Assessment: introduction to the collection

(Collection 3 of 7)

Overview

The object of this group of resources is to provoke thought about the role of assessment in an undergraduate programme. You will find activities modelling the process of choosing an assessment method (Assessment SWOT analysis; Mix and match; Creative assessment; Designing and running innovative assessents), on considering different views of assessment and feedback (What is assessment for?) and a marking exercise (Feedback and marking strategies). There is also a detailed 'assessment audit' lecturers can use to evaluate the state of assessment on a module they are teaching and an exercise involving the design of online quizzes (Computer-aided assessment).

It has recently become axiomatic that assessment is a tool for learning - get assessment right, runs the dogma, and all else follows. There is nothing in the traditions of Humanities teaching that would lead one to quarrel with that. Traditionally, until students reached 'finals', all essays or other exercises were what we now call 'formative'. If they were marked at all, that mark was not counted towards final results. In recent years, the demands upon assessment have become more complicated, and assessment (like all other aspects of teaching and learning) regulated in ever more complicated ways. Students now routinely undertake 'summative' assessment during as well as at the end of modules, and the pressures on them to attain high marks - and the means of doing so - become ever more ubiquitous. How, in these circumstances can teachers of English or Creative Writing design assessments that not only test their students' knowledge and abilities, but, more importantly, help them to learn? These resources have been designed not to provide answers, but to help you as a teacher think through the implications and dilemmas of assessment.

Let's bear in mind that part of the point of contemporary regulation and prescription is to achieve transparency and fairness. It represents (or is meant to represent) a break with a tradition that some people just know by osmosis what they are supposed to do, and others don't. Together with learning outcomes, assessment strategies, marking criteria and the rest are meant to help students understand what they are being required to do, and teachers to focus on what they want students to achieve. These are clearly good aims.The downside of any such system, though, is that for good or ill it eliminates the unexpected. In aiming for comparability and clarity it can also routinise and atomise. One of the challenges facing you as a teacher is to try to optimise the strengths of this system.

It will always be useful to think of individual assessments (and individual modules) in the light of the student's total experience of a programme. Thinking in this way should lead you to devise a variety of assessment methods to suit different learning styles and different stages in a student's career. It could be that two 2,500 word essays are just the thing for assessing your module: but it could also be that a little bit more thought might result in something both more appropriate to the subject matter and more stimulating for the student.

Running through the resources in this collection, then, is a stress on the need when designing assessments to balance the potentially competing requirements of the subject matter, the student, and the whole programme of which the module forms a part.

Links & References

- English Subject Centre assessment area

Professional Standards Framework

How does the entire collection under this theme relate to the PSF? As well as providing a device for mapping the levels of competence attained by lecturing staff, the PSF also provides a tool for reflection - albeit a fairly basic one. Conceptualisation of 'areas of activity', 'core knowledge', and 'professional values' provides one way of articulating what you know about pedagogy and how you activate and implement that knowledge. It is a device for rendering the tacit explicit, and to that extent converges with the objects of this collection of activities.

Individual & Group Activities

Some of the activities in this collection (the same is true of the other themed collections) are designed for individual use. Some are designed for use in groups (for example within the framework of a certificate course). In many cases the resource could be easily adapted for either. But where there is a marked difference we have indicated that a resource is primarily inflected towards either individual or group use.

Resources in the Assessment Collection

- **Assessment: introduction to the collection**
- Assessment audit: resource overview
    - Auditing English: individual activity
    - Auditing English: group activity
- Designing and running innovative assessments: resource overview
    - Creative assessments in Literature: outcomes, criteria: individual activity
    - Creative assessments in Literature: outcomes, criteria: group activity
- Assessment SWOT analysis: resource overview
    - SWOT analysis: individual activity
    - SWOT analysis: group activity
- Mix and match: resource overview
    - Matching assessment to outcome: individual activity
    - Matching assessment to outcome: group activity
- Creative assessment: resource overview
    - Creative criticism
- Feedback and marking strategies: resource overview
    - Marking exercise: individual activity
    - Marking exercise: group activity
- Computer-aided assessment: resource overview
    - Writing multiple-choice questionnaires: individual activity
    - Writing multiple-choice questionnaires: group activity
- What is assessment for? : resource overview
    - Balancing the interest groups: individual activity

- Balancing the interest groups: group activity