

Top 10 tips on Diversifying Assessment¹

Varying the forms of assessment will not only increase the skills of your students, but will also enhance their learning and engagement with the task. This sheet aims to provide ideas for alternative form of assessment.

1. Make your assessment more interesting.

- Involve students via self or peer assessment or in setting assessment criteria
- Allow students to choose the format of an assessment
- Vary the location of an assessment eg have public poster exhibitions rather than just submitting to a tutor.

2. Cases

- Case studies/Open problems: Allows students to exercise judgement and problem-solving skills. Can be time-consuming to prepare and mark.
- Problem based learning: can be applied to groups. May take time to complete but can assess a range of skills: problem-solving, team work, creativity etc.

3. Learning logs/reflective journals

- These can take any format but do require some training for students in reflective writing. Can be time consuming to write (for students) and to mark. Can result in wide variation of grades between markers.

4. Practicals

When measuring practical skills, ensure that what you want to assess is clearly defined, linked to your learning outcomes and made clear to students.

- Laboratory work: to vary this relatively standard form of assessment, provide assessed preparatory work; include lab related questions in the exams; get students to write exam questions and provide a report template.
- Mini practical: short, timed sessions can assess a wide range of skills and assessment and feedback are quick, although this may initially be time-consuming to design.
- Objective structured clinical examinations: common in health sciences but useful in a range of subjects. Time-consuming to set up and generally requires more than one marker. Can provide good feedback opportunities.

5. Written questions

- Essays: different types of essays exist but all generally measure understanding, synthesis and evaluation. Questions need to be framed with care and marking can vary widely between assessors.
- Extended essays, theses, dissertations: extended work requires tutorial and planning support, some of which may be provided by peers. When marking, collect questions for use at a later viva.
- Modified essay questions: students answer a question based on a case-study. Further information and a question are then given (and so on). These can be computer based.
- Short answer questions: easier to design than MCQs and can measure analysis, understanding and problem solving skills.
- Multiple choice questions: make sure your correct answer is not ambiguous or obvious and that your 'distractors' are plausible.

¹ Adapted from sources listed in Further Reading

6. Other written assessment

- Portfolios: Assessment criteria need to be clear so that students provide what is required only, rather than submitting everything. This becomes time-consuming to mark. Can form the basis of an oral assessment.
- Reviews and annotated bibliographies: allow students to choose topics for variety and set short word limits. This can be a useful group exercise and can be 'published' to the cohort. Advisable to involve library staff, too.
- Reports: Can be a useful way to develop alternative writing styles (depending on the subject area) or an over-used method of writing up practical work. Feedback sheets speed up marking.

7. Computer based assessment

This is often provided in the form of multiple choice questions which can provide instant feedback. It is recommended that computer based assessment is used formatively only at Kent as a secure, invigilated environment is not available for summative assessments.

8. Self and peer assessment

This is an ideal format to promote student engagement and reflection. See *Top 10 tips on Self, Peer and Group Assessment*.

9. Non-written assessments

It is useful to provide a rehearsal session to improve confidence, and also to involve students in peer assessment to avoid the boredom of watching several presentations. Video recording is useful, so consider the venue and time required.

- Posters/exhibitions: make these public where possible and vary the location of the exhibition. Peer review helps students to focus on the task.
- Performances: avoid competition, and aim to enhance reflective learning by using journal records of the steps taken in preparing the task.
- Presentations: may be a good group task and also works well in role-play situations.
- Orals: This provides a quick assessment of a student's knowledge and ability to respond under pressure; includes good feedback opportunities.
- Simulated interviews: this requires careful and sensitive feedback due to the personal nature of the task.

10. Groupwork

This provides the opportunity to develop interpersonal skills, leadership and team work, and can improve motivation. Grading effort and participation can be difficult, (See *Top 10 tips on Self, Peer and Group Assessment*).

Further Reading:

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

Brown, S, Race, P & Smith B (1996) *500 Tips on Assessment*, London: Kogan Page.