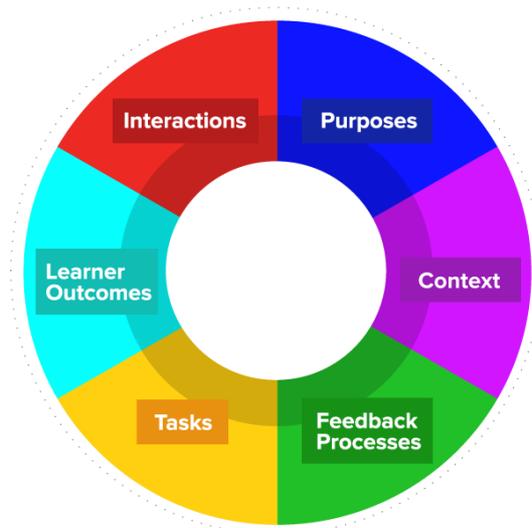


Guide to the Assessment Design Decisions Framework



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Introductory comments

The assessment design decisions framework consists of six categories:

- Purposes of assessment
- Context of assessment
- Learner outcomes
- Tasks
- Feedback processes
- Interactions

Each category in the framework is explored in this guide, with a series of assessment considerations.

- Explanatory text
- Key questions for educators to consider
- Links to online and print resources
- Links to other relevant parts of the guide
- Short vignettes of educator experiences.

Educator experiences have been drawn from both interview data and our own experiences. Direct quotes have been edited to enhance clarity of meaning and ease of reading.

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Purposes of assessment

Assessment activities exist for very different purposes. They support learning within a unit of study and ensure that students are prepared to meet the desired learning outcomes. They may contribute to final marks and grades which link to an ultimate certification of achievement or attainment of a standard. They also provide the foundation for learners to make judgements about their own work so they can learn and assess themselves beyond the unit of study. All of these purposes are important. However, any act of assessment might emphasise one purpose more than the others. Assessment design frequently focuses on the grading purpose, without considering how to support learning or how to build the capacity of students to make judgements about their own work.

Key assessment considerations

How can assessment:

- support student learning?
- generate grades that will form part of subsequent certification?
- equip learners for making future judgements?

Purposes>Support learning

Students learn in anticipation of assessment tasks and they learn from the tasks themselves. Some of this learning occurs from their own realisation of what they can or cannot do, but importantly, they also learn from the helpful comments provided to them by others. The role of assessment for learning, often called formative assessment, needs careful design and planning to ensure that: key learning outcomes are addressed; engagement in the task prompts the kind of learning most desired; the task is timed to ensure that there is an opportunity for students to benefit from the comments they receive; and that there is time within the semester to put their learning into practice in subsequent activities. Tasks that occur at the end of semester may be useful in providing a target for learning, but this is a particularly poor time to provide detailed comments on which students are expected to act. The design of engaging and challenging assessment tasks is one of the most important elements of planning a course. It may often be fruitful to plan these before other parts of the course are organised.

Assessment considerations:

- What assessment tasks best encompass the key learning outcomes for the unit?
- Will engagement in the task be a worthwhile learning activity in its own right?
- What information should be provided to learners about what is expected of them and the standards they should meet? When, and in what form, should this information be provided?
- What kinds of feedback information should be provided to learners following completion of the task? Who should provide this information? How promptly can it be realistically provided? How should it be structured?
- If marks or grades are also given, how can the design optimise learner engagement with detailed comments rather than focus on grades?
- On what specific occasions during the unit will students be able to apply what they have learned from completion of the task to subsequent work?

Also refer to:

[Outcomes>Unit/module learning outcomes](#)

[Tasks>Rationale](#)

[Tasks>Activities which drive learning](#)

[Tasks>Distribution](#)

[Feedback processes>Multiple feedback opportunities](#)

[Feedback processes>Types of feedback information](#)

Educator experiences

Organising the unit around tasks

When I realised that it is only through the work that students do themselves that they learn anything, I started to structure my unit around a series of key tasks. Some tasks are just things I provide strong encouragement for, others are tasks on which they get input from peers, and yet others are tasks I formally grade. I have found that so long as I don't overload students at the wrong times with unrealistic activities, most students do them all whether they are graded or not. But I don't sell them to students as added extras, I continually reinforce them as the core of the unit itself and the only way they will be able to learn what is needed. – Education lecturer

Staged early feedback

I'm a great believer in having students get lots of feedback early in the semester when it will do some good and spending very little time on it at the end. I've worked out which areas are the ones students have most difficulty within their assignments. Obviously, I have changed my teaching materials so they get extra support and examples in those areas. And I've put some self-tests online so they can check themselves. But in some areas this doesn't work because the difficulty is students not being able to see the problems in their own writing. This is where they need more feedback. Some of it I do by getting students to swap papers with their peers, but I also have arranged the tasks in a sequence so I can see whether students have improved in the problematic areas in later tasks. – Education lecturer

Resources:

- The University of New South Wales Assessment Toolkit has sections on Assessment as Learning teaching.unsw.edu.au/assessment-learning and Designing Assessment as Learning teaching.unsw.edu.au/designing-assessment-learning which includes 10 videos.

Purposes>Generate grades

Grades or marks provide a condensed summary of learner performance. They are collected and weighted within and across units to provide an account of a learner's overall performance in a program of study. This is commonly called summative assessment. Marks or grades contribute to decisions about progression to later units and to learners' overall success and failure. Students should be judged solely against explicit learning outcomes and standards of performance. Judgements must avoid comparing learners with each other as this practice can lead to the undermining of academic standards. While it has been common to provide percentage marks in some situations, care must be taken to avoid marking schemes that generate spurious levels of accuracy. Care must also be taken in adding marks and grades in ways that could permit students to pass a unit without having met all the learning outcomes and addressed threshold standards. Learners are sensitive to a lack of fairness and consistency and otherwise good assessment practices can be undermined by a lack of attention to this.

Assessment considerations:

- What features of the assessment task should be graded?
- What form of grades should be used? How are these to be linked to learning outcomes and criteria for performance?
- How can standards for grading be made explicit?
- How should different assessment activities within the same unit be weighted?
- How will you ensure that grades or marks are not provided to a finer level of accuracy than each task allows?
- How will you ensure that marking is consistent across all learners and all those doing the marking? Is a marking rubric appropriate for each task?

Also refer to:

[Context>Institutional assessment principles and policies](#)

[Outcomes>Unit/module learning outcomes](#)

[Outcomes>Overall program learning outcomes](#)

[Outcomes>Professional requirements](#)

[Tasks>Rationale](#)

[Tasks>Criteria for successful completion](#)

[Tasks>Identifying which tasks are graded](#)

Educator experiences

Using grades not percentages

My view is that students should only be graded on something they have already had a chance to practice, and preferably get feedback on. While this is not possible all the time, I find it can be done for all the major learning outcomes. What irritates me is that my uni expects us to record percentage points in the marking sheets we have to return. I say you can't do this for most assignments and I'm not prepared to waste my time agonising over a percentage here and a percentage there and have to justify the impossible to students who query them. So, I inform students that I just use the four common passing grades and link them to criteria. I only submit results as grades. – Education lecturer

Linking grades to outcomes and criteria

When we actually implement these subjects, I like to flesh out those assessment criteria that are currently in the subject outline as a series of bullet points; actually flesh that out into more of a comprehensive evaluation rubric to provide students, but also our tutors and teachers, with a better understanding of what that line in the subject outline means. So, my general practice is that, at the subject outline level, we usually provide some clear criteria but it's like in a range of bullet points, and then when I implement that, those bullet points get turned into an evaluation rubric to say, "What does that criterion look like at a HD level, and what would it look like at a pass level?" – Arts lecturer

Resources:

- The University of New South Wales Assessment Toolkit has sections on Standards-Based Assessment teaching.unsw.edu.au/standards-based-assessment, and Grading and Giving Feedback teaching.unsw.edu.au/grading-assessment-feedback
- The University of Technology Sydney Assessment Futures site has a section on Grading and Exams www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/teaching-and-learning/assessment-futures/designing-and-redesigning-assessmen-1
- The United Kingdom Higher Education Academy has a 33-minute video Marking Criteria and Assessment Methods vimeo.com/channels/154640/9320129
- The University of Sydney's Assessment website has sections on Setting Standards and Writing Grade Descriptors www.itl.usyd.edu.au/assessmentresources/grade_descriptors.htm, Marking and Grading www.itl.usyd.edu.au/assessmentresources/marketing_grading.htm
- The Better Judgement project www.flinders.edu.au/medicine/sites/better-judgement/ has a series of videos about bias, human judgement, subjectivity and reliability in assessment
- The United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education produces a guide for early-career academics titled Understanding assessment: its role in safeguarding academic standards and quality in higher education www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/understanding-assessment.pdf

Purposes>Future judgements

There is more to assessment than providing helpful information to improve performance in the current unit, and in generating marks and grades. Assessment, if well designed, also acts to build students' capacity to make judgements beyond immediate tasks or learning outcomes. It does this through developing their assessment literacy (how assessment operates and how it can be utilised for learners) and their own self-assessment capabilities. It is important that a learner not only be able to do something, but that they know they can do it and thus deploy such an understanding to useful ends beyond the course. Assessment for learning beyond the unit is often called sustainable assessment. It focuses on developing learners' capacity to identify appropriate standards and apply them to their own work and that of others. It also focuses on their ability to self-regulate, that is, to monitor their own work, identify what they need to do and to seek and utilise feedback from a variety of sources.

Assessment considerations:

- What will completion of each assessment activity contribute to students' ability to make judgements about their own learning?
- What capacities does each task build that will help students with future work involving different subject matter and/or learning outcomes?
- How will learners be able to calibrate their own judgements; that is, know whether they have a realistic view of their own work?
- How will the tasks enable learners to track their own development over time and identify what they will need to focus on in future study and practice?
- Will the tasks give learners practice in making judgements about the work of others and communicating these effectively?
- How will learners be able to identify the standards and criteria to apply to their own work? If these are provided to them, how will they be able to make sense of them in ways that will influence what they do?

Also refer to:

[Context>Characteristics of enrolled students](#)

[Context>Professional, vocational and employment related](#)

[Outcomes>Learner development](#)

[Tasks>Distribution](#)

Educator experiences

Developing judgement

I reckon my best contribution to students is to help them develop their own capacity to judge their work. One of the ways I do this is through firstly getting the class together to identify in their own words what they think are appropriate criteria for judging an assignment. Then, I turn these into an assignment attachment sheet which they complete and hand in alongside their assignment. In it they have to spell out in what ways their assignment does and does not meet these criteria. When I return the assignments I focus most, not so much on what they could or couldn't do well, but on areas in which they had the least insight into their own work. If they are blind to their own deficiencies this is a much more serious problem that needs attending to than whether they got something right or not. – Education lecturer

Peer feedback

I assigned the students into groups of three to four into the learning management system and asked them each to upload a scenario they've written for peer review. I provided a review framework and a feedback template. Everyone has to comment on at least two other scenarios. Then they can choose to integrate this feedback into a revised version for their summative assessment. In their portfolio, I asked them to reflect on the benefit of reviewing their peers' work and how judging others' work affected their understanding of writing scenarios. – Health sciences lecturer

Resource:

- Assessment Futures www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/teaching-and-learning/assessment-futures/overview is a website devoted to assessment for learning in the longer term. It provides a strong rationale for such assessment and is populated with a large number of examples of assessment tasks from different disciplines that show ways of incorporating it alongside assessment for other purposes.

