

Training Accreditation Council FACT SHEET

Assessment

The following is a discussion about assessment processes in the VET Sector. Some aspects are specified in the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015 (Standards for RTOs)* and are non-negotiable, other aspects are suggestions and guidance on how to meet those standards. Where the requirements of the *Standards for RTOs* apply, the relevant clauses are shown.

Setting the scene.... why all the fuss?

The prime responsibility of an RTO is to certify the competence of individuals. Certification must only be issued to a learner whom the RTO has assessed as meeting the requirements of the training product as specified in the relevant training package or VET accredited course (Clause 3.1). This may have been achieved through training delivered by the RTO, or skills acquired elsewhere (Clause 1.12). Credible assessments are an integral element of the VET system and therefore it is essential that RTOs undertake their assessments as per the *Standards for RTOs*.

Assessment in VET

Assessment in VET is defined as “the process of collecting evidence and making judgements on whether competency has been achieved, to confirm that an individual can perform to the standard required in the workplace, as specified in a training package or VET accredited course” *Standards for RTOs* Glossary page 7.

In VET assessment there are fixed performance standards set to reflect industry needs. These are specified as units of competency, and all aspects (100%) of the requirements of the unit are required to be judged to be competent. These rigorous requirements maximise consistency, reliability and validity. In competency-based VET we can have variable inputs to meet individual needs (Clause 1.7) but our task is to achieve uniform outputs that are meaningful and relevant to the workplace (Clause 1.5).



VET assessors and evidence-gatherers

In the VET context, trainers and assessors must meet the following strict criteria:

- ✓ be trained as assessors; (Clauses 1.14 & 1.15);
- ✓ have the vocational competence they are assessing (Clause 1.13a);
- ✓ have current industry skills relevant to the assessment (Clause 1.13b, Clause 1.6b, Standards page 7);
- ✓ have current knowledge and skills in VET that informs their assessment (Clause 1.13c); and
- ✓ maintain the currency of all of the above through professional development (Clause 1.16)

It is necessary for each VET assessor to bring all this expertise to the task of building and managing assessment tools and processes. If the task is approached this way then valid assessment tools, valid assessment processes and valid assessment outcomes are most likely. The *Standards for RTOs* also remove the room for error by stipulating specific quality requirements for the development of assessment tools and assessment judgement processes (Clause 1.8) and the validation of assessment outcomes (Clauses 1.9 – 1.11; and Clause 1.25).



Building and managing assessment processes

Assessment in VET is defined as “the process of collecting evidence and making judgements on whether competency has been achieved, to confirm that an individual can perform to the standard required in the workplace, as specified in a training package or VET accredited course”, so the focus is on competency.



Interpreting units of competency

When interpreting units of competency, the first aspect to attend to is the interpretation of “the standard required in the workplace”. The unit has been written in consultation with industry with the express purpose of defining a precise target for training delivery and a standard for assessment.

Competency means “the consistent application of knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace. It embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments.”
Standards for RTOs Glossary page 7.

The format of Training Packages has changed, and as a result the unit of competency may have one of two possible structures “new” and “old”.

Common terms used within training packages:

New streamlined units	Old units	Comment
	AQF level	<i>Guidance</i>
Application	Descriptor & application	<i>Guidance</i>
Prerequisite unit	Prerequisites	<i>Required pre-assessment</i>
Elements of competency	Elements of competency	<i>Required performance</i>
Performance criteria	Performance criteria	<i>Required performance</i>
Foundation skills		<i>Required performance</i>
Unit equivalence	Modification history	<i>Guidance</i>
Performance evidence	Required skills	<i>Required performance</i>
Knowledge evidence	Required knowledge	<i>Required knowledge</i>
	Critical aspects for assessment and evidence	<i>Required knowledge and/or skills</i>
Assessment conditions	Overview, context, resources, method	<i>Guidance</i>

Some information within the unit is provided as guidance for the assessor, to position the unit within the workplace context. The assessor needs to draw upon current industry skills to make the most of this guidance.

Most of the information provided in the unit states non-negotiable mandatory requirements of the unit; aspects that **must** be included in the evidence that is used to make the assessment judgement. Assessors need to use their vocational competence and industry skills to accurately understand these requirements.

