

NTS lesson plan

Preparation

Take the NTS, so you are familiar with how it works. In particular, make sure you are familiar with the results page at the end of the NTS. This is the page where participants can view their results and compare them to the national averages.

Taking the NTS

Introduce the lesson by telling students about the NTS and explaining that they will be comparing class results to those of other people from all over the United States who have already taken the NTS. Make it clear that the NTS is not a “test.” There are no right answers. Students should offer their own opinions.

Ask students to go to the NTS web site (<http://testingsurvey.us>) and take the NTS. Before they begin the assessment, explain that they should stop when they get to the results page at the end of the survey. (If there is not enough time for students to make comments or write their stories after completing the survey items, ask them to skip these questions.)

Important: If you are working with minors whose identities must be protected, have them fill in the email field on the first page of the NTS as follows: student@school.edu.

Recording results

Before you ask students to record their results, give them an opportunity to react to the experience of taking the survey and the numbers that supposedly summarize their thoughts. This step might better support the possibility that students would want to compare their answers with other students in the class (and beyond), which would then justify the tables, the statistics, discussions questions, etc.

When all students have completed the survey and are looking at the results page, hand out both pages of the worksheet. At this time, each student should carefully copy his or her average scores into the first table, “My average scores on the NTS.” (Make sure that students also record their names on this page before proceeding to the next step.)

After they have entered their scores, assign two advanced students with the task of entering all of the student scores into two tables—one table for “testing today” and one for “ideal tests”—on overheads or the blackboard. (All students can enter these figures into their own copies of the tables if you would like them to have a personal record of the lesson.)

While the data are being entered (or afterward, if you want all students to record the data), engage students in a discussion about their NTS experience and their results. Suggested topics:

- What do you think is meant by the names given to each of the 5 testing functions?
- Were there items in the survey that were surprising?

- How different were your scores for “today’s tests” and “ideal tests”?
- Using the key “what levels mean” on the worksheet, describe your scores on each of the test functions.
- What are your predictions about how the class averages will compare to the national averages?

After the data have been entered, ask students to use their calculators to calculate average scores for the class. If you are pressed for time, you can divide the class into up to 12 groups and have each group take responsibility for calculating one (or more) of the averages.

After the averages have been calculated, have students enter them into the table “Average scores of the class and the nation by test functions” and calculate the differences between average scores on “today’s tests” and “ideal tests” for the class and the nation.

Discussion suggestions

- What does it mean when one function of an *ideal* test has a higher (or lower) score than another function?
- What does it mean when one function of *today’s* tests has a higher (or lower) score than another function?
- What are the functions of *ideal* tests that your class rated highest, based on mean scores? Why do you think these are important?
- What are the testing functions that your class thought were not being fulfilled very well by *today’s* tests? Why?
- What are the testing functions where the difference between *today’s* tests and *ideal* tests is greatest? Why do you think the differences are greater for these functions? Are these the same for your class and the national sample?
- Are the testing functions of *ideal* tests that the class rated higher the same as the functions that were rated higher by the national sample? If not, why do you think class averages and national averages differ?
- How do you think items on the survey are related to the 5 testing functions (aside from “all”)? Which items do you think were included in “Measure relevant skills and abilities” (or any other function)? Why? (Show students the list on the last page of this document.)
- Do you think the average scores will be different when more people have taken the NTS? Why?

The 5 testing functions

The 5 testing functions represent roles of testing that philosophers and educators have discussed for many years. You will notice, if you read through the list on the following page, that some of the items in the NTS could have been assigned to more than one function, and you may find yourself disagreeing with our classification of some items. This is perfectly fine. Although it is convenient to make classifications like the ones we made when we defined the functions, it does not mean that they are “correct.” In fact, if we look closely enough, all of the functions appear to be related to one another. Once we have collected enough data, we will run some statistical analyses that will tell us if our groupings make statistical sense, and this may cause us to change some of the categories or move some of the items to different categories.

