

Online Course Development: A Guide for Instructors

The Design Process: Assessment

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Characteristics of an Exemplary Learning Assessment

Authentic: reflects real life experiences or applications
Challenging: stimulates a student to apply knowledge
Coherent: serves as a guide for the student to achieve learning outcomes
Engaging: captures student's interest
Respectful: sensitive to a student's beliefs and values
Responsive: includes ways to provide feedback to assist the student in the learning process
Rigorous: requires applied understand of learning to achieve learning outcomes
Valid: provides information that is useful to meet learning outcomes

Adapted from Sewell, J., Frith, K., Colvin, M., (2010). Online Assessment Strategies: A primer. MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 6(1). 297-305.

Types of Assessment

Assessment for learning (Formative) is ongoing assessment by which an instructor can measure progress made towards a learning outcome and adapt their teaching or learning activities to ensure the student is successful in meeting learning outcomes. This feedback is timely and ongoing.

For example; students complete a short quiz on Friday. You noticed that a majority of your students did not understand a specific concept. In response to their low performance, you create a 5 minute podcast or video to post by Sunday evening reviewing this concept. In addition, you provide students with a few extra problem sets.

Assessment of learning (Summative) occurs at the end of a specific point in learning to provide a summary of student's learning (e.g., mid-terms or finals).

Assessment as learning "is a process of developing and supporting metacognition for students" (Western and Northern Canadian Protocol, p.12). This type of assessment includes self-assessment, personal goals setting, and reflection. Actively involves learning to reflect on his or her learning

Self-Assessment

Promoting self-assessment methods provides students with the ability to develop metacognition to improve his or her learning and additionally to refine a student's ability to think critically (Cooper 2006).

The following four-stage module by Rolheiser and Ross (2000) describes teaching students to self-assess:

Stage 1: **Define** with students the criteria that will be used to assess learning

Stage 2: **Teach** students to apply the criteria

Stage 3: **Give** students feedback on the quality of their self-assessment

Stage 4: **Help** students develop individual learning goals and specific action plans

Practical Strategies:

- reflective journals or blogs
- self-assessment prompts
- portfolios
- self-assessment in group work using rubric or checklist
- surveys
- checklist
- one sentence summaries

Further Resources:

- [Assessing Online Learning: Strategies, Challenges and Opportunities \(PDF\)](#)
- [University of New South Wales, Teaching: Student Self-Assessment \(URL\)](#)

Peer Assessment

Peer assessment can either be a form of formative or summative assessment. Peer assessment can be defined as, "an arrangement for learners to consider and specify the level, value or quality of product or performance of other equal status learners" (Topping, 2009 p.20).

Tips for incorporating peer assessment:

- identify activities that students may benefit from peer feedback
- match students to aim for same-ability peer matching
- provide examples, training, and checklist
- create rubrics or guidelines for the reviewer to follow
- introduce rubrics through activity to ensure students have the ability to apply the rubric effectively
- monitor and coach
- examine quality of feedback

Further Resources:

- [Cornell University, Centre for Teaching Excellence: Peer-Assessment \(URL\)](#)

Peer Feedback Opportunities

This type of feedback allows peers to review each other's work and demonstrates one's understanding of the task and criteria used. Peers are more likely to provide feedback written in a language that they understand allowing a thorough review of feedback. The challenge with peer feedback is that they may not always trust comments made by their peers or they fear receiving negative feedback. Making sure that expectations and criteria are clear is critical for effective peer feedback. This type of feedback is designed to be a learning tool to improve a student's skill set rather than a tool for grading purposes.

Peer Feedback Guidelines:

- establish clear timelines (timely feedback is important)
- assign partners
- provide rubrics, criteria and models
- give incentive for peer feedback
- use peer feedback as a way to monitor student's progress on assignment

Feedback Activities

- feedback forms
- peer editing
- conduct a SNOB analysis and identify a peer's: **S**trengths/**N**eeds/**O**pportunities/**B**arriers
- assess a peer's assignment by doing a PMI: **P**luses/**M**inus/**I**nteresting

For more ideas on peer feedback, [go to page 3 of this \(PDF\) document](#).

Building a Better Rubric

What is a rubric?

- A grading tool that lists criteria for a piece of work, or "what counts."
- It also articulates grades of quality for each criterion, from excellent to beginning.
- A tool for students to better understand expectations for assignments and to monitor and regulate their work.
- A tool to facilitate a transparent and balanced grading process.

