

Using SAM Assessment and Training for Office 2003

Gary Whittle
Associate Professor of CIS
St. Catharine College
2735 Bardstown Rd.
St. Catharine, KY 40061
(859) 336-5082
gwhittle@sckky.edu

Abstract

This presentation will demonstrate the uses of SAM 2003 from Course Technology as a skills assessment and training software that is used via the Internet. Historically, testing in computer education has taken the form of pencil and paper or standardized testing. The actual computer skills of the student have not been properly assessed. With SAM, the testing strategy is to place a student in front of a computer with the relevant software and see if he can complete the required tasks in a limited time. The student will receive the task to be completed, with the application software running live on the computer. The computer contains all of the files needed to perform each task. The student stores his answers on the computer to be graded, and the exam is then graded based on the instructor's criteria. Since the exams are task-based, this method of testing has a high degree of validity.

Presenter Biography: Gary Whittle is an Associate Professor of Computer Information Systems at St. Catharine College in Springfield, KY. He has a B.S. Degree from Campbellsville University and a M.Ed. Degree from the University of Louisville. In addition, he has postgraduate work in computer science at Eastern Ky. University.

Introduction/Background

St. Catharine College is an independent Catholic college that provides quality undergraduate education and offers degrees in a variety of academic areas and professional programs. Consistent with the Dominican tradition upon which it was founded, St. Catharine College fosters education grounded in the liberal arts values and is committed to the free pursuit of truth. The College embraces Christian principles while respecting individuals of all religious traditions.

Computer literacy classes are a requirement for most degree and certificate programs on most college campuses. This requirement also makes the computer literacy class one of the most demanded classes on campus. With a class size usually limited due to computer lab space, several sections are needed to accommodate the student demand. With a growing enrollment, the general education requirement of computer literacy has placed a more diverse student population in the classroom and computer labs. To ensure that basic computer skills are demonstrated, Skills Assessment Manager, or SAM, has been used in all sections of CIS 110 at St. Catharine College, our general education required course. As we look to the future of distance learning, or Internet-based course, SAM will be a valuable tool in evaluating students in those courses as well.

For more than five years, SAM Assessment and Training has helped hundreds of thousands of educators and students assess and improve their skills in the Microsoft Office suite and other computer concepts. The 2003 version of SAM is the most powerful and user-friendly solution yet, with dozens of brand new features including...

- Open Simulations: Hands-on, skill-based Microsoft Office, Windows and Internet tasks are so life-like; your students will have trouble distinguishing them from the real thing!
- Custom Scheduled Training: Integrated SAM Training and enhanced scheduling tools allow you to build an exam and automatically create a custom training assignment.
- Tighter Security: Better security options, including a unique exam location function, allow you to lock SAM tests to specific computers.
- Enhanced Reporting: Numerous additional instructor reports enable you to track your students' testing and learning progress more closely than ever before.
- WebCT and Blackboard Integration: You can now export SAM result reports into your grade book using WebCT® and Blackboard®-ready formats.¹

Traditional Skills Assessment

Skills assessment has been a difficult and time consuming task for computer instructors. Opening files, looking at reveal codes, formulas, or other details for 100 or more students with 15-20 assignments and 3 or more tests often takes up instructor time, or is passed on to teaching assistants. With SAM, the student has the benefit of working real-time in the software, at their own pace, while the instructor is free to spend more time actually teaching and working with the students.

SAM Assessment and Training

As the diversity of the students enrolling in computer literacy classes continues to grow, using SAM as a pre-assessment for incoming students has given the students a chance to see where they really stand as far as computer literacy. Too often, students seem to deem themselves as being “computer literate,” when all they really know is how to turn the computer on, surf the Web, and type a paper and print it. An early pre-assessment can also help to identify the student that may truly be ready to take a challenge test and bypass the course. Using SAM as a post-assessment tool can also be a tool for the instructor to document class outcomes, and provide a valuable portfolio piece for students.

As the instructor moves to using SAM in the classroom, SAM assessment and training allows for instructor flexibility. The instructor has control of all practices, training, exams, times, and locations. One of the most popular “paths” used by instructors is to allow the student to take a pre-test or practice, go through SAM training, then take the exam. The flexibility of SAM can allow the instructor to let the student work on pre-tests and training at home, in the office, or in the classroom or lab. The exams can then be scheduled during supervised lab times if desired. All SAM tests can be customized by the instructor to fit the curriculum. Instructors also set pass rates, time constraints, and can even assign weights to specific tasks/questions. Security can also

¹ From “SAM 2003 Assessment & Training” http://samcentral.course.com/sam_2003.cfm

be set up by the instructor, who can decide on test passwords, time and location restrictions. For example, an instructor may allow practice and training at various times and locations, but set the exam to be only available at 9:00 a.m. on April 20, 2005 in Lab 232.