Context of assessment

Assessment practice is not something that can be considered in isolation. Assessment influences, and is influenced by, every aspect of higher education. The learners, the educators, the organisation and even the discipline, impact upon how assessment is designed, delivered, received and regarded. The assessment context may be considered the key to understanding assessment in action. Vocational requirements and institutional policies, as well as the culture of departments and disciplines, shape educators' views about assessment design. Learners' prior experiences and backgrounds influence their understanding of feedback and assessment as well as their capacity to successfully engage with assessment tasks. The overall program of study, team processes and learning environments also may mandate how learners experience assessment. The art of developing assessment lies in educators adapting assessment concepts to their local requirements. It is also important to bear in mind that working with a particular context requires interactions with colleagues and learners. Consideration of how and when communication takes place, and with whom, may also promote successful assessment design.

Key assessment considerations

Which of the following attributes needs to be considered when designing assessment in a unit?
What specifically about each can be taken into account? How can tensions between different needs be reconciled?

- characteristics of enrolled students
- institutional assessment principles and policies
- professional, vocational or employment-related issues
- departmental, disciplinary and personal norms, expectations and ideas
- the overall program and the role of the unit/module
- learning environment, e.g. class size or mode (online/face-to-face/blended).

Context>Characteristics of enrolled students

Your learners may be a relatively homogenous group whom you know well, who are experienced students, and who are already familiar with your assessment methods. Alternatively they may be new to higher education, studying across a number of programs, have different educational and/or cultural backgrounds, different life experience, and different background knowledge. It is worth explicitly considering your own assumptions and expectations as well as seeking information about potential learners prior to designing assessment. If you find there is a particular challenge due to the diversity of your learners, such as a big range of capability, it is worth revisiting the range of issues surrounding the purposes of assessment, task construction and learning outcomes to ensure that some of the tensions of the diverse needs are balanced across the cohort.

Assessment considerations:

- What assumptions are you making about your learners (e.g. prior learning, skills such as technological proficiency)? How accurate do you think these are?
- What learner characteristics should be kept in mind when designing assessment? How can you find out about these in relation to your learners?
- Are there identifiable subgroups of learners in your course? If so, what implications might this have for the assessment tasks and different learners' needs for support?
- How do you think your expectations and your learners' expectations of assessment differ? How will you communicate your expectations to the learners?
- How should you communicate to your learners your expectations regarding plagiarism?
- How can your assessment be made engaging for all learners?
- If the unit contains a 'first' experience (e.g. first year at university, first independent research project, first experience of a learning environment), how does the transition to a different way of learning affect the way that assessment is conducted and communicated?

Also refer to:

[Tasks>Activities which drive learning](#)

[Interactions>Learner requirements](#)

Educator experiences

Transition to higher education

One of the interesting learnings for me has been just how much student wellbeing is impacted by transitioning to uni. And all of the issues that we see in students' submissions are actually around transition issues. Lots of kids have moved away from home to study, and they're desperately homesick, or this isn't the course that they wanted to do, they've taken it as a second option or because their parents thought it was a great idea. Some of them have moved regionally, but some of them have moved from overseas, and so they've got English-language proficiency issues. So there's so much that needs to be invested in care for those students, and I think that needs to be considered in what's required of them in the unit, particularly in relation to assessment. In response to this, we ran a session on how to use education databases, drop-in sessions for assignment one, we ran "Mindfulness and Wellbeing" sessions, academic writing workshops and "learning how to reference" sessions. – Education lecturer

Working with diversity

It's hard to get the balance right between adapting everything for everyone and working out when flexibility can happen. Some things, such as mental health or disability, can be very sensitive and I've learnt very quickly that the first port of call is always the Disability Liaison Officer or the appropriate referral point within the institution. It can be tricky to work out how to adapt assessment submission forms or deadlines or whatever else might be required in a way that takes account of the task as well as learner's needs. Kind of similarly, I've also found having students from a range of nationalities also can be challenging in terms of assessment, particularly when someone is a great thinker but has poor English skills. In general, for me, clarifying rubrics and outlines of tasks, clearly laying out expectations, really helps. It feels like it's a question of balance and it's not always easy to keep that balance. – Health sciences lecturer

Conundrum of multiple unit purposes

A journalism degree is kind of meant to be training journalists. But of the 300 students who enrolled in this unit, only a third of them are Bachelor of Journalism students. The issue is, in terms of assessment, do we treat this first year cohort as potential journalists or as first year students who are just testing their wings and wanna do something interesting? Because that will change your approach, I think, to the assessments... – Journalism lecturer

Resources:

- University of New South Wales page about assessment and cross-cultural diversity teaching.unsw.edu.au/assessment-responding-cross-cultural-diversity, including a section about Assessing Inclusively teaching.unsw.edu.au/assessing-inclusively
- The United Kingdom Higher Education Academy has a 10-minute video about student experiences of assessment and feedback vimeo.com/channels/154640/9319496
- The University of Sydney's assessment website has a section about Disability Considerations www.itl.usyd.edu.au/assessmentresources/disability_considerations.htm
- The Assessing Learning in Australian Universities project has a page about assessing students unfamiliar with assessment practices in Australian higher education www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/03/intstaff.html
- The Assessing Students Unfamiliar with Assessment Practices in Australian Universities project has a manual for use in the discipline of accounting www.olt.gov.au/system/files/grants_2005project_accounting_manual.pdf

Context>Institutional assessment principles and policies

All universities have formal policies and/or procedures governing assessment which staff members are expected follow. Many also have less prescriptive guidelines. Policies, procedures and guidelines will often support good practice, though this is not always the case. A faculty and or school or department may also have mandatory procedures. However, it is important to distinguish what really is institutional policy and what is not. Many common assessment practices within schools and faculties may be historical and are not necessarily consistent with current policy. Keeping up-to-date with relevant policies can assist as certain procedures are mandatory when designing assessment for a new course or changing assessment for an existing course. Additionally, it is not uncommon for colleagues, even senior ones, to believe that policies and procedures limit assessment options when they may no longer be applicable, resulting in unnecessary constraints.

Assessment considerations:

- Are you familiar with the policies of your university/faculty/school/department?
- Do the requirements of any professional bodies need to be considered?
- What administrative procedures must be followed, e.g. timelines and documentation for changing assessment tasks?
- Is your assessment consistent with formal requirements? What might you be able to do if it is not?
- Who formally approves assessment in your courses (e.g. head of school; faculty assessment committee)?
- Are there less formal guidelines that might help you to plan your assessment?
- Who are the best people for you to talk to about policies and procedures?
- How can you describe and develop your assessment practices so that they meet requirements while still leaving you opportunity to make small modifications to suit changing local conditions?

Also refer to:

[Interactions>Resistance or engagement](#)

Educator experiences

Don't limit your own room to manoeuvre

I guess one of the other things that we learned was not to put too much data into the Faculty Education Committee documents. I remember in the early days, again, we proposed a 1500-word essay on topic X. And then afterwards when you go “that’s crazy”, then we had to go back to the committee and complete that load of paperwork and things. So, we are much more general about what we’re putting into the documentation which gives you a bit of freedom then to change things year-to-year. But we do need to keep an eye on making sure that we’re not moving away from the subject learning objectives or the competencies that we need to achieve. – Science lecturer

The faculty process: independent feedback

The faculty processes are very time-consuming. They are incredibly frustrating. But my experience is they're actually very helpful too. I've found the feedback really makes you think, "Why are you doing it this way?" So if you put up a unit proposal, the faculty is very concerned about the unit objectives and the unit content, and that these assessment tasks have a certain level of coherence. And so I've always found faculty processes terribly helpful, as I'm writing about the assessment, because they make me think about which learning outcomes an assessment will support. The faculty processes also help you think, "Why don't you think about assessment this way or that way?" So, it gets you thinking through, in more detail, in a way that, I think, is only possible when you have an independent review because you get caught up in what you're creating, and it's then very difficult to look outside your blinkered view. On the other hand, when the review comes back with requests for further work and you think, "Oh, I spent hours on that, what the-?" But I've certainly found it a positive process, if somewhat cumbersome. – Arts lecturer

Beware the unapproved change

For example, if I decided to drop out one of the orals, not saying that I would. Perhaps I could do that, if I notified all of the students and said, "Look, we're not gonna have the second oral. We'll put the extra 5 per cent onto this." I mean, you could do that, and that sort of thing does happen, but it's not officially approved by anybody. But you could get into a situation where if that's not agreed to and approved by everybody, and one student's gone on and prepared their second oral, well then, you're in strife, because you've got a dispute and you're not conforming to what's in the handbook. – Science lecturer

Resources

These are contextualised and include:

- your institution's formal assessment policies and procedures
- most faculties and/or departments have local assessment procedures, and some have policies as well
- other non-obligatory institutional, faculty or departmental guidelines. These are often available through the websites of central learning and teaching units
- assessment requirements of your professional body (where applicable).

Context>Professional, vocational and employment related

The possible work roles of the graduate can strongly influence assessment. Graduates can be clearly identified as aspiring to a specific vocation (e.g. nursing, law, engineering, teaching) or may simply be potential members of a generalist workforce. Educators and learners alike often seek to develop skills which will be of benefit to their future employment. In some instances, this is prescribed by formal documentation. At other times, and more frequently, educators draw from their own and industry colleagues' professional experiences and beliefs. Sometimes particular professions have forms of assessment which have meaning exclusive to that profession. These 'signature assessments' may be important for learners to know, in and of themselves (e.g. the legal moot, the medical case presentation, the designer portfolio). Sometimes there are demands to work across disciplines or interprofessionally and this can challenge assessment processes.

Assessment provides the opportunity to locate learning within the 'real world' of employment. It can do this in several ways: 1) Provision of an assessment task which develops particular skills, such as clinical skills, journalism techniques or laboratory methods; 2) Provision of an assessment task set in a specific context, such as building a specific bridge, or doing an environmental assessment of a particular river system, or simulating a hospital ward; and 3) Assessment of workplace performance, through placements or internships. This latter category can present real challenges as sometimes educators must rely on industry colleagues to supply judgements on learners, however, the benefits are that the learner is immersed in real practice and can develop the skills desired in a professional capacity.

Assessment considerations:

- What do learners need to be able to do in practice in the industry/profession?
- Are there any tasks which will mirror future professional assessment activities?
- Can you collaborate with business, industry, government or community groups to identify:
 - a) necessary skills;
 - b) projects that could be packaged as authentic assessments;
 - or c) work-based opportunities for assessment?
- How will you motivate learners and provide them with the requisite skills to complete the assessment?
- What does the learner need to be able to do or know about the assessment format (e.g. how to participate in role-plays, how to format portfolios, public speaking)?
- What logistics and resources are required to support each stage of the task (e.g. simulators, materials, permissions to access work locations)?
- How will you manage any work-based assessment processes and procedures?
- What types of cross-program assessment might be appropriate for your learners?

