

Planning your assessment and feedback for 2022-23

This guide takes you through some key questions you may have about assessment and feedback as you get ready for the 2022-23 academic year. It is designed to give you a few ideas and links to more detailed resources.

Assessment in 2022-23 should not see the level of disruption that we have witnessed over the last two or more years. Most teaching will be on campus, and there will be more scope for the kinds of assessments that everyone is familiar with. However, the changes that have been necessary during Covid – the shift to take-home exams and the wider use of continuous assessment in particular – have left their mark. On the positive side, many of us have had become familiar with new methods of assessment and new ways of providing feedback, which has broadened the horizons beyond the very traditional tools that dominated prior to 2020. On the less positive side, our students have had to cope with considerable change and uncertainty in assessment methods and will not have developed the same kind of familiarity with assessment methods as we might have expected from previous cohorts.

The topics addressed in this guide are intended to be the kinds of questions that you and your colleagues are thinking about, as you plan your courses for 2022-23.

Q1. How can we make the most of assessment and feedback to support students to learn?

The idea that assessment can, and should, be part of the whole learning and teaching process is known as Assessment for Learning. It is an important concept because assessment has a huge impact on how students approach their courses and programmes; we can therefore use assessments to guide students in the right kinds of directions, or conversely assessment can really get in the way. Making sure that assessments are contributing to the course/programme journey that we want students to take has some real benefits. It will help to make sure that students are spending enough time on activities that support their learning, it will help them to see assessments as positive opportunities rather than hoops to jump through, and it will – with luck – make the whole assessment process more interesting and rewarding for both students and staff.

- **Resource:** You can read about the idea of Assessment for Learning in [Designing assessment and feedback processes to inspire learning](#).

Q2. How can we design assessments that are more meaningful and interesting for students?

There are lots of ways of creating assessments that help students to learn. The best first step is often to think about the learning outcomes and wider aims of a course. Aligning the aims, teaching and assessment in this manner is a great way of making sure that everything is guiding students in the same direction to support students to achieve the learning outcomes.

- **Resource:** You can read a step-by-step guide to designing assessments based on learning outcomes in [How to design assessments for learning](#).

One way of making assessments more interesting for students (and often for staff as well) is to make them more 'authentic', which means creating assessment tasks that have a meaning to students beyond just acquiring grades. A common approach is to design an assessment that is based around the kind of complex, real-world task that students might encounter when they graduate.

- **Resource:** You can read practical advice in [A step-by-step guide to designing more authentic assessments](#).

Q3. How can we make the most of exams?

After over two years of mostly take-home, open-book exams, 2022-23 will see the possibility return of wider use of in-person, closed-book exams. While some teaching teams and individuals will want to continue using continuous assessments and some form of take-home exam, others will want to make use of in-person exams. Whatever decision is made, what we have learnt from the recent past will be useful in making the most of exams as educational opportunities.

Take-home, open-book exams are not just useful in an emergency situation such as a pandemic, they are a valuable assessment format in their own right. They have benefits in terms of reduced emphasis on memory, greater similarity to real-world tasks, and reduced exam anxiety for some students. However, during Covid we have learnt some important lessons about students' experiences of this type of exams, such as the importance of clear expectations and time management.

- **Resource:** You can read a guide to [turning a conventional exam into a take-home exam](#), and a guide to [creating a take-home exam from scratch](#).
- **Resource:** You can read about [HWU students' experiences of the take-home exams in May 2020](#).

When creating any exam paper, there are useful general tips about what to think about, such as getting feedback from colleagues, making sure that the exam allows students to demonstrate how they meet the course's learning outcomes, and proof-reading your paper carefully.

- **Resource:** There are general exam-writing tips in [In at the Deep End](#).

One common disadvantage of exams is the lack of feedback, which can be a big obstacle to students using them as opportunities to learn. However, there are ways of letting students know how they performed in the exam, such as providing whole-class feedback or running exam feedback sessions shortly afterwards.

- **Resource:** You can find useful ideas in [Helping students to benefit from feedback on exams](#).

Q4. How can we make the most of continuous assessments?

During Covid, many courses responded by shifting from exams to wider use of continuous assessments. While some will want to move back to exams (whether take-home or in-person) there are benefits to the continuing use of continuous assessments. An incredibly wide range of formats are available to courses using continuous assessments, allowing them to fit assessments to the kinds of knowledge and skills that courses are aiming to develop.

- **Resource:** Useful lists of assessment methods are available from the [London School of Economics and Political Science](#), and the [University of Reading](#).

The shift from exams to wider use of continuous assessment is a long-term trend in higher education. Continuous assessment can often help to support deeper understanding (rather than information recall), involve less unhelpful anxiety for students, can be better at yielding useful information for students about their performance and progress, and – with a bit of thought – many of the concerns about academic integrity can be managed.