Evidence must be gathered for all mandatory requirements, any evidence that does not relate to these requirements must be ignored. All mandatory requirements must have been demonstrated for the assessor to make a decision of “competent”.

Apart from any prerequisite units, all required evidence is either evidence of possession of knowledge or evidence of the performance of a skill.

Knowledge and skills

Knowledge is not the same as skill. As a skill can be performed without the knowledge of how the skill works, we cannot assume that a person performing a skill has the related knowledge. Likewise, we can have the knowledge related to a skill, but still not be able to perform the skill, so we cannot infer that a person with knowledge has the skill. This means that we have to explicitly assess knowledge and explicitly assess skill.



When we assess a skill we are limited to the context of the assessment, the equipment, materials, protocols and the environment are all limited to the situation where the skill is assessed. We can mitigate this to some extent, for example, by assessing every skill twice, with the second assessment deliberately arranged in a different site with different equipment, materials and protocols.



We have no such limitations when it comes to knowledge. Knowledge can be used to lift us out of the “here and now”; it can take us to other workplaces, to the past and the future, to know about other equipment, materials and protocols beyond our immediate environment. So when the writers of the units list required knowledge evidence they are not just asking for the knowledge that underpinned the specific context where the skill is performed, they are asking for assessors to refer to their current industry skills to deliver and assess knowledge beyond the here and now (Clause 1.6). This is another reason why it is insufficient to infer knowledge from the observation of the performance of a skill.

Given that it is necessary to explicitly assess knowledge and explicitly assess skill, it is not surprising to note that there are two different methods of evidence-gathering.

Evidence-gathering methods

What are these two assessment methods?
They are “show” and “tell”.

When it comes to gathering evidence of a skill, we ask the candidate to show us the skill - to perform the skill. When we are gathering evidence of knowledge, we ask the candidate to tell us the answer to a question.

These do not have to be separate assessment events. While we are observing the performance of a skill we can ask questions and record answers, but they are two different assessment methods.

It is the RTO assessor’s responsibility to develop a set of assessment tools to gather evidence of knowledge and evidence of skills. These tools can be used by the RTO assessor and also by others as third-party evidence-gatherers. (Note that when a third-party evidence-gatherer is not a trainer or assessor Clauses 1.17 – 1.20 may apply).

While the RTO assessor developing and managing the assessment tools and processes must meet the five criteria listed earlier (p2), the evidence-gatherer only needs to be able to correctly use the assessment tools.

If the evidence-gatherer is not the RTO assessor, then they must work under the direction of the RTO assessor to ensure that the rules of evidence are adhered to.

Third-party evidence-gatherers may be other RTO staff, employers, supervisors or others who are appropriately placed to use the assessment tools. They may simply ask questions and record answers (knowledge) and/or they may observe performances and record their observations (skills). Evidence-gatherers may be included in the assessment validation and verification processes. Evidence gatherers are merely reporting their observations, they are not making assessment judgements.

Having a range of potential evidence-gatherers greatly expands our assessment reach; we can gather evidence in a wide range of locations, including a candidate's workplace.

Our evidence-gathering methods, "show and tell" and observation, must meet all the rules of evidence (Clause 1.8b). These rules are:

- Validity - the evidence must be gathered in the correct way, and it must faithfully reflect a unit requirement (element, performance, foundation skill, knowledge);
- Sufficiency - there must be enough evidence to have confidence. This

requires that all performance criteria are observed when an element is being assessed, that all unit requirements are assessed, and may require more than one demonstration of a skill to provide evidence of retention and transfer;

- Currency - the evidence must reflect the knowledge or skill of the candidate now, not at some point in the past; and
- Authenticity - the evidence must be gathered first-hand, not through hearsay or by repute.

Now we know what to assess (unit requirements), how to assess (question and answers and observation), and who can gather the evidence, we need to make an assessment plan. The purpose of the plan is to ensure that every candidate has the opportunity to demonstrate competence. We might deviate from the plan due to a change in circumstances, to be "flexible" and "fair", but we must have a plan that will support the gathering of valid, sufficient, current and authentic evidence so that a valid and reliable judgement of competence can be made (Clauses 1.1 and 1.3).

