



Professional Development Sessions on Rigorous Assessments (Part One)

Provided as a Part of ACEL's Webinar
Series on Rigorous Assessments (2018)



Australian Council for
Educational Leaders

Created by Barbara R. Blackburn

www.barbarablackburnonline.com

bcgroup@gmail.com

Professional Development One: Understanding Rigor

(Use one or more as matches your needs)

1. Assess teachers' current understanding. Ask teachers to answer the following three questions anonymously. Either have them answer them in advance and collate them, (which you can hand out for discussion) or use post-it notes.
 - a. What is rigor?
 - b. What are students doing in a rigorous classroom?
 - c. What are teachers doing in a rigorous classroom?
2. After a discussion of teachers' perceptions of rigor, hand out *The Beginner's Guide to Rigor* (attached). After they read it, allow them to discuss the content. Lead a discussion, adding information from this workshop.
3. Put teachers in two groups. Give each group one of the following articles to read and discuss. Then, have them partner with someone from the other group to share information. Finally, ask teachers to try one activity in their classrooms.

Three Strategies to Increase Rigor in the Classroom (attached).

3 Simple Strategies for More Rigorous Instruction (attached).

Professional Development Two: Basics of Rigorous Assessment

(Use one or more as matches your needs)

1. Use the attached article, *Rigorous Assessments*, to guide a discussion with teachers.
2. Use the article, *3 Statements that Describe Rigorous Assessments* (attached), to guide a discussion. Ask teachers to choose one of their assessments and compare it to the statements.

3. Listen to the podcast on assessment and share key information from this overview. As an alternative, teachers can listen and discuss (55 minute interview with Dr. Blackburn). <https://teachinglearningleadingk12.podbean.com/e/barbara-blackburn-rigor-and-assessment-in-the-classroom-186/>
4. Use Chapter One in *Rigor and Assessment in the Classroom* as a resource for self-study or for leading a discussion with leadership or faculty. Determine if there are any recommendations you need to explore further.

Professional Development Three: Planning and Linking Instruction and Assessment

(Use one or more as matches your needs)

1. Use Chapter Two in *Rigor and Assessment in the Classroom* as a resource for self-study or for leading a discussion with leadership or faculty on planning for rigorous assessments. Choose at least one idea to use in your school or classrooms.
2. Use Chapter Three in *Rigor and Assessment in the Classroom* as a resource for self-study or for leading a discussion with leadership or faculty on linking instruction and assessment to improve rigor. Choose at least one idea to use in your school or classrooms.

Professional
Development



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The Beginner's Guide to Understanding Rigor

Barbara R. Blackburn



Rigor is creating an environment in which each student is expected to learn at high levels, each student is supported so he or she can learn at high levels, and each student demonstrates learning at high levels (Blackburn, 2008).

When I am in schools working with teachers, I'm often asked why I care about rigor. They are also quick to tell me they care about rigor because they are told they have to. My response is simple. There are other reasons, such as the clear research base that shows our students need more rigor, new standards that require more rigor, or the number of students who graduate from school ill-prepared for college or the workforce.

But my most important reason is this: rigor is not about giving students more to do, or punishing them with more homework. Rigor is about helping students learn at higher levels, and that's why I became a teacher.

Defining Rigor

My definition of rigor has a sharp focus on instruction: creating an environment in which:

- each student is expected to learn at high levels,
- each student is supported so he or she can learn at high levels, and
- each student demonstrates learning at high levels.

Notice we are looking at the environment you create. The tri-fold approach to rigor is not limited to the curriculum students are expected to learn. It is more than a specific lesson or instructional strategy. It is deeper than what a student says or does in response to a lesson.

True rigor is the result of weaving together all elements of schooling to raise students to higher levels of learning. Let's take a deeper look at the three aspects of the definition.

Expecting Students to Learn at High Levels

Rigor is creating an environment in which each student is expected to learn at high levels. Having high expectations starts with the decision that every student possesses the potential to be his or her best, no matter what.

As you design lessons that incorporate more rigorous opportunities for learning, you will want to consider the questions that are embedded in the instruction. Higher-level questioning is an integral part of a rigorous classroom. Look for open-ended questions, ones that are at the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy and Webb's Depth of Knowledge.

