

## What principles should a great assessment design follow?

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1. The activity is a learning experience
  - The assessment activity needs to be seen as interesting learning for students to invest the effort in it. This implies it must be intriguing and invite engagement.
  - It must be experienced as 'learning' and not compliance. That is, it prompts and fosters learning. Not any learning, of course, but the kind most needed to attain the desired learning outcomes of the unit of study.
  
2. It is seen as valid and worthwhile
  - The question, 'why is this worth doing?' must be addressed by the nature of the task and how it is presented. It will be seen to be valid and worthwhile if it seems relevant and leads to something that has value to the student.
  - Tasks must meet the 'so what?' test. That is, a connection between the activity and what students will subsequently do must be evident.
  - e.g. Projects in which students can influence what they do and how they do it can provide a vehicle for this.
  
3. It actively promotes learning and skills beyond the act itself
  - The question here is, 'what will this enable me to do that I can't already do?' Testing of existing knowledge isn't very satisfying unless students have doubts about what they know and can do. This can be achieved in simple self-tests throughout a program.
  - Substantial assessment tasks need to go beyond this—they are about doing something with the knowledge acquired, not just showing it has been acquired.
  - Assessment can consolidate existing learning and give students confidence in using it as well as extending it in new areas.
  - e.g. Activities based on scenarios in which students apply knowledge and ways of thinking in new situations of kinds that might realistically encounter after graduation.
  
4. The student is an active agent throughout

- Assessment tasks have traditionally positioned students as passive. That is, students respond to a task that has been set for them in conditions tightly controlled by others. While there is a need for integrity to be ensured, there is scope for students to influence the direction of assessment through choosing examples and illustrations they will pursue, through various forms of self assessment and through helping set the nature of the task itself.
  - Assessment can be co-constructed through a set brief which has scope for different approaches within it.
  - e.g. a learning contract with some of the features pre-specified, but with others open, or activities for which students have to choose the particular ways they demonstrate learning outcomes.
5. It has a strong positive backwash effect on learning during the Course
- Anticipation of assessment drives study patterns, so assessment tasks shape what students do prior to the activity itself. If there is any hint that memorization might be effective, students will be driven in that direction. They may need considerable persuasion that a task designed to prompt deep approaches to learning actually requires this of them and this may not conform to their previous experiences of how assessment works.
  - The more instrumentally the student acts towards their studies, the greater the backwash effect of assessment.
  - Of course, students need some experience of the type of assessment otherwise they may treat it inappropriately as one with which they are familiar.
6. It enables students to celebrate and portray achievements
- We are so used to assessment being a private act between student and assessor that we can overlook the potential for assessment to be a representation of learning that can be used beyond the act itself.
  - Some assessment tasks, particularly in the latter parts of programs should allow students to create products that indicate and illustrate their achievements to others outside the closed loop of assessor and assessee.
  - e.g. the final task in the final unit of a Masters program I teach requires students to summarize what they have learned in the previous courses in two pages that they

could use as an attachment to a curriculum vitae. It aims to portray their learning to prospective employers.

7. It is part of a sequence of great designs over the course as a whole
  - Good assessment designs feed off each other and poor designs undermine the good ones as they lead to students to expect the worst and prepare inappropriately.
  - One of the biggest challenges we face is to find practical ways of collaborating across an entire program to ensure that the overall diet of assessment is well-considered and digestible. Pressure points when assessment demands from different units coincide sabotage the designs of both.
  
8. It arises from a great learning environment
  - While assessment can drive learning, it can't compensate for a poor learning environment.
  - The best way of ensuring students go into assessment tasks with a positive attitude is to have a well-designed program that precedes it.
  - This builds confidence and skills, gives practice in key tasks and enables students to see that they are progressing.
  
9. It is not excessively resource-intensive
  - It is always easy to think of new approaches that take more time and effort of teaching staff, but this is unrealistic and must be avoided. The greater trap is to unwarily place an extra burden on students. An assessment activity will only prompt learning if students approach it in the right way. If they are overloaded even the best apparent design will flounder.
  - While extra work is always involved to the start of something new, my rule of thumb is that in the steady state, the assessment burden on staff must be eased and that the assessment work is more satisfying than was involved in the assessment that was replaced.
  
10. It requires and prompts informed judgement
  - I see assessment as essentially about informing judgement of the student and of the assessor. That is, the act of assessment contributes to refining the judgement of

learners about their own work. If it is not about this, then we are wasting a considerable opportunity to influence students in positive ways.

- My view of assessment is one in which it contributes both to the judgement of assessors (for purposes of validation and certification) and the judgement of students through enabling them to monitor their own understanding and identify what further learning they need.
- This point requires more elaboration than can be included here. See Boud (2007).