

Alternatives to High Stakes Testing

A Step-by-Step List of Ideas

This handout assists faculty in rethinking high stakes assessments (e.g., mid-terms and exams) for digital learning formats sharing ideas to consider as alternatives. High stakes assessment might not suit all learners who are unable to access reliable technology or Internet connections, are not mentally healthy or may be negatively impacted by additional stresses of a high stakes assessment etc.

Step 1: Review your Authorized Course Description (ACD), course learning outcomes, and content.

1. Are there any:
 - a. learning outcomes or content types that can **only** be evaluated through high stakes testing?
 - b. transfer or accreditation requirements for high stakes testing?

2. If you must use high stakes testing, go to step **3a** and build two or three versions of your test.

Step 2: Can your students achieve the learning outcomes by enhancing existing assignments?

1. add to existing assignments
2. create more challenging or broad-ranging assignments, to address higher order thinking skills
3. alternative assignments to take advantage of technology:
 - a. group or individual presentations
 - b. video or audio podcasts

Step 3: Choose alternative assessments

| Assessment | Features | More Info |
|--|---|--|
| Test using frequent low stakes quizzes <i>(chapter/weekly or module tests)</i> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build in the Blackboard Learn Test Tool 2. Use Respondus (BB Learn >>Instructor Resources >> Respondus) to save time. 3. Apply selective release settings: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Dates and times the test will be available b. Test duration c. Make individual accommodations, as necessary. 4. Do students need to show work? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. set up a BB Learn assignment that matches the test name | Single point and conventional rubrics attached. NIC: BB Learn Test Tips NIC: BB Learn Test Options |

| Assessment | Features | More Info |
|--|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. students use their phones or webcams to take pictures of the workstudents convert images to pdf and submit through the assignment tool | |
| Reflective writing exercises to answer the question: “What did I learn in this course?” | Specify the learning outcomes to address Set expectations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Length Time required to complete Degree of depth and support Number of references to course material per learning outcome, for example | Single point and conventional rubrics attached. <u>U. Waterloo description of activity/assessment</u> |
| Take home exam | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create an essay style question or questions to address the learning outcomes being tested <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ask open ended questions that are relatively high on Bloom’s Taxonomy <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Reduces student temptations to use Google! b. Set expectations: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Length ii. Time required to complete iii. Degree of depth and support <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of references to course material per learning outcome | Single point and conventional rubrics attached. <u>More information</u> , also from U. Waterloo |
| Memorandum or Briefing | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Goal: prepare a document that addresses a real-world discipline-based problem or problems using course content to provide answers/recommendations or solution alternatives. 2. Provide: heading structure, length, format, and expected depth (including number of course references) 3. Could combine written and oral presentation. | Build on a presentation rubric (there is <u>one here</u> with a lot of other rubric development ideas on Humber College’s T & L site) |
| Professional Presentation | This is a variation on Briefing, above. Students are placed in the role of community or professional consultant and use course principles and content to address real problems | See above |

| Assessment | Features | More Info |
|---|--|---|
| Annotated Anthology or Course Reader | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applies the idea of an annotated bibliography to a course instead of a single research project. 2. Supply focus related to learning outcomes and a reading list, with alternative readings/resources 3. Students provide evidence of reading and other research (interviews, e.g.) conducted over the course including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. A paragraph on each resource identifying content and relationship to other sources and relevant learning outcomes b. An outline/toc of each resource 4. This assessment can also be used for theme-based presentations. | A couple of annotated exercise Rubrics from U Texas |
| Mock Trials | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Trials of ideas or historical figures can be used as group assessments 2. Assign roles: e.g., prosecutors, defenders, witnesses 3. Specify purpose and depth of coverage of course material. | Group assessment sample rubric |
| Portfolios | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This is a course-long assignment that asks students to choose and curate their learning through assignments, written reflections and video or audio responses to course material. Structure the assessment such that student work is focussed on learning outcomes. 2. Students provide annotations explaining their selections and presentation 3. This activity can be used across programs and students may choose to use parts of portfolios to show prospective employers. | Stark State College example rubric |
| Poster Sessions/Mini Conferences | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students display their learning on posters that are shared with classmates for peer assessment. 2. Establish criteria for what constitutes a “good” contribution 3. Part marks possibly based on critique of others’ work 4. Mini-conference topics based on course themes. | U. South Maine Rubric example rubric |
| Student-Proposed Project | Set project goals: written and/or presentation expectations around length, quality and depth of course | Adapt rubrics elsewhere in this column as needed. |