It is also important to look at how teachers respond to student questions. When I visit schools, it is not uncommon to see teachers who ask higher-level questions. But I then see some of the same teachers accept low-level responses from students. In rigorous classrooms teachers push students to respond at high levels. They ask extending questions. If a student does not know the answer, the teacher continues to probe and guide the student to an appropriate answer, rather than moving on to the next student.



Supporting Students to Learn at High Levels

High expectations are important, but the most rigorous schools assure that each student is supported so he or she can learn at high levels, which is the second part of our definition. It is essential that teachers design lessons that move students to more challenging work while simultaneously providing ongoing scaffolding to support students' learning as they move to those higher levels.

Providing additional scaffolding throughout lessons is one of the most important ways to support students. This can occur in a variety of ways, but it requires that teachers ask themselves during every step of their lesson, "What extra support might my students need?"

Ensuring Students Demonstrate Learning at High Levels

The third component of a rigorous classroom provides each student with opportunities to demonstrate learning at high levels. What I've learned is that if we want students to show us they understand what they learned at a high level, we also need to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate they have truly mastered that learning. One way to accomplish that is through increased student engagement.

Options include requiring all students to respond either through pair-share, thumbs up or down, writing an answer on small whiteboards and sharing their response, or responding on a handheld computer that tallies responses. Such activities hold each student accountable for demonstrating their understanding.

Students should also demonstrate learning at a **high** level. As I mentioned earlier, using tools such as Bloom's Taxonomy or Webb's Depth of Knowledge (webbalign.org) can help you ensure that students are working at higher levels of critical thinking.

Conclusion

Rigor is much more than assigning more work for students to complete. True rigor involves increasing expectations for students, providing support and scaffolding so they can be successful, and giving them opportunities to demonstrate their understanding at higher levels of thinking.

Source: <http://www.barbarablackburnonline.com/rigor/>



Rigor Made Easy:

Three Strategies to Increase Rigor in the Classroom

Barbara R. Blackburn

Increasing Rigor Through Riddles

First, let's look at a way to increase the rigor of vocabulary. Usually, we ask students to demonstrate their understanding of a word or concept by restating the definition in their own words, or by using it in a sentence. Oftentimes, students simply memorize the definition long enough to complete the activity and take a test, rather than truly understanding the word or concept.

To increase the rigor, ask students to write a riddle about the word or concept. In addition to knowing what something means, they must turn that information into clues so that other students can guess the answer.



Prices go up.
Your wallet is thinner.
You pay twice as much
To provide family dinner.

Answer: Inflation

Increasing Rigor Through Problem-Solving

Next, when we start a lesson, we typically tell students what we will learn about that day. We are assuming they do not know anything yet, so we do all the talking. That's not very rigorous. We can turn that around and make all our introductions more about problem-solving and discovery in a simple way. *Three Alike* is a game in which the teacher provides three examples to the students, and then asks the group to guess what he or she will be teaching about today. Rather than saying, "I'm going to be teaching about negative integers today," the teacher says, "Notice I have three numbers on the screen (-5, -14, -25). What do they have in

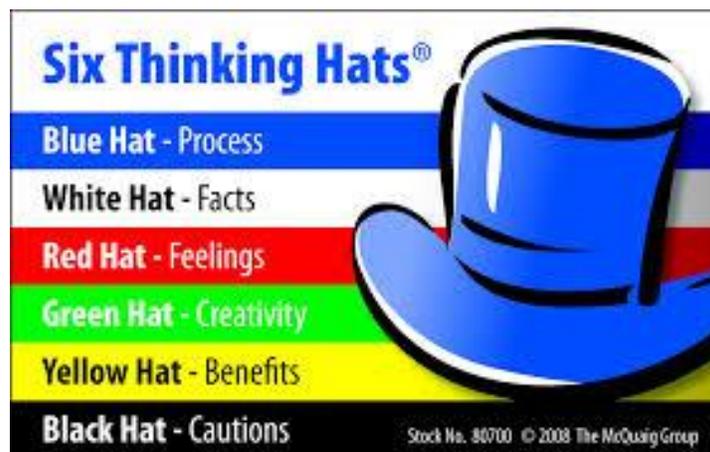
common?” At least one student in the room probably knows the answer, then you can build off that information as the lesson continues.

Once students are adept at *Three Alike*, you can increase the rigor again by playing the *Red Herring Game*. In this game, you provide four examples. Students must identify the one that does not belong, and justify their answer. For example, “Which of these does not belong: New South Wales, Tasmania, Sydney, or Victoria?” The answer is Sydney, because it is not a state. This can introduce your discussion of states and cities.

