

Assessment guidelines for Lingnan University

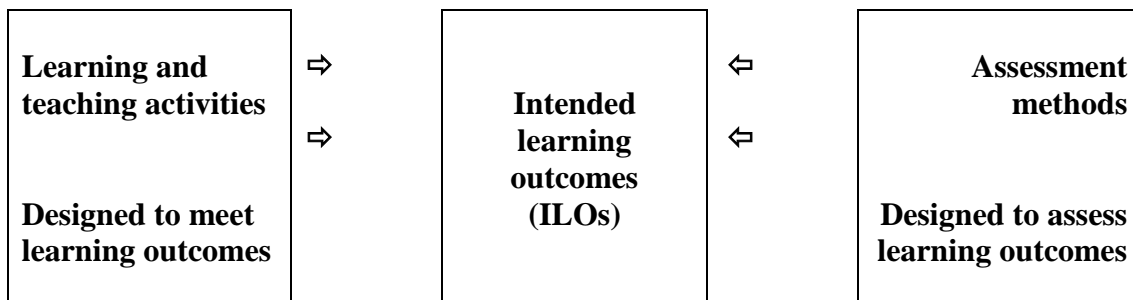
As one part of a complex system of interactions between teachers and students, assessment is an integral part of the educational process. Fair, transparent and effective assessment helps to ensure quality learning, provide evidence of the achievement of student learning outcomes, and discriminate between different levels of student academic performance. Striving for effective, consistent, fair and transparent assessment at all levels is essential for the continuous improvement of the educational experience of students at Lingnan University.

An outcome-based approach to teaching and learning (OBATL) is grounded in a set of pedagogical and institutional values and principles that articulate clearly stated “intended learning outcomes” (ILOs) with a set of assessment tasks (methods) for measuring them (see Figure 1). OBATL argues that teaching and learning are most effective if they are based upon a high level of mutual awareness between teachers and students.

This document outlines some well-established best practices for continually improving alignment between assessment and the intended learning outcomes in all courses and programmes of the University.

Figure 1: Curriculum Alignment (adapted from Biggs, 1999, p 27)

Curriculum alignment is a matter of learning and teaching activities, including assessment methods, being aligned with the intended learning outcomes.



General principles for effective assessment

1. These assessment guidelines are based upon the principles inherent in good teaching practice. They aim to ensure that for a degree programme :
 - (a) assessment tasks are aligned with its ILOs and those of the constituent courses;
 - (b) its students understand in advance what is expected of them in the programme;
 - (c) fairness is upheld in the administration of assignments and assessment tasks in all courses of the programme; and
 - (d) evidence is available for (a-c) above for the purpose of quality assurance and enhancement.

The guidelines affirm the teacher’s academic freedom in constructing and delivering the course content, while recognizing that the taught curriculum is fundamental to the student experience and should align well with the goals of the individual programme and the University as a whole. This helps the University to justify clearly the alignments among

the intended learning outcomes set by each programme and its constituent courses, the discipline-specific contents involved, and the design of assessment tasks and other appropriate student learning activities.

Curriculum alignment implies a number of principles:

- 1.1. It is important that students know and understand the criteria the teacher has set for grading specific assignments, and that grading adheres to those criteria.
- 1.2. It follows that the marking criteria and procedures and other assessment processes in a course need to be clear to teachers and students; students in particular need to be given sufficient and timely information about them.
- 1.3. A liberal arts curriculum seeks to develop students' graduate attributes. Students should be expected to evaluate, articulate and apply a wide range of high-level cognitive skills and values as well as subject-based knowledge.
- 1.4. It follows from 1.3 that assessment tasks should have sufficient variety to meet the range of ILOs, initially at the course level and ultimately at the programme level.
- 1.5. It is important that assessment tasks adopted in a programme of study include some that are sufficiently demanding to demonstrate higher level cognitive skills and knowledge.
- 1.6 Throughout any given course students should have opportunities to gain insights into their progress and how they might further improve. To that end, formative assessment tasks need to be followed by timely and appropriate feedback so that students are given adequate time for reflection and improvement. **The teacher should return works for all assessment tasks with feedback to students before the start of the examination period as far as practicable.**

Purpose of assessment

2. Appropriate assessment strategies support a high quality undergraduate education. In an OBATL curriculum, assessment provides evidence:
 - 2.1. for the students, about their learning progress, in order to facilitate the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.
 - 2.2. for the teachers and their peers, about the particular curriculum set-up, modes of teaching, and the methods of assessment adopted across the programmes, in order to further improve teaching and learning through review and evaluation; and
 - 2.3. for the University, the public and the wider community, about student attainment of learning outcomes, initially at the course level, then the programme, and ultimately at the level of a Lingnan graduate; as well as about the appropriate level of achievement of our graduates that is recognized by the society at large.

