Chapter IV

Ten Key Qualities of Assessment Online

Chris Morgan, Southern Cross University, Australia

Meg O’Reilly, Southern Cross University, Australia

Abstract

Student assessment belongs in the centre of our teaching and learning considerations—it is the engine that drives and shapes student learning. In online contexts, it is argued that although teaching and learning has been dramatically reconceptualised, assessment practices are lagging, and more likely to imitate conventional practices such as end of term exams that encourage rote learning and the dissemination of fixed content. The authors argue that it is essential for online educators to bring the same innovation to their assessment practices that they have to their other online teaching practices. Ten key qualities of good online assessment are offered for consideration and discussion, namely:

1. A clear rationale and consistent pedagogical approach
2. Explicit values, aims, criteria, and standards
3. Relevant authentic and holistic tasks
4. Awareness of students’ learning contexts and perceptions
5. **Sufficient and timely formative feedback**

6. **A facilitative degree of structure**

7. **Appropriate volume of assessment**

8. **Valid and reliable**

9. **Certifiable as students’ own work**

10. **Subject to continuous improvement via evaluation and quality enhancement**

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**Introduction**

A traditional view of assessment is that it is a terminal event—something that follows teaching and uncovers how much has been learned. It is about educational testing and quantitative measurement. It takes the view that assessment is a science that is expressed in terms of efficiency, reliability, and technical defensibility—from the design of tests to the bell curve in which grades are apportioned. At another level, it also implies a view of knowledge itself—that knowledge is relatively fixed, finite and resides with the teacher.

Although there are many vestiges of this assessment tradition flourishing in universities today, there are also many new views of assessment that have emerged in the past 10 or more years. Far from being a terminal event, assessment is moving into the centre of our teaching and learning considerations. Research into student learning has consistently located assessment at the centre of students’ thinking: how they spend their time, what they regard as important, and the kinds of learning approaches they adopt (Gibbs, 1992; Ramsden, 1997, Rowntree, 1977). We have come to reconceptualise assessment as the engine that drives and shapes learning, rather than simply an end-of-term event that grades and reports performance.

Online learning has created new opportunities for learning that require us to redesign our assessment practices (Alexander & McKenzie, 1998). We are challenged by a new medium, a broader and more diverse student population, new forms of interaction and dialogue, and potentially, new ways of knowing. Constructivist pedagogy has moved into the mainstream, and online learning, in its most potent form, is about the drama of the multiple meaning, the contrary viewpoint, the search for credible sources, and the elusive nature of “truth” in a postmodern world. Many teachers are also grappling for the first time with separation from learners, not to mention the complexities of cross-cultural dialogue, collaborative learning, and negotiated course content and assessment.