



Alternative Approaches to Assessment

"A teacher's approach to assessment must consist of different methods"
~(Edmunds et al., 2015, p. 135).

Session Description:

Have you been feeling like it's time to try some other ideas for assessment in your classes? Are you and your students ready to explore something new? Please join us to learn about three alternative approaches to assessment including group testing, flexible assessment, and ungrading.

Facilitators:

- Teresa Merrells (Humanities - Linguistics)
- Astrid Heidenreich (Health and Physical Education)

Speakers:

- Simon Magennis (Accounting)
- Ambrose Leung (Policy Studies)
- Vicki Bouvier (Indigenous Studies)



Is it time to try some other ideas for assessment in your classes?

Are you and your students ready to explore something new?

Ambrose Leung (Policy Studies)

UDL For Learning Assessment: Flexible Grading Scheme

As I began assessment as a teacher I reflected back on my experiences as a student and noted that there were various modes of assessment that I appreciated while my peers had preferences which occasionally matched or differed from my own. My personal preferences as a student were to have lots of practice questions, smaller and frequent testing, and to prepare multiple mini- papers to reflect on learning from the class (replacing participation grades which can be difficult for students who are less extroverted). As a student I did not prefer big exams, lots of homework, participation grades, or free flow discussion.

Universal design is when we design something for people with special needs, but it benefits everyone else. We apply this to teaching approaches.

Three main principles for UDL:

- Multiple means of engagement (purposeful and motivated)
 - Multiple means of Representation (resourceful and knowledgeable)
 - Multiple means of action and expression (strategic and self-directed)
- see the PowerPoint for a detailed list of how the Flexible Grading scheme fits well into UDL

Using UDL options (suggestions from Access and Inclusion Services) can have impacts on academic integrity and can also reduce time in class for teaching. This can be problematic in delivery of course material, can add a substantial amount of work in the development of multiple assessments/tests, and working accommodations into your pedagogy. One way to mitigate this is to implement a flexible grading scheme as it reduces the need to accommodate as it provides flexibility for students to engage in the modes of assessment that work for them.

Flexible Grading Process:

- Students do as much as they want in whatever assessment models they can
- The scheme that is selected by the professor that leads to the best final grade for the student.

Example of a flexible grading scheme



Flexible Grading Scheme

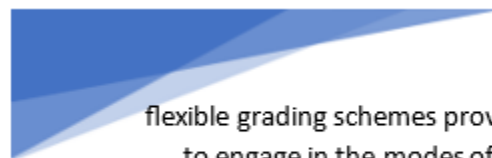
	Scheme 1: 3 quizzes + No final exam	Scheme 2: 2 quizzes + Final exam	Scheme 3: 1 quiz + Final exam	Scheme 4: No quiz + Final exam
Assignment and exercise (40%)				
Comprehensive online assignment	20%	20%	20%	20%
Class exercises OR Self-reflection exercises	10 x 2% = 20%	10 x 2% = 20%	10 x 2% = 20%	10 x 2% = 20%
Quiz and exam (60%)				
Quizzes (30 minutes each)	3 x 20% = 60%	2 x 20% = 40%	1 x 20% = 20%	-----
Final exam (3 hours)	-----	20%	40%	60% (10% oral exam)

This flexible grading scheme supports all the UDL guidelines and principles.

- This optimizes individual choice and autonomy (this supports recruiting interest)
- Varying resources to optimize challenge (this supports sustaining effort and persistence)
- Develop self assessment and regulation (this supports self-regulation)
- Vary the methods for response (this supports physical action)
- Build fluency through practice – having the variety of in class assignments and online.
- Offer information in different forms (supports perception)
- Illustrate through multiple media (language and symbols)

Students Reception of flexible grading:

- Students receive the flexible grading scheme very well.



flexible grading schemes provide flexibility for students to engage in the modes of assessment that work for them which reduces the need for accommodations.

Discussion:

Q: when students do not do the final exam they are perhaps missing out on the cumulative assessment: is this cumulative evaluation achieved through the comprehensive online assignment?

A: Yes, this is the means by which to evaluate their cumulative learning throughout the class.

- During the final exam, students find this very stressful to complete comprehensive exams for multiple courses all at once. Students are very stressed about final exams, and shifting this effort and assessment to a comprehensive assignment reduces stress and lets them work at things on their own pace.

Q: do students leave the comprehensive online assessment to the end?

A: there are parts of the online assessment that they can work on a weekly basis and the teacher provides reminders to do this on a weekly basis. There are elements that need to be deferred to the end of the year when they can complete the cumulative assessment

- The faculty member can also mark this on an ongoing basis and the student can then get feedback throughout the term.

Q: Can students pick between the grading scheme options throughout the term?

A: Students can do as much as they can in all the assessment options available and the teacher selects the scheme that leads to the best overall grade for the student

Q: which is the most popular grading scheme?

