**Designing your (on-line) assessments and writing assignment briefs**

Well-designed assessments are characterised by:

**Constructive alignment** where the assignment assesses the module learning outcomes; aligns with course level assessment strategies; and fits any subject benchmarks and/or professional accreditation requirements.

Suggestions

* Use an assessment method that helps to address the learning outcomes and use the assessment results and student feedback to inform the ongoing development of the module teaching and assessment.

**Authenticity** whereby the assignment relates to the requirements of the discipline / profession and is part of the learning process.

Suggestions

* Try a ‘pitch’ for a Marketing module, a briefing note for a Law module or programme notes for a music module etc.
* Consider specifying the employability skills that the assessment assists in developing.

**Appropriateness** when the assignment is designed with the expected level of ability of the students in mind and is something that can realistically be achieved within the word count/time limit.

Suggestions

* Avoid purposely creating over-difficult assignments to frighten students.
* Consider providing more guidance on structure and expectations for 1st and 2nd Year assignments.
* Consider inclusive practices: e.g. offer a (limited) choice of topic or assessment style such as either a 10 minute presentation or a 1500 word essay, for example.

**Minimise the risks of plagiarism / collusion** by developing students’ understanding of academic integrity through the provision of opportunities to practice note taking, paraphrasing, citation and referencing in taught sessions (e.g. as 10 minute activities at the end of seminars). In addition, signpost students to any institutional academic success study guides and workshops.

Suggestions

* Create an assessment that makes it difficult to copy or cheat.
* Avoid setting the same task each year.
* Design tasks that do not focus on regurgitating information; try asking for analysis, reflection, critique, or planning.
* Try using a unique data set/case study for each student.
* Make interim drafts, reviews of progress, and reflective writing part of the assessment.
* Try including verbal assessments, such as vivas.

**Writing the brief**

A well-written assignment brief has **clarity** as a result of using unambiguous language and terminology. It has an uncluttered, easy to navigate structure, and contains as much information as is needed to carry out the task, but no more. An effective brief may also include additional information to scaffold (i.e. break down) the task and provide links to other resources.

Suggestions

* State clearly the type of assignment (essay, presentation etc.).
* Isolate the task description from other text or highlight it in some way.
* Beware of fragmenting the task with other interspersed material – keep it all together and easy to follow.
* Be clear if the student is to play a role other than ‘student’ e.g. management consultant, project manager, researcher etc.
* Be clear about who the audience for the assignment is e.g. CEO, Board of Governors, Film producer, conference poster.
* Use appropriate process language for the level, e.g. report, analyse, evaluate.
* Consider providing a suggested structure or required elements, theories etc.
* Link to the core reading list, referencing guide, study guides and other useful information.

**Preparing our students for assessment**

Providing opportunities for formative learning and assessment during as part of the taught programme makes assessment part of the learning process and enables students to develop their skills in a low(er)-stress environment.

Suggestions

* Use methods such as peer feedback, submission of drafts, reflection on past feedback, essay plans, practice tests and/or individual tutorials.
* Use exemplars to make sure students are familiar with the style of writing, referencing and presentation required in the discipline means they can confidently tackle the task you have set them.
* Try showing students past/example submissions, or create short tasks based around marking sample essays using the criteria and give them opportunities to incrementally develop writing/performing/speaking in the required style.
* Provide clarification by allocating class time for discussion following the launch of an assessment. Taking time to talk through the task with students gives you the chance to answer questions, explain the criteria and make sure that students understand the purpose of the assessment. Try videoing the session and posting it on your VLE to be available to students for reference.