SAM Reports

SAM reports can provide the instructor and the student with a wealth of information. Students can print reports based on overall exam results, study guides, and certificates of completion. Instructors can also have access to a wealth of information, from how a particular class section performed on a test, to seeing how all students performed on a particular test, to seeing how an individual student performed. SAM can provide immediate feedback to students and teachers, giving results for each task attempted on a test, along with showing what the student did on the computer, and what page in the textbook the student can turn to for more information.

Skill Set	Activity	Result	Actions Taken	Training Completed	Launch Training
MS Excel 2003: Working with Cells and Cell Data	Merge cells	Correct	1. Cell Selected-A1 2. Cell Selected-Column A 3. Cell Selected-E6 4. Cell Selected-Column A 5. Cell Selected-E4 6. Cell Selected-A1 7. Cell Selected-A1:C1 8. Formatting Toolbar : Merge & Center Clicked	--	N/A
MS Excel 2003: Working with Cells and Cell Data	Insert columns and rows	Correct	1. Cell Selected-Row 7 2. MenuCommand : Insert Cells...	--	N/A
MS Excel 2003: Working with Cells and Cell Data	Center across selection	Correct	1. Cell Selected-A1:G1 2. Formatting Toolbar : Merge & Center Clicked	--	N/A
MS Excel 2003: Working with Cells and Cell Data	Use the fill handle to copy a cell	Correct	1. Cell Selected- B16:H16 2. Formatting Toolbar : Percent Clicked 3. Resumed Task 4. Cell Selected- B16 5. Cell Selected for Fill Handle- B16:H16 6. Fill Handle Selection Done 7. Cell Selected- B16:H16	--	N/A
MS Excel 2003: Working with Cells and Cell Data	Edit text in cells	Correct	1. Cell Selected- A2:E2 2. Text Enclosed - Pro Forma Statement for 2004 3. Cell Selected-E3	--	N/A
MS Excel 2003: Working with Cells and Cell Data	Apply number formats (currency	Incorrect	1. Cell Selected- H2:H3	--	N/A

Using the Internet

Most students come into college computer classes Internet savvy. SAM allows the instructor to use the student interest and knowledge of the Internet to practice and learn Microsoft Office skills in an environment that is more comfortable to the student. Even for the student that may come into the class with limited Internet experience, SAM can be easily set up at the student's home, office, or dorm room. All that is needed is the SAM software setup disk and an Internet connection.

Setup/Technical Requirements

SAM system requirements are:

- Internet Explorer 5.0 or higher
- Macromedia® Flash Player 7
- Live Internet connection (T1 or ISDN recommended, 56K minimum connection)
- Pentium 350 MHz or faster
- 128 MB RAM
- Up to 2.7 GB hard disk space.
- SVGA graphics (800x600.256 color or higher)
- Windows operating system (XP, 2000, or NT4 recommended)

SAM must be installed on every computer that is to be used by the instructor or the students. In the computer labs at St. Catharine College, we initially went through a local installation on each machine. Later, the technology department found that Ghosting the computers with SAM worked just as well. SAM also supports a network installation, but does not recommend this type of setup. In the network setup, speed and reliability of the network may cause some decreased performance in SAM.

Students purchase the SAM student edition, which contains the setup disks and the unique key code, which will allow them to create their SAM user profile and login. The setup is a very straight forward process. The disks auto run, and will take the student through the process step by step, usually in less than a couple of minutes. The student edition also contains a booklet explaining the setup process. The instructor must provide the student with the Institution Key, which is provided to the institution by SAM. It is very important for the SAM Supervisor to save the Institution Key. All students will need it the first time they log into SAM.

SAM also provides an Instructor's Manual and a SAM Lab Administrator's Guide that will provide all the information needed to create sections, create and schedule exams, administer training, and run reports. These documents can be downloaded from the SAM website.

Conclusion

As instructors in the computer information system classrooms are well aware of, we teach in a very dynamic area. Students are coming into our classrooms and computer labs with a much more diverse background. Computer literacy has become a cornerstone for practically every major degree area on college campuses. The challenge facing every computer teacher is to find appropriate means to teach and evaluate this ever-changing group of students. With SAM to help with the skills assessment and to help provide on-line training for the student, the teacher is free to work with the students one on one to address specific learning.

Some have addressed concerns about SAM taking over the teacher's role in the classroom. It is important to me to say that while I use SAM to help teach some of the technical skills, it is still my responsibility and obligation to teach the logic in how to use those skills. Through case studies, I still challenge the student to put those skills to practical use. The course grade is not solely based on the SAM test results. Students must still complete case work that will demonstrate

critical thinking skills and use the technical skills of the software that SAM helps to develop. The bottom line is that learning in the college computer classroom and lab is not just about mastering a skill, but about critical thinking and learning. SAM is just a tool to aid in the process.