Once students are familiar with both games, you can shift the ownership to them. They come up with the examples, and their classmates must guess the answers.

Increasing Rigor Through Various Points of View

Finally, it’s important to look at a situation through a variety of perspectives. When I was a teacher, I used six-sided cubes to encourage thinking about an issue. Each side of the cube had a prompt, such as “apply it”, “analyze it”, etc. It was effective, but not for every assignment. It also didn’t encourage group problem-solving. Another alternative is the use of Thinking Hats. With this activity, students are placed in groups of six, and each one is assigned a role, or hat. Notice from the descriptions below the perspective or assignment for each student.



Thinking Hats

- The White Hat calls for information known or needed. “The facts, just the facts.”
- The Yellow Hat symbolizes brightness and optimism. Under this hat you explore the positives and probe for value and benefit.
- The Black Hat is judgment—the devil’s advocate or why something may not work. Spot the difficulties and dangers—where things might go wrong. (I tend to change this to purple rather than black) Probably the most powerful and useful of the hats but a problem if overused.
- The Red Hat signifies feelings, hunches and intuition. When using this hat you can express emotions and feelings and share fears, likes, dislikes, loves, and hates.
- The Green Hat focuses on creativity—the possibilities, alternatives, and new ideas. It’s an opportunity to express new concepts and new perceptions.
- The Blue Hat is used to manage the thinking process. It’s the control mechanism that ensures the Six Thinking Hats® guidelines are observed.

Source: www.debonogroup.com/6hats.htm

Imagine using this when analyzing an issue in a science class, such as whether deniers (or supporters) of climate change should be able to use social media to promote their agenda. The white hat student points out the facts of the issue, such as the first amendment. The yellow hat looks for the positive aspects in the issues, or the benefits. Black, or purple plays the devil’s advocate. What are the difficulties? Where might something go wrong with this issue? How might the use of social media promote their agenda and damage Australia? The red hat focuses on emotions, both positive and negative. What emotions drive the argument over this issue? Green looks at the creative nature of the issue, with possibilities, solutions, and new ideas. Finally, the blue hat is the manager of the process, ensuring that all perspectives are addressed.

3 Simple Strategies for More Rigorous Instruction

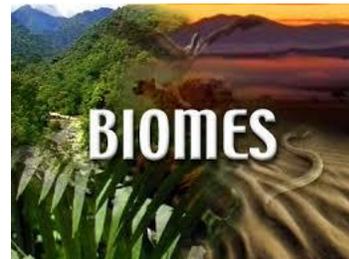
Barbara R. Blackburn

Let's look at options to increase the depth of your instruction. What you'll notice throughout the activities is a shift to student ownership of learning, as well as the need to think at higher levels to complete the activities.

Real-Life Learning

We often talk about the importance of real-life learning in the classroom. However, many times we have students complete application activities at the end of a lesson. In a rigorous classroom, we can flip this to apply the inductive model. Jessica Guidry, one of my former students, designed an ecology unit for her science classroom that applies this principle. Her students were introduced to the unit with the following task:

You are an ecologist from Rock Hill, South Carolina. Recently, members of the United Nations have come together and decided that they must eliminate one biome to make room for the world's growing human population. You and a group of your peers have decided to take a stand. You will each choose one biome to present to the United Nations in New York City this April. It is very important that you persuade the members of the UN to keep your chosen biome alive! The UN has asked that you write a persuasive essay to present to the audience. They also asked that you bring visuals and information about your references. You must be sure that you include how your biome benefits the world population. You need to include information about the habitats, populations, animals, plants, and food chains of your biome.



Throughout the unit, she integrated a variety of other open-ended projects, such as creating a flip book promoting their biome, participating in a debate, and creating food chains/webs in addition to the regular mix of lecture, guided discussion, and laboratory activities. However, since she began with the open-ended, authentic situation, her students were more engaged and challenged throughout the lessons.

Video Reporting

One of my son's favorite activities is recording his friends skateboarding and editing the clips. He used these techniques in his maths class to analyze the maths skills used in skateboarding. Given a choice of assignments, he would rather create a video than write a paper.



Students can create a video report on a wide range of topics in almost any class. Simply start with a topic, ask students to choose a perspective, and start filming. I've seen this used for students to create character profiles, job descriptions, and mini-talk shows. It's an engaging, motivating activity. However, as with all activities, provide structure and guidelines to ensure students move beyond a basic assignment to one that requires higher levels of thinking.

