Assessing Your Assessments: creating meaningful and inclusive assessment tasks

---

DR KIMBERLY DAVIS

SENIOR ACADEMIC AND DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT ADVISOR

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Pedagogy of Assessment

- **Why do we assess our students?**
  - The purpose of assessment is to judge student performance or progress, and to determine student interests to make judgments about their learning process.

  - In an ideal scenario, assessment presupposes a formative dimension aimed at helping students to learn better and to improve teaching and learning (Biggs 2003;Boud and Falchikov 2007; Gulikers et al. 2008).

- **Types of Assessment**
  - Assessment *of* learning
  - Assessment *for* learning
  - Assessment *as* learning

What is an Accessible Assessment?

The word "accessible" means different things to different people. Accessibility in higher education is no longer just about removing the physical barriers that can hinder a student, but the potential social, environmental and cognitive barriers that can make it harder for students to succeed.

Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education refers to the ways in which pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed and delivered *to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all.* It embraces a view of the individual and individual difference as the source of diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others.

(Hockings, 2010, my emphasis)

Question 1

- **What are the things that prevent our students from engaging with our assessment tasks?**

  Or, another way to think about this:

- **What makes our assessments inaccessible?**

Constructive Alignment (CA)

- Constructive alignment is the process of linking:
  - Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
  - Teaching and learning
  - Assessment

- CA is one of the most common models used by academic staff in universities

How do we use this conceptualization to make decisions towards more inclusive learning design?
Part 1: Reflection

- Making decisions about more inclusive instructional design is an exercise in pedagogy, which can be seen here as an intersection of disciplinary mastery, rigor of psycho-social concepts, and empathy. Making these decisions requires data relevant to all parts of that intersection. This data can be functionally obtained through critical self reflection that asks the following types of questions in the following order:

- Academic/content questions: What is the material? What are the complex ideas? What are the fundamental concepts?

- Logistical: Think of this as stats for you session - # of students, how much time you have, place in the learning journey of the semester/programme? What is the lesson plan? What has to be in the lesson? How is the material assessed? What technology do you use? Is there an important "why" to any of these answers?

- **Think about the academic/content and logistical reflections together, and ask yourself:**

- Necessarily Empathetic questions: How does everything you've reflected upon make learning hard for students in that lesson? What kind of background would make it difficult for a student to learn from your lesson? – from an emotional point of view i.e. Have students identified with it too much? Or to little? How challenging is the material? From a practical point of view, i.e. How complex are the ideas? Do experienced practitioners ever find it easy? Are students pressed for time? Is discussion difficult because of class size? Does a student need a lot of spare time outside class?

- Your answers to these empathetic questions need to be a synthesis of:

- your academic/content reflections, and your logistical reflections, you can begin your experience with students

- This is because your empathetic reflections will serve as the basis of your inclusion fail-points.

- **1) Biography of the lesson**

- *This includes*

- *When does the session run? Where is it in the semester, in the programme?*
- *In what space is the session run? What's it like?*
- *What materials and technology do you use?*
- *How many students?*
- *Why does the session exist?*
- *What content is covered? What is the session like (I.e. brief outline of the lesson plan*
- *What you'd like the session to be/be able to do in an ideal world*

- **2) Reflections on student expectations/experience/reactions**

- *This is based on your experiences as well as student feedback, and includes:*

- What students normally say about the session
- What your students' performance is typically like
- The problems your students have had with the session, inclusivity related and otherwise
- your previous insights as the "why" of the above reflections

- **3) What value must remain in the lesson, no matter what, and where you see flexibility**

- *This includes:*

- *how the session currently supports the assessment, and what must remain even after a redesign*
- *time and resource related matters, such as session length, materials, or texts*
- *links to other parts of the programme*
- *ambitions you have for the session*

Question 2

How can rewriting/reconsidering your ILOs help you design out accessibility issues?

Part 2: Alignment

• Separately, the lesson being delivered will need to have its learning outcomes re-written/ expanded to include all three domains of learning. Once these are complete, each fail-points can then be aligned to the verb/domain of learning that it most compromises.

• Once inclusion fail-points and domains are aligned, the lecturer can begin using the verb in the intended learning outcome to "cancel" out the fail-point's impact.

