



Broadening Student Assessment

The purpose of this document is to give course and programme designers at LSE a brief overview of summative assessment methods in use across the School, and to encourage consideration of the wider range of assessment methods available that they might choose to use.

1 Current assessment practice at LSE

At LSE different types of assessment tend to be used for different purposes.

Type of assessment	Purpose
Summative assessment Exams Formally assessed coursework Dissertations	Determines whether the student can move on from one year to the next Identifies the final degree classification At LSE students receive limited or no feedback on much of their summative work
Formative assessment Course essays Class presentations Student tasks which don't count to the final degree classifications	Facilitates the learning process by providing students with feedback on progress so that they may improve
Diagnostic assessment Book reviews Initial tests Mock exams	Gauges the different entry levels, rates of progress or potential weaknesses of individual students within a course or programme, which may then be used as the basis for increased support.

A simple analysis of course assessment methods as described in the 2008/2009 LSE Calendar indicated the following:

Assessment method	Undergraduate		Postgraduate	
	1999/2000	2008/09	1999/2000	2008/09
Sit down exams ONLY	238 (70%)	191 (63%)	292 (54%)	323 (44%)
Other forms of assessment for all or part of the final grade (includes dissertations and some non-assessed courses)	107 (30%)	111 (37%)	253 (46%)	403 (56%)

The limited use of non-conventional methods (NCMs) for undergraduate assessment is a consequence of past policy, which limited NCMs to a maximum of 30% of the assessment for any course. This policy has been relaxed.

Overall, it is clear that there is greater assessment mix at the graduate level than at the undergraduate level. There is considerable variability between departments, with some departments relying more or less exclusively on exams, and others having a much wider mix. For details, refer to the most recent School Calendar or Course Guides.

2 Types of assessment

A large number of activities – written, oral and practical – can be used for assessment purposes. These include:

i) Written, literature-based assessment, with variable time limit

- essay
- literature review
- academic article for journal / professional magazine/serious newspaper
- take-home exam
- dissertation
- web-based presentation
- contribution to online discussion

ii) Written, research-based assessment, with variable time limit

- project
- dissertation
- consultancy report for 'real' client
- work-based project
- case study
- portfolio
- web-based presentation
- research report
- project outline
- development of resources (eg manual, computer programme, learning materials, new product description)
- applied statistics projects
- development of policy / strategy / mission documents
- analytical exercises
- critical diaries, learning logs and journals

iii) Written assessment with set time limit

Sit-down exam which can be varied by using different question formats:

- essay
- short answer/gobbets
- multiple choice
- case-study
- data analysis/problem solving
- exam dependent on prior assessed work of any/all other formats

iv) Oral assessment

- class presentation
- oral examination
- conference presentation
- conference poster display
- meeting with 'client'/consulting situation
- assessed negotiation or simulation
- moots

v) Practical assessment

Not common in Social Sciences, though one might envisage:

- observation of interview skills
- application of other data collection techniques
- competence in operating given software programmes, computer assisted design

Note that most of the assessment tasks in 'written: literature or research based', 'oral' and some 'practical' can be set as group rather than individual assignments; most have the potential of being marked by tutors, the student him/herself or peers; several also have the potential for deciding whether the substantive content of the assessment is 'given' – decided by the tutor or course team – or 'negotiated' – agreed between tutor and student. There are a few additional group-based assessments, such as team exercises, reflective logs, analysis of team contribution and assessed negotiation or simulation.

3 Designing assessment

Broadening student assessment means designing an assessment strategy, which has a clear purpose and direction. This includes decisions about the type and format of assessment methods, and whether different types and formats are used in one course.

A range of factors need to be considered to determine the goals and functions which the assessment needs to fulfil, and what the potential consequences could be.

The **assessment mix** is determined by:

- The nature of the task the student is expected to do.
- The extent to which different aspects of the task are pre-defined by the tutor or open to negotiation between tutor and student (eg who decides on content focus, style, approach).
- Timing of key assessment deadlines across a course and/or a programme as a whole.
- Whether the student undertakes the work (all or part of it) alone or with others.
- Whether the marking and/or grading and/or feedback are undertaken by the tutor (or someone working under direction of the tutor), the student, or the student's peers.

3.1 Factors to consider

Validity → Does the task assess what you want it to assess?

Is the task intended to assess the breadth or the depth of a course? Does it test factual knowledge or in-depth conceptual understanding, professional or intellectual skills?