| Assessment | Features | More Info |
|-----------------|---|--|
| | material and ask students to define their own projects. | |
| Fishbowl | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This activity is like a debate 2. Adapts well to the digital environment 3. Half the class actively engages in discussion of critical ideas, the other half listens and takes notes 4. Roles switch halfway through the exercise. | <u>Fishbowl example</u> . This example came via <u>Harvard's Graduate School of Education</u> and there are a lot more assessment ideas there. |

Step 4: If you are concerned about cheating

1. Consider using an honour statement (some ideas here)
 - a. Send a paragraph to students identifying academic integrity expectations (reference policy 3-06: Community Code of Academic, Personal and Professional Conduct).
 - b. Ask students to cut and paste the paragraph into an email to you to signify that:
 - i. They have read the honour statement
 - ii. They intend to follow it in their work
2. Use selective release controls for tests and quizzes
3. Ask questions that focus on HOTS in essay or extended answer questions.
 - a. Specify the level of detail required to incorporate Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS)
 - b. Google your reflective or take-home question(s) and revise until your assessment device can't be easily answered or gamed by cut and paste.

Additional Resources

When you have some time, read these two articles:

Exams: Who are we leaving Out? By Post by Mary Burgess with help from Jess Mitchell, Josie Gray, Tracy Roberts, Amanda Coolidge, Carolee Clyne, Susan Doner, and Mirjam van Hasselt.

URL: <https://bccampus.ca/2020/07/21/exams-who-are-we-leaving-out/>

13 Alternatives to Traditional Testing by Dr. Rhonda Dubec, Lakehead University.

URL: <https://teachingcommons.lakeheadu.ca/13-alternatives-traditional-testing>

Rubrics for just about anything: <https://teachingcommons.lakeheadu.ca/50-beyond-essay-rubrics>

Two examples of conventional rubrics and their single point equivalents

Reflective Writing: Conventional Rubric

| | Try again | Novice | Competent | Proficient |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| What I learned | 0 (0.00%) I don't clearly express what I've learned; and I don't provide implications. | 8 (16.00%) I express what I learned briefly or in point form. | 14 (28.00%) I express what I learned in general, clearly and with some implications. | 18 (36.00%) I clearly express what I learned in great depth, and provide implications. |
| Why it is important | 0 (0.00%) My essay does not reflect any evidence of learning importance. | 8 (16.00%) I demonstrate briefly the importance of what I learned. I could provide more detail. | 14 (28.00%) I provide strong reasons for why lessons learned are important to me. | 16 (32.00%) I clearly articulate why lessons learned where important and give examples of how I will use what I learned. |
| Communication | 2 (4.00%) My communication needs work and it's not clear what I am trying to say. | 4 (8.00%) I communicate my points briefly and could provide a better description of what I mean. | 6 (12.00%) I communicate clearly, but could elaborate on some points to clarify my answers. | 8 (16.00%) I communicate exceptionally clearly and explain my answers in detail. |
| Organization | 0 (0.00%) My writing is aimless and disorganized. | 2 (4.00%) My organization is rough but workable. I might sometimes get off topic. There is a lot of repetition. | 3 (6.00%) My writing has a beginning, middle, and an end. It's divided into appropriate sections/ paragraphs. There is some repetition. | 4 (8.00%) My writing has a compelling opening, an informative and interesting middle, and a relevant conclusion. There is no repetition. |
| Grammar, word use, sentence fluency | 0 (0.00%) I use the same words over and over. Some words are confusing. My sentences are often awkward, run-ons, or fragments, and some make no sense at all. Numerous errors make my paper hard to read. | 2 (4.00%) The words that I use are not descriptive and not appropriate for the subject. I am starting to write more clearly, and have some problems, but overall, you should get the gist of what I'm saying. I have enough errors in my essay to distract a reader. | 3 (6.00%) I make some good word choices, but sometimes my choices aren't correct in meaning. I have well-constructed sentences and my essay reads moderately well. I have a few errors to fix, but I generally use correct conventions. | 4 (8.00%) The words that I use are precise, and appropriate to describe my thoughts. My sentences are clear, complete, and of varying lengths. I use correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling. |

