Measuring achievement & progress

Assessment relates to the methods, activities or tasks that measure the achievement of course learning outcomes and a student’s academic progress.

Assessment should:

• Provide a meaningful learning experience.
• Measure and report achievement of capability.
• Determine capabilities of students against learning outcomes.
• Identify learning needs.
• Provide feedback on learning.
• Increase students’ ability to assess and reflect on their own learning.
• Report on progress and achievements.
• Assist in the evaluation of the learning experience, including the assessment design.

RMIT programs use a range of assessment methods, which include formative and summative assessments. Formative assessments provide formative feedback to students during the learning cycle to assist them to identify how their learning is progressing. Summative assessments are typically provided at the end of the learning cycle to measure student performance against the standards provided by the course learning outcomes. Common examples of formative and summative assessment tasks are essays, presentations, written assignments and reports, wikis, blogs, test, examinations and case studies.

Transnational students may come to RMIT with the expectation that learning will be assessed through formal examinations requiring them to memorise and recall information presented in class. Academic and teaching staff should pay special attention to explaining and clarifying the assessment requirements at the beginning of the course and be prepared to assist students reframe their approach to the course, particularly when exams are not the main method of assessment.

Shaping behaviour & establishing expectations

Assessment is often the most powerful element of the curriculum. Assessment establishes expectations and shapes student behaviour by:

• Providing structure or a roadmap for their learning activities
• Giving students signals about the kinds of activity that is valued
• Influencing the energy and attention students give to a task
• Helping students develop disciplined learning and study skills.
• Assisting students to make connections between what they do in class and what they need to know.

The way a course is assessed is outlined in the Course Guide. At RMIT assessment tasks are usually set by the Course Co-ordinator in Melbourne. It is therefore important that transnational academic and teaching staff consult with the Course Co-ordinator to ensure they have an accurate understanding of the assessment tasks. Academic and teaching staff should be able to explain to students how the assessment task relates to the course learning outcomes.

Fundamentals of effective assessment

When designing assessments it is worth considering The Centre for the Study of Higher Education’s Fundamentals of effective assessment: Twelve principles.

The principles are:

1. Assessment should help students to learn.
2. Assessment must be consistent with the objectives of the course and what is taught and learnt.
3. Variety in types of assessment allows a range of different learning outcomes to be assessed. It also keeps students interested.
4. Students need to understand clearly what is expected of them in assessed tasks.
5. Criteria for assessment should be detailed, transparent and justifiable.
6. Students need specific and timely feedback on their work - not just a grade.
7. Too much assessment is unnecessary and may be counter-productive.
8. Assessment should be undertaken with an awareness that an assessor may be called upon to justify a student’s result.
9. The best starting point for countering plagiarism is in the design of the assessment tasks.
10. Group assessment needs to be carefully planned and structured.
11. When planning and wording assignments or questions, it is vital to mentally check their appropriateness to all students in the class, whatever their cultural differences.
12. Systematic analysis of students’ performance on assessed tasks can help identify areas of the curriculum which need improvement.
Writing assessment tasks

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga has designed a useful summary of commonly used methods of assessment, which is adapted below. The complete resource is available at:
http://www.utc.edu/walker-center-teaching-learning/faculty-development/online-resources/test-design.php

