Tip sheet - Designing assessment

This tip sheet provides guidance on how to approach assessment design. It demonstrates ways of adhering to the principles of assessment. When thinking about assessment consider it as a way to communicate a student's progress, their achievement and how they can reflect on their own current and future learning. Assessment operates in two ways, which may be separate but not mutually exclusive (Boud, 1995):

1. **Prompt for learning**
   Prompting learning often involves formative assessment (which can be formal or informal, graded or ungraded) where students are provided with insights into the gaps in their knowledge or skills, to help them improve. Guiding students to determine these gaps usually involves providing them with formal or informal feedback, which may occur via an automated prompt (via a quiz), from peers and/or from teaching staff.
2. **To certify achievement**
   Certification usually involves summative assessment and occurs when the final results of a students' assessment outcomes are communicated to the student and often to an external audience (exam board, other teaching staff, employer etc.). A summative assessment piece can occur within a topic or at the end of a topic, and also includes feedback.

Students and assessment

Students frequently perceive assessment practices they are exposed to as poor and specifically indicating that these practices:

- are narrow in scope
- lack authenticity and relevance to real world tasks
- rely heavily on factual recall rather than on higher order thinking and problem-solving skills
- have little long-term benefit
- fail to reward genuine effort
- have unclear expectations and assessment criteria
- fail to provide adequate feedback to students
- make unreasonable demands on students (Flint and Johnson, 2011, p. 2).

Addressing these student concerns requires an approach to assessment design which places students' learning and their longer terms needs at the centre. Therefore, assessment must be carefully designed to test that students have adequately acquired the skills and knowledge to meet the topic learning outcomes so they can progress to the next stage of their learning in authentic ways that can be potentially replicated in their working lives after graduating. It is therefore important that you:

- help students understand what they need to do
- provide students with the skills and knowledge to complete the assessments
- assess students in ways that are authentic and consider the careers they may undertake

Help students understand what they need to do

Assessment tasks need to be clearly articulated in language that students can understand with well-defined criteria indicating how their work will be assessed. To ensure students know what they need to do to complete an assessment task it is important to provide them with clear guidance / instruction on how to complete the task, adequate support to achieve their desired goals and information about the criteria on which they are judged. There are two important and separate aspects to providing this information to students, the *assessment instructions* and the *assessment rubric*. The assessment instructions need to be

written in clear language that students will understand while effectively articulating your expectations and may include an exemplar demonstrating what success looks like.

Provide students with the skills and knowledge to complete the assessments

It is imperative that students are assessed on what they have been taught, so assessments need to link to both the learning outcomes of the topic and the activities students have undertaken while progressing through the topics. Don't assume other topics have provided students with the knowledge and skills you are assessing, unless all skills they acquire are explicitly and clearly mapped across an entire course and your students are all part of the same cohort. Examples of things to consider are included within the context of different assessment types in Table 1.

It is also useful to provide links and/or access to explicit guiding resources students need to use while completing their assessment tasks. Examples include assessment instructions, rubrics, examples of submitted, anonymised assessments, specific materials used as part of the delivery of the topic (such as teaching lecture notes, videos, laboratory experiments or results etc.). Providing access to all the materials students need to use when completing the assessments in the same place as the assessments are explained (e.g. in the same assessment tool) will ensure they are easily found. In addition, ensuring your FLO site links to support materials students may choose to access while completing the assessment tasks is also helpful, this might comprise links to Library and Student Learning Support Service materials. Reminding students about the range of support available to them normalises accessing help and may encourage usage.

Assess students in ways that are authentic and consider the careers they may undertake

Ideally, assessment tasks provide opportunities to practice what students are learning in ways that either replicate, emulate or are real-life settings and demonstrate obvious links to the pedagogical approach to the teaching and learning.

Essays and examinations may be appropriate assessment tasks for topics where students are intending to be writers or teach writing (creative writing, English literature and language teaching) or where they are required to instantly recall information (law, medicine etc.) but many topics use these assessment tasks rather than more authentic assessments. Also, once a student has mastered essay writing they no longer benefit from opportunities to develop new skills as they complete assessment tasks.

The following table outlines ways in which assessment tasks across a range of topics may be rewritten to incorporate these ideas (the first two are rewritten for use when assessing students in first or second year).

Table 1: Rewritten assessment tasks

Assessment No.	Original Task	Re-written task to better support student progress	Essential considerations related to assessment task
1	Complete your lab reports for our first three experiments.	Use your notes from our first three experiments (Lab 1, Lab 2 and Lab 3) to complete your Lab report booklets. Follow the recommended procedures for writing notes from an experiment. Complete the first three questions and once you have feedback from those continue completing the booklet as we complete experiments. Ensure all questions are correctly answered.	Ensure assessment piece occurs shortly after the third laboratory (lab) session Require students to have participated in the three lab sessions Discuss how to complete the report with students, in addition to providing them with written assessment instructions and access to the artefact

