

Top 10 tips on... ... Designing Assessment Tasks¹

- 1. Have clearly defined learning outcomes for each task that you want to assess.**
The learning outcomes should indicate measurable skills or abilities which students acquire during the course. Learning outcomes are derived from course aims and inform the assessment criteria.
- 2. List the skills and abilities (implicit/explicit) required by the learning outcomes.**
Will you be explicitly teaching all the skills and abilities required to achieve the learning outcomes? Are any skills or abilities 'assumed' and not taught?
- 3. Check if you are over-assessing: have these outcomes/skills been assessed?**
Within a programme, students may have to demonstrate the same skills over several modules. Assessment loads may be reduced if assessed skills are spread over modules rather than repeated many times. Similarly, within a module, certain outcomes may only need to be assessed once or possibly not at all. Check the programme outcomes against each module's assessment methods to look for overlap or gaps in the use of certain forms of assessment.
- 4. Choose a method of assessment appropriate for the outcomes and skills.**
Often one form of assessment is overused in a module. Varying assessment methods enhances student skills, caters for individual abilities and can improve engagement with the task. (see *Top 10 tips on Diversifying Assessment*).
- 5. Decide if the assessment method is efficient regarding staff/student time.**
Investigate alternative forms of assessment and consider the advantages and disadvantages for you and for your students. For example, self/peer assessment may be time-consuming initially when training students, but ultimately provides good opportunities for developing self assessment skills, providing prompt focused feedback and possibly reducing marking load for staff.
- 6. Look at possible alternative forms of assessment: advantages/disadvantages.**
Look at the assessment demands for both you and your students. How much time is required to complete the assessment? Are there conflicting demands on students from different subjects? What feedback is required and can be produced in a timely fashion? Does this assessment build on prior assessments or develop skills for subsequent work? Can you effectively assess the learning outcomes using alternative methods which promote better student engagement? How might students view the task?
- 7. Formulate assessment criteria to match the outcomes and skills.**
Assessment criteria ideally are derived from module aims and learning outcomes and should precisely indicate the minimum standard required to demonstrate achievement of a learning outcome. Assessment criteria may also indicate standards required for the achievement of certain grades and can guide the students in their

¹ Adapted from sources listed in Further Readings.

learning. However, students may not interpret criteria as intended by staff: allow time for clarification.

8. Design out opportunities for plagiarism.

Reusing essay titles or setting general questions where material is easily accessible on the internet is an invitation to plagiarise for some students. Assess the process of completing the assignment as well as the final product; include an element of peer assessment and aim to individualise tasks. (See *Top 10 tips on Deterring Plagiarism*).

9. Select a marking scheme to suit the assessment and the assessment criteria.

Weightings for different grade assessment criteria (or task components in pass/fail situations) need to be allocated fairly and reflect the importance of the demonstrated learning outcomes. Groupwork needs careful consideration in order to provide a fair marking system to take into account individual contributions to the final product. (see *Top 10 tips on Self, Peer and Group Assessment*).

10. Provide feedback forms which reflect the assessment criteria

What is the aim of your feedback? Are you trying to influence motivation with new students, encourage reflective learning or just correct errors? By aligning your feedback with the assessment criteria, you encourage students to address the criteria and thereby achieve learning outcomes. The use of self and peer assessment can assist students to understand and internalise assessment criteria and standards (see *Top 10 tips on Feedback*).

Further Reading:

Brown, G. (2001) *Assessment: A Guide for Lecturers*, LTSN Generic Centre Assessment Series Number 3, York: LTSN Generic Centre.

Gibbs, G & Simpson, C. (2004) 'Conditions under which assessment supports students' learning', *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, Issue 1.

Moon, J. (2002) *The Module and Programme Development Handbook: Linking Levels, Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria*, London: Routledge Falmer.