Ex:

• If the cognitive verb of the intended learning outcome is "explain" but aligned fail-point is "dense material in limited class time", the lesson can be redesigned so that students have to explain the material in a situation where its density is less of a factor, such as breaking the material up between individual students or groups of students.

The COGNITIVE Domain

The cognitive domain deals with how we acquire, process, and use knowledge. It is the "thinking" domain. The table below outlines the six levels in this domain and verbs that can be used to write learning objectives.

-------------------Increasing Complexity------------------->

Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyze	Evaluate	Create
Retrieve relevant knowledge from long-term memory	Construct meaning from instructional messages, including oral, written, and graphic communication	Carry out or use a procedure in a given situation	Break material into its constituent parts and determine how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose	Make judgments based on criteria and standards	Put elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganize elements into a new pattern or structure
Arrange	Abstract	Apply	Analyze	Argue	Assemble
Cite	Associate	Carry out	Attribute	Assess	Build
Choose	Categorize	Demonstrate	Deconstruct	Check	Combine
Count	Clarify	Determine	Differentiate	Conclude	Compose
Define	Classify	Develop	Discriminate	Coordinate	Construct
Describe	Compare	Employ	Distinguish	Criticize	Create
Duplicate	Conclude	Execute	Focus	Critique	Design
Identify	Contrast	Implement	Organize	Detect	Draft
Label	Exemplify	Operate	Outline	Evaluate	Formulate
List	Explain	Show	Parse	Judge	Generate
Locate	Extrapolate	Sketch	Select	Justify	Hypothesize
Match	Generalize	Solve	Structure	Monitor	Integrate
Name	Illustrate	Use		Prioritize	Plan
Outline	Infer			Rank	Produce
Recall	Interpret			Rate	
Recite	Map			Recommend	
Recognize	Match			Test	
Record	Paraphrase				
Repeat	Predict				
Restate	Represent				
Review	Summarize				
Select	Translate				
State					

The AFFECTIVE Domain

The affective domain deals with our attitudes, values, and emotions. It is the "valuing" domain. The table below outlines the five levels in this domain and verbs that can be used to write learning objectives.

Affective Domain Levels

-------------------Increasing Complexity------------------->

Receiving	Responding	Valuing	Organization	Characterization
Openness to new information or experiences	Active participation in, interaction with, or response to new information or experiences	Attaching value or worth to new information or experiences	Incorporating new information or experiences into existing value system	Full integration/ internalization resulting in new and consistent attitudes, beliefs, and/or behaviors
Ask	Answer	Complete	Adhere	Act
Choose	Assist	Demonstrate	Alter	Discriminate
Describe	Aid	Differentiate	Arrange	Display
Follow	Compile	Explain	Combine	Influence
Give	Conform	Follow	Compare	Listen
Hold	Discuss	Form	Complete	Modify
Identify	Greet	Initiate	Defend	Perform
Locate	Help	Join	Formulate	Practice
Name	Label	Justify	Generalize	Propose
Select	Perform	Propose	Identify	Qualify
Reply	Practice	Read	Integrate	Question
Use	Present	Share	Modify	Revise
	Read	Study	Order	Serve
	Recite	Work	Organize	Solve
	Report		Prepare	Verify
	Select		Relate	Use
	Tell		Synthesize	
	Write			

The PSYCHOMOTOR Domain

The psychomotor domain deals with manual or physical skills. It is the "doing" domain. The table below outlines the five levels in this domain and verbs that can be used to write learning objectives.

Psychomotor Domain Levels				
-------------------Increasing Complexity------------------>				
Imitation	**Manipulation**	**Precision**	**Articulation**	**Naturalization**
Observing and copying another's action/skill	Reproducing action/skill through instruction	Accurately executing action/skill on own	Integrating multiple actions/skills and performing consistently	Naturally and automatically performing actions/skills at high level
Adhere Copy Follow Repeat Replicate	Build Execute Implement Perform Recreate	Calibrate Complete Control Demonstrate Perfect Show	Adapt Combine Construct Coordinate Develop Formulate Integrate Master Modify	Design Invent Manage Project Specify

Higher Order Thinking Skills

Evaluation
Make and defend judgments based on internal evidence or external criteria.

appraise
argue assess attach
choose compare conclude
contrast defend describe discriminate
estimate evaluate explain judge justify interpret
relate predict rate select summarize support value

ynthesis
ompile component ideas into a new whole or ropose alternative solutions.

