



Teaching Toolkit

Role of Assessment

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Role of Assessment

Assessment plays a number of roles in the life of a student, some of which they may be more aware of than others.

It's widely accepted that students' learning patterns, educational focus, and allocation of time will be directly influenced by assessment.

...assessment methods and requirements probably have a greater influence on how and what students learn than any other factor. This influence may well be of greater importance than the impact of teaching materials

(Boud, 1988, p.39)

Assessment does more than allocate a grade or degree classification to students – it plays an important role in focusing their attention and, as Sainsbury & Walker (2007) observe, actually drives their learning. Gibbs (2003) states that assessment has 6 main functions:

1. Capturing student time and attention
2. Generating appropriate student learning activity
3. Providing timely feedback which students pay attention to
4. Helping students to internalise the discipline's standards and notions of equality
5. Generating marks or grades which distinguish between students or enable pass/fail decisions to be made
6. Providing evidence for other outside the course to enable them to judge the appropriateness of standards on the course.

He states that with the exception of the last two points these should occur as frequently as possible to support effective learning.

Other reasons given for conducting assessment include (Brown & Knight, 1994):

Fulfil student expectations

Motivate students

Provide feedback

Provide opportunities to remedy mistakes

Help with module choice/selection

Indicate readiness for progression

Diagnostic tool

Enables grading and degree classification

Performance indicator for students

Performance indicator for staff

Performance indicator for institution

Tradition

Facilitates learning

Approaching assessment

When considering how to approach assessment Harris & Bell (1990) warn against getting too fixated with trying to apply as many new, innovate approaches as possible. Rather than simply replacing the end of term essay with an end of term report, the underlying philosophy of how we approach assessment has to be reconsidered. This means considering the course as a whole and the role of assessment within it. Biggs & Tang (2007) advocate an approach of asking why, what, how, who, and when?

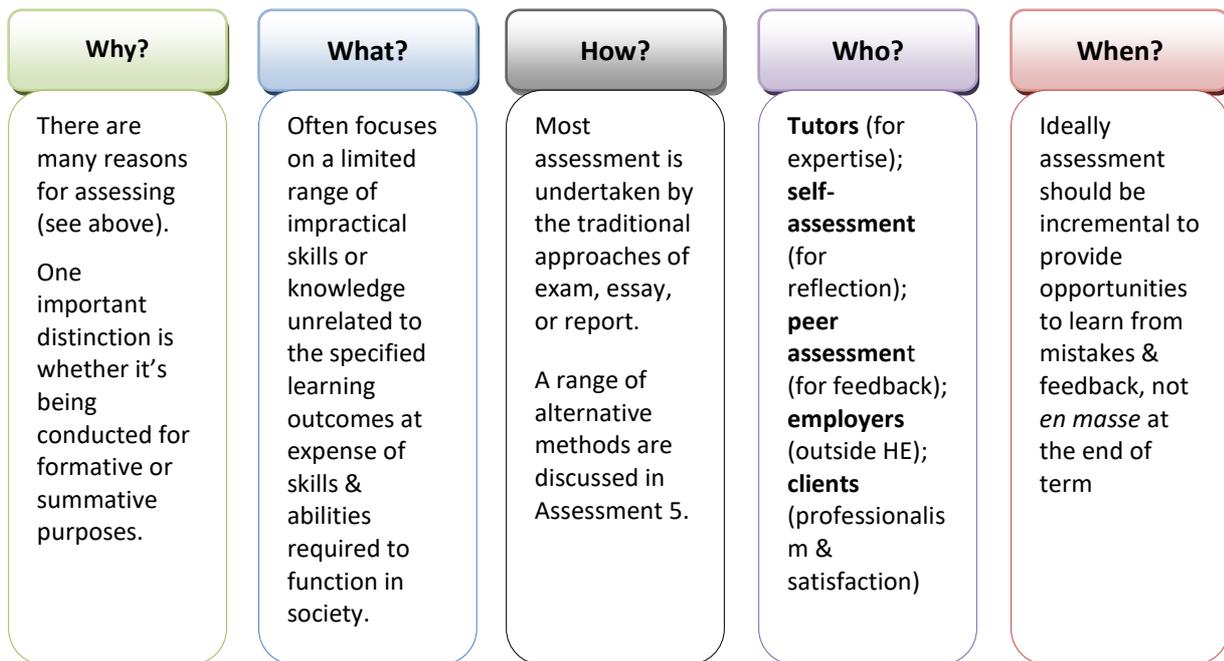


Figure 1: The Why, What, How, Who, & When of Assessment