



**The Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning
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Top 10 tips on Assessment for Learning¹

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Effective assessment design enhances student learning, and engages students with different learning styles. Assessment influences what a student interprets to be the important learning goals for a course. The assignments we design constitute the means by which we assess student learning. In the best case scenario, assessments should be aligned with course goals and objectives. The following tips provide guidelines for designing assessments that promote your students' learning.

ASSESSMENT INFLUENCES THE PROCESS OF LEARNING

1. Provide spaced assessed tasks to enable students to allocate sufficient time to study over a suitable time period and avoid 'cramming'.

Tips:

- Students submit drafts/works in progress or display work publicly at specific points during the course.
- For group work, provide mechanisms for formalized peer feedback throughout the project.
- Design frequent tasks rather than one end of course assessment (or build in steps)

2. Design the assessment so that students tackle the task appropriately: i.e. they engage in the process of learning rather than simply producing a final product

Tips:

- Allocate some percentage of the overall mark to drafts/works in progress or justifications of decisions made while completing the assignment
- Allow students to reveal their errors and explain their corrections- validate the process of learning
- Value the learning process rather than only the final assignment by allocating marks to students' self-analysis of their learning.

3. Give students the opportunity to practice the skills they need for each assessment.

Tips:

- Clearly explain the assessment criteria
- Give feedback on formative work
- Discuss the assessment task with students
- Continue to improve your assessment tasks for future iterations of your course based on feedback and based on how effective they were (or not) in enhancing students' learning.

USE FEEDBACK TO ENHANCE LEARNING

4. Provide sufficient and detailed feedback

Tips:

- Use feedback and self-assessment sheets
- Consider using audio or video recordings (e.g. for student presentations) and provide opportunities for students to discuss their reflections on their presentations and how they would like to improve
- Avoid checks and crosses, or meaningless terms like "Great work!" or "Poor"
- Make your writing legible- you would not accept unreadable student work!

5. Focus your feedback on student performance, learning or actions the student can control

¹ Adapted from the University of Kent, based on Gibbs, G & Simpson, C (2004) 'Conditions under which assessment supports students' learning', *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, Issue 1., and Brown, S, Race, P & Smith B, (1996) *500 Tips on Assessment*, Kogan Page: London.



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Tips:

- Identify errors clearly
- Outline 'options for action' that are reasonable
- Avoid personal comments which can reduce a student's sense of competence (linked to motivation)

6. Provide timely feedback: while it matters to the student and can be used to improve future performance

Tips:

- Discuss model answers or exemplars immediately after students submit their work, while the ideas are fresh in their minds
- Use peer feedback: immediate peer feedback is preferable to late professor feedback
- Computer-based practice tests (e.g. multiple choice tests on MyCourses) can provide immediate feedback for student self-paced study; however, ensure that explanations for incorrect and correct answers are provided. Also, provide "thought questions" to encourage students to consider the critical aspects of the questions (and discourage them from randomly guessing).

7. Align feedback with the learning goals of the assignment and the assessment criteria

Tips:

- Align your feedback with the aim of the assignment: are you trying to increase interest and motivation with new students, or promote reflective learning, or identify and correct misconceptions?
- Use self and peer assessment to encourage critical thinking and internalization of assessment criteria and standards

8. Provide feedback that is appropriate to the student's breadth and depth of background, experience, and level of independence.

Tips:

- Feedback needs to be understandable to the student and provide ways for the student to progress to the next stage or level of understanding.
- Provide feedback sensitive to the student's understanding of the discipline involved (i.e. separate generic study skills feedback from discipline-specific comments)

9. Feedback needs to be read and noticed

Tips:

- Provide ways for students to have an active role in eliciting useful feedback- have them identify and list points they need feedback on
- Where appropriate, it helps to give feedback only (no grade)
- Use self-assessment prior to any official grading
- Use two-part assignments: formative feedback at part 1; grade only at part 2
- Use self-assessment, professor feedback, and then supply a grade

10. Feedback is acted on by the student

Tips:

- Follow up the feedback and be encouraging
- Provide "feed-forward" (applies to future work)
- Use feedback to promote self-directed learning

Further Reading:

Gibbs, G & Simpson, C (2004) 'Conditions under which assessment supports students' learning', *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, Issue 1

Brown, S, Race, P & Smith B (1996) *500 Tips on Assessment*, London: Kogan Page

Woolcock, M.J.V. (2005) *Constructing a Syllabus: A handbook for faculty, teaching assistants and teaching fellows*. A publication of The Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, Brown University.