

Assessment in the Junior School

Schools are required to base their curriculum on the principles of the New Zealand Curriculum, to encourage and model the values, and to develop the key competencies at all year levels. The Tukatahi system does this seamlessly. At WHS we also take seriously our responsibility to prepare students for the senior school. One important way of doing this is by providing a cohesive and transparent school-wide assessment framework that will give students a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve their academic performance.

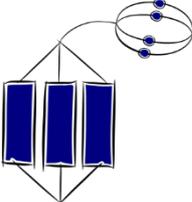
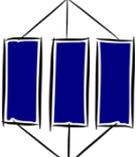
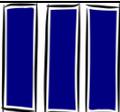
The New Zealand Curriculum states that effective assessment benefits students by clarifying for them "...what they know they can do and what they still need to do."¹ Wellington High School has decided to use the SOLO taxonomy as a tool for achieving this aim.

What is the SOLO taxonomy?

Solo Taxonomy (**S**tructure of **O**bserved **L**earning **O**utcomes) provides a simple, reliable and robust model for three levels of understanding – surface, deep and conceptual (Biggs and Collis 1982). These levels of thinking are broken into a number of categories associated with a different symbol for easy recognition of progress. "Learning to learn" requires learners to think about the strengths and weaknesses of their own thinking when they are learning and to make thoughtful decisions on what to do next.² Teachers will use a common framework to help students answer the following questions:

- What am I learning?
- How is it going?
- What do I do next?

Students in the junior school will be assessed using the SOLO taxonomy across all learning areas. They will be graded from 1 (pre-structural) through to 8 (Extended abstract) with clear reference to help the student identify the next steps needed for improvement.

Grade	Descriptor	SOLO	Explanation
8	Extended Abstract		At the extended abstract level the new understanding at the relational level is re-thought at another conceptual level, looked at in a new way, and used as the basis for prediction, generalisation, reflection, or creation of new understanding.
7			
6	Relational		At the relational level, the aspects of the task are known and are linked, integrated, and contribute to a deeper and more coherent understanding of the whole.
5			
4	Multistructural		At the multistructural level, several aspects of the task are known but their relationships to each other and the whole are missed.
3			
2	Unistructural		At the unistructural level, one aspect of the task is picked up, and student understanding is disconnected and limited.
1	Prestructural		At the prestructural level of understanding, the task is inappropriately approached, and the student has missed the point or needs help to start.

¹ <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/> pg. 40

² <http://pamhook.com/solo-taxonomy/>

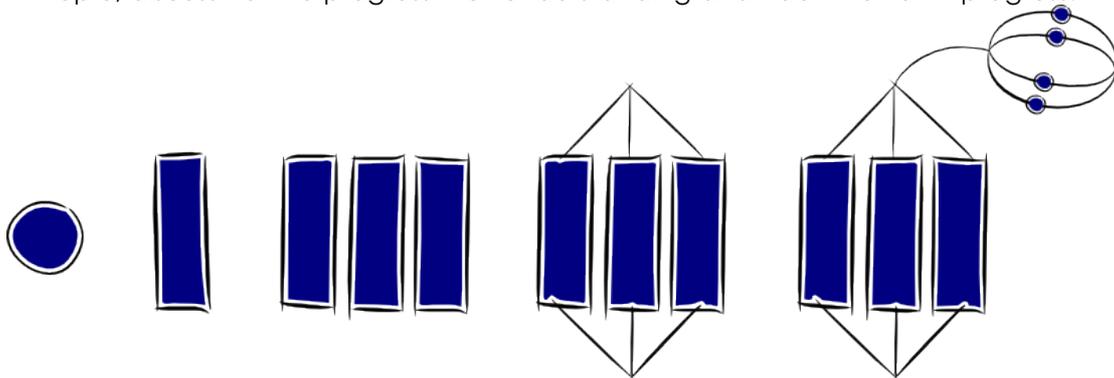
SOLO taxonomy and NCEA

One of the advantages of using SOLO taxonomy in the junior school is that it provides the perfect platform for students as they transition into the senior school. Much of the thinking behind the NCEA Achievement Standards is modelled on the same scaffolding SOLO taxonomy offers. The SOLO taxonomy has been used to describe the different levels of thinking in the standards.

The stages in the SOLO taxonomy are increasing in quantity and quality of thought.

- **Achieved** level often relates to the **multistructural** stage where students need to know or use more than one piece of given information, fact, or idea, but do not integrate their ideas.
- **Merit** often relates to **relational** thinking where students see the significance of how the various pieces of information relate to one another. 'Questions' that provide evidence for relational thinking will require students to integrate more than one piece of given knowledge, information, fact or idea.
- **Excellence** often relates to **extended abstract** thinking where students can make connections beyond the scope of the problem or question, to generalise or transfer learning into a new situation. Going beyond the given information, knowledge or ideas, or deducing a more general rule or proof that applies to all cases are examples of extended abstract thinking.³

We hope that by introducing students to SOLO taxonomy in the junior school students will be better equipped to unpack exactly what is expected of them in the senior school and demystify how to approach Achievement Standards. In addition, they should be able to express their level of understanding about a topic, discuss how to progress their understanding and track their own progress.



³ <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/qualifications-standards/qualifications/ncea/subjects/mathematics/clarifications/level-1/level-1-achievement-standards-mathematics-and-statistics/>

Reporting in the Junior School

Reporting to students and parents needs to be informative and timely so that students are provided with requisite information to be able to further their learning. Reporting should take on a formative and summative role. Formative reporting informs the student areas of strength and weakness and advises the next learning steps. It is ongoing and instructive. Summative reporting looks at what has been achieved over a period of time and creates a benchmark for further learning.

Reporting at Wellington High School is done in a number of ways:

- Electronic 'live' reporting through the parent portal – each term teachers assess and write formative comments
- Online reports – these are summative reports available for download as .pdf at the end of term 3 for senior students and the end of term 4 for junior students.
- Junior Learning Skills – these are self assessment grids which feed into the learning conversations in term 1 and 3 where students assess their learning skills against learning dispositions.
- Learning Conversations – these are a 20 minute conversation between student and teacher in term 1 and term 3 where student learning is reviewed and goals are set.
- Parent teacher evenings – these are the traditional 5 minute conferences to get a quick snapshot of a student's learning.

Live reporting on the parent portal

There is a direct link to the parent portal from our school web site (<http://www.whs.school.nz>) under the Whanau menu. The portal allows access to some of the information on our system: daily notices, student details and timetable, student attendance, NCEA summary, assessment results, extra curricular groups, reports, pastoral items, awards, fees and Fees with Flo2Cash (there is a secure facility where you can pay all or part of your fees), profile (containing a record of your learning conversation interview in the 'Interviews' section, course selection (this will be needed later in the year for Y9-12 students). Usernames and passwords are sent home and emailed to families early in the school year.