

# Moving ‘Academic Writing and Research Skills for Business’ online: Rethinking Inclusive Assessment

## Introduction

### Context

‘Academic Writing and Research Skills for Business’ is one of the four core modules Foundation students have to pass to be able to progress to Year 1 and join their Business degree of choice. The module is delivered over 24 weeks, and has always attracted a very diverse cohort including home and international students, school leavers, mature students and students with varied educational backgrounds and learning needs.

Middlesex University has announced that teaching in the new academic year (2020-21) will take a Blended Approach. As the main aim of the module is to develop learners’ academic competences needed at Level 4 and beyond, decisions will need to be made on how to develop and assess those skills in an online environment in a fair, satisfactory and inclusive way.

### Moving the module online – priorities:

- Create a collaborative environment where students can have meaningful learning experiences, build a sense of community, and enjoy their first year at university.
- Modify assessment activities so that they remain aligned to learning outcomes.
- Maintain appropriate standards.
- Create equal opportunities for success.
- Think about the impact of changes on the workload of lecturers.

### Aims

The aim of this poster is to explore different principles and approaches to inclusive assessment and reflect on challenges and opportunities that both students and lecturers might encounter after moving the module and its assessment online.

## Principles of Inclusive Assessment

### Design

- Promoting Assessment for learning (Elkington, 2016).
- Considering the question ‘what is being assessed?’ and undertaking a needs analysis for assessment requirements as soon as students are involved (Brown, 2018).
- Considering accessibility when designing online assessment tasks (Walker, 2007).
- Considering assessment as an integral part of learning which should be perceived by students as relevant to their learning outcomes (McLoughlin, 2001).
- Introducing regular micro assessment integrated in macro tasks to best fit ‘learning as acquiring competence’ (JISC, 2010).
- Ensuring assessment methods do not place students at a disadvantage and offer opportunities for self-reflection (Hanesworth, 2015).
- Varying assessment methods (Walker, 2007; Elkington, 2016).
- Incorporating choices (Hanesworth, 2015) and flexibility (Elkington, 2016).

### Instruction

- Developing fair, transparent, appropriately weighted marking criteria which is clearly communicated to students (Walker, 2007).
- Providing explicit assessment literacy (McLoughlin, 2001) and information about assessments as early as possible, and in different formats (Brown, 2018).

### Support

- Providing timely and meaningful feedback (Gikandi et al., 2011).
- Providing plenty of opportunities for formative feedback to support students’ self-regulation in learning (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).
- Teaching through assessment for knowledge creation rather than knowledge acquisition (Green et al., 2010).
- Providing opportunities for scaffolding – each week should build students’ skills towards a specific assessment point (Lowe, 2020).

## Developing Inclusive Assessment Online

### Formative Assessment

2019-20	2020-21
<b>Seminar Presentations</b> (delivered face-to-face in groups during class time; feedback received on the day- and followed by a class discussion)	<b>Seminar Presentations</b> can be pre-recorded and uploaded on Moodle and discussion can be led and followed up by the group on Moodle in writing. <b>Or</b> Students can produce a <b>podcast</b> instead and peers can give feedback.
<b>Annotated Bibliography</b> (‘submitted’ in class and peer-feedback received on the day)	<b>Annotated Bibliography</b> can be submitted electronically – tutor to distribute them for peer feedback (in checklist format).
In-text citations and Referencing <b>quizzes</b> (completed on Moodle while in class)	As before, but students can complete quizzes in their own time. <b>Plus</b> Regular weekly quizzes for students to assess weekly learning and milestones achieved.

### Summative Assessment

2019-20	2020-21
<b>Business Report</b> (individual, written, submitted on Turnitin)	Same submission mode, but the assignment can be broken down into smaller formative submissions (e.g. students to submit a plan, or a paragraph or the reference list).
<b>Group Presentation</b> (delivered in groups during class time)	Students can pre-record and upload the presentations on Moodle (more choices of delivery offered: podcast, voiceover, video recording, etc.).
<b>Reflective Essay</b> (individual, written, submitted on Turnitin)	Same submission mode, but the assignment can be broken down into smaller formative submissions (e.g. students to submit a plan, or a paragraph or the reference list).

### Feedback Opportunities

2019-20	2020-21
<b>Before</b> an assignment: Regular in-class face-to-face feedback opportunities or feedback requested via email.	Video or audio feedback. Video or phone tutorial. More opportunities for peer feedback. Written feedback in document or email.
<b>After</b> an assignment: Written feedback on Turnitin submission.	Written on Turnitin, but also Video or audio feedback to be considered.

## Further Considerations

### Opportunities

- Peer-feedback opportunities can increase engagement in an online environment (Gikandi, et al., 2011).
- Assessment for learning can have a positive impact on students’ learning experiences (Sambell, 2011).
- Online formative assessment has the potential to engage both learners and lecturers in a meaningful and collaborative learning experience, and meet diverse learning needs and support reflective and self-regulated learning (Gikandi et al., 2011). It also helps students measure learning in a timely way and it can be time saving for lecturers (Baleni, 2015).

### Challenges

- Not all students will have the same access to online learning (e.g. workspace and equipment).
- Not all students will have the same confidence using technology.
- The use of technology for educational purposes might be unfamiliar to students.
- Not all students will be in the same time zone.
- Not all students will have the same confidence and language proficiency to participate in online activities such as discussion forums and peer feedback activities.

### Practical Solutions

- Formative assessment will be linked to summative assessment more effectively in order to reduce the number of formal submissions and deadlines.
- Enough training and clear instruction will be provided to students in the form of short ‘how to’ videos.
- Videos summarising each assessment requirements and instructions will be available to students.
- For equal opportunities, all assessment submissions will be asynchronous.
- A glossary of key assessment terms will be produced.
- Weekly overviews and summaries will be uploaded in written and video formats.
- All videos will be captioned and transcripts will be provided.
- Module Leader will be ‘present’ to assess and act on assessment needs early.
- Lecturers will be regularly available and ‘visible’ online, but it is also important to encourage students to be proactive and plan for their feedback needs in advance, and to respect their lecturer’s contact hours.

## Conclusion

Moving teaching and assessment online can be challenging for both students and lecturers, but it has also provided a great opportunity to review principles of inclusion and accessibility, and to reflect on how various assessment choices will impact the students’ learning experience and their success. This reflection has highlighted the importance of a ‘do more with less’ approach. Explicit assessment instruction, more flexibility, more choices, and more opportunities for formative and peer feedback are changes that will be considered for the next academic year, but will also continue to be applied to future assessment design on this module in order to provide equal opportunities.

### References

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