An A–Z of Assessment Methods

Assignment	Mode of Assessment	What's Involved?
Abstract	Written	Students are required to write an abstract of a research paper/article within a specified word limit e.g. 300–500 words.
Annotated bibliographies	Written	Students produce a list of texts, primary sources and internet sites on specified or agreed topics to a particular referencing convention. They annotate these with a commentary, which could include an evaluation of what they have read.
Articles for different audiences	Written	Students are asked to write on a particular topic(s) to an agreed length in a specific style e.g. a journal, newspaper or magazine.
Assessment stations	Practical / Written	Developed in medicine, students move around a series of testing stations being assessed on a number of learning outcomes, each for a fixed period of time. Useful to assess a wide range of skills and knowledge.
Book, website, journal article or programme review	Written / Oral	Students write an account or present an oral presentation on designated articles or other programmes e.g. TV/radio. These often include an evaluative element to demonstrate depth of reading and level of understanding in concise formats.
Case studies / Care plans	Written / Oral / Problem-based / Practical	Students are required to work through a case study/care plan to identify the problem(s) and to offer potential solutions; useful for assessing students' understanding and for encouraging students to see links between theory and practice. Case studies could be provided in advance of a time-constrained assessment.
Concept maps	Written / Oral	Students map out their understanding of a particular concept. This is a useful (and potentially quick) exercise to provide feedback to staff on students' understanding.

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Critical incident accounts / Journals / Blogs	Written / Work placements	Students working on placements keep diaries, journals or blogs in which they record their experiences. They can be asked to write about a critical incident in terms of context, what happened, the outcomes, how theoretical material they have learnt underpins the process and how they would do things differently in future.
Designing learning materials	Written / Oral	Students prepare a learning package for a particular audience e.g. members of the public, school children etc. on a specified or agreed topic.
Dissertation	Written	Potential for sampling a wide range of practical, analytical and interpretative skills and to assess a broad application of knowledge, understanding and skills to other situations.
'Doing it' exam	Written	An exam which requires students to do something, like read an article, analyse and interpret data etc.
Essay	Written	Students are required to write an essay on specified or agreed topics within given parameters e.g. word count, use of different literature sources etc.
Essay plans	Written	Instead of writing a full essay, students produce an essay plan to demonstrate their preparation, planning and reading on a set or agreed topic. Useful for formative, self- and peer-assessment.
Field report	Written / Oral	Students are required to produce a written/oral report relating to a field/site visit.
Grant application	Written	Students are required to use real/adapted versions of different grant application forms to plan a research project. This could be assessed using the published criteria as a basis for the marking criteria.
Instant reports	Practical / Written	Students are required to submit a report as they leave the lab. Could be used with a pre-designed pro-forma to speed-up marking and feedback provision to students.

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In-tray exercises	Written / Oral	Students are provided with an initial dossier of papers to read, prioritise and work on, with a variety of tasks and new information given at intervals throughout the period of assessment. This simulates real practice where unknown elements and irrelevancies are often encountered.
Laboratory books / Reports	Practical / Written	Students are required to write a report for all (or a designated sample) of practicals in a single lab book. You could inform students that a sample of lab books will be collected each week to mark any reports of labs done in previous weeks; this encourages students to keep their lab books up to date. Each student should be sampled the same number of times throughout the module with a designated number contributing to the assessment mark.
Learning logs	Written / Work Placements / Practical	These are lists of activities and outcomes which students check off during a period of learning. For example, students could be asked to indicate competencies which they have practised to a specific level during a work placement.
Make or design something	Practical / Written	Students are required to make or design something, e.g. radio broadcast, video clip, web page etc; useful as a group work exercise.
Media profile	Practical / Written / Oral / Performance / Problem-based	Students are asked to use pictures or headlines from newspapers and magazines to illustrate the public perception/profile of a particular aspect of your subject area; useful as a group work exercise.
Mini-practical	Practical / Written	This involves a series of mini practical sessions conducted under timed conditions which creates potential for assessing a wide range of practical, analytical and interpretative skills.
Multiple choice questions (MCQs)	Written	Can be useful for diagnostic, formative assessment, in addition to summative assessment. Well designed questions can assess more than factual recall of information, but do take time to design.