Multiple-choice tests, for example, are less suited to the assessment of in-depth conceptual understanding but better suited to testing factual knowledge. Essays may assess research skills, while exams generally do not (unless exam questions address the process of research).

Integration with learning → Can the assessment integrate with and motivate learning?

Integration is achieved where feedback turns into feed-forward, ie students are given a genuine learning opportunity through assessment. This may generally be the case for low-stakes, formative assessment rather than summative assessment.

Feedback → How effective is the assessment in providing feedback?

Assessment is effective when it provides feedback, thus giving students a learning opportunity. Therefore, assessment design needs to consider whether the assessment provides students with timely and useful feedback, as well as an opportunity for the student to learn about:

- the performance of a required skill (eg developing an argument, referencing)?
- development and learning over time? (where there are several assignments)
- mistakes and misunderstandings? / successes and achievements?
- what has been done well / not so well?

Student understanding of rhetorical forms → How authentic is the assessment?

Does the task represent the way in which the discipline functions? Can students get an insight into disciplinary conventions and writing styles?

Reliability → Does the assessment allow for consistency in marking?

Do different markers give similar marks to the same piece of work? Is marking consistent over time? Is it consistent over remarking by the same marker? These questions are particularly relevant on large courses where a number of teachers are involved in lecturing and teaching.

Reliability is also relevant where the assessment is constructed broadly and students may respond in a variety of ways to the same task: Are different formats comparable? Do different markers give similar marks to different formats?

Sensitivity → Does the assessment recognise real achievement?

Does the assessment distinguish between more and less able students effectively, rather than being over-sensitive to non-essential factors e.g. first language?

Fairness → Is the assessment fair to all students?

Are students with disabilities or students for whom English is a second language disadvantaged by the assessment?

Efficiency → Does the assessment take into account the cost/benefit ratio?

Does the time required to complete the assessment stand in a positive relationship to the benefits the student will gain from completing it? Does the assessment require an unreasonable amount of time to complete? Does the assessment mix take into account tutor workload and external examiner workload?

Plagiarism → How plagiarism-proof is the assessment?

Assessment design need to consider both sides of plagiarism: prevention and detection: Can students cheat easily? Can plagiarism be detected easily? Can plagiarism be designed out of the course?

Resources → Does the assessment put pressure on the library and other resources?

An overview over strengths and weaknesses of different types of assessment, addressing the factors below, is provided in the Appendix.

3.2 Examples of 'non-conventional' assessment at LSE

Variations on standard 'essay' formats

Projects on quantitative analysis, Geographic Information Systems and qualitative analysis, plus an independent research project form the assessment for GY240.

(Similar project reports required for other Geography courses)

Participation in online discussions
(Media and Communications: MC411)

Geographical and bibliographies exercise: students have a 'take-home' paper, and are required to submit a word-processed reading list created from searches with UNICORN and bibliographic CD-ROMs on a given topic.
(Geography: GY140, Practical 1)

Students write a report on part of their practical research project. A peer review system allows students to gain (but not lose) marks through active and effective participation in the research project.
(Government: GV314)

Students write two pieces. One is a 600-750-word essay, taking the form of a newspaper column, the other a 2,500-4,000 word magazine article (guidance is given as to the types of publication they might consider submitting to). Students are also expected to submit an annotated reference list for each piece of work (including 100-200 word summary of each book or article included). Students are further encouraged (with optional 'bonus marks') to pass on to the course tutor interesting items from magazines/TV/web which could be useful triggers for discussion on the course.
(Information Systems: IS486a)

Variations on the use of team work

10% of a teamwork software development project is allocated to a reflective report, plus self and peer assessment aimed at raising student awareness of issues concerned with working in a team.

(Information Systems: IS470)

Students work in groups to present a seminar paper, and within a week of the live presentation submit a written report. Assessment criteria combine analysis of the substantive issues with leadership of the debate, presentation skills, and analysis of how students have addressed issues arising in discussion within the live seminar.

(Information Systems: IS340)

Students work in groups to design a website. Each group submits a report describing the process that the group went through to design the site, indicate why critical decisions were made, how tasks were allocated etc. Each individual submits a short piece of reflection on the process of undertaking the project.

