

**Designing authentic, inclusive and accessible assessments**

Adapted and expanded from [a guide produced by the Centre for Innovation in Education, University of Liverpool](https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/centre-for-innovation-in-education/resources/all-resources/designing-inclusive-and-accessible-assessments.html), according to its CC BY-NC Creative Commons licence. June 2024.

This guide explains how to create inclusive and accessible assessments that minimise the need for bespoke reasonable adjustments, supporting an accessible assessment environment for all students, including those who are disabled (Equality Act, 2010). Inclusivity also means recognising the knowledge and experiences that students themselves bring to their learning, and to be aware of the diversity of cultural perspectives that may relate to the discipline – this is referred to in the guidance as decolonisation.

* Designing accessibly allows all students to engage with challenging, motivating, more personalised assessments.
* Designing inclusively can help students personalise assessments to their needs without additional support, as well as increasing engagement with the topic.
* Using the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principle of ‘Multiple Means of Expression’ aims to give students choice so they choose how they can best demonstrate/express their learning.

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## 1: Review your Programme and Module Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

Programme ILOs are aspirational statements of what successful students will be able to do by the end of the programme. Module ILOs are statements of what students should be able to do when they have completed the module.

* + **Review your current ILOs** ([see SharePoint for your current Definitive Programme Document – DPD](https://bathspaonline.sharepoint.com/sites/DefinitiveProgrammeDocuments-com)) to check that the Module ILOs map to the Programme ILOs.
  + Are any ILOs likely to be unachievable by disabled students?
  + If yes, start the process of revising the ILOs (see [BSU guidance on writing programme aims and ILO](https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/projects/teaching-expertise-guide/curiosity-driven-pedagogies/#d.en.138610)S, and [AGQ SharePoint](https://bathspaonline.sharepoint.com/sites/AcademicGovernanceandQuality-com/SitePages/Modifications.aspx) site for information on modifications).
  + If the ILO is aligned to a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB)’s competence standards: clarify with the PSRB whether the standard of attainment might be assessed in different, accessible ways (see [Step 3](#Step_3)), or if the method of assessment is a key part of the competence standard and cannot be adjusted (highly unlikely).

## 2: Consider the balance of assessments in the modules across your programme

* **Design holistically**: for example, if you are teaching a first-year module, you may see opportunities to help students build assessment skills that will enhance their ability to tackle an assessment in the third year.
* **Vary assessment format** if you discover an assessment type being used repeatedly (but be mindful of the need to scaffold assessment, see [Step 6](#Step_6)). Students are often comfortable with familiar types of assessment; however, varied forms of assessment provide additional learning opportunities and avoid inadvertently disadvantaging students who are better able to demonstrate their learning in different formats (see [Step 3b](#Step_3b)).
* **Avoid assessment bunching**: collectively schedule assessments with colleagues leading other modules that semester, to space out deadlines. Assessment bunching can be stressful for all students (and staff!) and may particularly disadvantage disabled students.
* **Ensure you are not over-assessing**: estimate the workload to ensure that students will not be over-loaded and add these up with all the other notional hours required by the module (20 credits = 200 hours’ workload in total) (see [Step 3c](#Step_3c)). A perceived sense of too much to do can be a barrier for students.
* **Consider the balance of formative and summative assessments** across your module. Too many summative assessments can cause stress due to student over-work; too few can be stressful because the stakes for each are so high, you can help alleviate this with a series of relevant formative assessment opportunities ([see step 6](#Step_6)).
* **Schedule assignment deadlines thoughtfully** to avoid, wherever possible, assessment bunching, religious observances, or deadlines outside of office hours.

## 3: Design & align your authentic, inclusive assessments to the Module ILOs.

Well-designed assessments will enable students to enhance their learning, not just test their knowledge and skills. Within modules, formative assessments provide an opportunity for students to practise and receive feedback on the ILO activity during the module. Summative assessments provide an opportunity for students to show how well they can do the ILO activity and to have this formally evaluated to receive a grade.

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### 3a: Authentic, multi-modal assessments

**Authentic teaching and assessment** includes applied learning - enabling students to understand the work-related application of their subject area. It supports students to engage in meaningful activities, helping them to prepare for real-world challenges, contribute to higher-order thinking skills, foster transferable skills, and enhance their motivation in their learning process. Authentic teaching and assessment:

* Enables students to appreciate the work-related relevance of their subject-discipline.
* Enhances students' engagement in learning.
* Supports professional development.
* Improves readiness for professional and wider life.
* Presents an opportunity for educators to adopt a more personalised and inclusive approach.

