

Overview: Authentic Assessments, Exams, and Quizzes

Quizzes and exams are an important assessment component in some courses. In some cases they translate to an online mode while serving the same purpose. In other cases this may prove an inadequate or less reliable measure of learning. In this guide, we question assumptions about traditional summative assessments, discuss ways to enhance the design of exams and quizzes, and explore alternative assessments.

Reconsidering Traditional Assessments

- Consider how students would demonstrate mastery of what they've learned by an authentic application outside of class. A potential issue with traditional exams and quizzes is that they are not typically authentic to how students will be required to demonstrate knowledge outside of educational contexts, which can reduce the chance of learning transfer.
- Authentic alternatives can target higher levels of cognition such as synthesis, analysis, evaluation, and creation. Use Bloom's taxonomy as a guide in creating your assessments and consider which levels your assessment targets and their appropriateness for the level and nature of the discipline. For example, if you are preparing future healthcare professionals, your course might target their ability to apply knowledge to novel cases, in which case, you may use case studies or scenarios.
- Authentic alternatives to traditional exams and quizzes include:
 - Case studies
 - Simulations and role-playing exercises
 - Creative products like student-created podcasts, videos, portfolios, websites
 - Academic poster
 - Group debate or discussion
 - Diagram or infographic
 - Business plan

Other tips for creating effective and inclusive assessments include:

- Create more assessments of lesser value for a more accurate understanding of student learning over the semester than a few heavily weighted assessments.
- Embed low-stakes quizzes in Panopto video lectures or Top Hat presentations that align with learning outcomes and build skill and knowledge for summative assessments.
- Scaffold non-test, higher-stakes assessments by breaking them down into component parts with multiple submissions over time (e.g., topic selection, prospectus, bibliography, drafts, notes).
- Make assessments learner-centered by providing a choice of assessment formats (example: submitting a video, audio, or text response to a discussion question), using student-generated questions, tying them to students' goals and interests, etc.

Effective Quiz and Exam Design

You may opt to use quizzes and exams in addition to authentic assessments, and when designed well, they can be a useful assessment tool. Below are pointers for creating effective quizzes and exams:

- Ensure that quiz and exam questions align with the module or unit's learning objectives.
- Target higher order thinking by designing questions that require application of knowledge, such as scenario based questions.
- Ask for students to explain their choice, if time and format allows, so that you can better understand students' thinking and where errors occurred.
- Ensure that instructions and question stems are clear. Run questions by a peer or TA to get feedback on clarity.
- Consider asking a question that allows students to share something they learned that they were not tested on and provide credit if the answer is meaningful and accurate.
- Seek student feedback on the quiz or exam design, asking what was confusing and which questions or features best allowed them to demonstrate their learning, etc.