



Selecting Online Alternatives to Common Assessment Methods

Developed to support the Irish higher education community in the initial weeks of the move to online/remote teaching and learning in March 2020

While some assessment components do not need significant adjustment in the move to online (including at-distance) learning, others require some additional thought and may need to be replaced/significantly adjusted. The National Forum conducted a review of assessment practices across Irish higher education in 2016, exploring 487 modules and 1260 separate assessments across 30 programmes of study. This review highlighted the most commonly used assessment methods across the sector. In support of the move to online/remote assessment, this resource provides some indication of the kind of modifications that could be made for these common assessments. It is not an exhaustive list, but we hope it may be helpful in considering some of the available options.

Overall Considerations

- Before selecting an alternative assessment method for the online environment, please ensure you read the ten considerations for alternative assessments and the ten ways to make online assessment accessible and inclusive¹.
- It is important to keep the assessments **as familiar as possible for students**. There will be time to innovate in the future but, in the current context, the less complex and more familiar the assessment is, the better able students will be to adjust and succeed.
- In choosing alternative assessment methods, it is important to aim for the **achievement of the same learning outcomes**.
- With an alternative assessment, it may be that grading/marking criteria, rubrics or feedback procedures will need to be altered. It is crucial that you **discuss any grading/marking changes with colleagues** to ensure they are coherent and aligned. The detail of the revised grading/marking approaches should also be shared with students in advance of the assessment taking place.
- Before selecting an alternative assessment, **familiarise yourself with any institutional directives/recommendations** regarding, for example, selection of alternative assessments during COVID-19 or how students with limited/no internet access can be accommodated.
- Informed use of your institutional VLE will be crucial as assessment moves online. Be sure to **familiarise yourself with your VLE** and the options available to you and your students, such as how assessments can be recorded/stored, any file upload limits or what applications/software is supported by your institution.

Alternatives to formal examinations

- Assignment alternatives, such as an essay or report, which are familiar to students and can be uploaded by students through the institutional VLE, may be designed in such a way that they can reach the learning outcomes intended by the exam. It is important to give students as much time as possible to complete and submit this assignment. Alternative assessments such as this give the opportunity for students to complete the assessment in their own time and allow for constraints such as extra caring responsibilities or difficulties with internet access. Such alternatives are also easier for institutions to implement as they do not require exam timetabling.
- An open-book/take-home exam, with a time-limited deadline for online submission through the institutional VLE, may also be an alternative that students can complete in their own contexts. The original exam questions may need to be modified to ensure a focus on the application, synthesis, critique or evaluation of information, with less emphasis on recollection.
- Online quizzes may be used as alternatives to MCQ-style exams. Guides for how to create tests and include relevant question options are likely to be available in your VLE or from your institutional website. To ensure the academic integrity of online quizzes, it is advisable to randomise questions, and/or use short-answer questions to request a rationale for the selection of the multiple-choice responses.

Alternatives to in-person interview/oral exam

- Interviews/oral exams can be conducted online using video-conferencing options available through your institution, such as Google Hangouts Meet, virtual classroom, Zoom, Adobe Connect or Microsoft Teams. In using video conferencing for assessment, it will be important to ensure a recording is kept of the assessment in case it is needed for external examiners. Students will also need to be made aware that the interview/exam is being recorded.

Note: As with in-person examinations, in the case of open-book/take-home exams, online quizzes or online interviews/oral exams, which are completed within a short/defined timeframe within the examination period, **it will be necessary to maintain clear communications with those in the institution responsible for central timetabling** to avoid timetable clashes.

Online options for dissertation/report/essay

- These assessment types can be submitted through the institutional VLE, in line with standard institutional practice.

¹ See www.teachingandlearning.ie/publication-search/?fwp_format=insight



Online options for assessed group work

Depending on the nature of the learning outcomes to be achieved, a number of online group work assessment options may be suitable:

- A group report or similar group assignment may be submitted online in the standard way.
- Students could be asked to create a group presentation, for example, using a shared PowerPoint presentation with audio/notes or a digital poster with associated audio/notes.
- Wikis, if available and familiar, are a popular way to facilitate online group work due to the ability to both see the level of individual contributions and to encourage collaboration. It is also possible for feedback to be posted on the wiki as it progresses.
- Live discussions can take place during online lectures through the VLE or other applications supported by your institution, e.g. Microsoft Teams, Zoom, virtual classroom, Google Hangouts Meet, Adobe Connect. Discussion can involve the audio and chat functions.
- An online discussion forum could be used to allow for discussion/debate on a given topic. Most VLEs have discussion forum options.

Note: As you plan online group discussions, **it will be important to be clear with students what is being assessed and how.** Any group discussion/contribution that is being assessed will also need to be recorded and students will need to be made aware of this.

Peer assessment

- Some VLEs have the functionality for students to peer assess or peer review each other's work, usually done anonymously. Check availability of these tools in your VLE.

Alternatives to in-class presentations

- It may be possible for the student(s) to present live online through the VLE or other applications supported by your institution, e.g., Microsoft Teams, Zoom, virtual classroom, Google Hangouts Meet, Adobe Connect.
- Students could create audio/visual for their presentations using their own mobile devices or create a narrated slideshow using, for example, PowerPoint.

Alternatives to paper-based reflection/journal/portfolio

- A standard text-based reflective journal, or similar document, can be uploaded through the institutional VLE.
- A blog might be a suitable way for students to record and share their reflections online over time.
- If artefacts/evidence are required as part of a reflective assessment, students can be asked to upload relevant submissions in the form of text-based documents/visuals/video/audio/multimedia representations.
- If it is a familiar activity to you and your students, an ePortfolio can act as a digital alternative to a hard-copy portfolio and allow for various multimedia artefacts, including reflective texts, audio, visuals and recordings to be collected on one platform. Your institution is likely to have recommended ePortfolio software options.

