

How to use assessment to prevent learning! These tongue-in-cheek tips are designed to make you think about some of the behaviours that can actually get in the way of students' learning. They could be shown to students, who could be asked why the advice presented here is seriously misguided; such a discussion might help students better understand what is really expected of them in assessment. •

1. **Keep students in the dark about the rules of the game.** Brighter students will intuitively understand the criteria and naturally excel. You will thereby get a good range of marks, from the truly appalling to the really outstanding. This will make your external examiner happy. •
2. **Do all the assessment at the end of the learning programme.** You can't assess students until you have taught them everything, so all the assessment needs to take place at the very end of the process. If they then fail, it just shows that they weren't very good. •
3. **Make sure you know the identity of the student who has done each piece of work.** Then you can check whether the standard is what you would expect of that student. You can then correct marks if you think that a poor student has over-performed or a strong student has not done themselves justice. You can normally tell early on what kind of a degree a student will get and expectations are rarely proved wrong.
4. **To be fair to all students, give each an identical test.** If they have problems with it because of so-called 'special needs', that's their problem. •
5. **For coursework assessments, stick firmly to your deadlines,** regardless of the plausible excuses students come up with. The real world works on deadlines. If you show any flexibility, students will just take advantage of you. •
6. **Don't be soft on any students who claim that they don't do well in exams.** Even if their coursework marks are good, remind them that they have to get their act together for exams, or else they shouldn't be in higher education in the first place. •
7. **Don't indicate how many marks go with each of the parts of your questions.** This just causes trouble when you mark the scripts, and stops you being fair to the students who have worked out what was important in their answers. The really good students will know where the marks lie. •
8. **Don't give students any written feedback.** They will only argue with you about the marks you have given them and ask you to justify how the comments link to the scores you have awarded. You can't be expected to do that. In fact it is probably safest just to give them the mark and never give them back the original work. •
9. **Always plan at least some questions on material that you haven't covered with the class.** This sorts out those students who read around the subject and those who don't. But don't actually tell them that this is what you're planning to do, or the strategic students may read more extensively. •
10. **Only look at student scripts once.** Mark them as soon as you see them and never attempt to revisit earlier scripts because you might be tempted to

- change marks once you have seen other students' work. Rely on your innate ability to make fair and accurate judgments. •
11. **When designing assessments, trust your first instincts.** Don't show your draft assignments to other staff, who may interfere by making comments about the type of questions, wording, balance and coverage of the material.
 12. **Stick to tried and tested methods like unseen exams.** Any fancy innovative methods will be just too much hard work for you and won't test what you really want to find out, i.e. whether students can remember the facts. •
 13. **When you set coursework essays, don't set a word limit.** The good students will naturally have a lot to say, and will deserve good marks. You can usually tell at once from the length of an essay how much thought has gone into it. •
 14. **Don't make your questions too straightforward.** You want to be able to see who can make sense of the questions, and give these students the higher marks. Students who can't make sense of a question are demonstrating their ignorance, and don't deserve high marks. •
 15. **When you know that some particular bit is really important, hit it in several different questions in parallel,** so that there is no escape for those students who have not mastered that bit. •
 16. **Don't get into discussions with a class about how they will be assessed.** Just remind them that they're here to learn, and you're here to teach them, and then they've got to prove to you what they've learned. •
 17. **Don't be tempted to include self-assessment elements.** Students would simply give themselves over-high marks or grades, and would probably feel that it wasn't their job to assess their work. •
 18. **Don't get students peer-assessing each other's work.** They would learn too much from each other's mistakes, and you want to be able to see who makes which mistakes for yourself. •
 19. **If you design a question paper that really works well, use it year on year.** You can save yourself a lot of work by using the same questions again and again. There is no need to worry about students from previous years talking to the next cohort of students as they all tend to lead quite separate lives.

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