



EMERGING QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

ASSESSMENT

PRACTICES

The purpose of this document is to provide responses to a few frequently asked questions about assessment practices. These are guiding considerations only. There are no one-size-fits all responses. Learning and teaching in each disciplinary field is nuanced differently and requires reflective thought and tailored action.

1. What do I **most** want my students to learn?
2. Which of my module **learning outcomes** have already been met?
3. Do some learning outcomes need to **modified**. If so, how?
4. What are the best ways of ensuring that all my students **achieve** the outcomes
5. Is **continuous assessment** feasible for my module. If so, what are the implications of this for online learning?
6. How do I need to **adapt** my teaching to improve student learning through continuous assessment?
7. Do **formative assessments** need to count for marks?
8. If the assessment is not for marks, how do I **motivate** students to take the tasks?
9. How do I **construct** assessment tasks that will motivate students to do the task?
10. How do I enable **academic integrity**?



What do I most want my students to learn?

How do I choose?

Your course is your field of expertise and it is part of a programme. It initially consists of content topics which you most want students to learn. But this is only one dimension of what you most want your students to learn.

While content is indeed a central component of a programme or course, a one-dimensional teaching notion of 'covering' the topics is inadequate. Remember, it is outcome statements that we teach to. The content topics which you initially most want your students to learn need to be translated into learning outcome statements. These statements inform the learning, teaching and the assessments of your course. When writing learning outcomes, you need to decide on the level of cognitive engagement for students. This will set your teaching, learning and assessment alignment in motion within the course, nested in the programme, and achieving institutional goals.



Education is about conceptual change, not just the acquisition of content. Such conceptual change can occur when academics and students know what the intended outcomes are, where all can see where they are supposed to be going in terms of cognitive load/ level of learning. This necessitates you to plan the cognitive load.

Bloom's Taxonomy is very valuable for this:

CREATE	Create, design, plan, compose, formulate
EVALUATION	Evaluate, appraise, decide, recommend
ANALYSIS	Analyse, categorise, differentiate, deduce
APPLICATION	Apply, illustrate, relate, interpret
COMPREHENSION	Describe, explain, distinguish, summarise
KNOWLEDGE	Define, recall, recognise, list, name



Do some learning outcomes

need to be modified?

To what extent am I bound to

the learning outcomes?

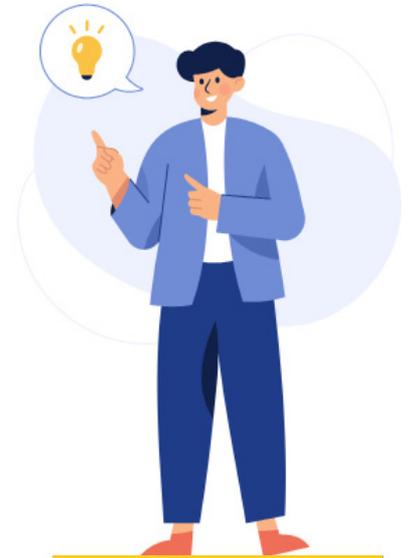
Modification is a sign of reflective practice

Modifying learning outcomes may well be a case of responding to the learning context. For example, if a cohort of students present with responsiveness to higher order learning and assessment, the cognitive load could be increased. Alternatively, it may need to decrease if students are homogeneously challenged by the learning outcomes. This might also have been signalled by the moderator's reports or student feedback, which would necessitate a modification of learning outcomes. But remember that you may only change up to 50% of the learning outcomes which will then not require an official institutional approval process. Ensure that you carefully construct your revised learning outcomes with explicit verbs at the appropriate cognitive level for your course offering. Be mindful of avoiding non-action words.

The beauty of outcomes-based learning is that the term 'intended' learning outcomes' is used, which means that the teaching and assessment allow for desirable but unintended outcomes. These occur when students have freedom to construct their own knowledge.

Remember that your teaching and assessments tasks should be open enough to allow for that but should not stray too far from the intended outcome.

In as much as there is freedom for students to construct their own knowledge, there is freedom for higher education teachers to be reflexive in modifying the learning outcomes and the subsequent assessment tasks.



Action Verbs

Define
Categorize
Calculate
Critique
Interpret
Create
Summarize
Hypothesize
Defend

Non-Action Verbs

Understand
Learn
Appreciate
Observe
Read
Consider
Demonstrate
Know



Which of my course learning outcomes have already been achieved?

You will only know which outcomes have been met once you have intentionally assessed each of them.

The student responses will tell you the extent to which your learning outcomes have been achieved, if at all. Their responses will also tell you if your assessment task was a good, reliable activity or if the task, in fact, needs to be changed or improved.



TIP:

In as much as there is freedom for students to construct their own knowledge, there is freedom for higher education teachers to be reflexive in modifying the learning outcomes and the subsequent assessment tasks.

