

ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK TOOLKIT

UNPACKING THE 10 PRINCIPLES IN THE CU ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

This document looks to unpack the 10 principles of assessment underpinning the assessment strategy at CU in more details and explore how you might apply them in practice.

THE CU 10 Assessment Principle (taken from the CU Assessment Strategy)
1. Undergraduate student progression from assessment as learning in level one to assessment of learning at level 3
2. Every course will include one or more integrative assessment points
3. Synergy of assessment between each level of study and course stage
4. Transparent and simple assessment points with no prescribed minimum or maximum number of assessments
5. Identified course stage assessment outcomes
6. Formative and summative assessment points in all courses
7. All assessments enable equal attainment opportunities for all students; whether home or overseas and regardless of socio-economic background or ethnicity
8. Standard maximum marking turnaround times for each level of study
9. Early and ongoing feedback, including course feedback and feedforward for individual students and groups
10. The opportunity for an individual mark as a contribution of every assessment

PRINCIPLE 1: UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT PROGRESSION FROM ASSESSMENT AS LEARNING IN LEVEL ONE TO ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING AT LEVEL 3.

*How will you explain to your course team the notion of **assessment as learning** in level one to **assessment of learning** at level 3?*

What does this mean?

This specific principle aims to readdress the imbalance between the two key purposes of assessment in order to improve students' overall assessment and learning experience. The first of the two purposes, where assessment's main focus is on providing opportunities to learn and to develop students' ability to self-assess and monitor their own learning is "assessment AS learning". The second of the two purposes, where assessment's main focus is on providing evidence and judgement about student's achievement, is "assessment OF learning".

Assessment has to fulfil these two 'competing priorities' (Carless, 2015), and the danger is that we may end up placing more emphasis on one (end of module/course judgement) and perhaps neglect the other (developing students' learning).

This principle notes that assessment at level 3 will undoubtedly focus on 'assessment OF learning' as we make the final judgement and certificate students' achievement. The key emphasis here is the need to design assessment that focuses on "assessment AS learning" in level 1, where students are given the opportunities to experiment, take-risks and develop their knowledge and skills in their assessment. The assessment in these early stages should prepare students as they progress through their degree and provide students with the 'scaffolding' they need to tackle the high-stakes assessment in level 3.

How can we put this in practice?

- Communicate to students that assessment is more about their development and learning rather than judgement of their performance at level 1.
- Design assessment tasks that allow students to experiment, take-risks and demonstrate their progression, especially at level 1 and 2. This could mean the use of creative and innovative assessment, or giving students a choice to present their assessment in different ways, e.g. a vlog (video blog) instead of an essay.
- Create an environment that is rich in feedback (tutors, peer and self). Continuous feedback is key to student learning, and it can come in many forms. They can be individual feedback from tutors on drafts, group feedback, or peer feedback. Self-evaluation and peer feedback are especially important for assessment as learning, as they develop students' abilities to evaluate own progress and direct own learning.
- Design formative tasks that link to summative tasks. Assessment as learning does not limit the use of only formative assessment. A well-designed formative assessment could help students develop their learning and enhance their achievement in their summative tasks. E.g. an essay plan, a bibliography before a final report/essay.

PRINCIPLE 2: EVERY COURSE WILL INCLUDE ONE OR MORE INTEGRATIVE ASSESSMENT POINTS

How will you, as course leader explain to your course team the concept of integrative assessment? Can you use this to assess course stage outcomes?

What does this mean?

Integrative assessment is assessment that encourages students to bring together their learning from across different modules/levels throughout the course. It can be seen as a way to bring together 'past, present and future learning', 'areas of study' and 'prior situations where learning was used and new situations where it could be used' (Mentkowski and Sharkey, 2011).

This principle is closely linked to Principle 5 and the ethos of a course based approach in curriculum design where the learning, teaching and assessment are designed with a cohesive overview of the course outcomes, rather than individual module's outcomes.

By providing integrative assessment points, assessment is more likely to support the development of slowly learnt aspects of the subject/skills within the course and more likely to be more authentic and meaningful to students, staff and external stakeholders (PASS, 2012). This principle calls for a move away from the disaggregated assessment experience students encounter in a course when assessment are designed in silos (modules) without clear opportunities for students to integrate their understandings and skills.

How can we put this in practice?

- Begin with your course aims and outcomes and design integrative assessment by working with your course team.
- You might design assessment that draws on the knowledge and skills from all (or a selection) of modules at a particular stage of a course. This kind of 'horizontal integrative assessment' could take the form of a complex case study or real-life projects that requires students to draw on multiple skills and knowledge from across the course.
- Another example takes a 'vertical integration' through a bridging module or spine module on a course. This module could capture the achievement of the course level learning outcomes as student progress through the course. For example, it can take on the form of a personal development portfolio that captures reflections by the student on own professional and personal development or a professional development portfolio where students are required to collect evidence against course learning outcomes throughout the semester/year.