Planning valid evidence-gathering

The *Standards for RTOs* is silent about how assessment processes must be managed. It speaks of the quality of the assessment outcomes, but not of the means by which those outcomes can be achieved. The following section does not represent policy, but provides guidance that will assist with demonstrating compliance with the outcome requirements of the *Standards for RTOs*.

FACT SHEET

There are many unit requirements to assess, and each one of them must be addressed (sometimes more than once), so we can start with a list of unit requirements. The list must reflect every mandatory unit requirement:

✓	Prerequisite(s)	if any
✓	Elements	we don't need to list the performance criteria, these are bound to each element
✓	Foundation skills	if any
✓	Performance evidence	required skills in old unit format
✓	Knowledge evidence	required knowledge in old unit format
✓	Critical aspects	old unit format only

This list will shape evidence-gathering processes and judgements (and may also be used to guide training delivery) so before we continue we need to ask someone else to draw up their own list for the unit and verify the lists (Clause 1.4 and 1.8a).

Now we need to determine the “how, when, where and who” to gather evidence for each unit requirement. Once again we need to draw upon our current industry skills and vocational competence to imagine a reasonable set of tasks to observe and question/answer opportunities that together will enable us to gather enough evidence for all of the unit requirements.

The approach adopted by many RTOs is a mapping or matrix of unit requirements and assessment events. This may be represented in a table with each of the unit requirements listed down the left hand side, and a column for each assessment event. For each mandatory unit requirement one or more assessment events are mapped to show that the assessment event addresses it, and which specific part (item number) in the assessment event. Some example lines of such a table might look something like this:

Prerequisites	Prerequisite unit A		Prerequisite unit B	
	Observation 1	Obs 2 & Q/A 1	Q/A 2	Observation 3
Requirement Element 3	5	2		
Element 4	6	4		
Knowledge 7		Q6	Q2	

In this example, there are two required prerequisites. These must have been achieved at the RTO (or at another RTO, Clause 3.5) before a judgement of “competent” can be made.

Below the prerequisites are four evidence gathering events. One is an observation combined with some set questions. Element 3 (and all its performance criteria) are observed in part 5 of Observation 1 and in part 2 of Observation 2. Note that it is not assessed by question/answer. Also in this example, item 7 of the knowledge evidence is assessed in Q6 of the question/answer part of the second assessment event, and again in Q2 in the question/answer test. Note that this is not assessed through observation.

This looks straightforward, what can go wrong? There are a number of issues that this kind of mapping can reveal, and help us avoid:

- ✗ Using the wrong method of evidence-gathering (validity);
- ✗ Not gathering evidence on every mandatory requirement (sufficiency); and
- ✗ Not gathering evidence enough times (particularly of skills, sufficiency).

Note that we have not listed performance criteria in the table. The performance criteria of an element are bound to that element and must always be assessed together in the same event when the element is being assessed. To assess them separately would be to invalidate the element. Later we will **use the performance criteria to guide the writing of an observation checklist for each element.**

Each column provides a specification for observation and/or questions for each assessment event, and would be the basis of an observation checklist and/or set of questions. If assessment tools have been purchased, the same mapping process will enable us to ensure that the tools provide valid and sufficient evidence and if not, the mapping will guide us to create supplementary tasks or questions to close the gaps.

We can also use the mapping in a number of other ways:

- ✓ Making sure that there are no extras in the evidence-gathering events (validity);
- ✓ Blending assessment events for clustered assessment (flexibility);
- ✓ Mapping delivery resources to the unit requirements (with an extra column, Clause 1.3c); and
- ✓ Informing candidates of the way they are to be assessed, and how and where each unit requirement will be assessed (fairness)

We may find that in delivery and assessment it is convenient to cluster units of competency. This does not change the mapping, it just means that the assessment activities will gather evidence for a number of units but we still have a separate mapping for each unit.

Later we will see that we can also use the mapping as a tool to keep a progressive record of each individual's skills and knowledge, and ultimately as a tool to make the assessment judgement.

The mapping table works as a useful tool to ensure (and demonstrate) that the rules of evidence of validity and sufficiency are met in the planning process.

Managing the gathering of evidence and record keeping

The RTO assessor must plan and create (or select) the evidence-gathering tools, and manage the evidence-gathering process, including giving direction to any third-party evidence-gatherers.

In developing evidence-gathering tools from the mapping the RTO assessor needs to develop a set of real or simulated workplace tasks that will provide the candidate with an opportunity to display their skills, and a set of oral or written questions which will enable the candidate to display their knowledge.