Assessment, learning and teaching need to be **constructively aligned**. You are the owner of this alignment. You teach to your learning outcomes and you assess these. Your teaching activities are designed for learning and for assessment.

Assess as you go along:

Assessment for learning

Assessment of learning

Assessment as learning

Your learning activities should be congruent with your assessment tasks. There are a number of easy-to-use online tools which can be used as learning activities as well as for formative assessment:





What are the best ways of

ensuring that all my students

achieve the outcome?

Explain the assessment criteria

Whereas learning outcomes begin with a verb which indicates what they will be doing (e.g. recall, construct etc.), assessment criteria tell them how it will be judged. This transparency practice plays a huge part in ensuring that all students work towards this.

When students are clearly informed of the expected quality in the assessment tasks (i.e. assessment criteria) they have 'learning co-ordinates' to guide their journey. But this is not enough. You should:

1. Invest sufficient time in explaining the assessment criteria to your students.
2. Engage students in a marking exercise where they can personally see the application of the criteria.

Constructively aligned assessment criteria begin with a noun that complements the verb in the learning outcome. For example, if the outcome is for students to summarize how concepts interrelate, one of the criteria might be 'breadth' of the summary.

Impact

Originality

Breadth

Accuracy

Depth

Succinctness



Is continuous assessment feasible

for my module? If so, what

are the implications of this

for online learning?

Continuous assessment is feasible for most courses because it involves a variety of assessments that are completed throughout your course. It **does not mean** 'constantly' or 'all the time'. It means **'well-connected'** tasks, each to the former and latter and directly to the learning outcomes. This works equally well in contact and online spaces.

Continuous assessment means:

Flowing, well-connected, adaptable



Continuous assessment provides powerful opportunities for incremental feedback for your students to act on in contact or online modes of learning. It can be used in two ways:

1. Summative assessment on tasks and activities which contribute to the final mark.
2. Formative assessment on tasks and activities that **DO NOT** necessarily contribute to the final mark but provide signals about the kind of engagement that is still needed for successful completion of the course.

Continuous assessment helps students to pace their learning and to engage with the course from week one. What is required of you is investing in flowing, well-connected assessment tasks that are also diverse in appealing to various learning styles.



Providing **meaningful and timely feedback** to students regarding the quality of their projects, tests, portfolios etc., is crucial.



How do I need to adapt

my teaching to improve

student learning through

continuous assessment?

1. Feed forward through well-connected assessment tasks and clear assessment criteria.

2. Provide feedback.

3. Feed in with adaptable teaching.

We know that students strategically engage with tasks that will count towards their final mark, so you should make assessment a central part of all your teaching activities. It is a strong 'FEED FORWARD' driver for student learning. You should think of assessment as 'assessment for learning'.

Your choices for assessments should be strongly formative in nature and used as the basis for providing feedback to students. Try to feed it into the flow of your teaching and formative assessment. These could be 'small' tasks which students know will 'lead to' or 'mirror' the imminent summative tasks.

Remember that summative tasks are neither a secret nor a surprise.

Change

Adjust

Shift

Transform

Modify

Transition



You could:

- **Develop draft** summative tasks before you embark on teaching your course.
- **Develop** mini formative tasks from these (small parts from the whole).
- **Modify** these as you go along and as you gauge student success along the way.
- **Adapt** your teaching from this on-going feedback to improve student success.



Do formative assessments

need to count for marks?

**Formative assessment can be marked but does not
need to count toward the final**

**Formative assessment provides feedback
formally or informally**

**Formative assessment can be used again,
as items, in a summative task**





If the assessment is not for marks

how do I motivate students

to do the tasks?

Continuous assessment has the potential to strengthen your students' motivation and their engagement with the learning outcomes if the assessment activities are designed in a meaningful, purposeful, and contextualized way. This often holds true for 'no marks' tasks too.

One way of achieving this is through authentic tasks that:

1. Draw on their interests and mirror real professional scenarios.
2. Are integrated with other tasks , particularly forthcoming summative assessments.
3. Are short, 'bite-sizes' that do not take too much of their time.

Operationally, you could make continuous assessment a course requirement : You could opt to specify the number of tasks to be completed in order to participate in summative assessments.

This could entrench to a culture of formative assessment in the program.

Explicitly convey to your students, at the outset that, your course is not limited to:

**Assessment
of learning**

**Foster a culture of
formative assessment**

Explicitly convey to your students, at the outset, that your course is shaped by:

**Assessment
as and for
learning**



How do I set assessment tasks that will motivate students to take ownership of their work?

Take a variety of assessment snapshots to show students a variety of images of their learning.



Take assessment snapshots

Variation in assessment is a strong motivating factor for students to take ownership of their work. Different methods of assessment provide different opportunities for students to engage with learning outcomes.

Diverse methods appeal to diverse student learning styles and will motivate students differently. Overuse of any one kind of assessment could jeopardise motivation.

Your approach in posing the task should be non-threatening and attainable.