PRINCIPLE 3. SYNERGY OF ASSESSMENT BETWEEN EACH LEVEL OF STUDY AND COURSE STAGE

What does the term synergy of assessment refer to? Is this planned in your assessment over the various stages on the course?

What does this mean?

This principle focuses on the efficiency and effectiveness of the entire assessment journey that students will experience at each level and their entire course. This principle is closely linked with Principle 2 and 5 and call for careful consideration on assessment loadings when designing assessment.

Are we over-assessing our students in certain outcomes or skills? Are we repeatedly using the same assessment methods to assess the same skills at different modules? Or are we exposing students to new, innovative assessment without any scaffolding or support earlier in the course? Is assessment designed in a way that they build on each other and the outcomes are not all assessed at the end of the course?

How can we put this in practice?

- Mapping out assessment at each level of the course could provide a clear picture of potential 'bunching' of deadlines or repetition in assessment tasks (e.g. are we assessing students with only essays throughout the course? Could we introduce different assessment to develop students' skills and knowledge in a different way?)
- Use a variety of assessment methods, at the same time, pay attention to the range of assessment methods used, as students will need time to get familiar with any 'new' assessment method.
- Provide guidance to students to develop assessment literacy when using a 'new' assessment method. Please see Guidance document on 'Developing Students' Assessment Literacy' for more information.

PRINCIPLE 4. TRANSPARENT AND SIMPLE ASSESSMENT POINTS WITH NO PRESCRIBED MINIMUM OR MAXIMUM NUMBER OF ASSESSMENTS

What does transparency and simplicity mean in assessment practice? How can you develop a shared understanding with your students on what is required in the assessment?

What does this mean?

Transparent and simplicity in this principle refers to the clarity of the assessment expectations, the task(s) and criteria. As academics, we are familiar with the language we use within academia and our familiarity with our courses and subject disciplines can sometimes act as an impediment to assessment transparency from the students' perspective. What is clear to us might not be clear to our students. Assessment literacy plays a key role here in enhancing the transparency in assessment.

We should avoid any 'hidden agenda' within assessment tasks. For example, the items of evidence required within a portfolio should be clearly outlined and communicated to students.

How can we put this in practice?

- Provide students with a clear assessment brief, criteria and marking rubric is a good starting point. However, in order for students to understand and engage with the often, implicit nature and wordings used in assessment criteria and rubrics, students should be given the opportunity to actively engage with the criteria. Please see Guidance document "Writing and Engaging Students with Assessment Briefs - Criteria and Rubrics" for more details.
- This can be achieved by providing students with model exemplars from previous cohorts across different grades, or asking students to mark example assessment using the marking criteria, along with a debriefing session in class.

PRINCIPLE 5. IDENTIFIED COURSE STAGE ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES

Do you have clear course stage assessment outcomes? Does all the assessment from the different modules within your course engage students with the overall course outcomes?

What does this mean?

For each stage of the course, there are specific outcomes that you would want your students to achieve. It is important that these outcomes are clearly outlined within your course team so the assessment within the modules, there is a common goal or vision for the students at that particular stage of the course. This is based on the course based approach in curriculum design where the learning, teaching and assessment are designed with a cohesive overview of the course outcomes, rather than individual module's outcomes.

How can we put this in practice?

- Move the focus on assessment design away from module outcomes to your course aims and outcomes by working with your course team.
- Consider what your 'ideal' graduate would look like and your assessment across the course enable students to develop into this 'ideal'.
- Design and make use of integrative assessment – please see Principle 2.

PRINCIPLE 6. FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT POINTS IN ALL COURSES

What is the relationship between formative and summative assessment? Can you integrate formative assessment with summative assessment?

What does this mean?

This principle advocates that all courses should have clear formative and summative assessment. Formative and summative assessment serves different purposes. Formative assessment is generally low-stakes, with the aim to provide opportunities for students and staff to develop and progress their learning through feedback and feedforward. Summative assessment on the other hand is generally high-stakes, with the aim to evaluate student learning at a given point to see if they have achieved specific standards.

Formative and summative assessment are not mutually exclusive. Students should be given the opportunity to gain feedback through formative tasks. However, they are more driven by summative assessment as it is associated with grades. Careful design in the course where formative assessment point feeding into the summative tasks could enhance student learning through meaningful feedforward to the summative tasks.

How can we put this in practice?

- Design formative assessment throughout the course and make clear to students how the formative tasks link to the summative tasks. E.g. an essay plan/draft essay for the summative task as the formative task, so tutors/peers could provide feedback and feedforward to students.
- To engage students further with the formative tasks and feedback, consider asking students to identify how they have incorporated the formative feedback into the summative task.

