

Assessment methods

Use this table to help you choose an assessment method based on its strengths and weaknesses.

Note: The descriptions below are considerations rather than definitive definitions.

Learning and Teaching at OP is currently reviewing all assessment methods and will provide an extensive list in the future.

Assessment method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
Examination	A formal assessment of a person's knowledge or skill. Often an assessment of a larger body of knowledge, such as that for an entire course conducted at the end of a course. Typically it has a defined time period and is frequently closed book.	Occurs after a period of time has elapsed between delivery and assessment. This helps ensure that skill / knowledge is repeatable.	Over assessment as material may have already been assessed in tests. Tends to be written and so may not be wholly relevant to learning outcomes being assessed. May be in place for historic or imposed external reasons.
Test	Similar to an examination. Still usually a time bound, closed book assessment but typically shorter than an examination and may only cover a section of a body of knowledge.	Will give assessment information close to the teaching and learning period. May be in place for motivational reasons.	Many frequent tests might cause over assessment. Tends to be written and so may not be wholly relevant to learning outcomes being assessed. May only be in place for motivational reasons.
Assignment	An assessment of a set of skills that a learner completes over a period of time. Will have a specified due date and completion may occur both in and outside of directed learning time.	Assignments can promote higher order thinking skills because they often can require application, evaluation, and creation. It will have, as a component, an aspect that requires the learner delve deeper into the material being assessed or to create something new from acquired learning.	



Assessment methods, continued

Assessment method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
Project	An individual or group activity that usually has a defined set of criteria, issues, or questions, often defined by the learner. An application of learning to a different context. It assesses both understanding and application. It also usually implies an aspect of research or investigation.	A project provides the opportunity for authentic assessment of multiple learning outcomes.	Clear measurable criteria need to be established and communicated to the learner prior to the assessment
Practical	A practical application of learned skills. Often the learner will complete a practical process or construct something demonstrating and applying learned skills.	Useful to assess practical skills where the assessment is the learner completing or applying those skills.	Care must be taken to ensure the learner is ready to be assessed and that the assessment itself does not put the learner in danger. Clear criteria must be established as well as the level of guidance permissible during the assessment.
Direct observation Naturally occurring evidence	A learner demonstrates practical learning through a direct observation of the learner's performance. For this form of assessment to be robust clear criteria must be utilised, and the learner must be aware that their performance is being observed and assessed.	Can be a real world assessment where learning can be assessed in context.	Ensuring that observation protocols are established and that a systematic process for recording the evidence presented is in place is essential. While checklists are often used, these may not provide sufficient detail to record the evidence needed.
Simulations/role-plays	Where realistic situations are set up to provide an opportunity for a learner to demonstrate application of their learning in a given situation.	Useful for assessing decision making, interactions, etc. or when real situations of emergencies, complaints, etc. are less likely to occur in a natural environment.	Clear criteria must be established and the simulation set carefully. Giving too much guidance may not provide a clear indication of the learner's skill.

Assessment methods, continued

Assessment method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
Portfolio	A portfolio collects learner work to demonstrate their skill acquisition and development. Often a portfolio is presented as simply a collection of a learner's work from the course however, while this is an aspect of the use of portfolio assessment, more importantly it is an opportunity for a learner to reflect on their learning and to discuss the learning involved with each piece included in the portfolio.	Useful for assessing practical, vocational or experiential learning where evidence is collected to show how the learner meets learning outcomes.	<p>A portfolio can become large and cumbersome and so it is important to have them structured. This might be around learning outcomes.</p> <p>More difficult to use successfully where learning cannot be demonstrated in practice, or when the assessment of steps towards an outcome are to be assessed as well as the final product.</p> <p>Consideration should also be given to copyright.</p>
Essay	A written assessment constructed to address a specific question.	An effective form of assessment when the purpose of assessment is to determine learners' ability to explain material in their own words.	<p>An essay cannot avoid assessing a learner's ability to construct written arguments. If this ability is not the purpose of assessment then the assessment may disadvantage a learner.</p> <p>An articulate essay may mask irrelevant or weak content. Ensuring authenticity may also be problematic for essays especially if similar topics are used for different cohorts.</p>
Oral presentation	Similar to an essay an oral presentation can assess a learner's ability to explain material in their own words.	Assesses a learner's ability to present material orally as well as their ability to structure and sequence material.	If the presentation skill is not a learning outcome then requiring an oral presentation may go beyond the requirements of the course.

Assessment methods, continued

Assessment method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
Case studies	A case study can be used to assess a learner's ability to apply material learned to a specific individual / organization. May be simple or complex, and responses might be short answer or deep analysis depending on the level.	They are valuable in that they may allow the student to apply understanding to real world situations.	Care does need to be taken to ensure that the level of detail presented in a case study is appropriate. Too much or too little detail and the case study may not be level appropriate or students may be guided to appropriate answers.
Group assignment	Often group assignments are simply a group of people working individually on specified aspects of an assignment. In their truest sense a group assignment should be set because the assessment requires the demonstration of interpersonal communication and collaborative skills.	Used effectively a group assignment will demonstrate a learners' ability to synthesize group understanding and work with others to create a group product. Also useful where a practical task takes more than one person to complete.	Clarity must be provided for how marks will be assigned to the group, especially in a situation where one member carries, or weakens the group. Care must be taken with the makeup of the groups so that one group is not advantaged or disadvantaged.
Multiple choice	Often multi choice is used because it can quickly provide a snap shot of understanding for a large cohort.		Selecting a correct answer may not provide learners with the opportunity to meet the requirements of many learning outcomes e.g. describe, explain, analyse etc. It is also important to consider that if four answers are given a learner has a 25% change of guessing the correct answer. Reassessment policy must be considered because with several opportunities a student has more change to guess the correct answer.