Also refer to:

[Outcomes>Professional requirements](#)

[Tasks>Activities which drive learning](#)

[Interactions>Resistance or engagement](#)

Educator experiences

Laboratory-based practical

Laboratory practicals have traditionally involved students following recipe-based workbooks in order to validate processes. But we've tried to get away from recipe-based practice. Although we still use recipes for teaching students how to learn to use equipment as appropriate, we've tried to give students opportunities to do real science. It's not one size fits all, but it gives students the opportunity to actually think about what they're doing, to solve problems and employ critical thinking. There's no set of ideal answers so students often end up with different data than you might expect. But that's science. – Science lecturer

Role-play and video review

They used to write a patient case assessment but that's one of the things I've changed to incorporate video-based assessment. Now, they actually video their management of that patient. So they'll have a mock patient, they'll have themselves as therapist, and they may have somebody else as a potential family member, whatever scenario they've described. They'll then act out for 10 minutes in the video. So, it's been changed to try to make it a little bit less paper-based, and a little bit more what we feel is an authentic clinical interaction. They need to try to align their practice with best evidence. Whenever you put something in video, it's a very powerful way for them to see an external viewpoint of performance. They can see what they look like and hopefully that, together with the prompts and the feedback that they receive for the assignment, will help facilitate their change, development. – Health professions lecturer

Site visits

In the first assessment that they're doing, students actually go and visit and interact with a play space or space that has been specifically designed for children to engage in. And to actually get out there and engage and see what we have to offer here in this city as well. So they take field notes about it and take photos of the space, and write little notes what children might say or how they explore it. And then from that, they write a critical review of the space with engagement with literature, on young children's play spaces, on Early Childhood Education. And from that base, they then design a classroom space. They then have to justify each choice that they make with engagement with the literature. 'Cause I see there is a lot of academic work, we're sitting in front of books; we're not connecting to the real world. – Education lecturer

Resources:

- The UNSW Assessment Toolkit has a section about Assessing Authentically teaching.unsw.edu.au/authentic-assessment, including an eight-part video series
- The Deakin website has a self-paced professional development package about authentic assessment www.deakin.edu.au/itl/assets/resources/pd/tl-modules/assessment/authenticassessment.pdf
- The Assessment Futures website has a section on authentic assessment www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/teaching-and-learning/assessment/assessment-futures/key-assessment-elements-1

Context>Departmental, disciplinary and personal conventions

Academics bring to their units a range of expectations and ideas about assessment, formed through their own life experience and careers. Some disciplines have forms of assessment that have become typical of that discipline. For example: case studies in management, essays in philosophy, clinical examinations in health sciences, and practice teaching in education. There are also the influences of immediate colleagues, which are not always written down – ‘the way things are done around here’ is a part of every workplace. It is useful to critically examine these norms in order to improve assessment practices. Challenging ‘normal’ practice can be surprisingly difficult to do, and it is often worth looking to perspectives external to the department, discipline or work environment. Collegiate review, particularly interdisciplinary review, of assessment practice can be helpful. Additionally, looking to the different purposes of assessment may also be beneficial, as historically the emphasis has mostly been on assessment as a means of certifying achievement.

Assessment considerations:

- What are your views on good assessment and how did you come to these beliefs?
- What are your discipline’s or profession’s general expectations of assessment and the assessment design process? How do you feel about these?
- What is the ‘way things are done around here’, in your department and/or teaching team? Does this align with the discipline/profession?
- In what ways do these accepted forms of assessment match with the purposes of assessment (supporting student learning, generating grades, supporting learners’ ongoing evaluative capacities)?
- What alternatives might you consider to these ‘standard’ forms?
- Is there someone within your own department as well as someone outside of your discipline or environment who might be able to exchange reviews of your assessment?
- If you are thinking about alternatives, how will you ‘sell’ this to your department and to your learners?

Also refer to:

[Purposes>Support learning](#)

[Purposes>Generate grades](#)

[Purposes>Future judgements](#)

[Interactions>Resistance or engagement](#)

Educator experiences

Reflecting on influences

Early on in my career, I was very influenced by the institutions that I taught in as a postgrad, and the institutions that I'd been taught in, by the institutional culture and the way they did things. I didn't often think about other ways of doing things because that's just the way that it is, and when you don't have any authority, you tend to assume that the way the people are tending to do things is a good way to do them, 'cause "they would know". Later in your career you see that this is not the case... – Arts lecturer

Wanting peer review

I don't know how other people teach. One thing we don't have in this faculty is regular conversations about how people teach or how people assess. That would be productive to do that. It's something of a real revelation to find out how other people assess, or I see a subject or outline being printed out ... I might take a copy of it you know, to find out what other people are doing, but in my experiences, there's no kind of formal or structured forum in which you talk about, discuss or improve your teaching or assessment. I'd like this. – Arts lecturer

Resource:

- JISC's guide to *Changing assessment and feedback practice* www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/changing-assessment-and-feedback-practice

Context>Overall program

Learners experience units as part of an overall course. In some instances, this is a set and structured progression through an overall program of study; for others, units may be taken in multiple ways to form a course. Framing assessment takes account of where students have come from (e.g. prerequisite subjects, 'final year' or placements), and where they may proceed next. All units can be viewed as being part of a larger whole, although it is most obvious with respect to core unit assessments, which must be successfully completed by students in order to progress or complete the course. Assessments may be repetitive in their requirements or can cluster within a semester if care is not taken to communicate within the program. Thinking about building assessments upon previous units' work may be useful. This can be both with respect to content, but also with process. For example, if peer feedback is introduced across a program, learners will be more familiar with it overall.

Assessment considerations:

- How do learners experience your unit within their overall program experiences?
- What are the formal and informal methods of communication with other unit teachers and administrators about assessment?
- How and when do you learn about assessment tasks and schedules of other common units?
- Are you able to fully describe the skills and knowledge that learners require coming into your unit and those that they require on successful completion?
- If relevant, how do you manage professional or external requirements (e.g. meeting professional body standards) across the unit?
- What are the implications if learners do not attain the skills and knowledge to appropriate levels, both for their future learning and for progression?

Also refer to:

[Context>Characteristics of enrolled students](#)

[Outcomes>Overall program learning outcomes](#)

[Outcomes>Professional requirements](#)

[Outcomes>Learner development](#)

Educator experiences

Looking for the wider picture

Everybody who's involved in the program needs to sit down together – and that never happens in terms of planning coherence across assignments. You know if we really want to test a particular understanding – for example, students' lesson planning ability – they don't need to do lesson plans in every subject. It doesn't really serve a purpose except "busy work", and a lot of hard work to mark. Nor do they need to write essays in every subject to demonstrate their ability to write an essay. There're other reasons to have them write an essay, of course, but I just think that it would be nice if we looked at the wider picture. So, if they're doing an essay in that subject this semester, they shouldn't do an essay in that other subject this semester, because all four subjects shouldn't give essays. – Education lecturer

Management committees

We have a second-year management committee. So, they have three core units in semester one, and three core units in semester two, and we meet about four times a year, usually pre-semester, post-semester and pre-semester, post-semester. And it tends to just be, "How are you going? When are your major assessments?" So, we make sure we line them up. That's the really big thing, we make sure we line up the assessments so they don't all have a mid-semester test in that week. You know, so they're staggered out. Otherwise we would just get 250 complaints. – Science lecturer

External requirements across the entire program

We've got an online repository that we have just put together. Whenever anything is dumped onto the repository, if it's an assessment task, it needs to be matched to the professional association competencies so that next time we have to do accreditation, our Information Technology team can just do me a spreadsheet and show me all the assessment tasks that have unit five competencies that matches the professional association requirements. – Health professional educator

Resources:

- The Assessing And Assuring Graduate Learning Outcomes project www.itl.usyd.edu.au/projects/aaglo/ has a range of relevant resources www.itl.usyd.edu.au/projects/aaglo/summaries.htm, particularly their resource on *Whole-of-program approaches to assessment planning* www.itl.usyd.edu.au/projects/aaglo/pdf/AAGLO%20Summary%209%20Whole%20of%20Program_Final.pdf
- If you don't have it already, you may wish to locate the official documentation of the overall program.

Context>Learning environment

The learning environment has a significant effect upon assessment processes. The space and delivery mode of the course all impact on the types of assessments. For a purely online course, the Learning Management System may place boundaries around what is possible; and for a face-to-face course, the simple availability of space for students to conduct assessment activities such as seminars or debates will also dictate the types of assessment processes possible. Access to technologies such as video can be used to enhance assessment through allowing learners to conduct a range of different tasks. The staff–learner ratio is also a significant consideration. A large unit with many tutors affords different kinds of feedback processes. If many educators are engaged in formative and summative assessment, thought must be given to teacher development. These environmental factors can constrain the educator, but they also represent an opportunity to optimise the available resources.

Assessment considerations:

- In what types of learning environment will students access, conduct and submit their assessments?
- If there are tutors, how will the tutors access learners' assessments, and how will they provide them with feedback?
- What are the benefits of the learning environments for students and how can these be maximised within the assessment processes? For example, what tools are available to students and educators within these learning environments to make artefacts, observe/record tasks or communicate?
- What are the limitations of the learning environments for the students and how can these be minimised within the assessment processes?
- What are the benefits and limitations of the learning environments for the educators?

Also refer to:

[Tasks>Activities which drive learning](#)

[Feedback processes>Types of feedback information](#)

Educator experiences

Distance learning with peer teaching

Our lectures are video-streamed but they meet in local tute groups with local tutors. One novel element of the assessment for the third year subject is peer teaching. So, students themselves give four facilitated tutorials, and they're not giving a presentation sitting down, they're running the tutorial as if they are tutors. Peer teaching is not particularly ground-breaking as a strategy, but I thought it would be an effective way to get these third year students engaged, particularly with content. And, another good by-product is that it reduces the marking load. – Arts lecturer

Online peer feedback

Our study days are 'blocked' so that there are periods of intensive activity followed by time devoted to assessments. One of the things we've found is that our learners struggle with doing their complex assessments without any kind of feedback. Partly it's a feeling of isolation, but it's also missing the real opportunity they have to learn with their peers. We ask them to provide structured feedback on two draft assessments by peers. This does a lot of things at once. It provides them with experience in providing written feedback, which is a good skill for educators. It allows them to critically engage with the subject material through analysing their peers' work. It also gives the feedback recipient a range of two other opinions on their work.
– Education lecturer

Resources:

- The Transforming Assessment project has a large set of resources about electronic assessment www.transformingassessment.com
- The University of New South Wales Assessment Toolkit has a section about Assessing Large Classes teaching.unsw.edu.au/assessing-large-classes which includes an eight-part video series
- The University of Reading has a few pages about Assessing large numbers of students www.reading.ac.uk/engageinassessment/assessing-large-groups/eia-assessing-large-groups.aspx

Outcomes

Assessment should ideally align with desired learner outcomes. This is most obvious from a grading or accreditation perspective, as it is critical to ensure that the learner has met the unit requirements and there isn't any disjunction between the general teaching and the assessment tasks, and on some occasions, external professional requirements as well. However, assessment tasks have more complex interactions with student outcomes, as learners develop over the course of a unit, and continue to develop through the program and into graduation. Any substantive new learning outcome needs to be: a) introduced; b) developed through formative assessment; and c) assured through summative assessment. Additionally, educators often design assessment to develop learners in broader ways than the specific learning outcomes. These can be at a program level (for example, to develop writing skills commensurate with a tertiary graduate), or at a discipline or professional level (for example, to be able to apply scientific arguments).

