

Innovative Assessment

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Innovative Assessment



Guidelines for varying your assessment methods

Are you interested in finding out more about
the different assessment methods you can
use in your department?

We can help you prepare your students for different types of assessment.

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We hope you find this booklet useful!



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Introduction

This booklet is for use by early career teachers, experienced teaching staff and/or course directors who are interested in developing student assessment. Intentions are to promote the concept of innovation in assessment and question the taken for granted notion that student assessment necessitates a written report/essay and written exam. Assessment is central to student learning and has implications for all stakeholders.

Coventry University has a large and diverse student population, with forecasts of further growth in student population. We hope this booklet will encourage you to investigate options with regard to how students are assessed.

In addition to offering a brief insight into the range of innovative assessment currently in use across the faculty, at the back of this booklet is a non-exhaustive list of study skills, development skills and research skills. The list is designed to help you identify specific skills that will allow students to perform to the required level in your chosen method of assessment. When you have identified those specific skills, simply gauge the level of importance and urgency of each skill, and map these skills into your teaching programme.

Please contact Alyson Morris or Gary Connor if you are interested in discussing issues related to the concept of innovating your assessment methods.

Why is assessment important?

“Nothing we do to, or for our students is more important than our assessment of their work and the feedback we give them on it. The results of our assessment influence our students for the rest of their lives and careers—fine if we get it right, but unthinkable if we get it wrong” (Race, Brown and Smith 2005:xi).

Rowntree (1987:4) identifies the purpose of assessment as “to some extent, it is an attempt to know that person”...and the person finding out about himself”. The correct method of assessment needs to be aligned to what is being measured to ensure validity; hence, a written assessment is unsuitable for measuring practical skills (QAA 2012, 6).

Hounsell et al. (2007, 4) identified a large growing body of research on the use of innovative forms of assessment, with particular emphasis on (i) UK students where English is not their first language

and (ii) international students. Specific areas of interest included presentations, group presentations, blogs, forums, contribution, vivas, debates and role-play. Negating this seemingly positive action, the HEA (2012, 8) has more recently identified that such research is small-scale, undertaken by enthusiastic teaching staff and rarely becomes common practice (Connor 2015).

Numerous arguments exist as to the purpose of assessment; however, there can be no argument as to its relevance with regard to a student’s degree classification and their future employment opportunities. Assessments should be varied, inclusive and offer all students the same opportunity to perform.

Creation of a Learning Object

Learners are required to produce a learning object, for a specific group of learners mapped to the Common European Framework of Reference, using the above software and a short reflective report justifying their design and reflecting on the difficulties they encountered during the production process. Learners are required to produce a series of activities including quizzes and crosswords, and they can incorporate video, audio and text into their finished product. They are encouraged to find their materials from Creative Commons sources and to be aware of cultural and accessibility

issues. They also have to explain how Computer Assisted Language Learning theories underpin their designs. The assessment helps learners understand many of the factors that need to be considered when designing for the web and the whole process helps to develop their digital literacies. Tutors benefit by understanding the philosophy behind the design and the level of learners' understanding of the theories underpinning learning object design.

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The Pitch

A verbal critical explanation and evaluation of a student's own developed marketing communications campaign. The learner, a tutor and a second marker are seated in a boardroom setting and the student must 'pitch' their campaign to the 'board'. Students are not expected to stand or to use PowerPoint but can use a range of electronic devices to demonstrate their ideas including laptops/iPads, music, mobile devices, storyboards, animation boards, scamps of work, press releases, advertisements, including any related artwork that they have produced. The

tutor can ask a range of questions if necessary; these are given to the learner as part of the assessment brief prior to the pitch and are only used to prompt the student. The pitch enables the student to gain valuable transferable skills useful in a range of workplace situations including pitching to a client, interview skills and defending an argument in a professional and assertive manner. The best pitch(es) is then chosen to be presented to the client.

