

## A-Z University Teaching & Learning

### Assessments – testing and reflecting on learning results

#### Different functions of assessments

In university teaching, assessments have several different functions. As diagnostic instruments they give feedback about teaching and learning processes; their evaluative character enables them to serve as a basis for selection in the education system. Students who successfully complete exams receive a degree and can go on to a higher level of education. Thus, assessments also have a prognostic function because they allow us to make assumptions about students' future academic careers.

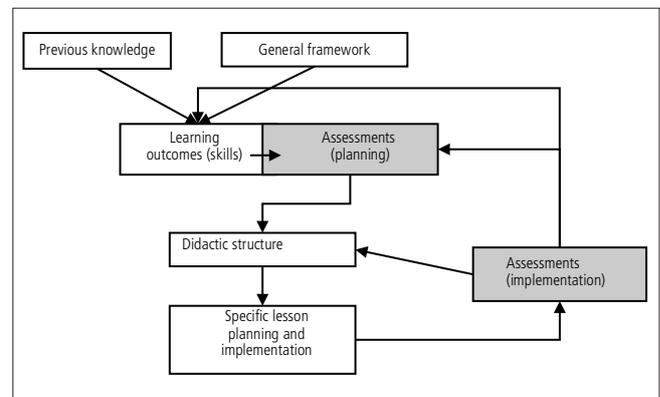
But assessments are also a motivator for studying, a means of exerting pressure in the classroom, initiation rites for admission into the scientific community, and gateways to certain social positions.

Within the context of the Bologna system (especially the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, ECTS), graded assessments are a necessary condition for the allocation of credits. Each teaching/learning unit for which ECTS credits can be earned must include an assessment. This means that there are generally more assessments under the Bologna requirements than before the academic reform.

#### Assessments and teaching/learning processes

Although assessments are often seen only as a necessary evil, they are of central importance to teaching and learning processes. Students often learn above all that which they will be tested on. And the relevance of every lesson sequence and every didactic method for the assessment must be shown. In order to design appropriate assessments and incorporate these into the course, one should examine one's own teaching concept, consider students' various possible learning styles, and formulate learning objectives in terms of skills descriptions.

The following aspects of assessments can be integrated into a simple university teaching curriculum model.



In this model, assessments are not merely afterthoughts that are developed and implemented after classes are over. Rather, as soon as learning outcomes (formulated as academic skills) are defined, it is clarified how they will be tested. From this, the didactic structuring and specific design of the course (or module) are derived. The assessment results, in turn, let us draw conclusions and explore customization options for refining the learning outcomes and didactic concepts.

#### Quality features of assessments

The quality of assessments is reflected in the contribution they make to the students' successful learning processes. If the type and curricular embedding of assessments help students to obtain and show proof of academic skills, then they fulfill their purpose.

In this sense, assessments are also measurements and they must therefore satisfy the central test-theoretical quality criteria:

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- An assessment must deliver results that are independent of the examiner (objectivity).
- An assessment is reliable when it measures the tested feature (skill) with a high degree of accuracy (reliability).
- An assessment delivers valid measurement results when it actually measures that which it claims to measure (validity).
- An assessment must have a clear framework (grading scale) that enables the interpretation of the measurement results (standardization).
- A test should deliver objective, reliable, and valid results within a reasonable expenditure of human and material resources (economy).

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### Types of assessments

There are many different types of assessments that can be administered at different points in time. Achievement can be measured by written or oral exams, presentations, papers, poster presentations, online postings, learning journals, etc. Assessments can be made in different stages during the semester, at the end of the lecture period, or following the end of the independent or group study.

Crucial for selecting the appropriate type and most favorable time are always the skills that the teaching/learning unit aims to impart. Assessments should create action situations that are as authentic as possible in order to determine the degree of achievement of complex academic skills as accurately as possible. Complex analytical capabilities, for example, can only be assessed to a limited degree by pure knowledge tests.

Naturally, when choosing the type and time of assessment, conditions such as examination rules and standards and available resources must also be taken into account.

### Literature

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