Key assessment considerations

How does assessment align with, and promote, desired student outcomes, including:

- unit/module learning outcomes?
- overall program learning outcomes?
- professional requirements?
- learners' general professional or intellectual development?

Outcomes>Unit/module learning outcomes

All units have official learning outcomes or objectives detailed in the approval documentation that students are expected to achieve. Ensuring that students can demonstrate what they have learned in relation to these formal outcomes is one of the purposes of assessment. When designing (or redesigning) assessment, it is important to critically evaluate the learning outcomes to see how well the unit learning outcomes align with the assessment tasks set. Additionally, it is also worth mapping the content of a unit against the learning outcomes to determine how well the non-graded activities contribute towards the learning outcomes and the assessment tasks. These links have to be communicated to the students to help them understand the unit as a whole and how it contributes to their learning. It may also be valuable to consult with others who have taught in the unit before (e.g. previous lecturers and tutors) and those teaching related units in the same program.

Assessment considerations:

- How well do the learning outcomes reflect what students need to learn from this unit?
- How does completion of the assessment tasks align with achieving the learning outcomes?
- How do the assessment tasks contribute towards the learning outcomes?
- What non-graded activities (in-class or online) and associated feedback help learners to complete the assessment tasks?
- How would you investigate alternative or better forms of assessment that would achieve the learning outcomes?
- How are the links between non-graded activities, assessment tasks and unit outcomes/objectives communicated to the learners?

Also refer to:

[Purposes>Support learning](#)

[Tasks>Activities which drive learning](#)

[Tasks>Criteria for successful completion](#)

[Tasks>Identifying which tasks are graded](#)

[Interactions>Learner requirements](#)

[Interactions>Changes to teaching and learning activities](#)

Educator experiences

Mapping learning outcomes onto assessment

We align unit learning outcomes to make sure the assessment tasks match. We go even further and make sure that the specific activities in a unit contribute towards students achieving the assessment task. That way we don't include arbitrary activities that have no relationship to the assessment task. – Education lecturer

Integrating content and assessment

My starting point was the learning objectives. For one learning objective, the module and the assessment were very separate. I thought: "they're not learning that in context, that is not authentic. It really needs to be integrated." So my starting point really was the learning objectives which helped me to detect and solve that problem. – Engineering lecturer

Resources:

- The University of New South Wales Assessment Toolkit has a section about Aligning Assessment with Outcomes teaching.unsw.edu.au/aligning-assessment-learning-outcomes
- The University of Queensland Assessment website has a resource about assessment and Biggs' SOLO taxonomy of learning outcomes uq.edu.au/tediteach/assessment/resources.html#
- The University of Sydney's assessment website has a page about learning outcomes, with a focus on writing them well www.itl.usyd.edu.au/assessmentresources/learning_outcomes.htm

Outcomes>Overall program learning outcomes

Program learning outcomes are those higher level outcomes which have been specified for a course or program. These outcomes help educators think about how the unit contributes to a course overall. For units where progression through the course is highly dependent on success within that unit, these outcomes are particularly significant. Program outcomes are often identified in the unit proposal, but also may have changed since the unit was established. Linking to these higher level outcomes in a clear and logical manner can help learners make sense of the unit within their program of study. Without these links, the unit may seem disconnected. Checking the formal documentation is helpful.

When thinking about program level learning, it is worth remembering that assessment develops learners across units; summative assessment in one unit serves a formative purpose for the next. Likewise, skills developed in one assessment (for example, writing essays), also tend to develop as the learner progresses through the course. These program outcomes can help guide the links between units in designing assessment. Formal and informal communication with colleagues about how to address these outcomes is very important.

Assessment considerations:

- What are the overall outcomes for the program in which your unit sits?
- How does your unit reflect these outcomes?
- How do you communicate with your colleagues about the overall purpose of the individual units within the program?
- Are there also any departmental, school or faculty level outcomes that are relevant?
- Is it appropriate to map assessment across the units within a program? If so, how can this process: a) iteratively develop skills and knowledge in core content; b) iteratively develop skills in assessment techniques; and c) demonstrate success for progression?

Also refer to:

[Purposes>Generate grades](#)

[Purposes>Future judgements](#)

[Context>Overall program](#)

[Tasks>Distribution](#)

Educator experiences

Matching learning outcomes to assessment

So we all sat down as a team and reviewed the overall learning outcomes for the program; in thinking about how much assessment should be tilted towards independent research versus everything else. And it was clear to us, after quite a long discussion, that we were overemphasising research for many students who did not have an interest or a requirement in this regard. And that a thesis assessment item, did not suit the majority of our students. – Health sciences lecturer

Developing disciplinary skills

Being able to write an historical essay is what marks you out as a historian. In every history unit a student does, they have to write at least one essay. But essay writing is not an innate ability. We can't expect first year students – even those who have done history at Year 12 level – to be able to just write essays the way we want them. Good assessment for first years is assessment that actually trains the student in essay writing. The idea is that we have tasks that will feed into the process of writing an essay, such as a source analysis or debate analysis. The essay remains the pinnacle in history and that's what we are aiming towards. – History Lecturer

Resources:

- The Assessing and Assuring Graduate Learning Outcomes project has a set of resources www.itl.usyd.edu.au/projects/aaglo/summaries.htm
- The Program Assessment Strategies (PASS) project has a guide to program-focused assessment, resources and case studies www.pass.brad.ac.uk
- Like many universities, the University of Sydney has undergone a curriculum mapping process and has much of it documented online www.itl.usyd.edu.au/graduateattributes/curriculum_mapping.htm
- University of New South Wales has three resources around mapping program and unit learning outcomes teaching.unsw.edu.au/tags/curriculum-mapping-0

Outcomes>Professional requirements

Outcomes that reflect the accreditation requirements of industry and professional bodies may also be important. If there are accreditation requirements, educators need know how the assessment tasks contribute to developing the required competencies. This may go beyond covering particular content, and extend to engaging learners with specific practices and skills. Some of these outcomes may already be mapped at the program level, and it may be a matter of consulting with colleagues to locate that documentation. Professional requirements may form a significant part of the design/redesign of assessments. It is also worth considering what other knowledge and skills your learners need to prepare for a profession. These might include dispositions and attitudes, as well as knowledge and skills not expressed in competencies. This gives the opportunity to think more generally about what it takes to be a successful person in that profession.

Assessment considerations:

- Are there specific competencies required by accrediting bodies that learners are expected to demonstrate?
- How do these appear in the program structure?
- How is the unit in which the assessment sits to address the professional requirements?
- How does the assessment design contribute to learners achieving those competencies?
- Are there further skills and knowledge you would like to develop in your learners that will help them in their future professional lives?
- Are there dispositions or values you would like to instil in your learners that they will need to be successful professionals?
- How can these be embedded in the assessment design?

Also refer to:

[Context>Professional, vocational and employment related](#)

[Outcomes>Learner development](#)

[Tasks>Criteria for successful completion](#)

[Tasks>Identifying which tasks are graded](#)

Educator experiences

Building professional skills

The assessment is geared around the fact that teaching is a collaborative profession and more and more teachers are required to work with a colleague or in teams to develop a unit of work. So I've changed the mode of presentation to include a conference. Part one is students write the teaching and learning plan. Part two is students presenting three of the highlights from their teaching and learning plan in a conference. I'm going to invite students from the other three units to be part of the audience to get ideas too. So the assessment models what qualified teachers do. – Education lecturer

Demonstrating competencies

We have a national set of competencies for our health profession. Over their four years of study, students have to develop a portfolio of evidence where they document how they meet all these competencies. In their final semester, our fourth year students do a 10-week placement, and come back with four weeks before they graduate as real life therapists. In that final four weeks they write a reflection piece on their portfolio which is handed in and marked. Then students do oral viva in front of two academic staff members and one or two members of the clinical professional community, in which they explain why they think they are ready and competent to practice as a health professional. – Health professions lecturer

Resources:

- Portfolios are one approach used to help students document their learning for accreditation or professional use. The University of New South Wales Assessment Toolkit has resources for portfolios teaching.unsw.edu.au/assessing-portfolio and electronic portfolios teaching.unsw.edu.au/assessing-eportfolios. JISC has a range of resources about e-Portfolios www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/eportfolios.aspx, including their e-Portfolio Implementation Toolkit epip.pbworks.com/w/page/28670505/The%20e-portfolio%20implementation%20toolkit. The University of Nottingham has a video case study of the use of portfolios www.nottingham.ac.uk/pesl/resources/assessment/portfolx635/
- The University of New South Wales Assessment Toolkit has a section on Work-Integrated Learning teaching.unsw.edu.au/work-integrated-learning
- The Assessing and Assuring Graduate Learning Outcomes project has a resource to assist with the Challenges of Assessing Graduate Learning Outcomes (GLOs) in work-based contexts www.itl.usyd.edu.au/projects/aaglo/summaries.htm

Outcomes>Learner development

There are sometimes less tangible outcomes educators would like their learners to achieve. These outcomes may express ambitions for students to develop as self-directed adult learners through a unit and program. Educators may want learners to engage with a discipline area that helps to make them informed and active citizens, or perhaps to focus on some of the 'soft skills' needed to work in a profession. These may reflect individuals' particular values that they wish to pass on to their learners. Institutions too, often have aims for graduates, described as 'graduate attributes'. Articulating how learners might develop in this broader sense, can help to make units and associated assessment more relevant for both learners and educators. It may be worth formally aligning assessments against these goals, and considering how to communicate these thoughts to learners. This type of approach may help clarify how assessments can draw from educators' individual expertise and experiences.

Assessment considerations:

- What is it about your experiences which might influence how you shape assessment?
- Thinking about these experiences, as well as drawing from your profession/discipline and the department/faculty/institution, are there additional outcomes you would like your unit's assessment to address?
- How do these relate to the other prescribed outcomes?
- How do they reflect your own understanding as a professional or discipline expert?
- How might these shape the assessment tasks?
- How will you provide feedback on these aspects of the tasks?
- How can you communicate these outcomes to learners?