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The Interactive Verbal Exam (IVE)

Equivalent to a written exam, except students verbally communicate their knowledge and acumen. The interactive verbal exam (IVE) allows examiners to more accurately identify the true level of a student's ability by its interactive nature. Examiners can probe for depth of understanding, whilst allowing students to confirm the meaning of exam questions and explain their culturally based ideas, knowledge and 'truths'. The IVE is arguably a

more culturally equivalent mode of assessment; additionally, the IVE more accurately replicates the nature of the workplace and prepares students for interviews and assessment centres. IVE's can replace your written exam; can be graded whilst examining, and recorded for moderation requirements.

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Reflective Mahara Portfolio

A formal reflective portfolio, constructed in Mahara. This assessment is based currently in the first semester first year academic skills module. It allows students to reflect on their initial journey in higher education by documenting key areas of reflection from their induction and first semester at university. The students' research and reflection normally would expect to encompass induction, APT and general settling, online etiquette and the VLE, learning styles and team working. But also to both reflect and plan going forward for areas such as internationalisation of their student experience, their strengths and weaknesses and what they plan

to do differently in order to succeed on their course. Students benefit by reflecting on their journey relatively early on and it allows them to see for themselves what they might have done better or where they could improve. The process of reflection and planning can be a powerful assessment tool whereby students can see their growth and shortcomings. Staff gain a greater understanding of their students, and APTs potentially can support the areas of weakness going forward.

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Problem-Based Assessment (based on a real-organisational issue)

Utilising a problem-based approach to learning and teaching, students are given the chance to tackle a real-life business issue by identifying potential solutions to a real-life organisational issue. A current organisational issue is identified that fits within the learning outcomes of the specific module. To bring the issue to life, a representative from the organisation briefs the students to launch the assessment. This is recorded for further comprehension and analysis. Students then research the issue, working in small groups to formulate a series of justified solutions. Lesson content during this time is tailored specifically to discuss the challenge and develops the knowledge required. Students should be able to pose further questions to the business during this time; these can be captured using Moodle as a Q&A.

Student groups present their proposals as part of the module assessment to tutors and are assessed upon the depth of understanding they had gleaned

about the issue and the feasibility of their potential solutions. A group mark is awarded. Additionally, for developmental purposes, the highest scoring teams can be offered the opportunity to present their ideas to the organisational representative who is responsible for the project. This can benefit the organisation with fresh ideas and academic insight. The second half of the coursework mark is an individual reflection upon the learning experience, allowing each learner the chance to suggest how he or she has developed and what they can take forward from the experience. By having the opportunity to work on a real-life problem, students gain real insight into organisational practice. The chance to work in small groups on an authentic project with tangible outcomes, creates focus, enthusiasm and commitment to learning, whilst developing key skills such as teamwork and communication.

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Company report presentation

The assessment is a culmination of a semester's work by first year French and Business students (172 DEL). They set up and run a fictitious company e.g. producing biscuits. The students are provided with the grammar, vocabulary, legal and commercial information and framework to run their operation in France (company registration, employment, disputes/negotiations, websites, marketing, supply chain, administration). Over the weeks, they create a website, a Facebook page and twitter account; they assume roles in the company and recruit people for the business; they design the product packaging and hold negotiations with staff, suppliers and service providers. The assessment is a 20-30 minute oral presentation summarising the current state of the company to potential investors. Students benefit as they are theoretically confident in the content – they can reflect on their own experience having seen how a company works, what problems can occur and how to manage a certain department, while putting into practice the basics they had learnt in SAM and MKT modules. They

learn how to overcome the challenges of making company presentations. Tutors benefit as there are high levels of student ownership through which interest is easy to maintain. Similar fictitious scenarios, which require the active involvement of all students over many weeks, leading to an oral presentation assessment could be used in many modules.

