

Innovating Assessment: an introduction

**Ian Lindsay
Academic Advisor**



Introduction

- Challenges
- Who, what, where, when, why and how?
- The Value of Variety
- Formative and Summative
- Feedback



**“Students can avoid bad teaching:
they can’t avoid bad assessment.”**

Ref: Boud, 1994



Fitness for purpose

- All assessment should be:
 - Fair
 - Consistent
 - Reliable
 - Valid
 - Manageable
 - Clear to the students as to the purpose(s) of different kinds of activity



The Assessment Challenges

- How do we (you!) build in the assessment?
 - As opposed to simply adding it on...
- How do we make the assessment authentic?
 - I.e. align the task(s) to the learning outcomes
- Is it SMART?
 - Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-constrained



The key questions...

- Who is the most appropriate assessor?
- What are actually assessing?
- Where should we assess?
- When should we assess?
- Why are we assessing?
- How are we assessing?



Who is the most appropriate assessor?

- The tutor?
- The student?
- Peers?
- Employers or line managers?
- Externals?



What do we assess?

- What we've always done?
- Whatever's easiest?



What should we assess?

- Product or process?
- Theory or practice?
- Subject knowledge or application?

NOTE: students are far more likely to put energy into assignments they see as authentic and worth bothering with



Where?

- In the classroom?
 - Exam, demonstration, viva etc..
- In the workplace?
- At home?
 - Virtual, on-line?



When?

- At the end of a module/unit/course when students have finished learning or when there is still time for improvement?
- Once or incrementally?
- When we find it most convenient?
 - Either personally or for the institutional system?
- When it's most beneficial to the students?
 - I.e not all at once, not after 6/12 weeks etc



Why are we bothering?

- To enable students to see how far they've come?
- To help students consolidate their learning?
- To demonstrate their employability
- To give feedback?
- To motivate?
- To provide an opportunity to relate theory and practice?
- To show how good we the teachers/tutors/lecturers are at teaching/tutoring/lecturing?
- So that those above us (& outside?) have some statistics?
 - Showing how good we the teachers/tutors/lecturers are at teaching/tutoring/lecturing.....



How?

- Typically...
 - Essays
 - Unseen written exams
 - Reports



But possibly?

- Annotated bibliographies
- Assessed seminars
- Blogs
- Case studies
- Critical incident accounts
- Diaries
- Exhibitions
- Field studies
- Open book exams
- Portfolios
- Productions
- Projects
- Poster presentations
- Reflective journals
- Take-away papers
- Vivas....



Variety is valuable...

- To make assessment integral with the purpose of learning
- To be fairer to the wider student group
 - All assessment methods disadvantage some of the students some of the time
- To access a wider range of student abilities and skills
- To learn from the experiences of others
- To make it more interesting
 - Both for the students and ourselves!



Formative and Summative

- Formative assessment
 - Primarily concerned with feedback aimed at prompting improvement
 - Often continuous and usually involves words.
- Summative assessment
 - Concerned with making evaluative judgments
 - Tends to be end point and involves letters/numbers.



Formative assessment

- "Doesn't count towards the final grade" so might not get taken seriously by the students
- Can take up a lot teacher/tutor/lecturer time
- Can be difficult to use with groups of students who are likely to be at different stages of development
- But very important if improvements are to be made...



Feeding back...

- Try to get the feedback to students very quickly, while they still care and while there is still time for them to do something with it.
- Put effort into helping students understand the importance of feedback and the value of spending some time after receiving work back to learn from the experience
 - Possibly withhold the mark until after the student has received and responded to feedback?
- Give incremental feedback throughout the module/unit/semester
- Ensure that the "more able" students don't feel short-changed by minimal feedback
- Detailed written feedback on work that is handed back at the end of the module/unit serves little purpose if that area of study is no longer being followed by the student



Feeding back: How?

- **Written:**
 - time consuming, provides a permanent record, can be carefully worded, can be used in evidence against you, can be compared with other students' comments
- **Oral:**
 - immediate, ephemeral, can be time-efficient, may be hasty or ill-considered, can be wrongly remembered, tone of voice and body language can add emphasis or soften the blow
- **Taped:**
 - can feel artificial, equipment can let you down, provides a record, must be listened to in real time, time-efficient, can be shared by several students, can be quality audited
- **E-mailed:**
 - practically instantaneous, students get feedback when they still care, needs marker to have a big computer desk, tone can be an issue



But mind your language...

- Avoid destructive criticism of the person rather than the work being assessed
- Avoid judgmental language like “appalling”, “disastrous” and “incompetent” as it leaves students with nowhere to go
- However, words like “incomparable” and “unimprovable” don’t help outstanding students to develop either

Ref: Boud (again!)



Multiple Assessment Opportunities

- Can resubmissions be part of the plan?
 - Students often feel they could do more once they have seen the formative feedback and are welcome of the chance to have another go
 - Feedback can often elicit a change of orientation in addition to the remediation of errors



Concluding thoughts..

- Summative assessment needs to be fit for purpose
 - What exactly are we trying to achieve with our current assessments and is the way we do it now the best way?
- Detailed and developmental formative feedback is quite possibly the single most useful thing we can do for our students
 - Particularly those for whom it is a considerable achievement just to be where they are now
- Thank you for listening



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ian@playingwithlearning.com