Also refer to:

[Purposes>Future judgements](#)

[Context>Departmental, disciplinary and personal conventions](#)

[Tasks>Rationale](#)

[Tasks>Activities which drive learning](#)

[Interactions>Learner requirements](#)

Educator experiences

Contributing to the community

Not all our students are going to go on to do honours or PhDs, but we want them to be scientifically literate and to be able to inform their friends. There are a whole lot of moral and ethical issues, as well as scientific issues and we want our graduates to be able to communicate them really clearly to their friends and family, to society. – Science lecturer

Understanding a political process

All of this geopolitics, it can be treated very theoretically, which I don't like ... I think, the students need to understand how these climate change negotiations work in practice. The following week, in the tutorial, we will run it as a very formal negotiation process. I've outlined a draft agreement on how we will do that, and it's called the [University name] Climate Change Convention. And it's very specific but not very detailed. And what's going to happen is each of the groups of students will have a little name, so there'll be a group called China and there'll be a lead negotiator. I'll be the Chair of this meeting and I'll be telling them how this is done, in a very formal way, so there's no arguing between delegations. My hope is that some of these people, possibly in as early as five years from now, will really go to similar sorts of negotiations. When they do, they'll look back at this unit and think, "I'm reasonably comfortable with this. I understand how this works". – Geography lecturer

Resources:

- Authentic assessment takes into consideration the sort of student development issues discussed here. The University of New South Wales Assessment Toolkit has a section about Assessing Authentically teaching.unsw.edu.au/authentic-assessment, including an eight-part video series
- The Deakin University website has a self-paced professional development package about authentic assessment www.deakin.edu.au/itl/assets/resources/pd/tl-modules/assessment/authenticassessment.pdf
- The Assessment Futures website has a section on authentic assessment www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/teaching-and-learning/assessment/assessment-futures/key-assessment-elements-1

Tasks

Tasks form the foundation of assessment design. An assessment task is one where the learner's performance is judged (either by educators or fellow learners) and this judgement is communicated (often as a grade but more valuably through written or verbal comments). An assessment task requires a learner to commit to their interpretation of the content, and it permits correction of errors and development of skills. A well-designed assessment task takes into account the different purposes of assessment; aligns with the overall teaching including learning outcomes; provides opportunity for iterative practice and feedback; and supports appropriate and helpful judgements about the learner's performance. Optimally designed assessment tasks also are sustainable from: 1) The perspective of developing the learner's own capacity to make evaluative judgements about their future work; and 2) The perspective of the teacher's workload. New and innovative tasks can challenge accepted practices, and interactions with colleagues and students alike may be required when introducing new tasks.

Key assessment considerations:

- What kinds of tasks do learners need to engage in to: a) develop and b) demonstrate their learning?
- What is the rationale for each task?
- How do the tasks drive learning? What do the tasks specifically require learners to do?
- What will be the criteria for successful completion?
- How are tasks best distributed across the semester including their relationship with other tasks within the unit and within the program?
- How will learners contribute to assessment processes?
- Which tasks will be graded?

Tasks>Rationale

When learners ask “why are we doing this assessment?” they are in part requesting a rationale for the task, which is ideally developed prior to, and alongside, the assessment task. Purposes of assessment and intended learning outcomes are good places to start in developing a rationale, but so are unpacking that tacit, gut feeling that a particular task is important. It is worth considering previous performance and learner feedback on the same or similar tasks. A rationale might include reasons for the choice and design of task, what learners will get out of it, why they should undertake it in a particular way and the reasoning behind the assessment criteria. Rationales for tasks which are common and usual, such as essays and exams, may need particularly careful thought. Rationales may also include issues which do not pertain to learners, such as workload concerns or resource restrictions. In fact, identification of these may also assist in developing assessments which benefit learners as much as possible within the reality of workplace constraints. The rationale may also help redesign or define the tasks as required. Educators may need multiple versions of a rationale: for teachers, for learners, for colleagues, and for a review or professional accrediting body.

Assessment considerations:

- Which purposes of assessment and outcomes does this task address?
- Why does this task exist? Are there other tasks that would achieve these goals better or more easily?
- Is this task a good use of everyone’s time?
- Who benefits from this task?
- What do learners think this task is for?
- How will you communicate the rationale of this task to learners, colleagues and the broader community?
- How does this task’s rationale connect to the overall rationale of the unit and program?

Also refer to:

[Purposes>Support learning](#)

[Purposes>Generate grades](#)

[Purposes>Future judgements](#)

[Context>Departmental, disciplinary and personal conventions](#)

[Outcomes>Unit/module learning outcomes](#)

[Feedback processes>Influence of learner performance](#)

Educator experiences

A chance for students to demonstrate what they know

The starting point in my assessment design is what do I want the students to know? What do I want them to demonstrate to me that they know, from the course, from what I'm teaching? And I start from there and then I look at the assessment task. – Education lecturer

Making tasks authentic

When thinking about the rationale for a task I design I always go back to the principle of authenticity. Because I'm in an applied field that means thinking about how the task I can ask students to do reflects what practitioners do 'in the real world'. And this is the way I'll explain to my students the importance of the task and the way I'm asking them to approach it. Keeping the workload manageable both for students and for me can be a real challenge. I often think of great projects, but then have to really think them through to make sure I'm not asking the students to do too much or not creating a marking nightmare for my tutors or me. Often it takes a few iterations to get it right. – Education lecturer

Resource:

- The University of New South Wales Assessment Toolkit has a page on Selecting Assessment Methods teaching.unsw.edu.au/printpdf/588

Tasks>Activities which drive learning

Assessment tasks can be graded or non-graded. Only grade bearing assessment is 'summative' assessment, which is a formal record of achievement. All forms of assessment offer the opportunity to develop the learner's capacities through receiving feedback on their performance. This is the 'formative' purpose of assessment. Assessment can be used as a strategic tool to guide learners through a series of tasks which optimise higher order learning beyond simple recall and recognition. To achieve this, educators focus on what they want students to learn, and the specific activities required by each assessment task which allow learners to develop skills but which also allow teachers or peers to judge and provide feedback on task performance. It is important that the assessment requirements superfluous to learning are not so onerous that they swamp the purpose of the assessment itself. Examples of activities which are helpful for learning as well as allowing judgement and feedback include problems where the learner must supply solutions, drawing from original thinking; written tasks which require synthesis and application of reflective thinking into concrete situations; or debates, role-plays and simulations where learners have to perform and respond to feedback in real time.

The creation of tasks can be the most enjoyable part of developing assessment and there is a significant amount of academic literature available to provide examples or discussion of how to design tasks which promote learning.

Assessment considerations:

- How do the tasks align to learning outcomes? How will the activities lead to learning? How will you know?
- What exactly will a learner need to do to satisfactorily complete this set of tasks?
- What will learners be able to do on completing these tasks that they can't do now? How will you cater for variable cohorts? Is it too hard/easy?
- How much of the workload of these tasks engages students in meaningful learning towards unit, program or other outcomes? What can you do to remove workload that is superfluous to learning?
- How does the design of the task discourage plagiarism?
- Are there shortcuts students could use to bypass the learning but still complete the task?
- What preparatory learning and teaching activities are necessary so students can commence these tasks?

Also refer to:

[Purposes>Support learning](#)

[Context>Characteristics of enrolled students](#)

[Context>Learning environment](#)

[Outcomes>Unit/module learning outcomes](#)

[Feedback processes>Multiple feedback opportunities](#)

Educator experiences

Activities in tutorials

The conundrum I often face is that I want students to undertake a particular activity because I think it's really important to their learning and to completing the tasks I've set, but I just don't want to attach marks to it and proliferate a whole lot of little sub-tasks. My strategy is to build these activities into tutorials, which have an attendance requirement. That way the students can work towards their assignments in class and get these experiences that are so important. It takes a bit of preparation because you've got to spend time breaking down the tasks. The other benefit is that it helps me make sure my tutorials are focused on important activities and there isn't anything unnecessary in there just taking up time. – Education lecturer

Integrating technology

In an effort to make tasks more interesting for students I'm always looking for ways to use new technologies. I do get concerned though about whether the technical side is going to get in the way of student learning. It's easy to assume that all students know how to use the technology, but I often find that isn't the case because students are so varied in their backgrounds. So I always spend some time to make sure that I know how the technology works and make sure there's support for students in tutorials or online. That way I know the technology isn't going to take over! – Education lecturer

Iteration within tasks

A couple of years ago I got interested in how I could build multiple iterations into tasks. It works best with tasks that students can work on over several weeks and I've done it a few different ways. Sometimes I structure it so students are just updating their ideas and progress of an assignment (e.g. on a blog or quick presentation in a tutorial), sometimes I give feedback in class or online, and other times I get other student involved in giving feedback too. It makes students start their assignment early then work on it progressively. Plus it discourages plagiarism because they have to show their work over time. That means it's harder for students to copy someone else or submit an assignment from a past student. – Education lecturer

Resources:

- The University of New South Wales Assessment Toolkit has sections on Assessment as Learning teaching.unsw.edu.au/assessment-learning and Designing Assessment as Learning teaching.unsw.edu.au/designing-assessment-learning which includes 10 videos
- University of Queensland Assessment Brief "Conditions under which assessment supports students' learning" uq.edu.au/tediteach/assessment/docs/brief-1-sep2009.pdf

Tasks>Criteria for successful completion

Tasks must be selected to permit an opportunity for meaningful judgements which align with learning outcomes. Almost all assessments are now judged against a set of criteria, not relative to others' performance (e.g. using the 'bell curve'). Criteria are helpful in clarifying expected standards and assisting the learner in understanding their strengths and weaknesses. Many tasks have rubrics associated, which outline specific criteria and what is expected across a range of standards. These rubrics serve multiple purposes. Firstly, they assist learners with formative activities, to self-assess and to develop their own judgements about performance. Secondly, they guide the learners in how to complete tasks. Thirdly, they frame the educators' judgement about the learner in a transparent manner. Finally, they support/facilitate specific feedback regarding strengths and weaknesses. Determining criteria is often a balancing act and requires the educator to make judgements about what the most relevant indicators of achieving a learning outcome are.

Assessment considerations:

- How do the assessment tasks support accurate and meaningful judgements by learners and others?
- What are the institutional/departmental requirements as well as the learner expectations for grading?
- How does successful completion of the graded tasks reflect the learning outcomes?
- Will rubrics be developed, and if so, how? Will learners or colleagues have inputs at preliminary stages? How does prior student performance affect the design of the rubric?
- What does writing or revising a rubric tell you about the design of the task?
- How will you know if their criteria indicate successful meeting of the learning outcomes?