“**Multimodal assessment** involves students creating, exploring, evaluating or interpreting multimodal artefacts, as part of a formative or summative assessment task. Examples of multimodal assessment could include students working with:

* Images, diagrams, drawings or maps;
* Oral presentations or performances (live);
* Audio or podcast recordings;
* Video, screen recordings or storyboards;
* Digital stories or animations;
* Infographics, posters, collages, comic strips, memes;
* Blogs, wikis, websites;
* Social media platforms;
* Or any other digital/analogue formats where multiple modes are present.” ([further guidance here](https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/projects/teaching-expertise-guide/creativity/)).

“When students engage in composing multimodal artefacts, the process of choosing and orchestrating, assembling different modes to make meaning, they deepen their learning. One purpose of multimodal assessments can be to build students' knowledge, confidence and skill in presenting specialist content to different audiences, contexts and purposes, making tasks more meaningful and authentic, fostering employability, and boosting engagement. Multimodal composing, since it is usually digitally mediated, can also improve students’ digital fluency.” [[Multi-modal Learning: a practitioner guide. Advance HE](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/multimodal-learning-practitioner-guide)]

Access to the Adobe Creative Suite at BSU, particularly Adobe Express, provides an opportunity for students to communicate in a wide variety of modes and formats.

If you are planning a **collaborative assessment**, consider enabling the class to negotiate rules for compassionate and productive team protocols ([further guidance here](https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/projects/teaching-expertise-guide/collaborative-learning/)).

It is important to address the use of **Generative AI in assessment** through fostering a culture of ethical use, and through the development of authentic assessments. “Strategies are suggested to make assessments more robust, including focusing on process over product, … authentic assessments, collaborations, competency-based tests, and portfolios.” ([Francis & Smith, 2023](https://figshare.edgehill.ac.uk/articles/educational_resource/Generative_AI_in_assessment/24121182)) See also the [[BSU Guidance on Generative AI & Assessment](https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/projects/teaching-expertise-guide/digital-fluency/#d.en.138560)](https://bathspaonline.sharepoint.com/sites/LearningandTeaching-com/SitePages/Assessment-and-Feedback-for-Education.aspx#generative-ai-and-chatgpt).

### 3b: accessibility & inclusivity

* **Can you anticipate any accessibility issues?** If so, can you mitigate them? For example, when setting a presentation, you might give all students choice about whether to record a presentation with a voiceover, or to perform it live in front of the class; you may decide to lengthen the time to do an assessment task for all students.
* **Where possible, offer a choice of assessment format**, so students can choose the format that best enables them to meet the learning outcomes (e.g. submit an essay, blog, or podcast). Rubrics help ensure equivalency and that Intended Learning Outcomes are demonstrable by all format options.
* **Support negotiated content in assessment where possible** (permitting students to focus on their area of particular interest within your discipline). As well as enabling engagement and ownership, this can support inclusivity, decolonisation and accessibility (e.g. allow students with mental health issues who find particular sensitive content triggering to make a choice that supports their wellbeing) thereby reducing awarding (attainment) gaps.
* **Competence standards:** The Equality Act 2010 defines a competence standard as “An academic, medical or other standard applied for the purposes of determining whether or not a person has a particular level of competence or ability.”   
  Competence standards include learning outcomes. [Advance HE guidance](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/student-recruitment-retention-and-attainment/inclusive-learning-and-teaching/competence-standards-and-reasonable-adjustments#questions) notes that higher education institutions “are **required to make adjustments to the ways that competence standards are assessed so that disabled students are not disadvantaged** in demonstrating their competence by the assessment method.” Assessment methods should not be described as competence standards themselves unless this is stipulated by the accrediting PSRB (which is highly unlikely, do not assume that reasonable adjustments cannot be made, always check with the PSRB).
* Further guidance on inclusive learning, teaching and assessment and reasonable adjustments is [available here](https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/projects/teaching-expertise-guide/).

### 3c: Assessment workload and word count equivalencies.

Programme teams, including all module leaders, should discuss their assessment strategy together to ensure consistency across the programme and a manageable workload for staff and students. The assessment word count or equivalent requirement should reflect the level and complexity of the task, and the amount of student effort.

