



# Guidelines for Developing and Assessing Skill Standard-Based Assessments

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## 1. Introduction

This document provides guidance for developing and assessing competency-based assessments aligned with skill standards. It is designed for tertiary education providers, wānanga, private training establishments (PTEs), work-based learning organisations and schools.

The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure that assessments are:

- ✘ **Valid, reliable, fair, and sufficient**
- ✘ **Aligned with skill standards and industry expectations**
- ✘ **Supportive of meaningful learning and workforce readiness**

## 2. Understanding Skill Standards

### What Are Skill Standards?

A skill standard is a detailed description of the specific skill, knowledge, and performance expectations required to carry out a particular task or job function competently in a real workplace setting. It outlines:



- ✘ What a learner or worker must be able to do (skills)
- ✘ What they need to know (knowledge)
- ✘ The conditions under which the task must be performed and
- ✘ The standard of performance expected by industry

Understanding the components of a skill standard is essential, as it provides a foundation for developing effective assessment materials. They are as follows:

## Components of a Skill Standard

### *Title*

The title reflects the outcomes in the standard and is meaningful to stakeholders. The title explains clearly what a learner awarded the standard can do, and in what context. It should be clear, specific, and reflect the main focus or content.

**Level** – refers to the complexity and depth of knowledge, skills and responsibility required to perform a task or function described, Levels are based on the **New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF)** which ranges from Level 1 (basic tasks) to level 10 (doctoral level).

**Credit** – A credit represents the amount of learning or effort required to achieve the outcomes of that standard. 1 credit equals approximately 10 notional hours of learning (NZQF)

### *Purpose*

The purpose outlines the overall intent of the qualification or standard—why it exists, who it is for, and what it aims to achieve. It typically includes the context, industry relevance, and the type of roles the learner could move into.

### *Learning Outcome*

A learning outcome is a clear statement of what a learner is expected to know, do, or understand by the end of a course or training module. It focuses on the learner's achievement and is used to guide assessment and teaching.

It describes:

- ✘ The specific skill or task to be performed.
- ✘ The context in which it should be applied (often work-based)
- ✘ The level of competence expected by industry

Learning outcomes are:

- ✘ Action orientated e.g. assemble, diagnose
- ✘ Aligned with NZQF level and



- ✘ **Used to guide teaching, learning and assessment**

### ***Assessment Criteria***

Assessment criteria define the benchmarks used to evaluate whether a learner has met the expected standard of competence. These are:

- ✘ **Specific** – Clearly defined required actions or outcomes
- ✘ **Measurable** – Include objective indicators (e.g., accuracy, timeliness)
- ✘ **Aligned** – Directly reflect the skill standard outcomes
- ✘ **Consistent and Fair** – Uniformly applied across learners and assessors
- ✘ **Workplace-Relevant** – Reflect real-life contexts

### ***Assessment Specifications***

A structured guide that outlines how learners will be assessed for competence.

This includes:

- ✘ **Assessment Methods** – Types of assessments used (e.g., practical demonstrations, written tasks, portfolios, observations, verbal assessment)
- ✘ **Assessment Criteria** – Specific behaviours and skills learners must demonstrate
- ✘ **Evidence Requirements** – The quality and type of evidence required used (e.g., practical demonstrations, written tasks, portfolios, observations, verbal assessment)
- ✘ **Conditions of Assessment** – Where and how assessment takes place (e.g., supervised, simulated, workplace).

### ***Definitions***

The definitions support consistent assessment, where the term defined is outside of common understanding.

### ***Grades***

All skill standards have a minimum passing grade of 'achieved', where the learner must meet the assessment criteria for each of the learning outcomes specified in the standard.

Skill standards may be awarded with the following grades:

- ✘ achieved / paetae
- ✘ merit / kaiaka
- ✘ excellence / kairangi.



### ***Indicative Content***

Provides suggestions or examples of relevant learning and assessment topics. This content is flexible and non-prescriptive, allowing providers to design assessments that suit their context while aligning with the outcomes of the skill standard.

Indicative content is not mandatory for assessment purposes. Refer to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria sections of these guidelines for what must be assessed.

