use the opportunity of assessment for the benefit of students.

## Introduction

In the field of medical education, it is a common saying that “assessment drives learning.”

(The statement “assessment drives learning” is common in medical education)

In fact, it is the responsibility of the educational system and the teachers to design a framework to assess core competencies to ascertain whether the student has learned or not.<sup>1</sup> It has been often recommended that assessment should be conducted in authentic settings and not as a proxy marker.<sup>1,2</sup> Recent developments in medical education have demonstrated a paradigm shift, wherein the focus has gradually shifted from the number of marks scored in high-stakes assessments to assessing the extent of clinical competencies and performance in workplace settings. To gauge this domain of learning, workplace-based assessments (WPBA) have been developed to assess workplace-based learning programs that can assess the “does” level in Miller’s framework for assessing clinical competence.<sup>1,2</sup>

Workplace-based assessments have been recommended in both undergraduate and postgraduate courses and have also been included in curricula.<sup>2,3</sup> WPBA tools can be broadly categorized based on the type of skill that can be tested, such as clinical, procedural, analytical, soft, or communication skills, along with professionalism, documentation, and reflection. WPBA tools can be effectively utilized by both teachers and the medical educational system to teach medical students.<sup>3</sup>

In this study, we focus on the rationale for and effective use of WPBA and feedback as part of the formative assessment of medical students.

## Scope of workplace-based assessments

WPBA tools are an effective approach to facilitating learning, since they can help ensure that the content of the training program, the intended competencies, and the assessment are aligned with each other.<sup>2</sup> These tools promote direct observation of a specific task assigned to students (such as history taking, physical examination,

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counseling) and, after the task, specific feedback is given to the student by the observer.<sup>2,3</sup> Several WPBA tools, such as mini-clinical evaluation exercises, clinical encounter cards, and clinical work sampling are already being used in medical training.<sup>2-4</sup> Furthermore, such assessments help students make progress towards attaining the learning outcomes and there is scope to provide feedback to the students during and after assessment, thus expediting learning.<sup>1,4</sup> Another advantage of WPBA is eliminating the limitations of conventional assessments, wherein students are not observed while in action and thus the opportunity to teach them is lost.<sup>1,3</sup>

### WPBA as a tool for learning

WPBA tools have been advocated for use in formative assessments as part of the ongoing learning process, emerging as opportunities to support and encourage learning.<sup>1</sup> Learning during the use of WPBA occurs via feedback offered to the students, predominantly informing the student about their progress and the areas in which more focus is required.<sup>3,4</sup> Moreover, the feedback plays an important role in motivating students to continue learning as well as advising them about how learning can be expedited, including the use of appropriate resources.<sup>3,4</sup>

### Feedback guided by WPBA

Feedback given to students during formative assessments is an effective mode for altering the approach of students towards learning and thereby enhancing their learning.<sup>2</sup> It has been recommended that WPBA tools can be used multiple times during the training period, since that will enhance the number of opportunities available for giving feedback and thereby enhancing learning.<sup>2,3</sup> However, regardless of the utility of the feedback, we must acknowledge that clinicians often fall short in giving feedback to students; this could be due to deficient skills in giving feedback or not being aware of the significance of feedback in improving learning.<sup>2-4</sup> This challenge can be effectively dealt with by informing faculty members about the scope and usefulness of feedback and the characteristics of effective feedback.<sup>4</sup>

Feedback offered by teachers after the use of WPBA tools should be given immediately after the assessment since it enhances the overall utility.<sup>4,5</sup> Teachers should give specific feedback targeting the behaviors of students

without being judgmental and without discouraging them. Simultaneously, teachers should motivate students to seek feedback and work with them to develop a shared action plan to attain the learning outcomes.<sup>2,3,5</sup> In addition, students should also reflect on their learning, which in turn encourages deep learning.<sup>2,4</sup>

### Conclusion

In conclusion, workplace-based assessment tools in medical training should not only be used to conduct an authentic assessment but also as a tool to facilitate learning among medical students. The process of learning is facilitated by giving timely feedback in alignment with the needs of the students, and all faculty members should be encouraged to use workplace-based assessment tools and effective and timely feedback for the benefit of students.

### Ethical approval

Not required

### Competing interests

None

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