Also refer to:

[Context>Institutional assessment principles and policies](#)

[Outcomes>Unit/module learning outcomes](#)

[Outcomes>Overall program learning outcomes](#)

[Outcomes>Professional requirements](#)

[Tasks>Rationale](#)

[Feedback processes>Influence of learner performance](#)

[Interactions>Learner requirements](#)

Educator experiences

Developing criteria

I find developing criteria quite tricky, especially for open-ended tasks and also when I'm running a task for the first time. No matter how much effort and thought I put into this first run, I often find myself rewriting the criteria in subsequent years because the students' work and their questions make me realise I can do better to explain what the task entails. Other times when I'm rewriting criteria it makes me realise there's something not right about the design of the task or somewhere the students need more support to complete it. – Education lecturer

Using rubrics

One of the things I like about writing rubrics for written work is that they help me to identify the difference between levels of performance on each criterion for a task. I use rubrics qualitatively rather than quantitatively. I don't try to specifically weight each according to a mark and then add it up at the end to get a total. But I do use them to help me decide on the approximate grade and then I can look more closely at the distinctions to decide where that piece of assessment work sits. I find rubrics really helpful in discussions with students about the strength and weaknesses of their work. – Education lecturer

Resources:

- The University of New South Wales Assessment Toolkit has sections on Standards-Based Assessment teaching.unsw.edu.au/standards-based-assessment, and Grading and Giving Feedback teaching.unsw.edu.au/grading-assessment-feedback
- The University of Technology Sydney Assessment Futures site has a section on Grading and Exams www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/teaching-and-learning/assessment-futures/designing-and-redesigning-assessmen-1
- The United Kingdom Higher Education Academy has a 33-minute video Marking Criteria and Assessment Methods vimeo.com/channels/154640/9320129
- The University of Sydney's Assessment website has sections on Setting Standards and Writing Grade Descriptors www.itl.usyd.edu.au/assessmentresources/grade_descriptors.htm, Marking and Grading www.itl.usyd.edu.au/assessmentresources/marking_grading.htm
- The Better Judgement project www.flinders.edu.au/medicine/sites/better-judgement/ has a series of videos about bias, human judgement, subjectivity and reliability in assessment
- The United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education produces a guide for early-career academics titled Understanding assessment: its role in safeguarding academic standards and quality in higher education www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/understanding-assessment.pdf

Tasks>Distribution

Choosing when assessment tasks are distributed and scheduled across a semester is more than just an administrative decision. Carefully connecting tasks with areas of overlap provides an opportunity to create an assessment narrative for a unit, with multiple opportunities for learners to act upon feedback and demonstrate how they have improved. This assessment narrative includes alignment with other activities such as lectures, tutorials and practicums. The effort required to complete a task should also be considered. Scheduling feedback opportunities is an important issue, as time must be allocated for judging assessment and providing feedback. Talking with colleagues about the assessment in their units can help pre-empt assessment 'pinch points' throughout the semester where learners have many tasks due at once. There may also be institutional imperatives, such as examination periods which dictate how assessment is scheduled.

Assessment considerations:

- Does your department or institution have any rules about the scheduling of assessment tasks?
- What are the assessment schedules of the other units your learners are undertaking? Are there potential synergies or conflicts?
- How much time do you expect each task to take learners? How do you know if these are reasonable estimates?
- What arrangement of these tasks will most encourage a sustained engagement and development over the whole semester?
- How can you time this sequence of tasks to ensure assessors and learners have multiple opportunities to engage in feedback?
- How will you support learners who underperform or miss earlier tasks so they have a chance to complete later tasks?
- What adjustments will you need to make to the teaching schedule so assessments can be completed and feedback provided in a timely fashion?

Also refer to:

[Tasks>Activities which drive learning](#)

[Feedback processes>Multiple feedback opportunities](#)

[Feedback processes>Influence of learner performance](#)

Educator experiences

Frequent small tasks to promote sustained work

With one assessment task, I tell them about it in week one but it's not due til week seven. Because of the propensity of the students to leave things to the last minute, what we've done is set up little mini-quizzes. These quizzes are only in the end worth 2 per cent but with certain weeks, like week one, week three, week four, and week six, there's these little mini-quizzes that are worth half a per cent. So it's trying to force them to do the activity and not leave it to the last minute. – Science lecturer

Getting students to start work early in the semester

We ask them to complete a task very early on. And they complain like billy-o, "What are you doing, making us do this at four weeks?" And then towards the end of semester, they go, "I see why you made me do that. It really got me started." So this preliminary investigation memo is getting them started, I make the tutors absolutely cover it in feedback comments, so that the students know where they're sitting – Engineering lecturer

Resources:

- The ESCAPE project has a section on Assessment Timelines
jiscdesignstudio.pbworks.com/w/page/30631817/ESCAPE%20-%20Assessment%20timelines
- Timing your assessments section on University of Reading Engage in Assessment site
www.reading.ac.uk/engageinassessment/assessment-design/planning/eia-timing-your-assessments.aspx
- University of Queensland assessment research brief Feeding forward from summative assessment: the Essay Feedback Checklist as a learning tool
uq.edu.au/tediteach/assessment/docs/brief-39-feb2014.pdf

Tasks>Learner contribution

There are many ways in which learners can be involved in assessment processes beyond their obvious role in responding to assessment tasks. Learners might design aspects of an assessment task, provide feedback to peers on draft or final work, use the assessment to develop resources for other learners' information, give presentations on topics that are vital to their fellow students' learning, or suggest how an assessment task could be improved for the following cohort of learners. Involving learners in such ways can increase their sense of responsibility, improve the quality of their work, and provide important information for enhancing assessment practices.

Assessment considerations:

- Which aspects of the assessment process lend themselves to more involvement by your learners, e.g. selecting or creating their own assignment topics, providing peer feedback, acting as an audience for presentations, or creating resources for future use?
- How can peer feedback be designed creatively to engage your learners in improving their own and others' work and knowledge?
- How might assessment tasks be used to generate artefacts for your future teaching?
- How might assessment tasks be used to generate resources for the benefit of your current learners?
- If your students are making oral presentations to the class, how can this be made into a genuine learning experience for the whole class?
- How can you collect high quality feedback from your learners on the assessment tasks in order to improve these tasks for your next cohort?

Also refer to:

[Tasks>Activities which drive learning](#)

Educator experiences

Peer review

With large classes of 700–800, the only way to solve the need for more feedback was by implementing peer review. We allowed the students to upload a draft of their essay into the learning management system and then it was sent anonymously to three people. We told the students that they would get feedback from peers, or from a member of staff. Even on that large scale, students were very constructive in helping each other and the students found that they were really getting quite significant feedback from each other. Most people found that it was a very rewarding experience. It had the effect, obviously, of inflating marks because quite clearly, they wrote better essays. – History lecturer

Incorporating student work into assessment design

I guess there's always an unknown. When it's the first time you do something that's new, you don't know how effective or useful it's going to be. So, that is an important part of the process, to sit down after the experience and think, "Well, okay, what happened there?" I consult with my students, I let them know, "This is the first time we've done this ... So, it would be good to get your feedback on how you see the effectiveness of it, the clarity, etc." I use Google forms in the last lesson to survey all the students because their feedback is important in shaping the future versions of the assessment task. – Education lecturer

Assessment products for future learning

A student performing these skills well and videoing themselves doing it for the assessment task, was as good a teaching resource as if I had recorded myself performing that skill. So their submissions are purposely used as teaching resources. Not only does it mean the students can learn from their peers, these video resources will help us facilitate the transition to our curriculum being online. – Health professions lecturer

Resources:

- The REAP Project's Feedback is a Dialogue campaign produced a set of resources, including a two-page leaflet for students www.reap.ac.uk/TheoryPractice/Students.aspx
- The University of Reading Engage in Feedback site has a section on Getting students to engage with feedback www.reading.ac.uk/internal/engageinfeedback/GettingStudentsToEngage/efb-GettingStudentsToEngage.aspx
- The University of Edinburgh Enhancing Feedback site has a section for students, as well as advice for staff to get students to engage with feedback www.enhancingfeedback.ed.ac.uk

Tasks>Identifying which tasks are graded

Assessment tasks are in general broadly identified as graded activities prior to commencing teaching. This can lead to some disconnect as it may take up to 18 months to change the formal requirements associated with a unit's grades. Details of the task may be changed at various junctures, but publishing of the unit guide also represents a 'fixed' point after which criteria, schedules and broad task descriptions generally do not change.

When considering which activities should be graded, it is helpful to take an overview of the entire unit first, to establish the overall pattern of formative and summative feedback and assessment in relation to the overall teaching. In particular, learners should only be graded on content which has already been taught and which aligns with the unit learning outcomes. In this way, the grade is a direct indication of the learner's achievement against the unit outcomes. Tasks should be selected for grading if they can be assessed equitably and appropriately. Also important, assessment designs should ensure tasks are neither too easy nor too burdensome for students through careful selection of activities. Segmenting tasks (just assessing a part of a task) can be helpful for learners' and assessors' workloads.

Assessment considerations:

- How can you write flexible formal requirements for your unit guide?
- How do the total of graded tasks align with unit learning outcomes?
- How can issues of validity and equity (such as ensuring the assessment is a fair indication of learners' capacities or that assessors are suitably prepared) be addressed?
- How do you ensure that learners' and assessors' workloads are not overly burdensome?
- How do non-graded tasks, with opportunities for feedback, support graded activities?
- What are the individual learner versus grouped assessment considerations in the graded activity?

Also refer to:

[Purposes>Generate grades](#)

[Context>Institutional assessment principles and policies](#)

[Outcomes>Unit/module learning outcomes](#)

[Outcomes>Overall program learning outcomes](#)

[Outcomes>Professional requirements](#)

Educator experiences

Distribution of grades

There can be a lot of angst over the distribution of grades in a unit with an idea that we have to achieve an appropriate distribution by the end of the semester. My approach is to make sure I don't lose sight of the learning objectives for the unit and make sure my marking criteria clearly relate back to them. The way I do it is make a table with a row for each task and then a column for the learning objective the task is addressing and then the marking criteria. That way I can see by comparing columns where the inconsistencies are. – Education lecturer

Reducing the number of graded tasks

We had our course externally reviewed, and the feedback was that we were grading too many tasks. It was a burden for the students and it was definitely a burden for us. We carefully reviewed the contribution to the unit, and realised that some of the tasks could be supported in class and were not required to meet the unit's learning outcomes. I used to want to grade an item for every objective. I've now realised that it is more meaningful for students to carefully select my tasks to cover a range of objectives; and certainly better for my marking load. – Health Sciences educator

Resources:

- The University of New South Wales Assessment Toolkit has sections on Standards-Based Assessment teaching.unsw.edu.au/standards-based-assessment, and Grading and Giving Feedback teaching.unsw.edu.au/grading-assessment-feedback
- The University of Technology Sydney Assessment Futures site has a section on Grading and exams www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/teaching-and-learning/assessment-futures/designing-and-redesigning-assessmen-1

Feedback

Feedback is most helpfully conceptualised as an iterative process through which the learner prepares work for judgement, receives verbal or written comments, and then has the opportunity to put what they have learnt into practice, ready for another cycle of feedback. Feedback and associated processes are integral to assessment which promotes learning. The challenges that educators have of learners not reading, accessing or acknowledging feedback can be addressed through assessment design: if they are not expected to respond to feedback, many will not do so. Tasks and associated feedback should permit the learner to develop throughout a unit or program. This requires multiple opportunities to complete work, to receive feedback, and to demonstrate how this feedback has changed what learners can do. Feedback information can be provided by people other than the lecturer or tutor, most importantly by fellow learners, although careful consideration should be given to maximising the value of peer feedback – both for the feedback giver and the recipient.