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Individual Reflective Piece Accompanying Group Report

Students work in groups of 4/5 producing a group report. They also have to submit a 500 word reflective piece that describes their experience of working on the project. Within their reflective piece they are asked to evaluate the contribution made by each member of the group and to rate each student on a 1 - 10 scale to reflect this contribution. The individual piece allows tutors to see who has contributed most to the project. Although the individual submission is worth 10% of total

marks, it also allows tutors to vary the group mark (out of 90) up or down to reflect each student's contribution. The knowledge that all students are going to report on each other often motivates the majority of students to increase their level of participation. The increase in student participation/engagement has resulted in minimal changes to individual student marks.

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The Blog

The blog is an innovative way for students to present their coursework for assessment. Online blogging sites offer students the opportunity to showcase their work (particularly appropriate for creative and performance-related coursework) and to provide peer feedback. Research on blogging suggests that students benefit in a number of ways: students pay greater attention to editing and proofreading; students can attract a public audience for their work; shy students can excel in virtual situations; students reflect and give feedback on their peers' work

and have access to considered and constructive peer feedback; students find it easier to express themselves emotionally and students show improvements in digital literacy. Tutors benefit in transferring elements of feedback from tutor to student, in being able to review peer feedback and in terms of the usual benefits of online access (not time or location constrained).

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The Online Quiz

The online quiz is a flexible tool with many potential uses, e.g. as a means of testing comprehension of virtual lectures; however, how do tutors know that students have watched them? The online quiz provides the answer. A simple series of questions testing comprehension of lecture content conducted online allows the tutor to know which students have watched the video lecture and how far they have understood it. But this throws up a further dilemma: why should students bother to do the quiz? And the answer is to make the quiz an assessed coursework element. So coursework marks, via the medium of the quiz, function to incentivise students to engage with lecture content.

Example, Module 250DEL: The Short Story Workshop, student engagement increased to in excess of 90% over the series of online lectures, a figure rarely matched in face-to-face lectures. So it is not the quizzes in themselves as coursework that is important, it is rather their role in ensuring engagement with lecture content that is. The most convenient way to run the quizzes for both students and tutors is for students

to do them at home, but this opens up the possibility of collusion or cheating. This potential can be minimised by restricting periods when the quiz is accessible, limiting the time students take to complete the quiz, randomising questions and randomising answers, all of which can be done in the system. Whilst this does not absolutely exclude the possibility of collusion, it makes it extremely difficult.

Students benefit by being able to view lectures from their bedrooms and on a macro-level the student population benefits by an increased level of engagement with course content. Tutors benefit by being able to deliver virtual content without worrying about student non-participation; but perhaps there is a benefit that tutors will appreciate to an even greater degree: once set up there is a potential for saving a great deal of time - online quizzes can be set up to provide automated grading and feedback, which means effectively the tutor has one less piece of coursework to mark.

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The Reflective Commentary

A semi-formal report that accompanies a piece of creative writing (or a product) such as a short story. It allows students to reflect on preparation, process, research and writing style. The research normally involves reading published works, textbooks on the writing genre, and criticisms which can be in the form of journal articles. All commentaries contain a reference list, and unlike academic essays, are written in the first person. Students benefit by reflecting on their product

and process while gaining a better understanding of the narrative form, and from critically engaging with the genre and style. Tutors benefit by understanding the ideas and rationale behind the production of the creative piece, and by gauging the level of critical understanding of theories and criticisms focused on the chosen genre and narrative style.

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The Short Story

The short story is used as a form of assessment for Human Rights and Civil Liberties; International Comparative Project (Social Work); Law, Ethics and Policy; Comparative Research in Disaster Management; Management and Team Working in a Large Organisation; A History of International Organised Crime; and, Introduction to Nursing and its Fields of Practice. It offers an alternative approach to an essay, report or case study; for example, Human Rights and Civil Liberties students use it to demonstrate their understanding of

a law case by writing a fictive account of the situation. Students benefit by occupying the heads of the plaintiff, accused, judge or jury member; and engaging more with resources to produce a credible story. Tutors have noted an increase in grammar skills, and more careful editing and proof reading, and have enjoyed the marking process. Assistance is provided by creative writing lecturers.