Assessment practices

3. It is generally accepted that assessment can be both formative and summative in nature. Summative assessment focuses on learning outcomes achieved by the end of the course, including higher-level outcomes. Formative assessment is generally intended to provide feedback to students in order to enhance their learning during the course (or, more broadly, over an entire programme of study). Both forms of assessment may contribute to final grades or marks. It follows from 1.6 that significant assessment tasks that entail formative evaluation should be included sufficiently early in a course of study to foster students' awareness of the quality of their academic work to date and their progress in achieving the learning outcomes.
4. Ideally, the assessment of ILOs will (a) inform the variety, timing, and evidence of student learning, (b) satisfy the requirements of future quality audit processes, and (c) enable recognition by the wider community of the value and rigour of a Lingnan degree. Assessment tasks should provide opportunities for students to demonstrate a variety of lower- and higher-level learning outcomes, and should yield timely and appropriate feedback for students and provide evidence about the extent of their achievement of the ILOs.
5. The teacher may require an assessment task to be non-marks bearing, in the form of a hurdle or completion task. This is often intended to provide evidence of the acquisition of a specific (usually lower-level learning outcome) skill, process or knowledge.

General principles for assessment at Lingnan (course and programme levels)

6. The significance, nature and extent of the assessment tasks are a matter of judgement by the teacher based upon the ILOs, best teaching and assessment practices, and specific needs of the academic discipline.
 - 6.1. Students' final grades may be based entirely upon summative assessment, but normally both summative and formative assessments will contribute to final grades.
 - 6.2. Team skills are an important aspect of Lingnan Graduate Attributes and group tasks will provide opportunities for students to demonstrate cooperation and collaboration. It is especially important that in assessing tasks undertaken by groups the teacher make clear the means by which the group (or individual within a group) is assessed.
 - 6.3. Peer assessment is potentially an excellent opportunity for students to develop comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of teams, and is a means of judging the quality of their own and others' work. Courses that include peer assessment have a special duty to provide sufficient resources (e.g., rubrics, in-class discussions, modeling the process by the teacher, exemplars from past courses etc.) for students to undertake this process in a fair and scholarly manner.
 - 6.4. Not all programme level learning outcomes need to be assessed in each course.

7. At the programme level, assessment tasks may be expected to span a wide range of learning outcomes.
 - 7.1. Students should be made aware of how the learning outcomes and assessment tasks in any given course align with programme level learning outcomes.
 - 7.2. The Programme and Curriculum Committee (PCC)/Undergraduate Business Programmes Committee (UBPC)/Departmental Board (DB) is the platform where the programme faculty as a collective body review the extent to which various assessments are aligned with the programme goals.
 - 7.3. The PCC/UBPC/DB collects and shares relevant information about assessment with the individual teachers and evaluates how the programme goals and learning outcomes have been achieved. This may also be done in conjunction with scheduled Programme Reviews.
 - 7.4. One implication of the broad-based Liberal Arts curriculum experienced by students is that it may not be possible to address all Lingnan Graduate Attributes in an individual programme. The PCC/UBPC/DB should be cognizant of the gaps (if any) between the programme level ILOs and the Lingnan Graduate Attributes, and inform teaching staff accordingly.