Sample Video Reporting Activities

Interview with a Historical Figure
News Report of a Current or Past Event
Profile of Math Applications of a Sport
Demonstration of the Water Cycle
Model Job Interview

Virtual Tours



Another effective way to use technology in the classroom is to conduct virtual field trips. In today's budget-conscious schools, this is particularly helpful. Imagine the activities you can integrate into the classroom with a virtual tour of the Smithsonian. However, it's important to remember that the field trip itself should not be the end result. Any tour should be linked to your standards, and the activities should result in increased learning related to your objectives. In the sample below, a visit to the Louvre was linked to a study of Egyptian history. With adaptations of the assignments, it could easily be used in a high school art class.

The Louvre Visit

Today we are going to take an exciting trip to Paris, France! Your ticket is <http://www.louvre.fr/en> and your vehicle is your computer, tablet or phone. Please read the instructions carefully so your trip is not wasted. I want you to have fun and learn something new in the process. We will have a round-table discussion on our magnificent trip Friday. Have fun and I can't wait to hear about your adventure!

1. As your tour guide, I suggest you learn some information about the Louvre Museum because you begin your tour. Start at the *Collection and Louvre Palace* link. *Read the information about the history of The Louvre. You are in Paris and you call home to talk to someone your love. Tell them about the Louvre's history in 3-5 sentences. Include why the museum was established and how it has been important to France.*
2. Now you are ready to take your tour. Using the same link go to *Online Tours*. Choose following tour: ***Egyptian Antiquities***, *Walk around on the floor to several areas. Spend 10 minutes learning how to navigate through the museum floor. Go to the help menu for ways to better navigate the tour.*

3. Choose one sculpture from your tour. Analyze how it reflects the culture of Egypt.
4. Interpret the artwork. Communicate the artist's statement. Describe what you think the artist is trying to say through the work of art. Expound on the feeling conveyed by the artwork. Describe what the artwork means to you, and why. Explain what you feel is the artist's intended purpose for creating that particular work of art. Examine why the artist made the choices in technique, materials and subject matter and how they relate to the intended purpose. Your narrative should be approximately one page.

**Note—for more suggestions, visit <http://www.wikihow.com/Critique-Artwork> (the suggestions in number 4 are an excerpt from this site).

NOTE: Ideas for other content areas:

Maths: Students can plan the trip to the Louvre, look up the flight, and calculate the cost. Social Studies: Plan what to take and how to pack, discuss how to prepare to visit the country, learn about Paris, and the French government. Also discuss the history of Egypt and the symbolism of the historical time period. Language Arts: How did the authors and poets of Egypt impact the culture? Also teach about critiques and writing the analysis.

A Final Note

Each of these shows how rigor can be a part of your instruction. You don't need to throw out everything you are doing; rather, take what you are doing and step it up a notch.

Source <https://www.teachthought.com/pedagogy/3-simple-strategies-rigorous-instruction/>

Article:

**Overview of Rigorous
Assessments**



Attached as a PDF

3 Statements that Describe Rigorous Assessments

Barbara R. Blackburn

As we've discussed rigor, the final component is rigorous assessment. There are three aspects of rigorous assessments: whether or not the assessment is appropriate, whether it is purposeful, and whether it is results-oriented.

Assessment is Appropriate

First, assessments should be appropriate. What do I mean by that? I mean they should be at a rigorous level.

Too often, we water our assessments down to make them easier for students. For example, I was in a first grade

classroom where students were working on numbers up to ten. The assignment was to simply color ten crayons in various groupings, despite the fact that was too easy, based on the earlier work. In another class, the teacher was using a much higher assessment that was more rigorous and required students to use higher order thinking.



Solve the problem. Show your work. I have 10 crayons. Some are red. Some are blue. How many of each could I have? How many red? How many blue? Find as many combinations as you can.

Source: Pearson Education Grade 1

Your questions should also be at an appropriate level of rigor. The high school example below is based on Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. You want to use the questions or prompts at the highest level possible, but you may need to start with the lower levels as a base, before you move up the levels.

Free At Last by Martin Luther King, Jr.