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Observation	Practical / Oral / Performance	Students are observed whilst undertaking some form of 'performance'. This is commonly used in teaching classroom practice and laboratory work.
Online discussion boards	Written	Students are assessed on the basis of their contributions to an online discussion for example, with their peers; this could be hosted on a virtual learning environment (VLE).
Open book exams	Written	Students have the opportunity to use any or specified resources to help them answer set questions under time constraints. This method removes the over-reliance on memory and recall and models the way that professionals manage information.
Oral presentations	Oral / Written	Students are asked to give an oral presentation on a particular topic for a specified length of time and could also be asked to prepare associated handout(s). Can usefully be combined with self- and peer-assessment.
Part-written practical reports	Practical / Written	Lab sheets given to students provide some of the write-up in full but leave sections such as error analysis, theoretical explanation etc. for the students to complete.
Patchwork texts	Written / Problem-based	Students write a number of small pieces of work ('patches'), which they then have to later 'stitch' together in a reflective commentary. The patches and the tasks upon which they are based are discrete and complete entities in their own right, but they can help contribute to a holistic understanding of the module content.
Performance	Practical / Oral / Written	Students are required to give some form of performance, e.g. concert, play, dance, etc.
Portfolios / e-Portfolios	Written / Work placements / Problem-based	Students provide evidence for their achievement of learning outcomes; these commonly incorporate a reflective commentary.
Posters	Practical / Written / Oral	Students are asked to produce a poster (either 'real size or as a PowerPoint file) on a particular topic. Can be used individually or in groups to assess a range of activities.

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Problem sheets	Written	Students complete problem sheets, e.g. on a weekly basis. This can be a useful way of providing students with regular formative feedback on their work and/or involving elements of self- and peer assessment.
Question banks	Written	Students are assessed on their ability to produce a certain number of questions on a topic. This helps students to recognise what they do and do not understand about a topic and is a useful way for staff to collate a question bank that could be used for quick formative quizzes throughout the module.
Reflective diaries	Written / Work placements / Practical	Students record their learning over a period of time, interspersing narrative with a reflective commentary which could support the development of an action plan.
Research projects / Group projects	Written / Practical / Oral / Performance / Problem-based / Work placement	Potential for sampling wide range of practical, analytical and interpretative skills. Can assess wide application of knowledge, understanding and skills.
Role play	Written / Oral / Performance	Students write or give a presentation taking on a particular role, e.g. a journal reviewer/ editor, consultant, art critic etc. This type of assignment could be paired up with a grant application exercise.
Seen exams	Written	Students are provided with the questions to be answered in a time-constrained context in advance. Alternatively the examination topics may be released in advance but the precise questions are unseen until the exam.
Selective reports / Sampling reports	Practical / Written	Students are asked to either write up only particular sections of a report each week, e.g. methods section or results section. Alternatively students are required to write practical reports in full but they are told in advance that only a percentage of the reports will be assessed.
Short answer questions	Written	Useful to assess a wide range of knowledge/skills across a module.

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Simulations	Practical / Written / Oral / Problem-based	Text or virtual computer-based simulations are provided for students who are then required to answer questions, resolve problems, perform tasks and take actions etc. according to changing circumstances within the simulation. Useful for assessing a wide range of skills, knowledge and competencies.
Wiki / Blogs	Written	Students are required to keep an individual blog, e.g. to record their progress on a project, or a wiki; could be used as part of a group project exercise.
Viva voce	Oral	Often used for assessing 'borderline' degree classifications but also useful to explore students' understanding of a wide range of topics. Depending on class size however, they can be time consuming for staff.

This is not an exhaustive list. To contribute ideas for additional assessment methods please email cqsd-tandl@reading.ac.uk

This table is a legacy resource from the University's 'Engage in Assessment' website developed by Dr Anne Crook.

The assessment methods referenced in the table were compiled from the following sources:

- Brown, G (2001). Assessment: A Guide for Lecturers. Assessment Series, LTSN, York.
- Brown, S & Smith, B (1997). Getting to Grips with Assessment. SEDA, Birmingham.
- Gibbs, G (1992). Assessing More Students. The Teaching More Students Project. Oxonion Rewley Press, Oxford.
- Habeshaw, S, Gibbs, G & Habeshaw, T (1993). 53 Interesting Ways to Assess your Students. Cromwell Press Ltd, Trowbridge.
- HEA Centre for Bioscience Assessment Briefing (2009) https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/resources-references-and-tools-assessment-biosciences
- Knight, P (2001). A Briefing on Key Concepts. Assessment Series, LTSN, York.

Further Recommended Resources

- Pugh, S. (ed) (2018) A compendium of assessment techniques in higher education: from students' perspectives. Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence. Available online: https://teachingexcellence.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2018/10/PUGHcompendiumcomplete.pdf
- Sambell, K. & Brown, S. (2023) Choosing and using fit-for-purpose assessment methods. Heriot Watt University Learning + Teaching Academy, Watt Works Quick Guide. Available online: https://lta.hw.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/Choosing-and-using-fit-for-purpose-assessment-methods.pdf