

Assessment Case Study

Streamlining assessment: Enhancing constructive alignment in response to student feedback

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Course: BSc Geography

Student Level: Undergraduate (Level 5)



AN EXAMPLE OF ASSESSMENT THAT INVOLVES...

- Authenticity
- Group work
- Promoting assessment literacy
- Feed forward feedback

AIM

The lecturer wanted to enhance the degree of **constructive alignment** (Biggs 1996) between the **module's learning outcomes (MLOs)**, teaching and learning activities, and assessment. Although a popular and successful module, verbal feedback from students indicated that teaching activities could support the requirements of the assessment- and the achievement of the MLOs- more effectively.

ACTIONS

The module comprised **two pieces of coursework**: a literature review, and a group presentation. Previously students were able to choose which MLOs were assessed for each assignment. For example, if a student chose to be assessed against the "rivers" MLOs for the literature review, they had to be assessed against the "coasts" MLOs for the group presentation.

Whilst this inclusive approach gave students some **choice in their assessment**, some students later reflected that they would have chosen differently if they had made the decision at a later stage in the module. To try and overcome this, the **module structure was redesigned** in relation to its assignments. Rather than running both the "river" and "coast" components of the module simultaneously, a decision was made to address the topics sequentially.

Thus, the first half of the module would focus on rivers and the literature review, whilst the second half would concentrate on coastal environments in relation to the group presentation. Although this reduced the choice available to students, the decision was made in response to student feedback. **Students would still be able to choose** the specific topic of their literature review.

Meanwhile, mechanisms to **build student's assessment literacy** as part of the group presentation exercise (e.g. requirements for students to ask a question of another group, and to provide feedback to peers), were retained.

IMPACT

The restructure of the module approach successfully **increased constructive alignment** between the module's content, MLOs, and assessment, whilst still meeting the requirements of the Module Description. It also enabled clearer guidance to be provided when introducing the coursework.

This proved especially important following the switch to online delivery in the wake of Covid-19. Rather than having to introduce the coursework across both river and coastal environments, more **explicit and relevant examples** can be used to enhance both the design of the assessment and students' assessment literacy.

An additional benefit is that knowing which MLOs the presentation will be assessing this year has enabled the lecturer to structure the assessment around a **real world example** (see brief on next page). The students are giving the presentation as if they are consultants dealing with a coastal management issue; hence, this is an **authentic approach** to assessment. So far the presentations have generally been of better quality than in previous years.

FEEDBACK

Students comments in the MEQ indicated that they were **happy with the module structure**. The module team have also commented that they prefer the new structure as it gives them the entire week to dedicate to a topic, allowing for further development of ideas and activities. This has been particularly important with the move to online delivery.

MESSAGE TO PEERS

Enhancing assessment and feedback practice is often an **iterative process**, requiring reflection and re-evaluation each time the module runs. By seeking out, and taking on board, feedback from students, adjustments can be made to strengthen the relationship between the teaching activities and assessment underpinning the MLOs, as well as developing of students' assessment literacy.

The lecturer advises peers "...**not to be afraid to make changes**. I inherited the module last year. It had run in the old format for a number years, and I could see the sense in the old structure. However, the experience of running the module made me realise that something needed to change [...] (the new approach) has worked so far."

REFERENCE Biggs, J. (1996). Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment. *Higher education*, 32(3), 347-364.

EXTRACT FROM ASSESSMENT BRIEF: see next page.

EXTRACT FROM ASSESSMENT BRIEF

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Coursework 2: Presentation (50% of Module Mark)

Module Learning Outcomes Assessed:

3. Demonstrate an understanding of the geomorphological processes that operate at the land-sea interface
4. Review the ways in which coasts evolve in response to short, medium and long term changes in climate.

Task and Mark distribution

The Thames Barrier is coming to the end of its design life time. The Government are tendering for a marine consultancy firm to design the future coastal flood defences for London and produce a management plan for the Thames, in order to update the Thames Estuary 2100 Plan. Your task is to produce a detailed plan of how you will protect London from sea level rise, increased in storm magnitude and frequency, the impact of anthropogenic development coastal habitat loss and erosion of coastal landforms.

Using the knowledge of coastal environments you have developed during the module you must present your proposal. It must be evidence based, including reference to scientific studies and reports of schemes from elsewhere, and include specific detail on where and how your scheme will be implemented. Whilst the Government are not concerned about the budget of the scheme at this stage, they have indicated that they are looking for a plan that is realistically achievable.

Within your presentation you should:

- Discuss the main geomorphological features and hydrological processes found within the Thames estuary, including background on the formation of these landforms, their evolution and the main driving processes / energy sources
- Outline the potential impact of future changes in climate on the coastal processes and the surrounding environment.
- Review the influence of human activities on the coastal features, landforms and processes
- Present your management plan

Your presentation should last for **15 minutes** and can either be a **recorded video** or **narrated PowerPoint**. You are encouraged to be creative in your delivery, but are expected to remain professional and present your work to a high standard. Week 12 will be presentation week. You will be required to submit your presentation before *[insert deadline here]*, either as a direct upload or as a word document containing a link to your presentation. You should then post your presentation on the Aula 'community' feed after *[insert deadline here]*. You will be expected to watch the other presentations and ask at least two questions of other students by commenting on their post. You should respond to questions on your post with all questions and answers to be posted by *[insert deadline here]*.

You will be assessed on the content and quality of your presentation, your visual materials, your response to questions and the questions you have asked.

Please note that in group work we reserve the right to viva students and individualise marks.



Students are also provided with a Marking Scheme/Criteria (not included here). Image: Jonathan Dale