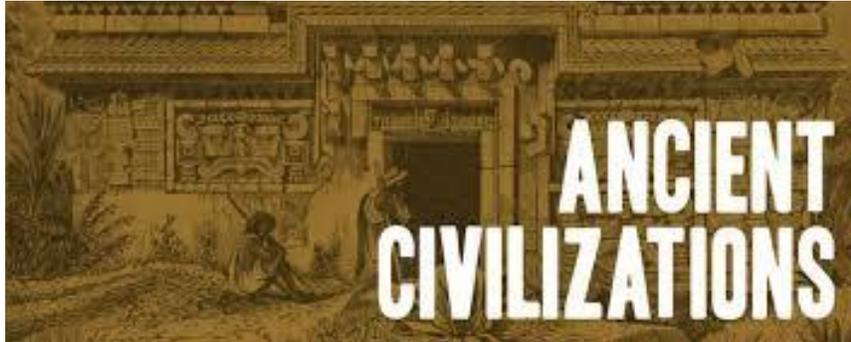
Bloom's Revised	Questions for Literature
Creating	Create your own speech using "Free At Last" as inspiration to save the oppressed from the injustice of big government.
Evaluating	Why does Martin Luther King use words that compare the rights of American citizens to a check?
Analyzing	Compare Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Free At Last."
Applying	Show how historical events prior to August 28, 1963 inspired Martin Luther King's speech "Free At Last".
Understanding	Paraphrase Martin Luther King's speech in your own words.
Remembering	What does it mean to be free?

Assignment is Purposeful

Next, the assessment should be purposeful. Rather than giving work simply to give work is not appropriate. When I was teaching, a fellow teacher gave homework every night—no matter what. Much of the work was busy work, but she felt that she should give them something to do every night, regardless of whether the work was needed.

As you think about in-class and out-of-class assignments, consider the standard(s) you are teaching, the type of thinking you want to see from students, and the ultimate product you would like. For example, you may want to prepare students for a multiple-choice test. If so,

some of your questions should be multiple-choice. However, the questions should include applications and thinking questions, rather than just guessing questions about basic facts.



In Angie Wiggins sixth-grade social studies classroom, she was teaching about ancient cultures. She also incorporates rigorous work, and wanted her students to work over time to do research. She designed an assignment that students worked on both in class and outside of class. You'll find the assignment is easily adaptable to other grade levels.

Choose a culture and a topic that you are interested in and that relates to one of the ancient cultures in the sixth grade social studies curriculum. Decide on your research questions that are broad and will provide interesting information. Complete your research, using at least three sources. Take notes during your research. Create a virtual museum exhibit about your culture and topic. Present your research in a costume that will represent your culture's clothing. Bring and serve a food that would have been eaten by the people of your culture.

Assessment Yields Results

Finally, your assessment should yield quality results. In one of his high school classes, my son was given a list of 250 words to memorize for a class. The words would be used throughout the year. Rather than simply memorizing them, it would be more appropriate to introduce the words in context when they are relevant to the content. Then they could be part of the lesson, with a focus not only on the definition, but on the related concepts and possible examples and non-examples. This allows for full comprehension rather than simple memorization. Which result do you prefer?

As an alternative, Scott Bauserman, from Decatur Central High School in Indiana, asks his students to choose a topic from a completed social studies unit and design a game to show what they have learned. The finished product must teach about the topic, use appropriate vocabulary and processes, and be fun to play. As he explains,

Students had to construct the game, and write the rules. I received a wide variety. One game I will always remember was about how a bill gets passed into law. We spent time [in class] talking about all the points where a bill in Congress or the state General Assembly could be killed, pigeon-holed, or defeated. The student took a box the size of a cereal box, set up a pathway with appropriate steps along the way, constructed question/answer cards, and found an array of tokens for game pieces. If a player answered a question correctly, he or she would roll the dice and move along the path to passage. But the student had cut trap doors at the points where a bill could be killed, and if a player landed on a trap door/bill-stopper, the player to the right could pull a string, making that player's token disappear from the board. The player would have to start over. Not a bad game from a student who has fetal alcohol syndrome and is still struggling to pass his classes.

A Final Note

As we finish, let's compare two different assignments for science. The first question was to use a graph to identify data. Although a good starting point, it needs to lead to more rigorous work. The teacher scaffolded the work, then in the final problem, students were required to collect, organize, record, and display data in pictographs and bar graphs where each picture or cell might represent more than one piece of data. Then, they were required to interpret the data. What a great example of a rigorous assessment.

Source: <https://www.teachthought.com/learning/true-statements-that-describe-rigorous-assessment/>

Figure 1

