

Assessment alternatives to exams

When moving teaching online, there are opportunities and challenges to consider with assessment. We need to think about assessment differently but key principles concerning assessment should still be followed. These are:

- assessment procedures will encourage, reinforce and be integral to learning
- assessment will provide quality and timely feedback to enhance learning
- assessment practices will be valid, reliable and consistent
- assessment is integral to course and topic design
- information about assessment is readily accessible
- assessment is fair, equitable and inclusive
- the amount of assessment is manageable for students and staff assessment practices are monitored for quality assurance and improvement

(Boud, 2010; Houston, 2018)

It should also be easy for students to meet academic integrity requirements, so your assessment design should:

- ensure assessments are linked to learning outcomes
- include skills students have developed within the course and topic
- ensure students have had time to practice/learn the skills you are assessing
- design assessment to encourage students to make/construct their own answer rather than find the answer in a text or online
- scaffold learning so new material is built on what is known – talk to students about what they know and should know
- have assessment pieces reviewed by colleagues

(Carroll, 2009; McGowan, 2016; Newton, 2016)

Some assessments are easily transferred to the online space; some, like invigilated exams need to be redesigned to ensure learning outcomes are still able to be assessed whilst maintaining quality and good practice. There are three options for alternative assessment to exams include:

1. Reweight other topic assessments (assuming other assessment addresses all the learning outcomes)
2. Consider alternative assessment types
3. Use a non-invigilated exam

Use the following flow chart to help you decide:



Exams are often an assessment of acquisition (of knowledge) of the students but there are many different types of assessment of learning that can be used instead. The table below looks at some alternative to exams based on Laurillard’s (2012) learning types. Many of these incorporate more than one type of learning but have been placed into the table based on their predominant characteristic. Look at your learning outcomes and choose an assessment type that will help the students demonstrate what they know in a way other than an exam. Sometimes a little rewriting of existing assessments will be enough.

Alternative Assessment types (based on Laurillard’s learning types)

Learning type	Acquisition	Collaboration	Discussion	Investigation	Practice	Production
Description	Learning through acquisition is what learners are doing when they are listening to a lecture or podcast, reading from books or websites, and watching demos or videos (the teacher controls the narrative of learning).	Learning through collaboration embraces mainly discussion, practice, and production. Building on investigations and acquisition it is about taking part in the process of knowledge building itself	Learning through discussion requires the learner to articulate their ideas and questions, and to challenge and respond to the ideas and questions from the teacher, and/or from their peers	Learning through investigation guides the learner to explore, compare and critique the texts, documents and resources that reflect the concepts and ideas being taught	Learning through practice enables the learner to adapt their actions to the task goal and use the feedback to improve their next action. Feedback may come from self-reflection, from peers, from the teacher, or from the activity itself, if it shows them how to improve the result of their action in relation to the goal	Learning through production is the way the teacher motivates the learner to consolidate what they have learned by articulating their current conceptual understanding and how they used it in practice
Assessment types	Take home exam (could include open book, longer form essays or problem-based questions); consider demonstration of a more research-based	Problem-solving (e.g. students collaborate to produce solution/s to a relevant issue) Create a webpage (on an issue to do with topic content)	Analyse and reflect on an online discussion within the topic Evaluate thinking (e.g. students discuss what they found and compare sources)	Critique and explanation of video practice (e.g. find / create videos and post online; include a critique task for students)	Video upload of task performance Reflection on online role plays or other online practice tasks Complete a grant application or award	Portfolio production (e.g., series of videos / artefacts showing production over time) Real time viva

	<p>approach with a reflective component</p> <p>Write an exam based on topic knowledge (include answers and justify rationale for questions)</p>	<p>Create a wiki (as a resource able to be used in the field)</p> <p>Collaborate to produce an annotated bibliography</p> <p>Design a theme for a conference (and describe why this would be of interest to the discipline)</p>	<p>Assess participation in synchronous discussions (e.g. via Collaborate)</p> <p>Debate (e.g. in asynchronous discussion forum)</p>	<p>Research and find the facts / research behind a relevant or current issue</p> <p>Analyse data from online database (e.g. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare)</p>	<p>nomination and include justification</p> <p>Quizzes (for formative assessment)</p>	<p>Reflection on process or production of work</p> <p>Evaluate a website</p> <p>Literature review (e.g. evaluative annotated bibliography)</p> <p>Create a blog, resource, model, computer program, animation (provide choice of content to allow for student agency and reduce academic integrity issues)</p> <p>Produce a journal article, book review, report etc.</p>
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References:

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