Guide to assessment types

TYPE OF ASSESSMENT	WHAT IT IS	BENEFIT	CHALLENGES/ LIMITATIONS
MCQ	Selecting from a bank of potential answers	• High reliability • Low cost • Efficient as the test is identical for everyone • Easy to administer and mark • Candidates can sit them at different times and locations • Good for testing factual knowledge • Easy to test a large part of factual syllabus • Can be online which saves paper • Can be used both in formatives and summative.	• Often not valid as they cannot test certain domains. • Not necessarily good predictors. • Difficult and costly to construct initially. • Pre-testing is required. • No access to higher order skills - No credit given for workings that display knowledge of principles/ reasoning cannot be seen. • Not always possible to see why a question was wrong. • Danger of guessing answers. • Can encourage a surface approach to learning by assessing what is easy to assess not what is important. • Writing good questions is difficult.
Annotated bibliographies	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.	• Rewards students who undertake wide reading.	• Can require staff to take on extra reading, which is time consuming and adds to the marking load.

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Learning Enhancement and **Development**

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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 work place.	• 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 purposed, 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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Group work	Working with peers to complete tasks	• Allows for team working skills to be developed, which is beneficial for employment • Ability to peer-assess and learn from each other • The group can either be assessed individually or as a group effort • Encourages peer feedback and learning from one another.	• Marking may be difficult as students find grading to be unfair when some members of the group have not 'pulled their weight' • Easy for less confident or less active members of the group to get good marks with little participation • Can be difficult to organise for large cohorts.
Electronically managed assessments	Digitalised assessments	• Staff can engage in online submission and feedback using a variety of tools and technologies • Regular and continual feedback to students – automated feedback • No need for multiple copies of the same work – saves printing costs and travelling to hand in work • Flexibility and privacy of receiving feedback • Immediate access to submitted work for staff to mark and moderate • Text matching tools provide opportunity for students to check their academic writing and referencing – allows for markers to evidence plagiarism.	• Systems integration in order to transfer and display assessment data and marks between systems – issue where institutions rely on proprietary software • Marking student work on a screen may take some getting used to – some argue issues regarding health and safety • Fragmented nature of implementation leads to groups of people in the university not working together.
Supervised practical's e.g. assessing clinical skills	Used in disciplines where practical skills are fundamental to the programme	• Enables students to record their findings accurately and in a timely manner • Encourages students to reflect on their learning and progress.	• Failure in practical assessments normally means students will fail the programme.

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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.