- **Resource:** You can read some advice about [shifting from exams to coursework](#), and there are ideas about exam alternatives in [Alternatives to essays](#).

Q5. How can we help students understand what assessments expect of them?

A common challenge is making sure that students understand what they need to do in assessments. Even if we provide detailed marking criteria and explicit rubrics, students often either do not read the information, or struggle to understand what we are looking for. ‘Assessment literacy’ – meaning that they understand the rules of the assessment game – is always important, and particularly when there is a lot of variation and flux in assessment methods, as there has been recently.

- **Resource:** There are ideas in [Helping students appreciate what’s expected of them in assessment](#).

One way of helping students to understand assessment requirements is to give them exemplars of work, ideally with some discussion activity to get them thinking about what is good and bad about those exemplars.

- **Resource:** There are suggestions about exemplars in [Using exemplars to enhance learning and support achievement](#).

Another approach is to get students to assess their own work, in order to develop a better understanding of how well their own work matches the requirements of assessments.

- **Resource:** You can find ideas about student self-assessment in [Getting students to self-assess to deepen their learning and develop feedback dialogues](#).

Q6. How can we stop students from engaging in plagiarism, collusion, contract cheating and other sorts of academic misconduct?

Academic misconduct of various forms has been a particular concern over the past few years, with an increased level of student misconduct cases associated with the alternative take-home exam formats that have been used during the pandemic. More positively, academic integrity – the understanding and motivation to engage in good academic practice – is a key part of what we want our students to learn as they progress through their degrees. Plagiarism and other forms of misconduct are sector-wide concerns, and there has been quite a lot of research about its prevalence and causes. The evidence about the extent of academic misconduct is complex and somewhat contradictory. There is also a growing body of research about why some students engage in academic misconduct, with reasons relating both to individual students (e.g. poor knowledge of academic practice) and context (e.g. the attitudes of teaching staff).

- **Resource:** There are summaries of relevant evidence in [Understanding academic integrity: considering the extent of student academic misconducts in Higher Education](#) and [Understanding academic integrity: exploring explanatory factors in Higher Education](#).

While there will always be some students who try and cheat on their assessments, there are things we can do to reduce the motivation and opportunities to engage in plagiarism etc. Clear and consistent policies, helping students to understand good academic practice in their subject, designing assessments to make them more personal and context-specific, academic staff developing their understanding of academic integrity and the root causes of academic misconduct: these are some of the things that we can do to address the problem of academic misconduct.

- **Resource:** Ideas about how to address academic misconduct, drawn from the research, can be found in [Understanding academic integrity: strategies and interventions in Higher Education](#).

Q7. How can we provide feedback to students more efficiently?

Providing constructive, detailed feedback is one of the best things we can do to help students to learn. Unfortunately, it can also be incredibly time-consuming, particularly with large classes. However, there are some ways in which we can streamline the process of providing feedback, such as making use of whole-class feedback, or banks of feedback comments that can be reused.

- **Resource:** You can find some ideas about providing feedback efficiently in [Streamlining feedback on summative tasks](#), and there is general advice about providing effective feedback in [Commenting constructively on assessed work](#).
- **Resource:** You can find advice about making the most of the grading tools in SpeedGrader in the [Canvas Instructor Guide](#), such as [how to use a comment library](#).

Q8. How can we encourage students to pay attention to the feedback that we provide them with?

It can be frustrating when we make the time to provide students with feedback, only to find that some students do not use the feedback to think about how they can improve their work. Traditionally, university teachers have relied on a hope that students act on feedback, but there are some good ideas about how we can encourage and support that process. For example, we can talk to students about what they are supposed to do with feedback, or focus on providing feedback mid-course so that they have a chance to act on the feedback.

- **Resource:** There are suggestions about how to encourage students to use feedback in [Getting students to engage with feedback](#).

Q9. How can I deal with common assessment challenges?

Assessment is one of the trickier aspects of learning and teaching. It is time-consuming, and the high stakes involved can make it an anxious experience for students (and sometimes for staff as well). In particular, making the most of assessments as educational opportunities can involve overcoming

obstacles on our side (e.g. how to manage marking loads) and the students' (e.g. how to help them see the value of groupwork).

- **Resource:** [Key assessment challenges and how to deal with them](#) provides advice on some familiar assessment barriers.

Q10. How can I help students to see the value of assessment and feedback as opportunities to learn?

Some of the challenges around assessment are created by a mismatch of perceptions between staff and students, or students' lack of understanding of the purpose and value of particular kinds of assessments. Students sometimes arrive at university with particular preconceptions of assessment (which can be reinforced while they are here) that limit their ability to use assessments as opportunities to try things out, gauge their performance and develop a deeper understanding of their subject.

- **Resource:** [Making the most of assessment and feedback: A guide for students](#) provides information about how assessments can support learning, the importance of students making use of feedback if it is going to help them improve and the ways in which the University ensures that assessments are fair.

Notes



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