What scores mean

6 = strongly agree, 5 = agree, 4 = somewhat agree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree

Tell us about your experience

If you can find the time, please tell us about your experience with this lesson: theo@testingsurvey.us

NTS items (grouped by function)

This is a list of the items in the NTS and their (provisional) categorization into test function categories.

Do a good job measuring learning

- accurately determine what students have learned
- tell us how much a particular student has learned during a specific period
- tell us what students have learned
- tell us how well students understand what they have learned

Measure relevant skills and abilities

- focus on skills that students will need as adults
- tell us everything we need to know to determine if a student is ready to move to the next grade
- focus on knowledge and skills that students need for success in life
- tell us what we need to know to determine if a student is ready to graduate
- focus on skills that students need in the "real world"
- focus on knowledge and skills that students need for success in college

Support learning

- encourage teachers to focus on helping students to learn thinking skills
- provide feedback to students that helps them learn
- help students learn
- encourage students to think about what they have learned
- support the kind of teaching that students' find interesting
- support the kind of teaching that enhances students' love of learning
- are learning experiences (in their own right)

Improve teaching

- help teachers do a better job in the classroom
- tell teachers what each student is most likely to benefit from learning next
- are an important part of the curriculum
- help teachers identify students with special needs
- help teachers identify talented students
- encourage teachers to focus on helping students to apply what they are learning
- encourage teachers to focus on enhancing student understanding
- enrich the curriculum

Do a good job informing administrators

- help administrators to identify poor teachers
- help administrators to identify bad schools
- help administrators to identify good teachers
- are objective (treat everyone the same)
- are unbiased (give diverse students an equal opportunity to show off what they have learned)
- help administrators to identify good schools

NTS items

- focus on skills that students need in the "real world"
- are objective (treat everyone the same)
- are unbiased (give diverse students an equal opportunity to show off what they have learned)
- tell us what students have learned
- tell us how well students understand what they have learned
- focus on skills that students will need as adults
- tell us everything we need to know to determine if a student is ready to move to the next grade
- are an important part of the curriculum
- focus on knowledge and skills that students need for success in life
- tell us what we need to know to determine if a student is ready to graduate
- focus on knowledge and skills that students need for success in college
- encourage teachers to focus on helping students to learn thinking skills
- provide feedback to students that helps them learn
- help administrators to identify bad schools
- help administrators to identify good teachers
- help students learn
- tell us how much a particular student has learned during a specific period
- encourage teachers to focus on helping students to apply what they are learning
- enrich the curriculum
- help administrators to identify poor teachers
- encourage students to think about what they have learned
- support the kind of teaching that students' find interesting
- support the kind of teaching that enhances students' love of learning
- are learning experiences (in their own right)
- help teachers do a better job in the classroom
- tell teachers what each student is most likely to benefit from learning next
- help teachers identify students with special needs
- help teachers identify talented students
- accurately determine what students have learned
- encourage teachers to focus on enhancing student understanding
- help administrators to identify good schools

Student worksheet

page 1

Student name _____

My average scores on the NTS by the test functions

#	Description of function	Today's tests	Ideal tests
1	All items		
2	Do a good job measuring learning		
3	Support learning		
4	Improve teaching		
5	Do a good job informing administrators		
6	Measure relevant skills and abilities		

Today's tests: Average scores for students in the classroom

#	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

What scores mean: 6 = strongly agree, 5 = agree, 4 = somewhat agree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree

Ideal tests: Average scores for students in the classroom

#	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
1	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
2	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
3	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
4	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
5	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
6	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Average scores of the class and the nation by test functions

#	Description of function	Today's tests Our class	Today's tests Nation	Difference	Ideal tests Our class	Ideal tests Nation	Difference
1	All items	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
2	Do a good job measuring learning	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
3	Support learning	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
4	Improve teaching	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
5	Do a good job informing administrators	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
6	Measure relevant skills and abilities	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00