* Notional assessment workload should be considered as a proportion of the overall notional workload for the module. The notional overall workload is approximately 10 hours per credit, e.g. a 20-credit module is normally equivalent to approximately 200 hours (including contact hours / scheduled learning, independent study time and assessment).
* The proportion of notional workload for the preparation and completion of assessment tasks is normally approximately 20% of the total workload for a 20-credit module. Assessment workload will include activities such as gathering, reading and organising information, drafting plans, writing-up/assembly, editing, revision or rehearsal, and delivery time e.g. giving a presentation.

For a 20-credit module (~200 hours), 20% of the workload (~40 hours) is approximately equivalent to a 4000 word standard essay (pro rata for lower or higher credit modules). This may be more or less for different levels of study depending on format and complexity and the overlap between learning activities and assessment (e.g. for practical and research projects); it is recognised that shorter assessment artefacts can be more complex to create. The following examples of word count equivalencies are provided for commonly used assessment methods, based on current (2023/4) practice at Bath Spa University. **These examples are provided for illustrative purposes only and this is not intended to be a definitive or exhaustive list.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Essay | 4000 words |
| Composed music with score and/or audio/visual documentation | 5-10 minutes |
| Recorded music (i.e. performed, recorded, mixed, and mastered) | 5-10 minutes |
| Live music performance | 20 minutes |
| Short-form video | 10-12 minutes |
| Podcasts, audio ads, immersive media content | 10-12 minutes |
| Feature article or blog | 1500-2000 words |
| Social media | 5-7 channels with posts |
| Photograph or artwork displays, posters, flyers | 10-12 artefacts |
| Booklets, leaflets, physical merchandise | 5-6 artefacts |
| Research proposal, small project | 4000 words |
| Group assessment (planning & delivering a live event, with management plan) | N/A |
| Portfolio based studio projects might include drawing, models, reflective work, made objects, research materials etc. Outputs are determined against a project brief and agreed before the start of the project. | N/A |

Other assessment types might form one component of the overall assessment for the module e.g.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Reflective journal or log, lab practical report | 1000 words | ~10 hours | 5 credits |
| Group assignment | 1000 words per member | ~10 hours | 5 credits |
| Individual presentation | 15 minutes | ~20 hours | 10 credits |
| Viva or oral exam | 20-30 minutes | ~20 hours | 10 credits |
| Small group presentation | 10 minutes per member | ~20 hours | 10 credits |

* Different items of assessment should measure different learning outcomes within a module.
* One assessment item can comprise smaller tasks that build on each other and measure the same learning outcomes at the end.

## 4: Use clear assessment instructions and rubrics

* **Specify assessment tasks and formats** before students choose your module, so they can make an informed choice more likely to match their needs.
* Help students understand how you are marking them by using a rubric that aligns with ILOs (see [B](https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/projects/teaching-expertise-guide/curiosity-driven-pedagogies/#d.en.144603)SU Guidance on Grade Descriptors).
* **Ensure your written instructions are in clear, concise, plain English, accessibly formatted and easily located by students**. Lack of clarity is a common trigger for panic in students with mental health issues.
* To make written assessments as accessible as possible, consider how you distribute marks between ‘higher order’ learning, such as content, ideas and critical thinking, and more technical, grammatical elements of the assignment. This does not mean disregarding spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPG); rather, it is about considering the **relative value of different elements** and awarding marks accordingly, taking into account any formal [competence standards](#Competence_Standards).
* **Marking criteria should award marks only for things which are achievable by all students**. Rather than specifying behaviour that can be impossible for disabled students, create a more flexible criterion (e.g. instead of good eye contact, you might ask for good engagement with the audience, which could be achieved physically or through creative digital communication).

## 5: Build-in activities that will develop assessment literacy

* **With first year students, provide class time to explore how assessment works** in the UK at HE level.
* Consider activities that **teach students to use rubrics** to ‘mark’ one or two mocked-up or anonymised (with permission) assessment examples to build their assessment literacy, including their understanding of what success looks like and insights into how to improve their own work.
* **Ask students to identify and include a key piece of feedback from a previous assessment,** together with a sentence on how they are addressing it in this new piece of work. Brief feedback on this when marking their work can help create a dialogic feedback process, encouraging students to make use of the important feedback you give them.
* **Consider asking your students to review any new assessment design**. Even if these students do not subsequently take the assessment, they will develop their assessment literacy in the process of reviewing it.

