

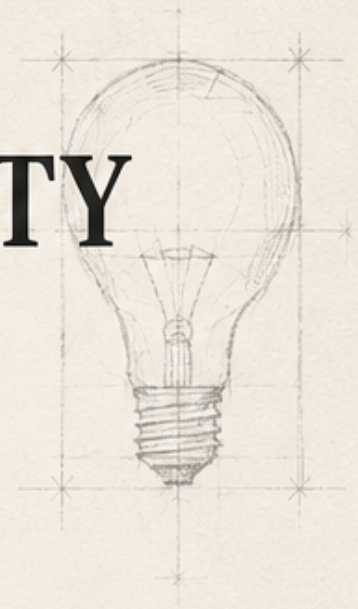
THE AI-ERA ASSESSMENT VISIBILITY MATRIX™

*Judgment
leaves
traces.*



*When artifacts stop proving thinking,
where is student judgment visible?*

By Brooke McKinney
The Engaging Teacher



**AI didn't break assessment.
It exposed it.**

For decades, educators have relied on artifacts—essays, reports, discussion posts, presentations, and projects—as evidence of learning. These artifacts were often the most practical way to infer thinking, reasoning, and understanding.

Artificial intelligence has changed that equation.

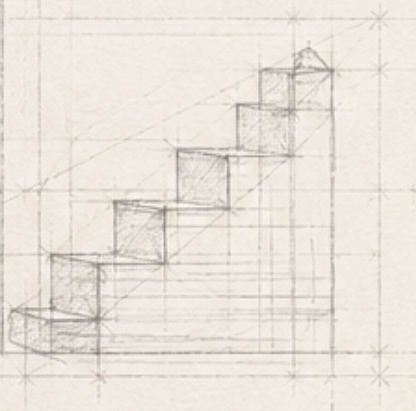
Today, many artifacts can be produced with little or no visible evidence of the judgment that created them. As a result, educators, instructional designers, and leaders are being asked to reconsider a foundational question:

What evidence actually demonstrates capability?

The AI-Era Assessment Visibility Matrix™ is a simple framework for evaluating where student judgment is visible within a learning experience. Rather than focusing solely on what learners produce, the matrix helps educators examine how reasoning, decision-making, reflection, and understanding become observable.

THIS FRAMEWORK CAN BE USED TO:

- Review assignments and assessments
- Evaluate AI-integrated learning activities
- Facilitate faculty and team discussions
- Improve the visibility of learner thinking
- Identify opportunities for authentic assessment
- Support instructional design and course review processes



KEY PRINCIPLE

**Evidence of learning
depends on
evidence of thinking.**

*Evidence
≠
Capability.*



The AI-Era Assessment Visibility Matrix™

A framework for evaluating where student judgment is visible within a learning experience.

Judgment
leaves
traces.

HIGH JUDGMENT VISIBILITY

Student thinking is **observable**.

LOW JUDGMENT VISIBILITY

Student thinking is **not observable**.

LOW ARTIFACT RELIANCE

Thinking is revealed in the process.



RECORDED REASONING

Student thinking is made visible through explanations, decisions, and justifications captured during the process.

Examples: Think-alouds, decision logs, annotated rationales, reflection notes, inquiry journals

HIGH ARTIFACT RELIANCE

Thinking is inferred from the product.



AI TRANSPARENCY

Student uses AI and makes thinking visible through disclosure, critique, and human judgment about the output.

Examples: AI transparency reports, prompt rationales, output evaluations, revision explanations



PROCESS REFLECTION

Student reflects on their learning process, but the thinking during the process is not visible.

Examples: End-of-unit reflections, learning journals, self-assessments without evidence of decisions made



ARTIFACT SUBMISSION

The final product is submitted, but thinking, decisions, and judgment are not visible.

Examples: Essays, reports, presentations, projects, discussion posts, AI-generated content with no transparency

VISIBILITY OF STUDENT JUDGMENT



HOW TO USE THIS MATRIX

Consider each assessment, activity, or learning experience. Where does it fall in this matrix today? Where could it move to increase the visibility of student judgment?

Understanding the Four Quadrants

Each quadrant represents a different level of visibility into student thinking and judgment.

Use this page as a guide to what each quadrant looks like in practice.



The goal is visibility, not more work.

HIGH JUDGMENT VISIBILITY

Thinking is **observable**.



1. RECORDED REASONING

Student thinking is made visible through explanations, decisions, and justifications captured during the process.

Why it matters: It reveals how students think, evaluate, and reason.

Examples:

- Think-alouds and verbal explanations
- Decision logs and rationale journals
- Annotated outlines and planning documents
- Inquiry notes and research journals
- Problem-solving strategies with justifications



2. AI TRANSPARENCY

Student uses AI and makes thinking visible through disclosure, critique, and human judgment about the output.

Why it matters: It shows responsible AI use paired with human evaluation and reasoning.

Examples:

- AI transparency reports
- Prompt rationales and iteration notes
- Output evaluations and improvement plans
- Comparative analyses (AI vs. human)
- Revision explanations and decision logs

LOW JUDGMENT VISIBILITY

Thinking is not **observable**.



