



A spotlight on...

Authentic Assessment

Centre for Innovation in Education

Overview

Assessment is considered authentic when it requires students to apply newly acquired knowledge and skills to realistic scenarios. Assessment tasks can then reflect those expected from graduate-level professionals.

Wiggins (1990) defines assessment as authentic if it is realistic, requires judgement, simulates real life contexts and assesses students' judgement in negotiating a complex task, whilst allowing appropriate opportunities to practice and receive feedback on performance.

Benefits

Authentic Assessment:

- Helps develop skills that traditional assessment wouldn't typically cover (Arnold, 2019).
- Closes competency gaps between education and professional life (Ashford-Rowe, Herrington, & Brown, 2014; Cranmer, 2006; Mungal & Cloete, 2016).
- Focuses on higher order thinking skills (Koh, 2017) as students are required to apply knowledge creatively to problem solve.
- Motivates students by providing tasks relevant to professional and everyday life (Coon & Walker, 2013).



Putting it into practice

To design successful authentic assessment tasks, ask:

- What skills and knowledge standards do I want students to achieve?
- What authentic tasks do I need to design to determine students have met these standards?
- What criteria am I looking to assess and what does good performance look like?

Explore ways you might:

- Design tasks to resemble activities expected within professional or everyday environments.
- Present tasks with no fixed solutions.
- Assess factual, procedural and conditional knowledge (Anderson et al., 2000).
- Ask students to communicate their knowledge for a specific audience of purpose.
- Require students to address professional or untrained audiences.

Authentic assessment can drive curriculum design, by using what has been referred to by Wiggins and McTighe (2005) as backwards design. First, by shaping what tasks students will perform to demonstrate their mastery, then developing the curriculum to ensure students acquire the essential knowledge, skills and experience to perform those tasks well.



Clear communication, student involvement in designing tasks, providing helpful feedback and incentives for students to improve are all key elements of good assessment practices (Case, 2013). Clarity is essential when designing authentic tasks – be clear on what you require from students, and explain how tasks are relevant to their learning outcomes. Ensure marking criteria is shared and understood so students know what you are looking for in their work.

Managing expectations

Have realistic expectations – consider the time students have available to complete the assessment and any other demands they have on their time. Encourage students to be free-thinking and creative; this could be through the medium they produce, or freedom to choose tools and technologies.

Involve local businesses, charities or community groups with authentic assessment tasks. Ask externals to offer real world problems to solve, community projects that could involve elements being undertaken by individuals or groups or invite them to provide feedback on tasks. Collaborating with external stakeholders is also great for employability, linking students to future employers. Authentic projects might cross disciplines, e.g. marketing students creating a video might brief music students to produce a commercial soundtrack.

Work with colleagues to consider how authentic assessment can be a journey throughout the programme. Build confidence in students and other staff delivering the tasks, by scaffolding authentic assessment. Small-scale tasks early in the programme will equip students and colleagues to undertake these types of assessment. This concept may be new to students so progressively building authenticity into assessment as the programme develops is key.

Authentic assessment doesn't have to be a large scale, group project including numerous stakeholders to provide a brief and feedback. It can be for example: team projects, professional simulations, case studies, clinical evaluations or writing for and presenting to a specific audience.

Additional resources & references

www.liverpool.ac.uk/centre-for-innovation-in-education/resources/all-resources/authentic-assessment.html



Challenges and resources

- Authentic assessment can be hard to envisage in courses which do not align directly to a specific profession – if this is the case aim to design tasks that will emphasise the key skills graduates may require. Auditing an assessment task (Centre for Innovation in Education, 2019) can be beneficial here.
- Not all students will want to follow the most common career paths, focus on the wider benefits and skills learnt from undertaking the tasks.
- Student support requires thought, consider what skills and knowledge need to be in place before undertaking the assessment tasks, specifically if students are required to deliver in a different format to what has previously been taught.
- Build in design time for yourself, especially if external resources are required.

Support

Creating a rubric ensures all involved with the assessment have clear guidance on how and what is being assessed such as the weight of marks given to the content and to the process (Case, 2013).

If you are looking to embed authentic assessment into your curriculum for the first time, it may be beneficial to seek support from your colleagues who have already introduced similar assessments.

Help and feedback

Can you help us improve this resource or suggest a future one? Do you need this resource in an alternative format? Please contact us at: cie@liverpool.ac.uk