
Tip sheet - Authentic Assessment

This tip sheet outlines authentic assessment, discusses some of its advantages and provides examples of how to use it. According to the [University of New South Wales \(UNSW\)](#) “Authentic assessment focuses on students using and applying knowledge and skills in real-life settings.” They differentiate this from “more traditional forms of assessment” (essays or examinations) which “have no specific application in most real-world settings”. Others describe authentic assessment items as ones which support learning in a topic by ensuring learning outcomes and the material or skills you have covered in the topic are assessed. In addition, authentic assessment items support students’ continuing studies or future career (Ashford-Rowe, Herrington & Brown, 2014; Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Any topic related role-play, simulation, assessment related to work-integrated learning which occurs in a workplace or task related to something that assesses student learning in a real-world setting can be considered authentic.

UNSW suggest authentic assessment fundamentally reflects good practice because it

helps students contextualise their learning and to see how real-life conditions or situations, in all their unpredictability, ambiguity and complexity, affect their theoretical knowledge. As they draw together their knowledge and skills to engage productively and solve problems, their behaviour clearly shows, both to staff and themselves, the level of capacity or competency they have gained.

Miles & Foggett (2019) identified a range of [authentic assessment items](#) they promoted at the University of Newcastle to better support academic integrity while addressing validity, reliability and practicality of assessments. While they need to be contextualised for specific subject areas all the listed assessments items are in use across their institution. These were also promoted as alternatives to both exams and essays:

- **Science / medicine / politics etc. in the news**
Find evidence in literature for news release claims and complete an annotated bibliography or short rebuttal/supporting statement citing the evidence.
- **Letter to the Editor**
Choose a newspaper/magazine related to the specific area of study and write an editorial.
- **Diary Entry**
Write a diary entry from a famous person in your field/patient with a disorder/legal client
- **Biography**
Select a scholar/researcher in field and report (write a brief biography?) which includes career, influences, major ideas, moods and trends in research program.
- **Follow a piece of legislation through government processes**
What groups are lobbying for/against it and why? Prepare a press release or short presentation to peers based on your findings.
- **Follow a current foreign policy issue as it develops**
Have students adopt the perspective of one of the various groups involved and predict the next move.
- **Nominate someone for a Nobel prize**
Justify nomination on a blog posting or via a short newspaper/magazine article.
- **Adopt a persona**
Write journal entries, letters, commentaries from that person’s perspective
- **Write a resume and cover letter (real or fictional) for a relevant job posting in your field**
- **Write a presentation proposal for a relevant scholarly or industry conference and write a proposal abstract.**
- **Write a review of a performance, a movie, a book, a journal article, a guest speaker lecture...**
Identify where it may potentially be published

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- **Write a newspaper, magazine, Wikipedia, webpage story on a topic.**
Note these require a different skills-set than those required when producing a journal article, book review or report
 - **Evaluate an article in a trade magazine (Psychology Today, Harvard Business Review) -**
Compared to findings in scholarly journals and prepare a short presentation to peers based on your findings.
 - **Describe your dream job**
Have students research careers in the field and write a reflective journal piece justifying their choice of company, location, job, etc.
 - **Watch a movie or TV show**
Prepare to lead a discussion on how characters in different roles or procedures compare to national standards/how relationships compare to known models/theories
 - **Find, compare and contrast primary and secondary sources**
Complete an annotated bibliography, including a brief introduction discussing differences, write a short report and cite sources, prepare a presentation to other students, contribute to a blog post

There are many other examples including:

- making a video related to topic content which reflects an understanding of the topic
- producing, directing, filming, acting in or other film related activities
- creating an artistic piece
- Writing a self-reflection on learning to date
- writing up experiments or indicating what went wrong in an experiment
- conducting interviews (with others in the class; experts in the field or family)
- presenting a diagram, picture or other non-textual piece representing achievement of learning outcomes etc.

Further examples are also presented in the table on pages 3 and 4 of the [Assessment alternatives to exams](#) resource. These have been linked to learning types (Laurillard, 2012) to aid in determining the ways in which they meet learning outcomes.

References

Ashford-Rowe, K., Herrington, J., & Brown, C. (2014). Establishing the critical elements that determine authentic assessment. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 39(2), 205-222.
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Boud, D., & Falchikov, N. (2006). Aligning assessment with long-term learning. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 31(4), 399-413. doi:10.1080/02602930600679050

Laurillard, D. (2012) *Teaching as Design Science: Building Pedagogical Patterns for Learning and Technology*, New York: Routledge.

Miles, C., & Foggett, K. (2019) *A shift from discouraging academic dishonesty to authentic assessment*, presentation on Transforming Assessment webinar available:
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