A: Scheme 1 – most students tend to focus on this one. Very few opt for scheme 4

Q: What are the self reflections?

A: these can be 2-minute mini-papers in every class and the grade is out of 2. They get 2 if they complete it well and they get 0 if it is not satisfactory completion.

Q: Did this have an impact on your grades?

A: Yes, this did lead to higher grades but that was due to it better designed for all learners and being aligned with UDL principles.

Simon Magennis (Accounting)

Group Testing: One for all and all for one!



Group Testing helps to encourage pre-reading and it helps to identify the problem areas that teachers can focus on to best support students where they need it.

Group learning and testing

Group learning and group testing has been designed for several reasons:

- A student can come into a program with certain expectations and using alternative approaches can alter their perception of the disciplines they are working in. For instance, an accounting student may expect to work independently but, in fact, they do work very much in teams. So, team-based learning helps build these skills for students.
- Team based learning can be used in first year as well as senior year courses.
- It is based on a rigorous approach that lets them think for themselves and requires them to do a lot of work up front and come to class well prepared.
- There are individual and group test components.
- There are formative tests throughout this process and there is preparation provided for students to learn new material.

To start:

We bring students together to do a practice run of individual assessment and then group assessment. Students would answer questions individually and then come together in groups to complete the assignment collectively where they grade themselves using a scratch pad that reveals correct answers.

- Question design in this is very important.
- This can be used to identify which areas the students had difficulty with in the pre-reading.
- This gets students thinking, it gets them to apply their learning.

RAT – The readiness assurance test.

- This is the basis for learning to assess how ready students are to learn the material.
- This is designed to be formative and it does need to be closed book.
- These do promote careful reading in advance: questions should not be based on memorization or recall. You are trying to get students to really understand the concepts and identify the problem areas early on.
 - In disciplines like accounting or finance you really need to read very carefully as there can be real and significant consequences of not reading carefully.

Notes:

- Less is more in terms of pre-reading.
- You can give questions to go along with the pre-reading. If students can answer the questions they have done enough reading.

Benefits:

- Immediate Feedback Assessment Techniques (these are the scratch cards) provide students with clear feedback on where they need to focus their efforts.

Stages:

1. Student Preparation pre-class
2. Individual test
3. Team Test
4. Appeals process
 - a. If a team thought the question was ambiguous or did not fit with pre-reading, the students could appeal it and get the mark
5. Mini lecture/clarification
 - a. This is where you build on the parts that students had difficulty with. This helps to weed out what you as a teacher need to focus in on.
 - b. The faculty member goes around and listens and observes the teams completing the tests and identifies the problem areas.

Challenges:

- Students may not like it as they may feel like they do not know the answers and feel pressure in the group testing setting.
- In practice, when they are working in the field, there is the need to be comfortable with an individual approach and be ready to have it reviewed by peers.

Benefits – what does the literature say?

- This improves test scores.
 - Having the group testing encourages students to prepare better and try harder to be ready for class

- This forces the students to think about what they have read and apply it on a regular basis.
- Meta cognition
- Reflective Thinking
- Reduces Test Anxiety
- Improves student interaction.
- Builds capacity for self-directed learning.
 - Students need to learn to stop learning about grades and GPAs.
- This builds capacity for learning in teams.
- Enhances capacity for problem solving

From SPoTs:

- Teach yourself accounting course
- You need to tell me what to do – I paid for this course
 - I taught them the parts they needed me to know

Discussion:

Q: how do you assign groups?

A: I did it statistically random way but at the same time tried to spread out people based on assumed skill sets (i.e. asking students to stand around the room based on whether they had previous related experience)

Q: Given that there is a grade attached to the team component – is there a way for students to grade each other?

A: Yes, this can be built into assessment. They fill in a group assessment form. You assess your group members half way through and again at the end based on their contribution to the learning and this grade would contribute to 5% of the student's grade

Q: Is there a way to do team-based learning without the multi-choice scratch pads with immediate feedback?

A: Yes, this is possible with incorporating the learning from the pre-reading into the questions. You need to link back to the material they read and give them the opportunity to discuss. The questions also need to be complicated enough that it gives the students the opportunity to discuss: if the questions are too simple then there will be no team learning opportunity as they will all know the answers.

Vicki Bouvier (Humanities)

Decolonizing Grading - Knowledge Validation

~ Looking at knowledge validation: grading does not always show us what students know ~

~ Consider how they are learning or what they are learning? ~

~ Ungrading is part of the process – we can do things differently as opposed to the traditional grading ~

~ We need to understand what we mean by grading before we try to deconstruct it ~

What do you think of when we think of grading?

- Stress
- Fear
- Accuracy

What is the etymology of grading?

- Classification and stratification
- When we privilege learning grading goes against what we are actually trying to do with students

What are the beliefs that lead us to grading?