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Students as Assessment Creators

An activity for students in which they create assessment items based on their themes of study. It is based on the sound pedagogical principle that to create requires understanding, and a direct attack to the 'student as passive consumer' approach, which lacks any pedagogical underpinning. Encouraging students to create questions to build into a test is an effective way of assessing their understanding twice. To support flipped classroom approaches, an activity was added to Moodle called 'Hot Question'. This was used in a largely online course to ask students to develop and submit questions during the week

on a topic for their regular end-of-week test. To increase the learning in this activity, Bloom's taxonomy could be introduced to explain higher and lower order thinking skills and encourage students to think about how these are tested differently. It would also give students an appreciation of the work and pedagogical understanding that goes into building assessment materials.

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Business Report

Students are required to provide a work-based report that addresses an issue as highlighted by the work placement host organisation. Students must demonstrate a detailed awareness of the host organisation's work issue to be addressed; show an ability to present findings in a format identified by the host organisation in a professional, culturally sensitive and convincing manner, and provide the organisation with realistic conclusions and achievable recommendations. The main purpose of the Business Report is to provide the host employer with a report relating to the specific business issue identified at the beginning of the student's work placement. Examples of business

reports might include generalist HR activities; an investigation into an HRM/HRD related business issue as identified by the host organisation; a copy of a policy document the student has developed for the host organisation; details of a training course/event. Students benefit as it turns the rhetoric of HR into reality and provides the opportunity to transfer newly acquired HR knowledge into practice. More importantly, it also provides students with the opportunity to network with organisations with the potential to develop their employability profiles.

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Student Skills

Not all students have developed the required skill level to tackle assessments. On the next page you will see a non-exhaustive list of skills, broken down into three categories: (i) study (ii) development (iii) research. For your chosen assessment method, identify the skills you believe are required in order for students to perform to the expected level. Next, gauge the level (e.g. out of 10) of importance and urgency for each skill you identify. You will then be able to map these skills into your teaching schedule based on the level of priority denoted by your scores.

Example 1

For an interactive verbal exam, verbal communication is important (10/10), but not so urgent (1 or 2/10) as the exam takes place at the end of the module. This skill would be taught in the latter weeks.

Example 2

For a reflective commentary, critical thinking is important (10/10) and urgent (10/10) as the reflective commentary will accompany a student's creative piece mid-semester. This skill will be taught in the early weeks.

NB

Please note that the categorisation of skills is subjective. Many of the skills could and do fit into more than one category.

Study Skills	Development Skills	Research Skills
• Analysing case studies	• Adaptability	• Analyse qualitative data
• Answering exam questions	• Applying knowledge	• Analyse quantitative data
• Constructing an argument	• Collaboration	• Collecting qualitative data
• Creativity	• Flexibility	• Collecting quantitative data
• Critical thinking	• Initiative	• Ethics in research
• Critical reading	• Imagination	• Ethical approval
• Critical writing skills	• Leadership	• Evaluation
• Digital literacy	• Learning styles	• Reasoning
• Global awareness	• Metacognitive	• Reliability in research
• How to read a journal article	• Networking	• Role of theory and concepts
• How to use locate	• Peer assessment	• Validity in research
• How to write a report	• Respect for diversity and cultures	• Understanding bias
• How to write an essay	• Self-management	<p>This list has been produced in conjunction with another student project involving the kind assistance of Michelle McLardy (BES) and Nicola Dawson (BES).</p>
• Information competency	• Setting objectives	
• In-text referencing	• Social responsibility	
• Paraphrasing and summarising	• Time management	
• Presentation skills	• Transition from UG to PG	
• Presenting your work	• Working in groups	
• Problem solving	• Working with your APTs	
• Producing a reference list		
• Searching for literature		
• The reflective commentary		
• Understanding bias		
• Understanding Turnitin		
• Understanding academic jargon		
• Understanding assessment questions		
• Using Refworks		
• Verbal communication		
• What is plagiarism?		
• Working as a team		

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