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Good for...</th>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Tips for writing</th>
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| Multiple Choice | Application, synthesis, analysis, and evaluation levels | Question/Right answer Incomplete statement Best answer | • Stem should present single, clearly formulated problem.  
• Stem should be in simple, understood language; delete extraneous words.  
• Avoid “all of the above” - can answer based on partial knowledge (if one is incorrect or two are correct, but unsure of the third...).  
• Avoid “none of the above.”  
• Make all distractors plausible/homegenous.  
• Don’t overlap response alternatives (decreases discrimination between students who know the material and those who don’t).  
• Don’t use double negatives.  
• Present alternatives in logical or numerical order.  
• Place correct answer at random.  
• Make each item independent of others on test.  
• Way to judge a good stem: student’s who know the content should be able to answer before reading the alternatives  
• List alternatives on separate lines, indent, separate by blank line, use letters vs. numbers for alternative answers.  
• Need more than 3 alternatives, 4 is best. |
| Short Answer    | Application, synthesis, analysis, and evaluation levels | Extended response: synthesis and evaluation levels; a lot of freedom in answers Restricted response: more consistent scoring, outlines parameters of responses | • When using with definitions: supply term, not the definition for a better judge of student knowledge.  
• For numbers, indicate the degree of precision/units expected.  
• Use direct questions, not an incomplete statement.  
• If you do use incomplete statements, don’t use more than 2 blanks within an item.  
• Arrange blanks to make scoring easy.  
• Try to phrase question so there is only one answer possible. |
| Essay           | Application, synthesis and evaluation levels | Extended response: synthesis and evaluation levels; a lot of freedom in answers Restricted response: more consistent scoring, outlines parameters of responses | • Provide reasonable time limits for thinking and writing.  
• Avoid letting them choose from a choice of questions (You won’t get a good idea of the breadth of student achievement when they only answer a set of questions.)  
• Give definitive task to students - compare, analyze, evaluate, etc.  
• Use a checklist point system to score with a model answer: write outline, determine how many points to assign to each part.  
• Score one question at a time - all at the same time. |
Using assessment criteria

To ensure that assessment is conducted fairly and equitably, standard criteria improve objectivity and minimise variability in marking. Assessment criteria are typically presented in a marking guide, an assessment rubric or matrix. These may be presented in a table format and set out the different levels of achievement. Useful resources are listed below to assist you to develop your skills in assessing student's work.

Your Course Coordinator will provide you with established assessment criteria from which to work. Should the criteria not be available, you may be able to contribute to the development of a marking guide with your Course Coordinator.

Moderating assessment

Moderation of assessment is a quality assurance process that is designed to ensure that assessments are marked with accuracy, consistency and fairness. This is often conducted in pre-marking and post-marking meetings. The RMIT moderation policy outlines the process which assures consistent moderation practices that promote fairness, consistency and reliability of assessment grading and comparability of assessment within courses across multiple markers, campuses, sites and student cohorts (offshore, onshore, online). Assessment results can provide academic and teaching staff with information about the effectiveness of their teaching. The quality of understanding displayed by students through their assessment tasks may indicate how effectively teachers have motivated students and facilitated their learning. Lang (2010) suggests questions that may be useful to reflect upon as part of your assessment review process:

- What did you learn from planning, designing and implementing your assessment?
- What kinds of learners did you encourage/nurture because of the ways you designed your assessment?
- What patterns of student performance occurred across the course cohort? Do these patterns indicate any feedback on your assessment design?
- How/what will you change in the assessment and/or curriculum next time you deliver this course? Why?

If your responsibilities include designing assessment you should consult RMIT's Assessment Policies and Procedures Manual.

Assessment policies & procedures

Academic and teaching staff must ensure they are familiar with RMIT's Assessment Policies which is located at:
http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=m7g41I8jk1bpz
The Guide provides useful information relating to:

- Assessment Policies & Principles
- The Assessment Charter
- Types of Assessment
- Designing Assessment
- Moderation & Validation of Assessment
- Grading of Assessment
- Managing Borderline Fails
- Special Consideration & Reasonable Adjustments
- Supplementary Assessments and Re-sit Assessment
- Applications for Extensions
- Appeals against Assessment
- Academic Progress
- Providing Feedback to learners
- Assessment Procedures
- Feedback from students
- Academic Integrity

**Useful resources**

Support is available from your Deputy Head of School (Learning & Teaching) or equivalent. Your College Academic Development Group or learning & teaching specialist can also provide advice, support and professional development.


Diversity of Assessment Strategies

Thinking about assessment design:

RMIT Assessment policies:
[http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=m7g4l18jk1bpz](http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=m7g4l18jk1bpz)

Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne discusses strategies for academics to explain the process for arriving at a grade to international students who are unfamiliar with assessment practices in Australian higher education:


RMIT Practical Guide to Teaching:
[http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=oq0o018wg4ja1](http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=oq0o018wg4ja1)
References


