



Tips for students: assessments

These tips may help your students do better in assessment, and may make your work as an assessor rather happier. Better still, fine-tune and add to these tips before giving them to your students.

- 1 *You're assessed on what you show, not on what you know.* (Of course, if you don't know it, you've got very little chance of showing it anyway, but the problem is knowing it and not managing to show it; just knowing it is far too risky). Whatever form of assessment you're preparing for, practise giving evidence of what you know – writing it, talking it, repeating it, and gaining speed and confidence in showing it when it matters (such as in exams).
- 2 *With any kind of assessment, read the briefing properly.* You're measured on how well you do exactly what is being asked. You're not measured on all the things you might do that aren't asked for. Even in an exam, keep looking back at the question, and make sure you're still answering it and not going off on a flight of fancy.
- 3 *Keep your eyes and ears open for clues and cues.* You can work out a lot about what is going to be assessed from things said by tutors, and from syllabus documentation (look at the intended learning outcomes, for example), and from all the information you can dig up about past assessments or exams. When possible, also talk to some students who've already succeeded on the course or module.
- 4 *Build your own question bank.* Collect and compose lots and lots of short, sharp questions to practise answering. The more often you've answered a question (in writing, in speaking, any way you wish) the faster and better you get at answering it. Exams, for example, really just measure how practised you have become at answering exam questions, rather than how much you know.
- 5 *With coursework, be your own editor.* The mark you get for coursework depends on the edition you hand in. You can do a lot of improving by editing several times before you hand it in, each version getting just a bit better. Editing on a computer is so easy, but save it as something different every time – don't risk losing something you may want to go back to. Besides, if you've edited your material well all the way along, there won't be any obvious errors left (spelling, grammar, and so on). Such errors would have given the impression it's a hasty last-minute attempt – not likely to put any assessor into a generous mood!
- 6 *Get ahead of schedule.* Fend off dangers of crises, illness or anything unexpected getting in the way of your progress. With coursework, it can be really good to draft it really early, put it away for a week or two, then edit it all the better by being able to have a fresh look at what you actually wrote, and seeing how much you can improve it to turn it into what you meant to write. This is much happier than wasting a lot of time putting off the evil moment of getting stuck into it.
- 7 *Talk a lot to fellow learners.* Talk about the work you're doing. Listen to them – you'll get ideas which will make your own work better. Explain things to them – every time you explain something you become better at explaining it, and can do so better when you come to do your own assessed work. But beware – make sure that (if it's coursework) when you come to do it in earnest, it's *your* work. The earlier talking is to help you get your head around it – but your assessed work needs to be about how well your head has now got round it.
- 8 *Use all the feedback you can get.* Take particular note of previous feedback from tutors. Things they liked may well increase your marks in future work. Things they didn't like may well be worth avoiding in future. Feedback needs to be used – otherwise it's wasted. Past critical feedback is really, really useful.
- 9 *Before you hand in coursework, have yet another good look at the instructions.* Check that you've followed these really closely. Check any briefings on word count, layout and, particularly, what exactly is asked for. It can even be worth doing a quick spell-check on someone else's machine, in case (like me) you've accidentally taught your own machine some incorrect spellings!
- 10 *Before you hand in coursework – do one more thing.* Mark it yourself! Apply the assessment criteria yourself. You will often find out, in time, about marks you would have lost if you hadn't done this bit of self-assessment. If you haven't got the criteria, make some up on the basis of experience. Then make final improvements to your work so that it scores marks against all the likely criteria.