(Information Systems: IS143)

Strengths and weaknesses of group-based assessments

Strengths	Possible problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Savings in time for markers.• Benefits for students from collaborative learning (eg students teaching students and learning from having to explain; students pooling skills; students developing their team work, negotiation and communication skills).• Mimics many work settings, where work is often done as a team, rather than individually.• Can reduce pressure on central resources (though may require different types of resource, such as group working space in the library or elsewhere, or access to online collaborative learning tools).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questions of equity in terms of final marks concerning who has contributed and how? (NB: there are various ways of dealing with this at different levels including peer marking or the option of finishing the 'open' work off with a 'closed' final assessment, but where the work along the way is a pre-requisite to the final assessment).• May require introduction of new teaching methods (eg introduction of team building into the course design).• Some students, both home and overseas, are very uncomfortable and unfamiliar with group work which then requires the tutor to spend more time on the mechanics of getting it going successfully.

Other approaches

The Language Centre includes a portfolio of evidence for Language and Society courses, which should include examples of class work, translation work, oral presentations with support materials, news/TV reviews, a film review, a video file. It has set out assessment criteria for use in oral exams, and for translation exercises for Language and Society courses.

Students participate in an online discussion, for which they receive 10% of the overall grade. (Media: MC411)

Students make an oral presentation of a paper they subsequently submit for formal assessment. (Law: LL402)

Students submit a data portfolio, demonstrating that they have had practical experience, and reflected on the experience of using three different approaches to data collection. They then deliver group presentations at a student symposium on different methods of qualitative research; they submit individual essays; they sit a 3hr exam.

(Methodology Institute: Mi421, 422)

Many departments now have detailed written guidance, one-off workshop outlines, and more extensive mini-courses directed at helping students work on dissertations, long essays and research projects. The TLC has accumulated a collection of these, if you wish to get some ideas

4 Formative assessment

4.1 Purpose and goals

At LSE submission of formative assignment may be required if a student wishes to enter the final examination.

Formative assessment seeks to provide students with the opportunity of a low-stakes evaluation of their learning. Whether assignments are graded or not, formative assessment does not count these grades towards a degree classification or for progression purposes. Instead, formative assessment provides feedback on learning and an indication for both teacher and student how well the student is progressing and where further development is needed.

Formative assessment provides a low-stakes opportunity to train certain skills (eg writing formats or speaking) and check knowledge and understanding for summative assessment.

To be most effective, formative assessment should be linked to summative assessment by assessing similar skills and knowledge. This need not be within a single course but can be spread over a programme of study, in particular as part of compulsory courses.

4.2 Feedback

Feedback is key to successful formative assessment. Nicol and Marcfarlane-Dick (2004) identify **seven principles of good feedback practice**:

1. Facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning.
2. Encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning.
3. Helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards expected).
4. Provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance.
5. Delivers high quality information to students about their learning.
6. Encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem.
7. Provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching.

4.4 Peer / Self assessment

Formative assessment provides a range opportunities to use peer assessment or self-assessment instead of, or in addition to tutor assessment.

Engaging students in the assessment process and therefore the reasoning involved in marking, means that students engage more closely with the assignment criteria and learning outcomes. Students will therefore better understand the standards of quality academic work and be able to improve their work based on self-reflection.

Secondly, peer assessment allows for a better **integration of learning activities into the classroom**. For example, peer assessed presentations engage listeners more actively in both content and presentation. Thus, presentations are not an add-on but part of an ongoing discussion and learning opportunity.

However, Rust (2001a) emphasises that peer assessment has to give students a real part in the marking process, as otherwise peer assessment will not be taken seriously by students if the final judgement remains with the tutor.

5 Addressing tutor concerns about a wider mix of methods

5.1 Work overload for tutors

There are various strategies which could be used to decrease workload, when faced with large numbers. These are summarised by Rust (2001b) as:

Front-ending: Provide clear guidance to students on what they are required to do.

‘Do it in class’: Build assessment into the learning process through use of devices such as assessed student presentation – where the assessment task and marking/grading/feedback can happen in the same study period.

Use self/peer assessment: Use peer assessment to help students better understand the course requirements and the standards of good quality work. Reflection on their own work will enable students to improve their own work.

Use group assessment: Use in conjunction with peer/self assessment to achieve fair marks to unequal contributions.

Use mechanised feedback through self-marking computerised systems, or use of standard feedback sheets, which require limited writing from tutors.

‘Strategic’ reduction:

I. Reduce the number of assessments, where there is obvious duplication in style/student learning required. Think about assessment for a degree programme as a whole, rather than for its constituent parts. Swap some essays for some different assessment format which is less time consuming for markers. Get rid of the requirement that all courses must in part be assessed by exam. Review the need for extensive summative assessment in the 1st year of undergraduate programmes, where pass/fail is the main concern.