H. Hessel, U. Sask. This entry was posted in [Assessment and Evaluation](#), [Remote Teaching](#) by [Heather M. Ross](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

Reflective Writing: Single point Rubric (after H. Hessel, U. Sask.)

Single Point Rubrics: The intention is to remove marks/levels and percentages and instead focus on where the work was below or above the required criteria. First, students complete as a self-reflection and the teacher then completes. Emphasis is on less time to mark for teacher and a focus on helpful comments for improvement or acknowledgement of exceeding expectations for students. Always go over with students before using to explain, do a sample with them and allow for questions.

| Concerns Areas that need work | Criteria Standards for this performance | Advanced Evidence of exceeding standards |
|---|---|--|
| | I clearly express what I learned in great depth and provide implications. | |
| | I clearly articulate why lessons learned were important and give examples of how I will use what I learned. | |
| | I communicate exceptionally clearly and explain my answers in detail. | |
| | My writing has a compelling opening, an informative and interesting middle, and a relevant conclusion. There is no repetition. | |
| | The words that I use are precise and appropriate to describe my thoughts. My sentences are clear, complete, and of varying lengths. I use correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling. | |

Conventional Rubric: Grading Answers on an Essay Exam (Claudia Stanny, University of West Florida)

| Criteria & Points Assigned | Missing or Serious Problems | Below Expectations | Meets Expectations | Excellent Work | Points Earned |
|--|--|---|--|--|---------------|
| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Relevance of answer to the question | The essay did not answer the question | Answer is incomplete. Excessive discussion of unrelated issues and/or significant errors in content | Answer is brief with insufficient detail. Unrelated issues were introduced and/or minor errors in content. | Answer is complete; sufficient detail provided to support assertions; answer focuses only on issues related to the question; factually correct | |
| Thoroughness of answer | None of the relevant details were included | Serious gaps in the basic details needed | Most of the basic details are included but some are missing | Deals fully with the entire question | |
| Organization and logic of answer | Weak organization; sentences rambling; ideas are repeated | Minor problems of organization or logic; Needs work on creating transitions between ideas | Clear and logical presentation; good development of an argument; Transitions are made clearly and smoothly | | |
| Mechanics of writing (spelling, punctuation, grammar, clarity of prose) | Major problems with mechanics of language; Awkward sentence construction; Poor or absent transitions; Frequently difficult to understand | Frequent problems with mechanics of language; Occasional awkward sentences and poor transitions; reduce readability | Clear, readable, prose. Good use of transitions; no problems with spelling, punctuation, or grammar. | | |
| TOTAL POINTS (10 possible) | | | | | |

Single Point Rubric: Grading Answers on an Essay Exam (adapted from C. Stanny)

Single Point Rubrics: The intention is to remove marks/levels and percentages and instead focus on where the work was below or above the required criteria. First, students complete as a self-reflection and the teacher then completes. Emphasis is on less time to mark for teacher and a focus on helpful comments for improvement or acknowledgement of exceeding expectations for students. Always go over with students before using to explain, do a sample with them and allow for questions.

| Concerns Areas that need work | Criteria Standards for this performance | Advanced Evidence of exceeding standards |
|---|--|--|
| | Relevance of Work My answer is complete. I have provided sufficient detail to support my assertions. My answer focusses only on issues related to the question and is factually correct. | |
| | Thoroughness of Answer My answer deals fully with the entire question. | |
| | Organization and Logic of Answer My answer is clearly and logically presented. It has a fully developed argument and clear, smooth transitions between ideas. | |
| | Mechanics of Writing My prose is clear and readable, with well constructed paragraphs and transitions. There are no errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation. | |