Assessment Tools & Activities

Keep in mind that your choice of assessment tools should always relate back to the stated learning outcomes for the course. Wherever possible, think about how you will grade these activities in advance – otherwise, you might have students submit an assignment and then realize you have set an impossible task for the teaching assistants or for yourself. You can also develop grading rubrics to help with marking student submissions. Here are a few suggestions for assessment activities you can incorporate into a course's online learning environment:

Discussions (face-to-face or online)

- Discussions are a common tool used in online learning environments. As with in-class discussions, providing guidance to students helps to ensure that the discussions are productive and useful learning tools. It helps to give students specific questions to answer in their discussion posts (e.g., Using examples, explain how Freud differentiates between the id, the ego, and the superego.). You might also want to include a requirement for students to respond to one another in the online discussion. For example, you can divide students into four groups (A, B, C, and D). In week one, students from group A post their responses to the discussion question, while students from groups B, C, and D are required to respond to their colleagues' posts. Please see Ideas for Discussion Forums for more on using this type of assessment within your course.

Self-performance review

- Consider giving students a rubric they can use to assess their own performance. You can have them rate themselves on the frequency of their log-ins, their time-management skills, their contributions to discussions, their engagement with their peers, etc. Perhaps you can also ask them to write a paragraph of additional comments about their performance in the online learning environment.

Case study analysis

- In some courses, you can check students' ability to apply knowledge through case study analysis. You can have one ongoing case that you use as an example throughout the duration of the course, returning to it to add to the depth and complexity of analysis. Provide students with this case at the beginning of the term and let them know that they will become really familiar with it. Perhaps you can present the case through video. Each week, students can post their answers to a question about new content by relating it to the shared cases study. To assist with your workload, you can have students submit their answers in groups, alternate the weeks of their posts, or have them rate each other's posts using a shared rubric.

Blog

- Blogs are a common mode of written online communication. They are shorter than essays, but they are a great avenue for students to develop written communication skills because they require regular updates and, thus, make writing about course content a habitual practice. Some learning management systems will allow you to set up blogs that are hosted on your educational institution's secure server and where students are not required to post to public forums. Blogs can be set up as individual or group activities and you can ask students to alternate between contributing their own blog posts and commenting on those of their colleagues. You can also publish the blog posts yourself (or ask TAs to do so) and give students the task of commenting on instructor or TA initiated posts. The university hosts and supports the Wordpress blogging platform, but this does not integrate with Canvas.

Scaffolded project (individual or group)

- You can also set up scaffolded research projects in online learning environments. One week, students can be asked to upload a link to a resource and a description of that link. The following week, they could post a choice of two course concepts that could be applied to explain or analyze certain elements of the resource as well as definitions of those concepts. The next week, students could post one analytic post applying one of the concepts to their resource. The idea here is that each week, students would add to what they did the previous week. This would maintain engagement and break up their tasks, while ensuring that the grading is spaced out over a longer period of time.

Online quiz

- These can be multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, or short answer questions. You can embed them into the course content so that students are frequently checking their comprehension of materials. Within Canvas you can automate the feedback and guidance that students receive.

Wiki update

- A wiki consists of one or more webpages or online documents that can be created or edited by multiple authors. They can be public to the entire internet or restricted to a select group of people (e.g. students in a shared course, or one section of a course). One well-known example is the wiki encyclopedia, Wikipedia.org. Wikis are a great platform for collectively updating information. You can use wikis in many different ways in your courses. You can even create a wiki for your course that has multiple pages for you, the TAs, and/or students can add: (1) course and assignment FAQs; (2) course glossaries and media libraries; (3) an ongoing archive or current content related to the course, such links, subject resources, or news items; and/or (4) spaces for online study groups or group assignments. The university hosts and supports the Confluence wiki platform.

Video or audio creation

- Video or audio creation projects can take a variety of different forms including having students create instructional how-to videos, interview segments, story-based media to illustrate a concept, or even short music videos. Implementing a video / audio assignment requires a lot of planning and clear parameters, especially since some students tend to put excessive amounts of energy into creative projects that can interfere with their other classes. For students who are anxious about working with a new medium of communication, guidelines make the task more manageable. Video / audio creation is an ideal team project where students can share the tasks!

Learning portfolio

- An increasingly common assessment tool is a learning portfolio. If you decide to use this, keep in mind that guidelines are helpful. You can ask students to maintain a weekly learning portfolio, where they select a learning activity they did for the class (e.g. a discussion) and reflect on what they learned through engagement in that activity. You can also ask students to post to an online learning portfolio about how they are applying course concepts in their lives outside the classroom. The university hosts and support the Mahara ePortfolio platform, but portfolios can also be created using blogging tools like Wordpress.

Annotated bibliography

- You can have the entire class contribute to creating a large, annotated online library of academic articles and/or books that are relevant for your course. Students can be divided up into groups and the groups can take turns contributing their annotated additions to the course library. A wiki may be useful for students to post their work for this assessment.

Follow and journal about news or policy issues

- You can have students maintain weekly posts in the online learning environment where they are monitoring, commenting on, or responding to current policy debates or news events that relate to the course content. They can follow one on-going policy discussion or news story and add to their analysis of it each week as they learn new content.

Mid-term/final exam

- You can also use a midterm or final exam method of assessment. You can include a combination of formats, from multiple choice and true or false, to solving equations (that may be difficult in an online environment), to short answers, to matching, to longer essay-style questions. Keep in mind that the kinds of questions you ask should reflect the stated learning outcomes for the course. You can set up these kinds of tests to take place online or in person.