## **3. Differences Between Unit Standards and Skill Standards**

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Unit Standard</b>	<b>Skill Standard</b>
<b>Assessment Focus</b>	Assesses specific tasks and competencies separately	Assesses overall competency in real-world context
<b>Structure</b>	Clearly defined performance criteria and range statements	Broad competency descriptions contained in the Learning outcomes, assessment criteria, assessment specifications and supported by indicative content,
<b>Assessment Approach</b>	Checklist based with step-by-step evidence requirements	Holistic assessment allowing multiple ways to demonstrate competency
<b>Evidence Required</b>	Predefined specific evidence to meet exact criteria	Flexible evidence based on context
<b>Application</b>	Task-driven and broken down into small components	Outcome-driven, integrating skills, knowledge and problem solving
<b>Assessment Flexibility</b>	Limited; all learners must meet the same criteria in the same way	Greater flexibility: learners can demonstrate competency through different measures



## 4. Principles of Effective Assessment

All assessment materials should align with the following principles to ensure quality:

- ✘ **Validity** – Assessment measures what it intends to (e.g., practical customer interaction, not just theory)
- ✘ **Reliability** – Consistent results across assessors and settings
- ✘ **Fairness** – Free from bias, inclusive of all learners (e.g., accessible to learners with disabilities)
- ✘ **Sufficiency** – Enough quality evidence to confidently determine competence

## 5. Developing Assessment Materials for Skill Standards

### Step 1: Identify Key Competencies

**Review the skill standard to determine the critical knowledge, skills, and application.**

**Example:** Plumbing Installation

- ✘ **Knowledge** – Plumbing regulations, safety procedures
- ✘ **Skills** – Cutting, fitting, joining pipes
- ✘ **Application** – Installing a complete plumbing system.

### Step 2: Design Authentic Assessment Activities

Use tasks that reflect real-life job scenarios and assess skills holistically.

**Examples:**

- ✘ **Observation** – Mechanic diagnosing and fixing a vehicle
- ✘ **Project-Based** – Building a small structure from a blueprint
- ✘ **Verbal Questioning** – Chef explaining food safety during inspection
- ✘ **Portfolio of evidence** – Admin learner submitting reports, emails, meeting minutes.

### Step 3: Provide Clear Assessment Instructions

Give precise guidance to learners and assessors.



**Example:** "You will be assessed on your ability to install an electrical circuit. You must provide evidence of wiring selection, adherence to safety protocols, and fault testing."

#### Step 4: Create Marking Guides and Judgement Criteria

Define what competent performance looks like in a workplace context.

**Example:** Hospitality Skill Standard

The learner can:

- 🌀 **Welcome customers professionally**
- 🌀 **Accurately take and processes order**
- 🌀 **Resolve complaints effectively**

## 6. Types of Assessments for Skill Standards

Use a range of assessment types to suit different learners and contexts:

Assessment Type	Description	Example
<b>Formative Assessment</b>	Ongoing assessments to provide feedback and support learning	A trainer observing an apprentice carpenter using a saw safely and providing immediate feedback
<b>Summative Assessment</b>	Final assessment to determine overall competency	A fully installed and tested electrical wiring system in a house
<b>Practical Demonstration</b>	Observing learners perform real tasks	A welder creating stable and clean weld joint
<b>Workplace Project</b>	Assessing how a learner applies skills in a full work-based project	A digital marketing student designing and launching a campaign for a real client
<b>Portfolio of Evidence</b>	A collection of documents, reports or photos showing competence	A beauty therapy student submitting client feedback and treatment records and photos of completed services



## 7. Moderation and Validation of Assessments

To ensure quality and consistency, assessments need to undergo:

- ✘ **Pre-assessment Moderation** – Checking assessment materials before use to ensure clarity and alignment with skills standards and fit for purpose.
- ✘ **Post-assessment Moderation** – Reviewing assessment decisions to ensure consistency across assessors.
- ✘ **Validation** – Gaining feedback from industry and educators to ensure relevance and accuracy. For example, industry Subject Matter Experts (SME) review assessment tasks to ensure alignment with current codes and practices.

## 8. Conclusion

By applying these guidelines, education and training providers can create valid, fair, and industry-aligned assessments that support learners in achieving meaningful, real-world, competency.