Guide to assessment types

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<th>BENEFIT</th>
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<td>MCQ</td>
<td>Selecting from a bank of potential answers</td>
<td>• High reliability&lt;br&gt;• Low cost&lt;br&gt;• Efficient as the test is identical for everyone&lt;br&gt;• Easy to administer and mark&lt;br&gt;• Candidates can sit them at different times and locations&lt;br&gt;• Good for testing factual knowledge&lt;br&gt;• Easy to test a large part of factual syllabus&lt;br&gt;• Can be online which saves paper&lt;br&gt;• Can be used both in formatives and summative.</td>
<td>• Often not valid as they cannot test certain domains.&lt;br&gt;• Not necessarily good predictors.&lt;br&gt;• Difficult and costly to construct initially.&lt;br&gt;• Pre-testing is required.&lt;br&gt;• No access to higher order skills - No credit given for workings that display knowledge of principles/ reasoning cannot be seen.&lt;br&gt;• Not always possible to see why a question was wrong.&lt;br&gt;• Danger of guessing answers.&lt;br&gt;• Can encourage a surface approach to learning by assessing what is easy to assess not what is important.&lt;br&gt;• Writing good questions is difficult.</td>
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<td>Annotated bibliographies</td>
<td>A list of citations of books, journals, documents and other articles. Following each citation is a brief evaluation that informs the readers of the relevance and quality of the source cited.</td>
<td>• Rewards students who undertake wide reading.</td>
<td>• Can require staff to take on extra reading, which is time consuming and adds to the marking load.</td>
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| Book review       | Book reviews can either be critical or descriptive. Descriptive reviews give essential information including the author’s aims and purpose. Critical reviews evaluate and analyse the contents. | • Encourages critical evaluation of work  
• Opportunity to test analytical skills and writing skills  
• Showcase how a student has ‘read around’ the subject. | • Descriptive reviews may not test depth of knowledge and understanding of surrounding topics.  
• Online resources mean students may not read the books themselves, but summaries online.  
• Students may overlook purpose of critical assessment for simply telling the facts of the story. |
| Articles – journals | Short papers on specific topics. | • Word counts and deadlines encourage time management and the production of work containing little jargon. | • Encourages students to paraphrase without applying own knowledge or evaluation.  
• Time consuming for staff as they may need to take on extra reading themselves. |
| Case studies      | Fictional or realistic simulations of ‘real world’ scenarios. | • Attempts to assess the student’s ability to recognise the nature of the ‘problem’ and suggest alternative solutions  
• Has the potential to test a wider range of higher cognitive skills in a more ‘realistic’ setting than conventional methods  
• Can demonstrate skills learned in a professional context. | • Hard to draw definite conclusions – i.e there is not always a right or wrong answer. This can be a challenging concept for students to grasp and for staff to mark. |
| Short answer test | Open ended questions to test basic knowledge and understanding | • Offers extensive syllabus coverage  
• Focus on specific knowledge and skills. | • Less reliable than MCQ as they simplify complicated ideas  
• Tests low cognitive levels of understanding. |
| Extended answer tests | An open-ended question that’s begins with some type of prompt. | • Easy to construct questions  
• Unseen questions make students revise the entire syllabus as anything may appear on the paper. | • Provide scope for question spotting and ignoring sections of the syllabus that are too difficult. |
| Critical incident accounts | Lessons that can be learned from a key incident that has occurred in the workplace. | • Encourages reflection on ways a situation might have been avoided or how the reaction to a crisis might have been improved  
• Different perspectives on the same incident can be compared and contrasted  
• Accounts can form part of a portfolio of evidence. | • Learners need an opportunity to develop their self-evaluation and self-assessment skills to do such assessment in the first place. |
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| Direct observation | Used for training purposes, usually in a practical setting. This can be done through working alongside the student, visiting the student or arranging for activities to take place. | • In a formative setting it gives an opportunity to reflect on what has been learned  
• Providing feedback on alternative approaches can encourage learning from experience  
• Can use other reflective tasks such as journals in conjunction to this method. | • Feedback may not be extensive enough if it does not include information on further learning  
• Feedback can be ineffective if not taken on board. |
| Learning contracts | Agreements established between students and tutors or between employers and students to achieve set learning objectives. | • Students become motivated by setting their own goals for learning  
• Encourages self-assessment practices  
• Learns can reflect on their own professional needs as well as the employers. | • Require the learner to have the necessary skills to identify where they are placed in terms of their own skills and competencies. |
| Self and Peer assessment | Critically evaluating one’s own work or a peers’ work to highlight strengths and weaknesses. | • Emphasis on reliability and validity  
• Students try to apply the assessment criteria themselves  
• Develops learners own abilities of being self-reflective. | • Unreliable as peers are more likely to over grade learners work  
• Weaker students can ‘hide’ in more proactive groups  
• Self-assessment may take time to master if not guided properly. |
| Orals and presentations | Communicating information and knowledge to an audience. | • Good way of examining problem solving abilities  
• Assesses communication skills  
• Immediacy  
• Difficult to cheat. | • Time consuming as often on a one to one basis  
• Unsuitable where there are a large groups. |
| Portfolios | Collection of items that attempts to produce multiple sources of evidence to verify claims of achievement of learning outcomes | • Demonstrates achievement of several learning outcomes over a period of time  
• Students are engaged and involved in their development  
• Plagiarism is more difficult as the portfolio is individual to the learner. | • Picking the best pieces of work vs showing all the evidence  