arrange assemble categorize collect combine comply
compose construct create design develop devise explain
formulate generate plan prepare rearrange reconstruct relate
reorganize revise rewrite set up summarize synthesize tell write

Analysis
Break down objects or ideas into simpler parts and find evidence to support generalizations.

analyze appraise breakdown calculate categorize compare
contrast criticize diagram differentiate discriminate distinguish
examine experiment identify illustrate infer model outline
point out question relate select separate subdivide test

Application
Apply knowledge to actual situations.

apply change choose compute demonstrate discover
dramatize employ illustrate interpret manipulate
modify operate practice predict prepare produce
relate schedule show sketch solve use write

Comprehension
Demonstrate an understanding of the facts.

classify convert defend describe discuss
distinguish estimate explain express
extend generalized give example(s)
identify indicate infer locate paraphrase
predict recognize rewrite review select
summarize translate

Knowledge
Remember previously learned information.

arrange define describe duplicate
identify label list match memorize
name order outline recognize
relate recall repeat reproduce
select state

Accessibility and Learning Differences

- **Layout**
  - Ensure that documents given to students with dyslexia contain only the instructions needed for the exercise; omit any unnecessary details as these could be distracting
  - All materials for students with dyslexia should have a clear layout, short sentences and an uncomplicated structure.

- **Illustrations**
  - Use images that exemplify sentences or unfamiliar words
  - Space out the instructions and add a diagram, so that students can follow it without having to understand every word.

Other elements to consider for accessible assessments

Accessibility and Learning Differences

- **Fonts and background colours**
  - Use sans serif fonts, such as Arial and Comic Sans, as letters can appear less crowded. Alternatives include Verdana, Tahoma, Century Gothic, Trebuchet, Calibri, Open Sans.

  - Font size should be 12 to 14 points. Some dyslexic readers may request a larger font.

  - When you can, avoid using stark white backgrounds.

Inclusive Language

- Consider the diversity of your student population with inclusive language. Inclusive language further highlights our respect for the diversity of backgrounds in the classroom.

- Use varied names and socio-cultural contexts in test questions, assignments and case studies.

- Use language that is truly generic, ie, winter/holiday break instead of Christmas break and house of worship instead of church.

- Use language to acknowledge different lived experiences: "For those of you who have studied abroad/seen Field of Dreams/been on a ferry…"

Accessible Assessments

- **Alternative formats**
  - Consider whether a written brief is the best way to deliver the task to your students.
  - Make sure there are closed captions and transcripts available for any video or audio files you provide.

Meaningful Assessments

Creating a meaningful assessment is about de-obfuscating achievement – creating a situation where the learning that students display cannot be faked by preparation or go unrecognised by the conventions of teaching.

These assessments also mirror what students might be asked to do in a real-world scenario. Thinking about assessments this way further supports the accessible nature of the assessments because both meaningful assessments and accessible assessments are designed with the idea of excising the arbitrary, and arbitrarily alienating, tasks that hinder student engagement with the assessments.

Meaningful Assessment

o Why are you teaching your students this 'content'?

o What is it you want them to know/learn/understand/be able to do?

o How could they prove to you they 'get it'?

o How would they show you in a work-environment that they are using this knowledge/understanding?

o How does this course and this assessment fit into the programme of your students' learning, build on their current skills, and prepare them for future assessments?

o The answers to these questions will help you to think about assessments you might use.

Accessibility Through Assessment Literacy

The last tip is perhaps the most important. All assessments can be accessible to students if they understand what the assessment is and how they are supposed to engage with it. Assessment literacy means that students have the knowledge of how to complete an assessment regardless of the format.

Take the time to help your students become assessment and feedback literate.

Teach students to understand the purpose of assessment and be explicit about your expectations related to how they engage with and complete the assessment.

Explain how feedback will be provided and how it can be used to support the students in their learning.

The Perfect Assessment

- What does the perfect assessment look like for your course?

  - If time, the number of students, the number of students, the number of people who can mark, and the resources available were no object, what type of assessment would you present to your students?

Questions?

————————

DR KIMBERLY DAVIS

KIMBERLY.DAVIS@GLASGOW.AC.UK

@DOCKIMWILDER