Alternatives to in-person work practice assessment

- It may be that, due to licence to practice regulations or difficulty in finding a suitable alternative, a work placement assessment needs to be deferred to a later time. Such decisions will need to be discussed at institutional level, in collaboration with the relevant professional body.
- In the meantime, it is worth considering whether any learning outcomes from the given module can be achieved without students being physically present – could a theoretical assignment, reflection on learning, or practical report, for example, allow some of the learning outcomes to be reached, while others are deferred to a future module?

Alternatives to in-class practical/oral assessments

While in some instances there may not be a viable online alternative for practical/lab-based assessments due to the necessity to access specialised equipment, in some cases alternatives may be possible:

- Online simulations may be used to allow students to learn and be assessed on practical knowledge, for example with students given access to datasets that they are asked to interpret.
- It may also be possible for students to upload video recordings of themselves performing a practical task, if such a task can be safely and appropriately replicated in their home setting.
- Audio recordings could be used to replace oral assessments, such as an in-class language test, or to allow students the opportunity to talk through their response to a stated problem/scenario.

Useful Case Studies and Resources

The following are links to some case studies and resources from the Irish context that may be useful in considering alternative assessment methods.

The case studies, although implemented in a time frame much longer than that currently available, provide useful relevant background and detail, as well as reflections on experience from across the Irish higher education community. Remember, an alternative assessment should be what is familiar to you and your students at this time.

Be sure to also check to see what resources/guides your own institution may have prepared for staff, tailored to your institutional VLE and context.

Video conferencing

[Micro-lesson and resources for video-conferencing](#)

All Aboard

Open-book exam

[Case study of using open-book exam in computer programming](#)
TU Dublin

Online quizzes

[Case study of use of online quizzes in technology/engineering](#)
TU Dublin

[Case study of use of online quizzes in electronic engineering](#)
TU Dublin

An online catalogue of tests for use in mathematics education available on the [TEAME website](#)

Online group work/discussion

[Screencast on using wikis as a collaborative writing tool](#)

Take 1 Step

[Case study of use of wikis for group work in event management](#)

TU Dublin

[Case study of use of wikis for group work in chemistry](#)

TU Dublin

[Case study of use of multimedia for group work in biochemistry](#)

TU Dublin

[Guidance for online class and group activities](#)

#OpenTeach

[Guidance on using discussion forums](#)

#OpenTeach

[Micro-lesson on having discussions online using discussion boards](#)

TEL Tools

Replacing in-person presentations

[Micro-lesson on facilitating student live presentations and feedback](#)

TEL Tools

[Case study of using storytelling for online presentations in applied languages](#)

TEL Tools

[Resources on using digital audio to support learning](#)

All Aboard

[Video explaining how audio can be added to a PowerPoint presentation](#)

Mary Immaculate College

ePortfolios

[ePortfolio case study in sociology](#)

DCU

[Learning journal ePortfolio case study in geography](#)

DCU

[Electronic Preparation for Professional Practice](#)

– using ePortfolios in professional practice

Reflective activities

[Micro-lesson and resources related to blogging](#)

All Aboard

[Resources on creating and writing a blog](#)

Take 1 Step

[Case study of using multimedia for reflective practice and peer feedback in product design](#)

TU Dublin

[Case study of using blogs for lab write-ups/mini projects in electronic engineering](#)

TU Dublin

Work placement/practicals

[Case study of using mobile technology for clinical work-based assessment](#)

TEL Tools

[Case study of using blogs for work-based assessment and peer feedback](#)

TU Dublin

The [GeoLab Virtual Microscope](#) contains digital artefacts that can be used to create online practical assessments in the field of geology

[Case study of video use for practical tests in nutrition and health](#), TU Dublin

A general overview of technology-enhanced assessment in science and health practical settings is available [here](#).

Feedback

[Website of case studies and information on digitally-enabled feedback approaches](#)

Y1 Feedback

Accessible and inclusive assessment and feedback

[Resources and advice for making distance learning accessible and inclusive](#)

AHEAD

[Universal design case studies of inclusive assessment and feedback](#)

IADT and UCD

Key Sources

[Guidance for Designing Alternative Assessment Methods](#) and accompanying webinar, UCD Teaching and Learning

[Contingency planning: exploring rapid alternatives to face-to-face assessment](#), Sally Brown and Kay Sambell

[Exemplars and case studies of technology-enhanced assessment in FE and HE institutions](#), Rob Lowney and Suzanne Stone, DCU, and IUA Enhancing Digital Teaching and Learning Project

[Assessment Toolkit](#), TU Dublin

[Assessment Toolkit](#), TU Dublin

National Forum-funded projects from which resources were drawn

[All Aboard](#), conducted by NUIG, UCD, UL, Mary Immaculate College

[ePortfolioHub](#), conducted by DIT, ITB, IT Tallaght, Hibernia College

[ePPreP](#), conducted by UCC, IT Tralee, TCD, UCD, UL

[GeoLab](#), conducted by UCC, UCD, TCD, NUIG, Open University

[Take 1 Step](#), conducted by UL, LIT, Mary Immaculate College

[TEAM](#), conducted by DkIT, AIT, IT Sligo, IT Carlow

[TEAME](#), project conducted by UCC, CIT

[TEL Tools](#), conducted by CIT, DIT, UCD, IT Tralee, UCC

[#OpenTeach](#), conducted by DCU

[Y1Feedback](#), conducted by MU, AIT, DCU, DkIT

This resource was compiled in collaboration with Prof Geraldine O'Neill,

UCD, who led the National Forum Enhancement Theme 2016-18, focused on Assessment Of/For/As Learning.

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