

Assessment methods

This handout will cover:

- What is assessment?
- Initial, formative and summative assessment
- Choosing methods
- Assessment methods: informal and formal
- Holistic assessment
- Strengths and limitations of assessment methods
- Meeting individual needs
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What is assessment?

Assessment is a way of finding out if learning has taken place, it is a process of making a decision regarding your learner's knowledge and/or performance against set criteria. If learning has taken place, there will be a change in behaviour i.e. improved demonstration of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and understanding.

Assessment can take place prior to, or when a learner commences, whilst they are progressing, and when they complete their learning programme. These are known as *assessment types* and include initial, formative and summative assessment.

Initial assessment can ascertain prior learning, it can also be used to find out learning preferences, and current skills and knowledge. It can be a diagnostic tool to ascertain specific skills of learners and any learner requirements that may need support, such as dyslexia.

Initial, formative and summative assessment

Initial assessment can ascertain prior learning, learning preferences and current skills and knowledge. Formative assessment checks ongoing progress, usually by informal methods devised by the assessor. Summative assessment confirms achievement (or not) usually by formal methods devised by an awarding organisation.

Examples of formative assessment methods are by using questions, quizzes and discussions. This is known as assessment *for* learning as it prepares learners for formal assessment.

Examples of summative assessment methods are using tests, exams, assignments and observations. This is known as assessment *of* learning as it assesses learning has taken place.

Choosing methods

There are many methods you can use to assess your learners, these will depend upon *what* you are assessing and *where*. They can be *informal* to check ongoing progress and/or *formal* to confirm achievement. The methods you choose will be influenced by whether you are assessing vocational skills or academic knowledge.

If learners are working towards an accredited programme, the assessment methods are often stated in the qualification specification. Assessment activities such as assignments might also be provided along with guidance towards decision making and grading.

If none are provided, you will have to devise activities based upon the requirements of the programme or what is being assessed.

Assessment methods

Assessment *methods* are different to assessment *types*, a method is *how* the assessment type will be used e.g. questions for initial assessment, observation for formative assessment, an exam for summative assessment etc.

The method can be formal or informal, formal methods count towards achievement whereas informal methods check ongoing progress. Examples of formal and informal assessment methods include the following: (some can occur in both depending upon the situation).

Formal assessment methods	Informal assessment methods
• assignments • case studies • essays • examinations • multiple-choice questions • observations • professional discussions • projects • recognition of prior learning • reviewing learner evidence • tests • witness testimony • written questions	• crosswords • discussions • gapped handouts (sentences with missing words) • journals/diaries • peer- and self-assessment • puzzles • practical activities • questions: oral, written, multiple choice • quizzes • role plays • simulation • worksheets and workbooks

If you are assessing a programme where the assessment activities are provided, for example, tests or exams, there is often the tendency to teach purely what is required to achieve a pass. Learners may therefore not gain valuable additional skills and knowledge. Teaching to pass tests does not maximise a learners' ability and potential.

Holistic assessment

This is a method of assessing several aspects of a qualification, unit, programme or job specification at the same time. It should make evidence collection by the learner quicker and easier as one piece of evidence could cover several aspects.

Assessment of a learner's skills, knowledge and understanding can be much more efficient.

Strengths and limitations of assessment methods

Depending upon what subject you are assessing and the methods you choose, there will be positive and negative aspects of each, these are known as strengths and limitations. What may be a strength for one subject might be a limitation for another, for example:

Assignments - strengths:

Consolidates learning

Several aspects of a qualification can be assessed at once

Assignments might be set by the awarding organisation who will give clear marking criteria

Assignments - limitations:

Everything must have been taught beforehand

Questions can be misinterpreted if written by someone else

Can be time consuming

Must be individually assessed and written feedback should be given

Assessor might be biased when marking

Observation - strengths:

Enables skills to be seen in action

Learners can make a mistake (if it is safe) enabling them to realise their errors

Can be holistic and assess several aspects at the same time

Observation - limitations:

Timing must be arranged to suit each learner

Communication needs to take place with others (if applicable)

No permanent record unless visually recorded or copious notes taken

Questions must be asked to confirm understanding

Assessor might not be objective with decision

Learner might put on an *act* for the assessor which isn't how they normally perform

Meeting individual needs

If you have learners with any particular needs or requirements, you should consider how you can help meet these. Always check with your organisation regarding what you can and can't do as you may need approval to make any reasonable adjustments.

Some examples of meeting your learners' needs include:

- adapting or providing resources and equipment for a learner who is partially sighted
- adapting the environment for a learner who is physically disabled
- allowing extra time for a learner with dyslexia
- arranging to use another language such as British Sign Language with a learner who is partially deaf
- changing the date and/or time for a learner who works shifts
- liaising with others who could offer advice regarding financial concerns
- providing specialist support staff to improve English and maths skills
- providing the assessment information in an alternative format such as spoken instead of written for a learner who has impaired vision
- using a different location which is more accessible to learners who have to travel far
- using different assessment activities to suit individual learning preferences
- using new and emerging technologies to help improve confidence with computer skills
- using larger print, Braille, or other alternative support mechanisms for learners with particular needs.

Reading list

Gravells A (2017) *Principles and Practices of Teaching and Training* London Learning Matters SAGE

Gravells A (2016) *Principles and Practices of Assessment* London Learning Matters SAGE

Ollin R & Tucker J (2016) *The Vocational Assessor Handbook* (6th Edn) London Kogan Page

Read H (2016) *The Best Assessor's Guide* Bideford Read On Publications Ltd

Tummons J (2011) *Assessing Learning in the Lifelong Learning Sector* Exeter Learning Matters

Wilson L (2012) *Practical teaching: A guide to assessment and quality assurance* Andover Cengage Learning

Website list

Assessment in education - <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/caie20/24/1>

Assessor resources - www.anngravells.com/resources/assessment123

Peer- and self-assessment: www.ncrlc.org/essentials/assessing/peereval.htm

Plagiarism: www.plagiarism.org

Chartered Institute for Educational Assessors – www.ciea.org.uk

Developing Assessment Feedback - <http://escalate.ac.uk/4147>

Initial Assessment Tools – www.toolslibrary.co.uk

Learning Preferences – www.vark-learn.com

Types of assessment -

<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocslid/resources/assessment/types.html>

Methods of assessment -

<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocslid/resources/methods.html>