Key assessment considerations:

- How will tasks be located, related to each other and staged to produce multiple feedback opportunities?
- What types of feedback information will be provided and by whom?
- How will learner performance be used to influence the (re)design of later tasks?

Feedback processes>Multiple feedback opportunities

Feedback is frequently characterised as the information that the educator imparts to the learner. Such a view diminishes the value that feedback can serve. Feedback is most useful to the learner when they have a chance to apply the feedback to another activity, and then gain feedback on their subsequent work. It is also of great value to educators to observe that a learner can receive feedback and adjust their performance accordingly. In order to achieve the maximum value from feedback opportunities, both non-graded and graded assessment tasks should be carefully staged in order to allow multiple feedback opportunities. These opportunities can iteratively develop the learner's capacity and maximise the value of assessment to the learner.

Assessment considerations:

- How can tasks be located within a unit to provide iterative feedback opportunities?
- How can learners be given information about feedback and how they are expected to incorporate it into their activities?
- How will feedback be framed so that learners can respond to it constructively?
- How can the non-graded and graded tasks relate to each other so that learners have the chance to incorporate feedback from one task into the next?
- How can the final graded activity build upon prior tasks?

Also refer to:

[Outcomes>Unit/module learning outcomes](#)

[Tasks>Distribution](#)

[Feedback processes>Types of feedback information](#)

Educator experiences

Building up a task over time

I was using two big tasks in a unit: a final portfolio, and a proposal of what to put in the portfolio. I found that students weren't acting on feedback on their proposal when working on their final portfolio. I was giving them the same feedback twice! I rethought the tasks so that the writing from the proposal task became embedded inside the portfolio, and literally required them to act upon feedback from their proposal inside the portfolio. I had to explain to them that "yes, really you can copy-paste; I want to see how you can improve it". They're doing better work now that I see that work twice and require them to act on feedback. – Education lecturer

Modularisation can make feedback challenging

I inherited a unit that was really just a set of six disjointed modules, taught by six academics, each with their own assessment. There was no narrative to the assessment, and students didn't really have a chance to get and act on feedback before they were assessed. It felt unfair. In the short term we fixed this by getting together and trying to identify a sort of progression between the tasks, but in the long term we just had to move away from that sort of modular approach. –
Education lecturer

Resources:

- The ESCAPE project has a section on Assessment timelines
jiscdesignstudio.pbworks.com/w/page/30631817/ESCAPE%20-%20Assessment%20timelines
- The University of Reading Engage in Feedback site has a set of useful resources
www.reading.ac.uk/internal/engageinfeedback/Quicktips/efb-QuickTipsAndResources.aspx including tips on feed-forward guidance and an audit tool for teachers to self-assess their feedback practices
- The University of Reading Engage in Assessment site has a brief discussion of the challenges of modularisation www.reading.ac.uk/engageinassessment/assessment-design/eia-seeing-the-bigger-assessment-picture.aspx and a spreadsheet tool for assessment mapping
- Timing your assessments section on University of Reading Engage in Assessment site
www.reading.ac.uk/engageinassessment/assessment-design/planning/eia-timing-your-assessments.aspx
- University of Queensland's assessment research brief Feeding Forward from Summative Assessment: the Essay Feedback Checklist as a Learning Tool
uq.edu.au/tediteach/assessment/docs/brief-39-feb2014.pdf
- The first few chapters in Boud and Molloy's (2013) *Feedback in Higher and Professional Education: Understanding it and doing it well*
www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415692298/ present a model of feedback that can inform assessment design.

Feedback processes>Types of feedback information

Feedback information can be given in multiple forms and from multiple sources. The least informative feedback is a single grade, without any reference to criteria or any commentary. Rubrics or grading criteria provide more information, but they depend on learners appreciating the criteria used. Qualitative comments can also help, either in written, verbal or audio/video recorded form. Giving feedback information individually can be a very time consuming process for educators, and ways of balancing out the need for feedback and the challenges of giving feedback require some thought. Priorities should be set regarding the most important areas where learners require information in order to develop skills or understanding. Peer feedback is highly valuable. It is not time consuming for educators, and it develops learners' skills through requiring them to judge the elements of a successful performance. Feedback commentary or 'generic' feedback, which is for more than one learner, can also be helpful. For example, a summary of strengths and weaknesses of an entire cohort may suit certain groups of learners.

Assessment considerations:

- Who is providing the feedback? (e.g. tutors, learners, educators) How can the feedback processes be balanced against workload?
- When, in relation to the task, will the feedback be given?
- How will the feedback providers make their judgements and how will they be supported to do this?
- What form will the feedback take?
- What are the most important matters that feedback should focus on?
- When is there value in providing 'generic' cohort feedback?

Also refer to:

[Context>Departmental, disciplinary and personal conventions](#)

[Context>Overall program](#)

[Context>Learning environment](#)

[Tasks>Learner contributions](#)

Educator experiences

Peer feedback

A couple of years ago I was facing massive workload issues myself and I thought peer assessment might be a way out. Big mistake – the students got very angry, and looking back, I can see why. I hadn't really prepared them for it, and it was quite a substantial time requirement too. They also didn't trust each others' judgement. I did salvage some good stuff from that experience though. I now devote time in class every semester to formative peer feedback on the major tasks. We do this a couple of weeks before each task is due, in pairs, and we spend substantial time talking through the assessment criteria beforehand; I also give them exemplars. – Education lecturer

Comparing self-assessment and teacher-assessment

So I give them the rubric, a video where I talk through the criteria, and an example of a HD from last year. I get them to hand in a self-assessed copy of the rubric when they hand in their assignment. My markers assess on the same copy of the rubric, and then focus their written feedback on where there is a difference of opinion. If the student and the marker both know part of the assignment wasn't up to scratch there's no need to write much about it. But if the student thinks they've met a particular criterion and we think they haven't, that's where we focus. This saves so much time, and students love it. – Education lecturer

Resources

There are many guides to incorporating peer- and self-feedback:

- the University of Technology Sydney Assessment Futures website includes a section on Giving and receiving feedback www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/teaching-and-learning/assessment-futures/key-assessment-elements/giving-and-receiving-feedback which includes a useful set of guidelines
- sections of the University of New South Wales Assessment Toolkit teaching.unsw.edu.au/self-assessment, teaching.unsw.edu.au/peer-assessment
- the University of Reading's Engage in Assessment www.reading.ac.uk/engageinassessment/peer-and-self-assessment/eia-peer-and-self-assessment-main.aspx and Engage in Feedback www.reading.ac.uk/internal/engageinfeedback/efb-Home.aspx
- the REAP PEER project has produced a toolkit for peer assessment www.reap.ac.uk/PEERToolkit.aspx

There are also many guides for teacher feedback:

- the University of Reading Engage in Feedback site has a set of resources about feedback for different task types www.reading.ac.uk/internal/engageinfeedback/Quicktips/efb-QuickTipsAndResources.aspx
- sections of the UNSW Assessment Toolkit teaching.unsw.edu.au/assessment-feedback
- the University of Edinburgh Enhancing Feedback site has examples and case studies of feedback practice www.enhancingfeedback.ed.ac.uk/staff/resources.html
- The Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange (ASKe) project has a set of brief brochures about feedback www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/resources/index.html including face-to-face feedback, peer feedback, generic feedback and automatic feedback from text-matching tools like Turnitin.

Feedback processes>Influence of learner performance

Feedback informs the learner as to how they are proceeding against criteria and standards, and also provides educators with a range of information about how the learner has engaged with their teaching. If assessment tasks are scheduled in such a way that enables the assessment to develop the learners' skills through feedback, then examining learner performance provides valuable information as to the design or implementation of later activities. A critical loop for educators is to examine how learners have performed in both graded (summative) and non-graded (formative) assessments in order to consider the design of later assessment tasks. While it may not be practical to redesign a graded activity within a semester, as tasks may already be published in unit guides or equivalent, the use of non-graded tasks and support processes needs to be considered. It is also important to consider the implications of learner performance for future iterations of the unit, or future assessments in the overall program.

Assessment considerations:

- What are you able to learn from the regular processes of judging learner performance and associated feedback?
- In a unit, how can you adapt activities and non-graded tasks to reflect this?
- After a unit, how can you adapt assessment tasks in the next iteration of the unit to reflect this?
- How can you communicate what you learn about your students to others within the program?
- How will you change your unit on the basis of what you have learned from learner responses to the assessment task?

Also refer to:

[Interactions>Resistance or engagement](#)

[Interactions>Assessment improvement](#)

Educator experiences

Helping students with referencing

I saw some early in-class writing, and the students' referencing really worried me, so I made a point of stressing to them that they need to get this right, 'or else'. Despite my scaremongering, when I looked at their first big summative task, around half of the class were that bad they technically plagiarised their sources. I told them this in my feedback comments; they fought back, saying it wasn't fair to be assessed on referencing when nobody has taught it to them yet. I had to push a few things around but I was able to find some time to get them to do the mechanics of referencing in class – real low-level, nitty-gritty stuff, but it worked, and there were fewer accidental plagiarists in the next assignment. – Education lecturer

Building on learner performance

We were teaching a new cohort of students who hadn't come to uni through the usual entry schemes, which meant we didn't have much data about their capabilities. We needed to teach some concepts around sustainability that required a certain level of maths understanding, and we didn't quite know how much to assume. I talked with someone in the School of Mathematics and they referred me to a mathematics diagnostic quiz, which we administered the semester before my unit ran. What really surprised us was that many students were more numerate than we expected, so instead of getting everyone to do the remedial activities we were more targeted with our limited resources. – Science lecturer

Resource:

- The University of Technology Sydney Assessment Futures site has a section about Reviewing assessment tasks www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/teaching-and-learning/assessment-futures/designing-and-redesigning-assessmen-3

Interactions

Assessment design is a dynamic process and educators must interact with a whole range of stakeholders in order to ensure the success of their endeavour. Educators must explain, negotiate and evaluate assessment design with colleagues and learners, to ensure that their assessment design is understood, appreciated and continually improving. This can be a very strategic process. It may involve a range of communications to bring learners and colleagues 'on side'. It can also be as simple as adapting the assessment according to learners' performance and/or feedback. It is important to remember that assessment does not sit as an isolated event but dynamically interacts with other teaching and learning activities.

Key assessment considerations:

- How will resistance or engagement from learners or colleagues influence assessment processes?
- How will learners understand what is required in the assessment task(s)?
- What information will be needed to improve this assessment for subsequent occasions?
- What associated changes in teaching and learning activities will be required?

Interactions>Resistance or engagement

Changing assessment is important for many reasons, but change can often bring resistance. At times academics don't give sufficient emphasis to the perspective of colleagues and learners. There are many different ways of understanding these views. There are formal feedback mechanisms, such as teaching evaluations or education committee reviews. There are more frequent but less formal types of feedback, such as a Head of Department's enthusiastic endorsement of an approach or students 'voting with their feet'. Thinking about these issues in advance may assist with overcoming resistance and harnessing enthusiasm, particularly if you are intending to innovate.