Marking and grading

8. The key principles of fairness, awareness and transparency imply that marking and grading must be as equitable as possible, particularly in multi-section courses. Some assessment strategies that can help teachers achieve these goals include:
 - 8.1. The marking criteria of an assignment or assignment category should be made explicit to students in a timely fashion and linked to the ILOs.
 - 8.2. The implementation by the programme of procedures to ensure comparability of grading across sections of the same course (e.g., double marking of a set of sample scripts from each grade level, or marking of a certain part of an assessment task by a single teacher, etc.). These are especially important when multiple teachers are involved in grading across multiple sections.
 - 8.3. The archiving of marking criteria and sample scripts for:
 - 8.3.1. scheduled course and programme reviews;
 - 8.3.2. scrutiny by external reviewers if requested/ required; and
 - 8.3.3. future reference and mentoring of new staff, and as exemplars for students.
9. Assessment tasks that are weighted relatively more heavily should be designed to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate that they can perform at optimum levels.
10. Care should be taken to ensure that the descriptors provided for assessing student achievement of learning outcomes are sufficiently comprehensive to discriminate student performance across a range of levels.

Programme and course outlines, and assessment descriptors

11. As a programme moves to align its assessment tasks with its ILOs, it is good practice for:
 - 11.1. assessment goals across all its courses to be made available to students using multiple platforms (e.g., handbooks, the University intranet);
 - 11.2. each programme to include a statement of programme-level learning outcomes linked to the Lingnan Graduate attributes in each programme description;
 - 11.3. course instructors to provide students with information on how the specific assessment tasks (e.g., classroom discussions, attendance, online forums, quizzes, mid-term, end-of-term examination, term paper, group work, artifacts, etc.) relate to course-level and programme-level learning outcomes;
 - 11.3.1. except for purely fact-based assessment tasks, marking criteria should be given to students in advance and documented. In the case of multi-sectional courses, the criteria should be consistent across sections;
 - 11.3.2. the link between the assessment tasks and the ILOs should be indicated to the students and should be documented for the purpose of quality assurance and enhancement;
 - 11.3.3. major changes would normally not be made to the assessment tasks after the commencement of a course, and minor changes would be made in consultation with the students, and would be recorded; and
 - 11.3.4. major changes to the suite of assessment tasks for a course should be approved by the PCC/UBPC/DB.
 - 11.4. the grading/marking procedures for individual contributors to group projects to be specified clearly so as to allow the instructor to allocate grades fairly based on the contribution each student has made to the final product.

Academic integrity

12. The presentation of another person's work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student's own work is deemed as plagiarism, and students should be made aware of the policies of the University and the resultant action.
 - 12.1. Teachers are strongly advised to inform/remind all students (particularly in the early stages of university life) as to the penalties for plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct. It is important that there is a common understanding by all teachers in a programme as to the actions that will result if academic misconduct is shown to have occurred, and that these actions follow University policy.
 - 12.2. It is mandatory to use Turnitin, an anti plagiarism tool, to check all written assignments (written in Chinese or English) for all courses.

Appendix 1 provides a simple checklist to assist the development of a more coherent assessment framework in programmes.

(Approved by AQAC on 10 February 2012)

Revised in February 2015, and
in March 2017

Guidelines for a holistic approach to assessment within programmes

Programmes may wish to adopt some version of the checklist below for their own internal purposes.

- Possible items for consideration
- 1 Are the course assessment schemes developed in sufficient time to inform students at the beginning of term, and they available via the inter- or intranet?
 - 2 Are the course assessment schemes integrated with the programme-level assessment scheme, and is such information made available to teachers and students via the inter- or intranet?
 - 3 Are assessment rubrics and criteria shared with all departmental colleagues, particularly when there is more than one teacher teaching a course?
 - 4 Are student guidelines, suitable for the core discipline(s), on how to avoid plagiarism developed and consistently applied?
 - 5 Is there a programme-wide policy on how marks will be moderated, if required?
 - 6 Is there a programme-wide policy on the grading of group projects?
 - 7 In courses with more than one section taught by different teachers, is there a process to ensure comparability across the different sections and a means by which sample scripts are double marked to ensure grade consistency and fairness?
 - 8 Have the criteria for grades in the core discipline(s) been clearly defined, and is there a process to ensure that staff have the opportunity to reach consensus?
 - 9 Is there a programme-wide policy regarding the nature and timing of student feedback?
 - 10 If peer assessment is required in a particular course, are there resources to assist students and staff (e.g., peer assessment instruments) in this process?