

**Practical advice for enhancing
your teaching and learning**

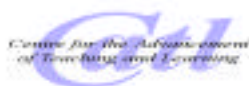
**Assessing your
students**

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April 2001



**THE UNIVERSITY OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIA**



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This booklet will give you guidance on the following questions:

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What makes an effective assessment task?

When assessment tasks are well designed, teachers are able to assess more effectively and students are provided with a valuable learning experience. The following features are characteristic of good assessment tasks:

- **Clear structure**
Students should be given detailed information about what is expected of them. For example, include the purpose of the assessment, the required format, word limits if needed, the expected use of resources, etc.
- **Authentic**
Tasks based in real-life contexts are especially effective for motivating students and providing engaging learning situations.
- **Encourage integration**
Where appropriate, assessment tasks should require students to integrate knowledge from different parts of the course.

How do you choose assessment tasks?

Students' study habits are often driven by assessment so it is important to develop appropriate tasks. When planning assessment for your course:

- **Match assessment to learning outcomes**
To ensure all your learning outcomes are met, design assessment tasks which cover all the essential outcomes. This should include not only knowledge-based outcomes but assessment of skills and attitudes as well (e.g., assessment of ability to work effectively in a group).
- **Ensure variety**
Different assessment tasks cater for students' varying learning styles (e.g., visual or verbal).
- **Consult colleagues**
Ask for advice on how others have assessed in your area. Ask colleagues to look at your assessment tasks before they are given to students.
- **Create an assessment database**
Generate multiple assessment tasks and questions. These may be useful for supplementary examinations or future semesters.

How can you use formative assessment?

Formative assessment gives students feedback on their performance. Although it does not count towards a final mark, they find it very helpful. It could consist of:

- **Informal feedback**
Tutors or lecturers can give verbal or written feedback to individuals or groups.
- **Quizzes and short tests**
Including a quick revision test before beginning a lecture or tutorial can help students consolidate and focus their learning.
- **Mock versions of summative assessments**
When students are able to sit a trial version of a final examination, much anxiety is relieved and their final revision is more focused. You can use self or peer-marking to provide feedback or distribute model answers.
- **Computer-based assessment**
Software is available to provide formative tests for students to access when they choose. It can provide immediate feedback in the form of results or further prompts to help students solve problems.

What types of summative assessment can you use?

Summative assessment, which contributes towards a student's mark, can occur throughout the semester or in a final examination period. There are a wide variety of possible tasks and the following list provides some suggestions:

- Articles for professional or academic journals
- Reviews of products or texts
- Reflective journal writing
- Essays
- Portfolio of collected or created resources
- Industry-style reports or newsletters
- Policy writing or analysis
- Interview transcripts and analysis
- Case studies
- Collaborative group projects
- Results from surveys
- Letter writing from various perspectives

How can you use web-based assessment?

Web-based assessment is beginning to be used on a wider scale. Key features of web-based assessment tasks include:

- **Easy access for students**
Students can work on assessment tasks at any time of day and in a variety of locations, including university labs and at home.
- **Efficient provision of feedback**
Tasks such as multiple-choice questions can provide immediate contextual feedback to students.
- **Collaboration between students**
Group assessment tasks can be extremely effective when web-based. The contribution of each student can be efficiently tracked, and quieter students can participate more easily over the web than face-to-face.
- **Improved writing for students**
Increasingly, students are more accustomed to typing than writing by hand and research has shown that some students perform better at writing tasks when using a computer.

How can you use group assessment tasks?

Assigning assessment tasks which students must complete in groups is becoming increasingly common. The features of an effective group task include:

- **Appropriate group selection methods**
Teacher-selected groups simulate more closely how students will work in employment situations; student-selected groups may cause difficulties such as similar abilities grouping together or quieter students being left out, but students can learn from these experiences.
- **An equitable marking system**
Students are often concerned about "free-loaders" in group tasks. Using confidential peer assessment, giving groups an overall mark and asking them to negotiate the appropriate mark for each member, or including individual pieces of work as part of the task help to solve this.
- **Well-designed task to fit outcomes for all**
Tasks should be designed so all students have some exposure to each element. If outcomes such as collaborative skills are also being assessed, students should be taught about how to work in a group.

How can you set a good examination?

A good examination allows markers to effectively assess student performance while providing students with valuable learning experiences. It is important that examination papers are:

- **Well structured**
Instructions and choices should be unambiguous. These details could even be provided to students before the examination.
- **Linked to learning outcomes**
By focusing their study on the outcomes, students should be able to prepare well for the examination.
- **Reasonable in length and scope**
Questions should be readily answerable in the time allocated. The detail expected should be in accordance with the examination conditions.
- **Focused on appropriate cognitive skills**
For example, an open book examination may encourage higher level cognitive skills such as application and integration of knowledge.

How can you write good examination questions?

Write examination questions before and during semester, so you have time to review them before students sit the examination.

- **Multiple-choice questions**
Include questions which involve reasoning out an answer rather than recalling facts. Use plausible options - the aim is for each option to be selected by some students. Circulate your questions to colleagues to ensure the answers are agreed on by a "panel of experts".
- **Short answer questions**
These can range from one word to several paragraphs. Make the style and length expected clear to students.
- **Essay questions**
Ensure students can readily understand the kind of answer you are looking for. Where appropriate, provide a suggested structure.
- **Practical examinations**
Provide adequate time for students to complete tasks. Design questions which examine subsets of larger tasks to broaden your sample.

How can you develop effective marking criteria?

In order to mark students' assessment tasks fairly, as well as making the job easier for the marker, it is important to develop a set of marking criteria.

Effective marking criteria will:

- Provide you with a consistent measure when assigning marks or grades.
- Give sufficient detail to enable you to mark different aspects of the assessment. For example, you could allocate 20% of the final mark for an essay to grammar and sentence structure, and describe what level a student needs to attain to be given a certain mark.
- Be explicit enough to be used reliably by other markers to award the same marks or grades.
- Where appropriate, be useful to provide to students to help them understand what is required for the assessment task.
- Enable you to provide students with clear feedback on how they can improve their performance.

For more information

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