• Portfolio moves from outside the classroom to the workplace which means costs of assessments are transferred  
• Authenticity of evidence. |
| Coursework | Can include a wide range of activities including dissertations, reports and portfolios. In general these are detailed pieces that have a set time frame and/or word limit. | • Students consider coursework to be a fairer measure of a range of abilities as it allows them to organise their own work patterns to a greater extent  
• Focus on analytical and evaluative skills. | • Risk of plagiarism and impersonation  
• Word counts may be restrictive. |
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<td>Group work</td>
<td>Working with peers to complete tasks</td>
<td>• Allows for team working skills to be developed, which is beneficial for employment</td>
<td>• Marking may be difficult as students find grading to be unfair when some members of the group have not ‘pulled their weight’</td>
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<td>• Ability to peer-assess and learn from each other</td>
<td>• Easy for less confident or less active members of the group to get good marks with little participation</td>
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<td>• The group can either be assessed individually or as a group effort</td>
<td>• Can be difficult to organise for large cohorts.</td>
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<td>• Encourages peer feedback and learning from one another.</td>
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<td>Electronically</td>
<td>Digitalised assessments</td>
<td>• Staff can engage in online submission and feedback using a variety of tools and technologies</td>
<td>• Systems integration in order to transfer and display assessment data and marks between systems – issue where institutions rely on proprietary software</td>
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<td>managed assessments</td>
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<td>• Regular and continual feedback to students – automated feedback</td>
<td>• Marking student work on a screen may take some getting used to – some argue issues regarding health and safety</td>
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<td>• No need for multiple copies of the same work – saves printing costs and travelling to hand in work</td>
<td>• Fragmented nature of implementation leads to groups of people in the university not working together.</td>
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<td>• Flexibility and privacy of receiving feedback</td>
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<td>• Immediate access to submitted work for staff to mark and moderate</td>
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<td>Supervised practical’s e.g. assessing clinical skills</td>
<td>Used in disciplines where practical skills are fundamental to the programme</td>
<td>• Enables students to record their findings accurately and in a timely manner</td>
<td>• Failure in practical assessments normally means students will fail the programme.</td>
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<td>• Encourages students to reflect on their learning and progress.</td>
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| Field reports/lab reports | Description of observations and analysis of data from these observations. | • Easy to assess understanding of learning outcomes as through clear structure of report  
• Improves (scientific) communication  
• Tests ability to summarise data, form hypotheses and draw inferences  
• Encourages self-reflection as students outline limitations of their work and how improvements can be made. | • Practical problems such as access and availability to resources  
• Difficulty in large cohorts. |
| Posters | Visual presentation of information and ideas | • Focuses attention of condensing information to just the key points  
• Allows students to be rewarded based on creativity  
• Can be used in large cohorts and encourages group work  
• Can be combined with other assessment methods. | • Information that is shared can be limited due to space, and if not combined with another assessment method students are unable to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of learning criteria  
• Students may place too much focus on aesthetics as opposed to content. |
| Open book/open note examinations | Access to specified texts/notes during exam | • Assess critical thinking as opposed to memory  
• Allows for more demanding questions to be set as anxiety is reduced. | • Students may waste time looking for information rather than writing  
• Temptation to use too many quotes despite relevance, which can increase risk of plagiarism. |
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| **Patchwork assessments** | Formative assessment opportunities that can be stitched together to produce a summative account | • Curriculum that is customised to suit real world needs  
• Learners engage in co creation of their own learning by selecting what is important to them in their own organisational contexts  
• Continuous assessment that encourages deep and transformative learning  
• Develops understanding of complex inter relationships  
• Prioritises opportunities for self and peer assessment  
• Promotes assessment FOR learning rather than assessment OF learning  
• Enables students to develop and practice graduate skills that are desirable to employers  
• Encouraging inclusivity by using a range of resources to demonstrate students learning. | • Language of the patchwork assessment process can appear very alien at the outset to under confident students  
• If assessment design is not well thought through, the process may seem fragmented Students will be unable to understand the link between the assignments thus learning outcomes will seem unclear. |
| **Seen exams** | Pre-released exam question. This can include notes when the actual exam takes place. | • Reduces question spotting and anxiety thus emphasis on learning  
• Greater focus on analysis and deeper thinking skills, as student has had time to reflect over the question. | • Encourages surface learning as students practice for the assessment at hand  
• Short time frame can restrict students from sharing their knowledge effectively. |
| **Research/ dissertation projects** | Substantial piece of writing following an investigation or piece of research | • Allows for self-assessment as little supervision  
• Tests analytical and evaluative skills  
• Encourages deep cognitive thinking in order to articulate and structure well thought through arguments. | • Lengthy to mark and remark  
• For larger projects, individual supervisors may be required This can be economically ineffective and time consuming for staff who already have a heavy workload. |