Assessment considerations:

- Whose support is critical for an assessment process to succeed?
- How can you ensure that you have that support and how long might this take?
- If you are considering cross-program assessment (interdisciplinary) how will you manage the multiple stakeholders?
- How does an assessment process affect learners and/or colleagues?
- What may learners and/or colleagues see as benefits?
- What may learners and/or colleagues see as drawbacks or negative outcomes for themselves?
- What processes can you put in place to engage with learners and colleagues over timeline of the unit?
- How you will be able to evaluate the impact of the assessment on learners and subsequently adapt processes as required?

Also refer to:

[Context>Characteristics of enrolled students](#)

[Context>Institutional assessment principles and policies](#)

[Context>Departmental, disciplinary and personal conventions](#)

[Tasks>Rationale](#)

Educator experiences

Engaging students

Sometimes if I make a change I have to pitch it to the students. I explain why we're doing things. I explain what the outcome is that we are hoping to get, and why we want to test them in the way that we test them. – Languages lecturer

Building innovation over time

There was quite a bit of push back, especially the first semester. With teaching innovations, we found, it takes about three semesters to really bed it in. And part of that is me working at getting better and better at scaffolding or framing, marketing, selling to the students why this is a really good learning opportunity for you. And also, partly it takes that long for the grapevine to say, “You got that crazy woman ... Yeah. This is what you can expect in that subject.” – Engineering lecturer

Collecting evidence

Often I’d think to myself that “you might be pushing things too far.” ... What I’ll tend to do is evaluate it. And often do a study around it, and build up the evidence to actually test the waters and say, “Well, are the students gonna like this, or not?” – Health Professions lecturer

Strategic engagement of colleagues

I developed the documents and then I had to submit those for approval through the course committee. But what I did was I kept the head of that committee, the head of Teaching and Learning, up-to-date all the time. So I would meet the teachers and I’d say, “Look, this is kind of where I’m at.” And when I got to the end of the process, I said, “Well, look, this is what I’ve got. I want to now change the subject outline and see whether I can get approval.” But I went into that last part of the project knowing that I would get approval because I’d been talking about it. – Engineering lecturer

Resources:

- JISC’s guide to *Changing assessment and feedback practice* has a section on Handling resistance www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/changing-assessment-and-feedback-practice#resistance
- UTS has some brief pages about Convincing Student www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/teaching-and-learning/assessment-futures/designing-and-redesigning-assessmen-5 and Convincing Staff and Managers www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/teaching-and-learning/assessment/assessment-futures/designing-and-redesignin-5
- Liu, N.-F., & Carless, D. (2006). Peer feedback: the learning element of peer assessment. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 11(3), 279–290. doi:10.1080/13562510600680582
 - this article considers a change (in this case peer feedback) and the student and academic response to that change
- Deneen, C., & Boud, D. (2013). Patterns of resistance in managing assessment change. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 1–15. doi:10.1080/02602938.2013.859654
 - this article discusses resistance in managing assessment change.

Interactions>Learner requirements

While assessment tasks usually seem clear to educators, this is often not the case for many learners. In fact most, if not all, learners benefit from efforts to make expectations as clear as possible. There are several reasons for this: some learners may be new to higher education; they may come from a variety of educational backgrounds; they may be new to the discipline; they may not have experienced a particular kind of assessment task before; or a task may be unusual or particularly complex. Students often need to learn about assessment just as they need to learn about subject content – through explanations, questions, discussions, examples and practice. Sequencing of non-graded and graded tasks can assist with this, as can feedback opportunities. It is also important that students understand why the assessment is valuable for them in terms of learning, as well as any associated formal requirements or longer term benefits.

Assessment considerations:

- Are learners familiar with the kind of assessment tasks you are using or will these be new to at least some of your learners?
- How will learners know why they are completing the assessment?
- How can you best convey to learners what they need to do to address the assessment tasks?
- Are there adequate opportunities for learners to discuss and clarify what is expected?
- How might you use examples of past learners' work to clarify what constitutes good work for present learners?
- Are there opportunities for learners to practice assessment tasks in class, e.g. through activities, short presentations or quizzes?
- How can you best use marking rubrics with your learners to clarify expectations?

Also refer to:

[Context>Characteristics of enrolled students](#)

[Context>Institutional assessment principles and policies](#)

[Tasks>Rationale](#)

[Tasks>Distribution](#)

[Feedback processes>Multiple feedback opportunities](#)

Educator experiences

Showing examples of students' work

Students love to see someone else's work and I feel a bit conflicted about it, because then sometimes I think it becomes a bit 'monkey see, monkey do'. But I think it works in terms of getting them to produce a better quality submission. – Education lecturer

Using rubrics

I think if you put more time into getting the instructions in the rubric right, you save time for yourself later ... and that's been my experience in all of the units that I've taught. Where I've had to teach with a set of instructions or a rubric that someone else has written but not necessarily thought about very carefully, it always becomes a nightmare because the students are confused, the academics are confused and more time is lost in marking and double-marking and moderating. – Education lecturer

Resources:

- The Centre for Studies in Higher Education/AUTC Assessing students unfamiliar with assessment practices in Australian higher education project has a section on Helping students understand assessment expectations www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/03/intstaff.html
- The University of Edinburgh's Enhancing Feedback site has a section about briefing and training students for feedback www.enhancingfeedback.ed.ac.uk/staff/resources/briefing.html
- The University of Wollongong has a brief resource about Making expectations clear, using accessible language www.uow.edu.au/dvce/socialinclusion/inclusiveteaching/advice4teachers/expectations/index.html

Interactions>Assessment improvements

Changing assessment is often driven by previous learner performance as well as by internal and external reviews of programs. These types of evaluations can frame and shape assessment design. When developing assessments, educators should consider both prior evaluation data and how they will generate evaluation data to 'feed forward' into the next iteration of development. Prior evaluation data can include formal data gathered by the institution, as well as learner performance such as inability to complete tasks well, disengagement or good meeting of desired learning outcomes. It may be data on a similar type of task or unit, outside of the institution, but within the experience of the educator. Generation of evaluation data can be as simple as this year's teachers keeping a reflective journal for the unit on the successes or difficulties with respect to assessment intended to inform next year's teachers, or it can be as complex as external formal evaluation intended for a broader audience. Some types of assessment tasks which have many and easily quantified items (e.g. multiple choice questions) can undergo psychometric checks for quality assurance. It is worth remembering that asking learners to contribute to the piloting or design of assessment activities can be very valuable.

Assessment considerations:

- What experience do you have regarding the successes or challenges faced by this or similar types of assessment? How will this, with a focus on learner performance, shape your current assessment?
- What data are available (formal and informal) regarding the successes or challenges faced by this or similar types of assessment? How will this shape your current assessment?
- How might you engage learners in future design of assessments?
- What data will you generate for future iterations of the unit? What data are valuable for your type of assessment (e.g. psychometric analysis, qualitative review, learner feedback)? How can these data inform your understanding of the assessment task?
- How will you remind yourself, or inform others, of how learners performed in this task previously?
- How will you let learners, colleagues and your institution know about the outcomes of any evaluations?

Also refer to:

[Context>Institutional assessment principles and policies](#)

[Tasks>Rationale](#)

[Tasks>Activities which drive learning](#)

[Interactions>Resistance or engagement](#)

Educator experiences

Evaluating every semester saved time in the long run

The first time I taught my current unit, the students practically revolted over the assessment. I hadn't taught this sort of cohort before, and I'd made a lot of incorrect assumptions; stuff like workload and prior knowledge. After that experience, I now devote some time in class at the start and end of semester for the students to evaluate the assessment. I get them to work through the checklist on the Assessment Futures website in groups and anonymously feed back to me. This has led to rapid improvement in the assessment, particularly around clarity of the task; I spend so much less time explaining procedural stuff about the assessment now. – Education lecturer

Keeping notes and reflections

Every semester I dedicate a two-page spread in my notebook to jotting down feedback or ideas about my unit. Much of this relates to assessment. I might have explained something poorly; a student might have misinterpreted the task in a way I should have foreseen; or alternatively someone might just have a great idea. Students seem to really like that I write down their feedback, and at the start of each semester I look back at my notes from last time and make adjustments where they're needed. – Science lecturer

Formal course review led to improvement

Last year we went through a formal course review process. It was gruelling and meticulous, but revealed some issues with our assessment we weren't aware of. We had huge variations in the workload between our units, which we've now changed. But more troublingly it showed that we were mostly just getting students to write a lot, which doesn't really lead to the sorts of outcomes our short practically-focused postgraduate course should produce. We're still working on that one... – Education lecturer

Review of quantitative data

We debate for ages looking at the midterms or the questions, we look at the averages. We're always trying to look at it and say, "How can we make these questions better?" Not easier, better. – Engineering lecturer

Resource:

- The UTS Assessment Futures site has a section about Reviewing assessment tasks www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/teaching-and-learning/assessment-futures/designing-and-redesigning-assessmen-3

Interactions>Changes to teaching and learning activities

Changing assessment may also require changes to teaching. Assessment review can highlight deficits or excellence in teaching and it can also indicate that learning outcomes may be over-ambitious or unrealistic. It is important to ensure that assessment is aligned with teaching as well as unit and program learning outcomes and professional requirements. Sometimes those responsible for the assessment design are not responsible for the teaching. Good communication across faculty is critical to ensure assessment is planned for and structured appropriately.

Assessment considerations:

- How do the assessment and teaching currently align? Are any changes required?
- How will changes to assessment design affect changes to teaching?
- Who needs to know about any necessary changes to teaching?
- How will you determine if the changes to the teaching are influencing how learners perform in assessments?

Also refer to:

[Context>Overall program](#)

[Context>Learning environment](#)

[Outcomes>Unit/module learning outcomes](#)

[Outcomes>Overall program learning outcomes](#)

[Feedback processes>Influence of learner performance](#)

[Interactions>Assessment improvements](#)

Educator experiences

Adjusting assumptions

I asked my students to do a task that requires them to read a particular type of research study, and then come up with implications for practice. I'd supposed that reading research would be assumed knowledge for these postgrads but I was wrong, and it meant that the task was very challenging in ways that weren't really contributing to the learning I wanted. I made a change to the teaching the following year where I provide examples of me reading these studies and the implications for my own practice, which they've said help a lot. – Education lecturer

Adjusting teaching

I was teaching a unit with a very large group project, and it became clear pretty quickly that we weren't allowing enough time for the groups to work together in class. Even worse, we hadn't really taught about doing this sort of project. So before the next time I taught it I had to go and learn more about group project work myself, which led me to incorporate short catch-ups every week, as well as some discussions about how groups work. The tutors were really on board with this, as they were professionals with lots of experience managing this stuff in industry. – Sustainability lecturer

Resource:

- The University of Technology Sydney Assessment Futures site has a section about Reviewing assessment tasks www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/teaching-and-learning/assessment-futures/designing-and-redesigning-assessmen-3