

Criterion - Referenced Evaluation vs. Normative Referenced Evaluation

1) Which have you used as either an instructor or a student?

As a student I have taken both criterion-referenced and normative-referenced tests. The only normative test I can recall taking would be the SAT test I took in my Junior year of high school, as I remember my verbal skills weren't all that good, but my reading was high and my math score was in the top 2%. As an adult I have taken several industry certification tests from Microsoft, Cisco, and Comptia, all of which were criterion-based and very difficult to pass. It took months of studying and lots of memorization skill to pass those tests. I took my first Microsoft test 6 times before I passed, but once I realized where the bar was set and became more comfortable sitting in those testing booths, I successfully passed all subsequent tests on the first try. While completing my B.S. degree at CSUSB, most classes had the standard mid-term/final 100 question multiple choice criterion-referenced testing format; I didn't find those to be particularly difficult to do well on. As an instructor all I have ever offered is criterion-referenced tests. From what I have learned by talking with elementary and high school teachers I have met while taking courses in education, normative-referenced testing sounds to be quite common due to state mandated standardized testing.

2) Which do you prefer (and why)?

As an instructor I have always used criterion-referenced tests, mainly because it is the only option I am aware of that is available to me. I have written many of them myself, but I also use the publisher-based ones as well. Until this question came up I had never given any thought to which testing format is better. From what I read in the text it sounds like criterion-referenced tests are more accurate in identifying if a student is understanding the material or not. It sounds as if the normative-referenced assessments can be quite problematic depending on the sampling that the "norm" is based on. In my Intro to Networking classes students are required to learn a lot of new terms and concepts so I allow them to use the criterion-referenced chapter quizzes as a learning tool by repeating each one as many times as they wish. Each time they take a quiz they see 20 randomly selected questions from a pool of 50 multiple choice questions. This method seems to have increased my students' retention of the material. I think it becomes kind of a game for them to see how many questions of the 50 they can discover and how many they can answer correctly or look up the answer to; either way it gives them a good gauge of how well there are learning the lingo of networking, and increases their retention in the process.