Real or simulated workplace tasks include a set of instructions for the candidate (task, outcomes, equipment, materials, conditions etc), a set of directions for the observer (typical workplace observations, reasonable flexibility, recording and reporting requirements, questions and typical answers, etc.), and an observer checklist to guide observation and record observations and answers. To understand

the specific requirements of elements, the checklist should ensure that every performance criterion of each element is included in the checklist, contextualised to the set task and the assessment environment. The observer is not making assessment judgements, they are making observations, recording them and reporting them to the RTO assessor.

Each oral or written question/answer would include instructions for the candidate (answering mode, time etc), a set of directions for the administrator (time, conditions, typical answers, recording and reporting requirements etc.). The administrator is not making assessment judgements, they are recording answers and reporting them to the RTO assessor.

A process to record the evidence that is being gathered for each candidate is required. For example, as observation checklists and questions and answers are completed, the RTO assessor could record the outcomes on a copy of the assessment mapping by having one copy for each candidate.

This would mean that we have an expanded assessment mapping document; one for each candidate that would now look like the following:

Name of candidate: *Joe Bloggs*

Prerequisites	Prerequisite unit A ✓			Prerequisite unit B ✓	
Requirement	Obs 1	Obs 2 & Q/A 1	Q/A 2	Obs 3	Other evidence
Element 3	5 ✓	2 ✗			
Element 4	6 ✓	4 ✗			Workplace performance ✓
Knowledge 7		Q6 ✓	Q2 ✓		

We could also keep a column empty so that any other unplanned evidence could be noted against the appropriate unit requirement(s), or to manage reasonable adjustments where alternative evidence is gathered, or to record credible evidence offered as a part of an RPL process.

This mapping/record document provides a continuous record of an individual candidate's progress, indicating where supplementary training and assessment might be needed, and can be used to identify common problems that the cohort of learners might be experiencing with particular aspects of the unit.

Over time the record for each candidate will accumulate, until a judgement has to be made of their competence. **The Principles of Assessment (Clause 1.8b)** state:

- assessments must be fair - candidate needs are considered in the design and delivery of the assessment process, including reasonable adjustments, and candidates are fully informed about the processes to be followed;
- assessments must be flexible - the assessment process can be modified to meet candidate needs, including offering RPL and varying the range of contexts where assessment might take place;
- assessments must be reliable - assessment processes are so structured as to ensure that outcomes do not vary from one assessor to another; and, above all
- Assessment must be valid - the assessment judgement is made on credible evidence of the achievement of all the unit mandatory requirements and no other factors.

The assessment mapping/record document can also be used to ensure that evidence gathered for assessments associated with the Recognition of Prior Learning are based on the same criteria (Clause 1.8), and to support the evidence-gathering processes of partner organisations delivering training and assessment on behalf of the RTO (Clause 2.1).



Making the assessment judgement

When making the assessment judgement, assessors determine if competency has been achieved through assessing whether all of the unit requirements have been accomplished, rather than asking whether all the assessment tools have been completed. The tools belong to the RTO and are not nationally recognised, only the

unit is nationally recognised, so the unit must be the basis of the assessment judgement and national certification (Clause 3.1).

As we already have the record from the mapping of the student's evidence against the unit's requirements, all we need to do is add one more column to record the assessor's decisions with regard to each requirement, and a final summation, as is suggested on the following table:

FACT SHEET

Name of candidate: *Joe Bloggs*

Prerequisites	Prerequisite unit A ✓			Prerequisite unit B ✓		
Requirement	Obs 1	Obs 2 & Q/A 1	Q/A 2	Obs 3	Other evidence	Outcome
Element 3	5 ✓	2 ✘				✘
Element 4	6 ✓	4 ✘			Workplace performance ✓	✓
Knowledge 7		Q6 ✓	Q2 ✓			✓

Assessment judgement: Competent Not yet competent

Name of RTO assessor: *A. Sessor* Date of assessment:

The assessor notes that Element 3 has been demonstrated only once, and if in the example the RTO is assessing every skill twice, then this cannot be signed off as demonstrated. Element 4 was not seen in Observation 2, but was subsequently seen in the workplace, so it's OK. Knowledge item 7 has been demonstrated. As element 3 has not been demonstrated, the overall judgement is "not yet competent".