## 6: Design formative opportunities to scaffold students’ progress to the assessment

* Provide **formative assessments** (low- or no-stakes) for students to develop their ability to use feedback to successfully complete summative assessments.
* Consider designing peer review to increase students’ assessment literacy and reduce the marking burden.

## Links to Further guidance

You may find the following helpful:

* BSU guidance on [Generative AI in assessment](https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/projects/teaching-expertise-guide/digital-fluency/#d.en.139733), including an assessment brief template
* BSU [guidance on writing programme aims and ILOS](https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/projects/teaching-expertise-guide/curiosity-driven-pedagogies/#d.en.138610)
* [BSU Grading Descriptors](https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/projects/teaching-expertise-guide/curiosity-driven-pedagogies/#d.en.144603)
* BSU [Careers & Employability SharePoint site](https://bathspaonline.sharepoint.com/sites/CareersandEmployability-com/SitePages/Learning-and-Teaching.aspx)
* Guidance on [Generative AI in assessment](https://figshare.edgehill.ac.uk/articles/educational_resource/Generative_AI_in_assessment/24121182) (Francis & Smith, 2023)
* [Advance HE’s Assessment & Feedback resources](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning/assessment-and-feedback-higher-education)
* Group-work: the University of Liverpool's [Multi cultural Group-Work Spotlight Guide](https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/centre-for-innovation-in-education/resources/all-resources/multi-cultural-group-work.html) advises on creating inclusive groups and fostering belonging.
* Inclusive Curriculum: the University of Liverpool's [Spotlight Guide to the Inclusive Curriculum](https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/centre-for-innovation-in-education/resources/all-resources/inclusive-curriculum.html) provides guidance on ensuring everyone has an equal opportunity to participate and succeed.

Explore further resources on inclusive, pedagogical and digital education topics by searching BSU’s [Teaching Expertise Guide.](https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/projects/teaching-expertise-guide/)

**Additional reading:**

AbilityNet. (2022) [HE and FE Accessibility Maturity Model](https://abilitynet.org.uk/accessibility-services/he-and-fe-accessibility-maturity-model)

Advance HE. (2020) [Transforming assessment in higher education](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/teaching-and-learning/transforming-assessment)

AdvanceHE. (n.d.) [Inclusive curriculum](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/teaching-and-learning/student-retention-and-success)

Baughan, Patrick (ed) & Advance HE (2021) [Assessment and Feedback in a Post-Pandemic Era: A Time for](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/assessment-and-feedback-post-pandemic-era-time-learning-and-inclusion) [Learning and Inclusion](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/assessment-and-feedback-post-pandemic-era-time-learning-and-inclusion)

British Dyslexia Association (2018) [Dyslexia friendly style guide](https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/advice/employers/creating-a-dyslexia-friendly-workplace/dyslexia-friendly-style-guide)

Gillespie, Helena (2021) [Marking schemes – does inclusive practice lead to a ‘standards’ problem?](https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2021/07/20/marking-schemes-does-inclusive-practice-lead-to-a-standards-problem/) Higher Education Policy Institute Blog

Hanesworth, Pauline; Bracken, Seán; Elkington, Sam (2018) [A typology for a social justice approach to](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13562517.2018.1465405?journalCode=cthe20) [assessment: learning from universal design and culturally sustaining pedagogy](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13562517.2018.1465405?journalCode=cthe20)

JISC. (2024) [Principles of good assessment feedback](https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/principles-of-good-assessment-and-feedback)

McArthur, J. [Rethinking authentic assessment: work, well-being, and society](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00822-y). High Educ 85, 85–101 (2023)

Talbot, C. (2004). Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity: Curriculum Matters (P. Frame, Ed.). SEDA. UK Home Office (n.d.) [Designing for accessibility](https://ukhomeoffice.github.io/accessibility-posters/posters/accessibility-posters.pdf)

Universities UK/National Union of Students. (2019). [Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment At](https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/bame-student-attainment.pdf) [UK Universities: Case studies #Closingthegap](https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/bame-student-attainment.pdf). (May), 51.

University of Plymouth (n.d) [Inclusive assessment](https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/about-us/teaching-and-learning/inclusivity/inclusive-assessment)