- Grading lets students get into undergraduate and into graduate programs
- Grades assign value – giving a grade indicates the value of the assessment and motivates students to complete the work
- Students believe that grades are important and so they work for the good grades
- Students think that everything covered will be assessed and what they do and how well they do is driven by assessment
- If it is not assessed students will not do it
- Grading is the quantification of knowledge



Is it time to try some other ideas for assessment in your classes?

Are you and your students ready to explore something new?

What does grading indicate about knowledge and learning?

How does a numerical quantitative process intersect with or disrupt the process of learning?

What assessment practices do you currently use?

How do those align with your beliefs about learning?

Indigenous Oral Systems:

Understanding how we “see”, understand, and interact with the universe.

Learning and knowledge in these systems is more about how you relate to the information, to the world, and to the people around you and your environment.

- Animacy
- Connectedness, holism, and self-policing
 - o Self-policing is where students take responsibility for their learning and faculty are the facilitators and the guides
 - o Your boss may tell you what to do in the real world but normally you need to be self directing. Moving away from grading better prepares students for independent, self-directed agency in the world.

Setting up learning and teaching to facilitate

- We need to create an ethical space where we all can work together to create and build knowledge (see [Dr. Ermine's article on the ethical space](#))
- Consider how you bring yourself into the space.
- There are rules of engagement for the class that are set up at the beginning of the class and these are revisited throughout the term. This helps ensure students all do their part in the assigned group work.

Creating assignments based on how you think your students should learn

- Wiki page development assignments
- Next discussions – where a student creates a synthesis and then creates discussion questions.
 - o Students are then responsible for keeping these conversations flowing

Ungrading in these class environments

- There was a mid-term which was a 50% self assessed mid term and a 50% self assessed final.
 - o The self-assessment model has students consider what they have learned and how they have learned
 - o Students complete the self- assessment in a lab together and can discuss as they complete the work. Then the faculty member will review the self-assessment and can disagree or agree and have a discussion with the student.
 - o Students also need to be able to find their own resources: they can seek the resources they need and they can also seek answers from their peers.
- Have students do the same assignment and so from scratch to finish through the whole term. There is an outline, a rough draft, feedback given by peers to peers, then the final draft and more peer to peer feedback.
 - o Students rely on this feedback from their peers in order to improve
 - o Students really value the feedback and assessment from their peers
 - o In class discussions are really good to help understand what students are, but more importantly, what they are not learning.
 - o Using oral systems to assess learning, like in class discussions, can help tie learning to everyday lived experiences

Benefits of this process:

- Relationships with students are richer.
 - o The grade does not dictate the relationship between the student and the teacher and between the student and their learning.
 - o There end up being more questions from students about content rather than expected deliverables.
- Self Assessment grading places agency in the student
 - o Students can consider their life situation in their self- assessments.
 - o If students are going to be late, they can explain why.
 - o Students see the grading in the course as interconnected and interrelated.
 - o They recognize that their actions matter: showing up matters, missing class matters, building relationships with peers matters, getting outside support matters etc.
- Students can actualize the grade they want to see in the course – ask them at the beginning – what grade do you want and how are you going to get there (then give this to them at the mid term assessment)
- Feedback is integrated throughout the course to support their learning
- Faculty become guides and facilitators rather than being the all-knowing figure. There is content they need to understand but the assignment is the kinetic space where they get to the learning.
- There is always conversation about the assignments in the classroom. There are creative ways to check in on what we know and where we are going (i.e. mentimeter feedback forms) – this is a way of testing but not testing and identifies where students need more focussed instruction.

Considerations:

- This process is a huge amount of work to do for every class – *you need to determine which courses you can approach with self-assessment.*
- It is good because it includes them in the conversation and development of their grades.

Discussion:

Q: how many students were in these classes where this assessment was used?

A: 40 and 30.

- There is a lot of reading here but it is a lot of front-end work. There can be a lot of front-end feedback in the earlier self- assessments.
- Adding the layer of the peer review really helps as well as it can be more meaningful to them than getting feedback from the faculty member.

Q: Asking them to take responsibility and asking them to do it up front – at what point do they accept this?

A: Be very upfront and tell them that this approach is not for everyone and that they are welcome to leave the class early while there is still time to leave without consequence. A few have dropped the class. However, most have appreciated this approach. They can relax and they can justify their approach to their learning where applicable.

Q: What are the assignments that happen through the term and how do you get to the letter grade?

A: in a GenEd course there was a blog and they needed to pick a topic and do a blog and there is feedback throughout. They also need to do their leadership (NEST) discussion and they then give themselves a grade based on these. This is the grade that is input.

- There is less grading for the faculty member but a lot more feedback. So, the feedback becomes the “grade” that they receive from the teacher
- There are other options, there are podcasts (conversations), self-reflections etc.