Benefits of using rubrics:

1. Improve student performance & monitor it by making teacher expectations clear and by showing students how to meet expectations.
2. Help define quality. Thus, results point towards marked improvements in the quality of student work and in learning.
3. Helps students become more thoughtful judges of the quality of their own and others work. When rubrics are used to guide self- and peer-assessment, students become increasingly able to spot and solve problems in their own and one another's work.
4. Reduce the amount of time teachers spend evaluating student work. If rubrics are used to self-assess and peer assess according to the rubric, they have little left to say about it. When they do have something to say, they can often simply circle an item in the rubric, rather than struggling to explain the flaw or strength they have noticed and figuring out

what to suggest in terms of improvements. Rubrics provide students with more information and feedback on their strengths and areas they need to improve.

- Helps students understand what is truly important in the assigned work, project or online discussion. For first year students this is especially helpful as students come from varying backgrounds and have no benchmark to identify with requirements and expectations. A rubric is balanced and fair, taking into consideration all aspects. The rubric identifies aspects of the work that have counted for a significant portion of their grade previously. For example, instructors who were obsessed with works cited page or with format issues.
- Prevents instructors from grading subjectively. Keeps instructor focused on what they communicate is important. Guides comments and focuses them on the teaching issues

Online Discussion Forum Participation Rubric

Consider the following tips when creating a rubric or guidelines:

- Community: emphasizes the importance of participation and helps to guide group learning in an online community.
- Timeline: identifies deadlines for posts & time period for each discussion forum.
- Participation: identifies the number of required posts & numbers of required responses with classmates per discussion topic.
- Etiquette: communicates writing and style guidelines, including: language, code of conduct, keeping posts objective and professional, not taking it personally.
- Grammar: communicates grammar and spelling expectations in discussion forum
- Course Content: references relevant course content, readings, research, text, etc. to be reflected in posts and responses.
- Critical thinking: guides use of critical thinking and probing questions.
- Rubric: employs rubric to guide discussion forum and to complete posts.
- Sources Cited: identifies when to cite sources.

Example Discussion Rubric

Note: criteria are listed in the left column and the varying degrees of quality are described in the columns to the right of the criteria.

| | No Participation | Unsubstantial Participation | Partial Participation | Full Participation |
|---------------------|--|---|---|---|
| Quality of Posting | Does not post an original peer response. 0 points | Post is not original and simply paraphrases what others have said or just says, "I agree..." or "Good idea..." 2 points | Post is original and contributes at least one new idea or example that adds value to the discussion. 3 points | Post is original and contributes >1 new idea or example that adds value to the discussion. 4 points |
| Quantity of Posting | At this point, it does not appear that you have posted any responses to your classmates in the Main forum. To earn full participation, post a substantive message twice a day on three different days. 0 points | Partial participation points earned this week. You have a good start at participation, but for a post to count toward participation credit, it must be substantial. Thoroughly discuss or converse with classmates. Say more than just "I agree" or "Good ideas". Have a conversation. To earn full participation, post twice a day on three different days. You are to have two a day on three different days to earn full credit. Good start overall! 2 points | Good start at participation this week. Your contributions to classroom discussion are stimulating and a pleasure to read. However, make sure to spread out evenly these participation posts. You are to have two a day on three different days to earn full credit. Thanks for sharing! 3 points | Full participation points earned this week! Fantastic! Your contributions to classroom discussion are stimulating and a pleasure to read. Thanks for sharing! 4 points |

Further Resource:

- [Carnegie Mellon, Eberly Centre of Teaching Excellence and Educational Innovation: Grading and Performance Rubrics](#)

Tests and Final Exams

Examination or assessment security and authenticity is an important consideration in quality online learning. Those who are sceptical of the possibilities of online learning often raise it as an issue. While there is value in providing some flexibility in assessments in the online environment, if not managed well, this flexibility can create problems of security and authentication. Remember, though, that issues of identification – in the context of assignments – are not new. Assignments are usually completed outside class, raising similar challenges of being sure that students did their own assignments. Proctoring and verifying student identity is part of our examination process, whether the exam is administered by the Exams Office at Queen's or by staff at one of our off-campus exam centres.

New examination security software also provides the means to 'lock down' the devices being used when taking examinations, thus preventing access to non-examination materials. CDS is currently investigating possibilities with and service providers who may be able to offer exam security in online settings. In exceptional circumstances, and a written examination can also be verified by live oral dialogues using video conferencing software.

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