Note:

Examinations were incorrectly deemed the best task for students to take ownership of their work.

Bear in mind that exams is an approach to assessment which has been overused. Exams have also been granted heavy weightings in the assessment load.

An exam only defines the conditions under which student's abilities will be tested.

Assignments, on the other hand, combine formative and summative assessment tasks. These can also pose challenges but they are better in explicating assessment criteria, which shows their purpose and practicality, are less anxie-





How do I ensure academic

Think about how you could
intentionally enable
academic integrity

integrity?

Assessment activities and practices dominate a student's learning experiences and their academic integrity.

Students are most likely to compromise academic integrity for personal and pedagogic reasons:

1. Yearning for high marks
2. Fear of failing
3. Poor time management
4. Perception that they will not get caught
5. Misconceptions of what constitutes compromise of academic integrity
6. Disinterest in the tasks

We have a greater chance of enabling academic integrity in our pedagogic sphere of influence.

Academic integrity is a way of being and a way of doing in the education endeavour. It is not a deficit student condition.



A compromise in academic integrity within the student community can also be associated with:

1. An overloaded course/programme
2. High number of contact hours
3. Overloaded learning material
4. Limited choice in electives
5. A threatening/anxiety-provoking system which feels like a constant juggle and fight for survival



Continued:

Think about how you could enable deep learning as a pathway to academic integrity.

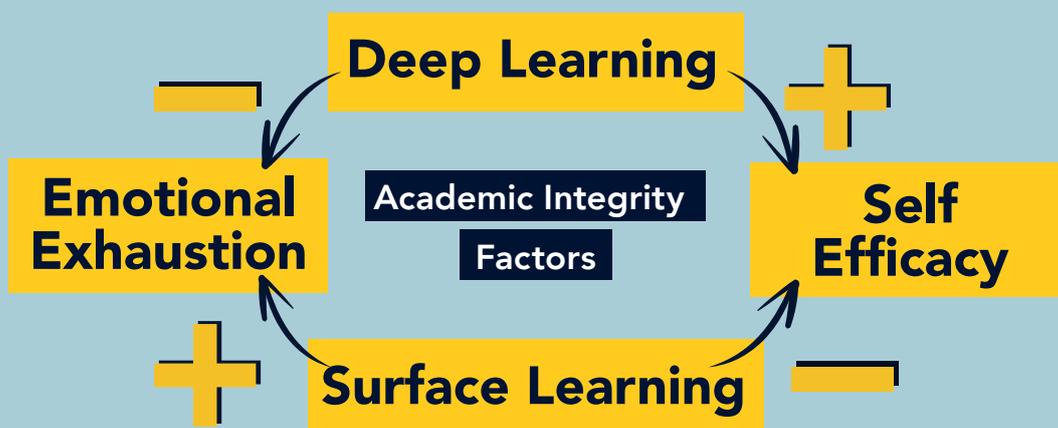


Students are more likely to take a deep approach to their learning when they are convinced of the relevance and importance of the assessment (e.g. real world).

Research evidence shows that students are more likely to justify plagiarism/forms of cheating when they perceive your assessment process as:

- Unreliable/unfair
- Unexplained/vague
- Heavy, overloaded summative weightings

A threatening assessment environment tends to predispose some students to 'desperate' actions that compromise integrity.





Continued:

What could I do to enable a better chance of academic integrity with online tests?



The potential of compromising academic integrity in summative tests/exams offered online, is great. It requires virtual live proctoring technologies. There are a number ways that you can attempt to decrease this vulnerability by considering the following techniques:

1. Offer a practice exam with a few questions to address technologic anxiety.
2. Create varied questions that require higher order thinking that requires students to explain in their own words.
3. Restrict the testing window where students are in different time zones, different sets of tests, at three different start times.
4. Set-up the exam to show one question at a time to limit potential to scan test questions and research answers.
5. Prohibit backtracking so that students focus solely on one question at a time, answer it with a final answer, and then move to the next question.
6. Change the test question sequence to offer different versions of the same test.
7. Delay score availability so that students cannot advise their peers.



Some thoughts to consider:

This document provided responses to a few frequently asked questions in our institution about assessment practices. As we embark on learning, teaching and assessment planning, we should intentionally set out to reshape and rethink our assessment practices for two key reasons as shown below:

"Assessment is a serious and often tragic enterprise."

(Ramsden, 2003)

"Students can, with difficulty, escape from the effects of poor teaching, they cannot (by definition if they want to graduate) escape the effects of poor assessment."

(Boud, 1995)

We need to remember that this is a living document which is open to innovation and amendment as we learn more going forward. Ideally, we would like to work towards our assessment practices embodying non-elitist ways of knowing, being and doing at course, programme and institutional level so as to respond to this insight from Race (2003):

"Assessment is such an immovable and institutionalised process because it is the tip of the cultural iceberg on which elitist, class-ridden societies seek to maintain the status quo".

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