3. PROCESS REFLECTION

Student reflects on their learning process, but the thinking during the process is not visible.

Why it matters: It encourages metacognition but does not show the original thinking.

Examples:

- End-of-unit reflections
- Learning journals
- Self-assessments
- Retrospective analysis
- "What I learned" summaries



4. ARTIFACT SUBMISSION

The final product is submitted, but the thinking, decisions, and judgment behind it are not visible.

Why it matters: It may demonstrate skill or knowledge, but not the thinking that produced it.

Examples:

- Essays and reports
- Presentations and slides
- Projects and portfolios
- Discussion posts with no transparency
- AI-generated work without disclosure

LOW ARTIFACT RELIANCE

Thinking is revealed in the process.

HIGH ARTIFACT RELIANCE

Thinking is inferred from the product.



Key Takeaway

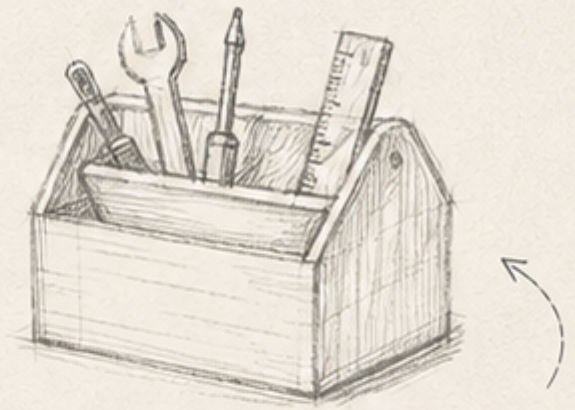
Move activities and assessments toward the top of the matrix (higher judgment visibility) and to the left (lower artifact reliance) to make learning—and thinking—visible.

When judgment is visible, we can support it, strengthen it, and assess it with confidence.

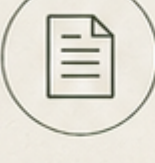
Putting It into Practice

EXAMPLES OF MORE AND LESS VISIBLE EVIDENCE OF THINKING

The goal is not to eliminate artifacts. The goal is to design learning experiences where student thinking, reasoning, and judgment are visible—not just the final product.



*Design for visibility,
not just completion.*

TRADITIONAL (LESS VISIBLE)	MORE VISIBLE (THINKING MADE VISIBLE)
 Essay Final product shows what was produced, not how thinking developed.	 Recorded Reasoning Think-alouds, decision logs, or written rationales reveal how conclusions were formed.
 Class Discussion Participation may show engagement, but not the depth of individual thinking.	 Decision Log Students document options considered, evidence used, and decisions made.
 Presentation Communicates ideas, but not the thinking and iteration behind them.	 Iteration Notes Students show how ideas evolved through feedback and revision.
 Research Report Shows findings, but not the inquiry journey or decision-making process.	 Inquiry Journal Documents questions, sources, analysis, and how understanding deepened.
 Assignment Submission Signals completion of a task, not evidence of thinking.	 AI Transparency Report Students disclose AI use, describe how it informed their thinking, and explain their judgment.



Reflection for Educators and Leaders

Use the prompts on the next page to review your own assessments, activities, and learning experiences.

- ✓ Which quadrant best describes this activity or assessment?
- ✓ Where is student judgment visible (or not visible)?
- ✓ What adjustments could increase visibility of thinking?
- ✓ What support or resources might learners need to make their thinking visible?



Bringing It All Together

THREE QUESTIONS TO GUIDE STRONGER, MORE VISIBLE ASSESSMENT

Use these questions to reflect on individual assessments, entire courses, or program-level learning experiences. These are powerful conversation starters for faculty teams and leadership meetings.



Clarity leads to better design.
Better design leads to learning.



1. WHERE IS JUDGMENT VISIBLE?

Identify the moments in the learning experience where student thinking, reasoning, and decision-making are observable.

Look for evidence beyond the final product.



2. WHAT CAPABILITY AM I ASSESSING?

Clarify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions you want learners to develop and demonstrate.

Align the assessment with the capability—not just the content.



3. WHAT EVIDENCE DEMONSTRATES THAT CAPABILITY?

Determine what observable evidence will demonstrate that learners can apply their thinking in meaningful ways.

Evidence of learning depends on evidence of thinking.



NEXT STEPS

Use the AI-Era Assessment Visibility Matrix™ as a starting point for meaningful change. Explore these connected frameworks and resources to go deeper:



SIGNAL™

A framework for understanding where judgment becomes visible in learning experiences.



THE WORK HAS STOPPED PROVING THE THINKING™

A call to rethink the way we design, evaluate, and value student work.



FOUR CONDITIONS OF REAL ENGAGEMENT™

The conditions that make thinking visible, meaningful, and transferable.



DECIDE™

A decision-making model for choosing the right learning, activities, and evidence for the outcomes that matter.

Visit theengagingteacher.com to explore tools, templates, and professional learning resources.



Join The Human Part

Stay connected for new frameworks, practical strategies, and thoughtful conversations about assessment, capability, and engagement in the AI era.

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Judgment leaves traces.

Thank you for your commitment to making thinking visible.

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