

ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK TOOLKIT

ASSESSMENT DESIGN

CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT

This guidance is linked to Principle 1 and 5 in the CU Assessment Strategy.

A good teaching system aligns teaching method and assessment to the learning activities stated in the objectives, so that all aspects of this system act in accord to support appropriate learning. This system is called constructive alignment, based as it is on the twin principle of constructivism in learning and alignment in teaching. (Biggs, 2003a, p.11)

INTRODUCTION

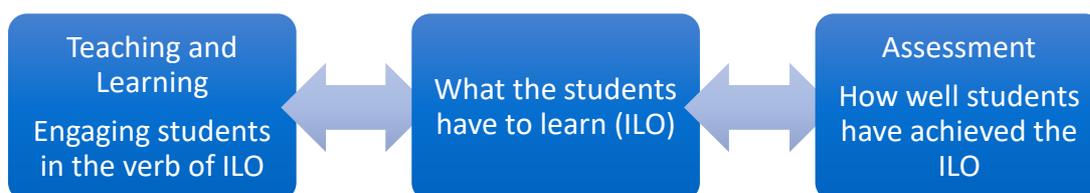
Constructive Alignment is a term often mentioned in Higher Education, and is often considered to be one of the core principles in course design. It is a notion that was developed by John Biggs emphasising the important shift from 'teaching' to 'learning'. Biggs (2003b) describes constructive alignment as follows:

'construct meaning through relevant learning activities. That is, meaning is not something imparted or transmitted from teacher to learner, but is something learners have to create for themselves. Teaching is simply a catalyst for learning...'

'The 'alignment' aspect refers to what the teacher does, which is to set up a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieving the desired learning outcomes. The key is that the components in the teaching system, especially the teaching methods used and the assessment tasks, are aligned with the learning activities assumed in the intended outcomes. The learner is in a sense 'trapped', and finds it difficult to escape without learning what he or she is intended to learn.'

The concept is often depicted in diagram like the one below, emphasising the relationships between intended learning outcomes, learning and teaching activities and assessment tasks.

Figure 1: Constructive Alignment (Biggs and Tang, 2008)



At Coventry, with a focus on a course based approach to assessment design, it is important that when designing our assessment, we focus not only on the module's learning outcome, but also the course's overall learning outcomes too. By looking at the course's learning outcomes, course teams can avoid over-assessing or missing some of the outcomes when simply focusing at a modular level.

HOW TO ALIGN ASSESSMENT TO COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES?

- Course teams should have a clear understanding of the course learning outcomes and map their module assessment against the course learning outcomes.
- Consider the level of the outcomes and align the assessment to the specific level and complexity. The SOLO taxonomy is a good reference point. Chapter 3 in Biggs (2003a) provide a good starting point.
- Consider the use of diverse and innovative assessment methods that will enable your students to address the course learning outcomes. Please see here a list from Oxford Brookes University outlining some different methods of assessment based on different learning outcomes: <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocslid/resources/methods.html> and an A-Z of assessment methods by The University of Reading: <https://www.reading.ac.uk/engageinassessment/different-ways-to-assess/eia-different-assessment-methods.aspx>
- Consider the use of authentic assessment. Thus, can you design your assessment to enable students to experience the real-life situations they will face when they graduate? E.g. Simulation in HealthCare and Aviation are obvious examples, others examples include real-life case studies/scenarios or role playing activities or games.
- The learning and teaching activities throughout the course should align with the assessment tasks. E.g. if the assessment includes practical tasks, do the learning and teaching activities and environment provide practical opportunities for students?

REFERENCES

Biggs (2003a) Teaching for Quality Learning at University. The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

Biggs (2003b) Aligning teaching for constructing learning. The Higher Education Academy Resources.

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/id477_aligning_teaching_for_constructing_learning.pdf

Biggs, J.; Tang, C. (2008) Constructive alignment in Learning, Teaching and Assessment. Keynote at the ATN Assessment conference 2008 'Engaging students with assessment 20-21 November 2008. <https://www.slideshare.net/DianaMQinn/john-biggs-and-catherine-tang-2008-presentation>

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<https://acdev.coventry.domains/>