This mapping/recording/judgement document, together with a set of evidence-gathering tools provides detailed information supporting remedial or supplementary training (particularly if delivery resources are also mapped), enables the credentials of the assessor to be verified, and provides an evidence trail for potential appeals (Clause 6.2) or validation (Clauses 1.9 – 1.11).

A VET assessment system needs to ensure assessments are consistent and are based on the Principles of Assessment and the Rules of Evidence (Clause 1.8).

The *Standards for RTOs* require that RTOs conduct regular validations of assessment processes and outcomes (Clause 1.8 and Clauses 1.9 – 1.11).

Validating VET assessment processes and outcomes

The following discussion is designed to link the information above to the requirements detailed in the *TAC Fact Sheet: Assessment Validation* and the *Standards for RTOs*.

The validation of assessment is a requirement of the *Standards for RTOs* in Clauses 1.8 – 1.11, 1.25, 2.2 and 2.4, and in the *Glossary* page 12.

The *TAC Fact Sheet: Assessment Validation* indicates that there are three phases where validation is needed. Firstly, validation needs to be built-in to the process of developing assessment tools and systems. In particular we need to verify that:

- 1.1 All mandatory unit requirements are recognised and incorporated into the evidence-gathering and assessment judgement processes;
- 1.2 Assessors meet the five requirements specified in Clauses 1.13 – 1.16;
- 1.3 All evidence-gathering tools meet the rules of evidence (Clause 1.8b); and
- 1.4 The assessment system and judgement process meet the principles of assessment (Clause 1.8b), reflect the requirements of the Training Package (Clauses 1.4 and 1.8a) and are relevant to the needs of industry (Clause 1.5).

The second phase is the evidence-gathering stage. Here we need to verify that:

- 2.1 The instructions for candidates provide sufficient information to support relevant performance;
- 2.2 The instructions for third-party evidence-gatherers provide sufficient information to ensure the valid administration of the assessment tools; and
- 2.3 Third-party evidence-gatherers are fit for task, accurately follow the assessor instructions for the use of the observation and/or Q/A tools; provide timely feedback on performance; and provide an accurate and honest record of performance.

The final third phase is the assessment judgement process. We need to verify that:

- 3.1 Sufficient information has been provided to candidates to understand how they are to be assessed (fairness, and Clause 5.2);
- 3.2 The assessment process has been sufficiently flexible to accommodate candidate needs including reasonable adjustment and RPL; and
- 3.3 The assessment judgement process is reliable and valid, and accurately reflects the competency status of each individual candidate.

It is necessary to build validation processes or review points into the development of all three phases **for all units of competency**. This is reflected in the validity requirements of Clause 1.8 of the *Standards for RTOs* and is intrinsic to the development, revision, and delivery process for each unit of competency. This validation process is one of **reviewing documentation** relating to assessment policies and procedures, assessment plans, assessment tools, judgement tools, assessor qualifications and experience, the management of third-party evidence-gatherers, and information provided to candidates before, during and after assessments.

In contrast, Clauses 1.9 – 1.11 require that assessment practices and judgements be systematically validated on a five year cycle. This is the validation of assessment systems, assessment products, assessment outcomes and assessors for a qualification, skill set, or for stand-alone units not delivered as part of a qualification or skill set. This validation process is designed to provide assurance

that the RTO's assessment development and delivery processes are **used properly** and lead to accurate and credible outcomes. This validation process involves the observing of actual assessment activities and evidence-gatherers to verify compliance with planned processes, interviewing candidates, and following the evidence-trail to the judgement of competence.

Clauses 1.9 – 1.11 define conditions for this validation process, including planning, timing, coverage, personnel and resulting action. Note that as the assessor is being validated, that person cannot be a part of the validation team (Clause 1.11) when validating that assessor's assessments.

Validation conducted under Clauses 1.9 – 1.11 will include the ten components listed above for the three phases, but in addition will review the actual assessments and assessment outcomes of a sample of candidates of stand-alone units or a sample of candidates from a sample of units from each qualification or skill set.

More detailed information is provided in the [TAC Fact Sheet: Assessment Validation](#)

[Other Resources: Assessment in the VET Sector information booklet](#)