2	Write an annotated bibliography, including 5 relevant references.	Write an annotated bibliography on the topic of your choice for assessment 2. Ensure to include a brief paragraph (approx. 150 words) discussing the content of the reference which should be formatted using APA referencing. Your bibliography should contain 5 peer reviewed references from databases available from Flinders Library, as discussed in the session on Library resources. It is anticipated that the references used, and feedback received from the annotated bibliography will be used to complete the poster developed for assessment 2.	Preparing an annotated bibliography will help students better prepare for their next assignment and gain skills they will use as they progress through their studies. Discuss different types of bibliographies and peer reviewed references with students. Provide the opportunity for students to attend a revision session on the use of library databases (which may include a session with a librarian) Provide students with access to any other required details, you expect them to include in the assessment (related to the subject they choose to focus on).
3	Write a 2000-word essay comparing Australia's approach to health care with an approach from another country.	Write a 2000 word report, comparing one area of the Australian health care system with the same area of health care in another country (the area of health care you cover should be limited to those discussed in class e.g. private versus public health insurance; the government subsidised medicine schemes; emergency health care services; health promotion and managing public health outbreaks). Then, using the report template provided, write a 2000-word report. Ensure your report includes an executive summary; references and responses to the other three sections in the template.	Students are more likely to write reports than essays when they are employed. Ensure students know what a report is and how to write one (ideally outlining how they differ from other forms of written assessment pieces). List the areas of health care students may include and what should not be considered a relevant area to cover. Provide students with access to the report template briefly outlines what to include and summarises your expectations regarding content (Cover page, executive summary, contents page, section headings introduction, tables, etc.)

Bloom's taxonomy and Laurillard's learning types

The Good practice guide - writing learning outcomes discusses ways of using language (specifically Bloom's taxonomy) to ensure learning outcomes are appropriately aimed at your students' year and expertise level. Your assessment items need to do the same and be described to students in ways that do not over or underestimate their abilities. In addition, your choice of assessment task will also depend on the activities you require students to do and the type of learning being assessed. Table 2 discusses various learning types and links them to assessment activities, while a number of the assessment items incorporate more than one type of learning they have been placed into the table based on their predominant characteristic.

Table 2: Alternative assessment types (based on Laurillard's learning types)

Learning type	Acquisition	Collaboration	Discussion	Investigation	Practice	Production
Description	Learning through acquisition is what learners are doing when they are listening to a lecture or podcast, reading from books or websites, and watching demos or videos (the teacher controls the narrative of learning).	Learning through collaboration embraces mainly discussion, practice, and production. Building on investigations and acquisition it is about taking part in the process of knowledge building itself	Learning through discussion requires the learner to articulate their ideas and questions, and to challenge and respond to the ideas and questions from the teacher, and/or from their peers	Learning through investigation guides the learner to explore, compare and critique the texts, documents and resources that reflect the concepts and ideas being taught	Learning through practice enables the learner to adapt their actions to the task goal and use the feedback to improve their next action. Feedback may come from self-reflection, from peers, from the teacher, or from the activity itself, if it shows them how to improve the result of their action in relation to the goal	Learning through production is the way the teacher motivates the learner to consolidate what they have learned by articulating their current conceptual understanding and how they used it in practice
Assessment types	Take home exam (could include open book, longer form essays or problem-based questions); consider demonstration of a more research-based approach with a reflective component Write an exam based on topic knowledge (include answers and justify rationale for questions)	Problem-solving (e.g. students collaborate to produce solution/s to a relevant issue) Create a webpage (on an issue to do with course content). Create a wiki (as a resource able to be used in the field) Collaborate to produce an annotated bibliography Design a Theme for a Conference (and describe why this would be of interest to discipline)	Reflect on an online discussion within the topic Evaluate thinking (e.g. students discuss what they found and compare sources) Assess participation in synchronous discussions (e.g. via Collaborate) Debate (e.g. in asynchronous discussion forum)	Critique and explanation of video practice (e.g. find / create videos and post online; include a critique task for students) Research and find the facts / research behind a relevant or current issue Analyse data from online database (e.g. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare)	Video upload of task performance Online simulation tasks Reflection on online role plays or other online practice tasks Completion of tasks in virtual labs Complete a grant application or award nomination and include justification	Portfolio production (e.g., series of videos / artefacts showing production over time) Real time viva Reflection on process or production of work Evaluate a website. Literature review (e.g. evaluative annotated bibliography) Create a blog, resource, model, computer program, animation (provide choice of content to allow for student agency and reduce academic integrity issues) Produce a journal article, book review, report etc.

Reviewing and moderating your assessment items

Once you are satisfied with the way your assessment tasks are written it is useful to review them. Table 3 provides an approach to reviewing assessments. It is also important to have them moderated by asking a colleague to read them to ensure they are fair, unambiguous, and transparently indicate your expectations.

Table 3: Swain, K. (2019) modified from, Rowntree, D. (1987). Assessing Students: How Shall We Know Them? New York: Nichols Publishing Company

Consider the following questions when developing or determining the appropriateness of an assessment piece:
Who is being assessed? Provide an overview of the students for whom the assessment is designed.
Why are you assessing them? Explain the purpose of the assessment.
What will you assess? Outline what will be included in the assessment.
How will you assess? What will the assessment look like and what are the students expected to do? Analyse and justify your design decisions in relation to the principles of assessment, validity, reliability and fairness and equity.
What constitutes success? Describe and explain specifically what a successful achievement would look like.
What feedback will you give? Explain what sort of feedback you will give your students.
How will you give the feedback? Explain how the feedback will be delivered to the students.
How will you use the data? What purpose will the data serve, to improve student learning?

References

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Flint, N., & Johnson, B. (2011). *Towards fairer university assessment recognizing the concerns of students* (1st ed.). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

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Swain, K (2019) *Modified assessment table*, Flinders university, unpublished