PRINCIPLE 7. ALL ASSESSMENTS ENABLE EQUAL ATTAINMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL STUDENTS; WHETHER HOME OR OVERSEAS AND REGARDLESS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OR ETHNICITY

Does your assessment provide equal opportunities for all students to demonstrate their ability to meet the learning outcomes? Is your assessment accessible, engaging and relevant to all?

What does this mean?

This principle asks course team to consider the diverse nature of their student profile and inclusiveness of the assessment at the course design phase, rather than making individual adjustments later in the course (Hockings, 2010). While reasonable adjustment might need to be considered depending on the situation, this principle encourages course team to design assessment that is inclusive and minimise the need for reasonable adjustment.

Inclusive assessment does not mean you will be 'dumbing down' your assessment to benefit certain groups of students. Instead, it should 'benefit most learners without losing the requirement that assessment should aid learning and should demonstrate the acquisition of the module or course learning outcomes' Waterfield and West (2006, p.219).

How can we put this in practice?

- Review the assessment diet across the course and consider increasing the diversity of assessment methods rather than relying on 'traditional' essay or reports across the whole course.
- Incorporate choice in your assessment, e.g. providing a number of questions/topic for students to choose from, or different ways of presenting their work, e.g. video/audio/presentation instead of written work.
- When introducing choice or diverse assessment methods, prepare and support students by developing their assessment literacy through examples/pre-assessment sessions.

PRINCIPLE 8. STANDARD MAXIMUM MARKING TURNAROUND TIMES FOR EACH LEVEL OF STUDY

How can you ensure a consistent maximum turnaround time, especially when you have a large cohort? How can you ensure your feedback are timely?

What does this mean?

Feedback is most effective to students when it is timely (Gibbs and Simpson 2005), i.e. not long after students have submitted their work, so they still care about the work they have done and have not forgotten or moved on to another task yet. The University has a standard maximum marking turnaround times for each level of study and course team should be made aware of these to ensure that students are receiving a consistent experience.

How can we put this in practice?

- Provide group feedback in class, or in the form of audio/video feedback
- Consider different assessment tasks, such as formative tasks, portfolio or presentation rather than essays, where earlier feedback could be provided to reduce the loading of marking at the end. Please see Principle 9 for more details.

You can find more information in the following Guidance documents:

- Methods in giving feedback
- Engaging students with Feedback

PRINCIPLE 9. EARLY AND ONGOING FEEDBACK, INCLUDING COURSE FEEDBACK AND FEEDFORWARD FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS AND GROUPS

How can we engage students with feedback and feedforward? When is the best time to provide students with feedback?

What does this mean?

Following from the last principle, other than timeliness of feedback, in order for students to engage and act on the feedback, the feedback should be provided early enough and enable students to continuously monitor their own progress and development. Feedforward refers to comments that students can make use of to improve their next tasks/learning in the future. It is important that the feedback we provided does not only focus on corrections of error but provide advice on how students can improve.

The term ipsative feedback (Hughes, 2012) refers to feedback that focuses on student's personal development and progress, is worth considering here, as part of the feedback and feedforward that we provide our students.

However, feedback does not have to come from tutors alone, consider the use of self and peer feedback and engaging students in a dialogue rather than assuming a unilateral mode of feedback.

How can we put this in practice?

- Design assessment with formative assessment point throughout the course so students are provided with early and timely feedback that they can action in the next task. (Please see Principle 6)
- Introduce peer and self-feedback opportunities and engage students in dialogue about assessment criteria, rubrics and the role of feedback and feedforward.

You can find more information in the following Guidance documents:

- Methods in giving feedback
- Engaging students with Feedback

PRINCIPLE 10. THE OPPORTUNITY FOR AN INDIVIDUAL MARK AS A CONTRIBUTION OF EVERY ASSESSMENT

How can we promote fairness in group assessment and encourage students to participant in group work?

What does this mean?

This final principle focuses on group work and the issue of fair contributions when marking group work. While group work a key part of student's learning, very often students working in groups complains of freeloading peers, and understandably, students can be demotivated by group projects when they feel that their grades are heavily dependent on their team members who might not be contributing equally.

It is important to therefore look at how we can assess group work. We need to be able to assess individual's contribution as well as the group's performance. It is often fairer if we assess the process as well as the product. In other words, how the students work and progress towards the work they produced.

While a clear assessment criteria is important for every assessment so students understand what is expected, it is perhaps even more so when it comes to group work in order to communicate clearly to students the different aspects of product and process that they are being assessed. An example of group work rubric can be found here:

<https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/examples/courselevel-bycollege/hss/tools/jeria.pdf>

How can we put this in practice?

- Encourage and support students to peer and self-evaluate their group contribution in order to allocate an individual grade for their work. Students will need training and practice to do this, a clear grading rubrics and a peer learning culture is crucial in order to encourage open and fair discussion.
- Decide what percentage will be based on assessments of product vs. assessments of process and communicate this early to students. Or consider discussing this and the weighting with students to agree on an assessment rubric.

References:

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