II. Reduce time spent on feedback through for example feedback to groups rather than individuals; mechanised feedback (see above); tape-record your comments (hence possibly reducing time on your side, whilst increasing detail and quality of feedback to student).

The Rust paper also includes some interesting case studies of assessment approaches aimed at addressing some of the problems with assessing large numbers. The following two may be of particular interest for some of the large LSE quantitative courses:

Encouraging students to complete quantitative problem sets

This example in Rust is of a Chemistry course, but the lesson could be a useful one for several of LSE's quantitative course:

Many students were faring badly on a Chemistry course that involved a lot of mathematics. They tended not to do the weekly problems, and left study to the last minute exam revision, by which time it was too late. The solution was the creation of multiple-choice tests, put on the web, and left for students to do (marked automatically, open to them to do as often as they liked). In order to encourage students to do the tests, part of the final exam included a section on multiple-choice questions selected from the set the students could work on during the term. This was sufficient incentive to get the students to do the tests themselves, and brought about a significant improvement in final results.

(Rust p.21)

Increasing learning through group support

This example is from Accountancy, again aimed at improving results:

Large numbers of students were doing badly on a 1st year accountancy course. To try to improve outcomes, students were given the option of working through the course in teams of four. At the end of the year, all students would sit the exam individually, but would get the average mark from the team of four. There were three provisos: first, that students all agreed to the system; second that no-one who failed the paper outright as an individual could pass on the basis of their average group mark; and, third, that no-one who passed the paper as an individual could fail on the basis of their average group mark. The students agreed to the system, they then worked hard in their groups to ensure no one was seriously behind. The outcome showed a significant improvement in the overall results – with no failures. (Rust p.23)

5.2 Plagiarism

A real concern when broadening the assessment repertoire is that students will increasingly plagiarise. Plagiarism can take a number of forms: passing off somebody else's work as one's own (eg internet essay banks), copying someone else's work by cutting and pasting text (eg from the internet) without referencing, using one's own work written for another purpose, or paraphrasing without using references.

Learning how to reference accurately is a process in which students should be supported, however LSE regulations emphasise that responsibility to learn appropriate referencing ultimately lies with the individual:

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/resources/calendar/academicRegulations/RegulationsOnAssessmentOffences-Plagiarism.htm>.

5.2.1 Preventing Plagiarism

Plagiarism can be prevented through the design of the course and the choice of assessment. For example, regularly changing assignment and exam questions will decrease opportunity for deliberate plagiarism (cheating). Further, Brown (2001) suggests the following preventative measures to enable students to write their own work, focussing on creating awareness and teaching appropriate skills:

- Give students clear guidance on what constitutes plagiarism.
- Model the process of essay writing, including referencing, so that students are well informed about the conventions of your discipline for acknowledgement and citation.
- Inform students of the precise nature of assessment criteria so that it is clear if you are rewarding for merely finding information or for analysing and evaluating it.
- Involve students more in the design of assessment tasks and in the setting of assessment criteria.

5.2.2 Detecting Plagiarism

The School has a site licence for the JISC plagiarism detection software which is based on the Turnitin.com product. For further advice on using this, feel free to contact TLC for initial guidance.

5.3 Assessing students with disabilities

Since September 2002, institutions have had a legal duty to anticipate the needs of students with disabilities, and where appropriate to make reasonable adjustments in advance. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 extended this into the disability equality duty which requires positive action to improve opportunities for disabled people.

The School already has provision to provide alternative forms of assessment for students under certain circumstances, and to give students additional time and resources in exams, as detailed in an Individual Student Support Agreement (ISSA). However, departments may wish to consider other options to accommodate differing needs while maintaining the fairness of the assessment process for all students.

The Disability and Well-being Office website (<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/disabilityOffice/>) has more information. The South West Academic Network for Disability Support (SWANDS) has a website (<http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/view.asp?page=3243#>) offering detailed guidance which includes a number of case studies on alternative assessments, two of which are outlined here.

Student with difficulties in writing fluently due to dyslexia

Standard assessment method

Requirement: 8–10,000 word dissertation

Alternative assessment method

Solution: The student submitted a collection of audio tapes, containing research and interviews on the subject. The assignment was passed.

Student feedback

The student had to spend a significant amount of time on the project, more than would have been required for the written dissertation.

Student with cerebral palsy

Standard assessment method

Requirement: 8–10,000 word dissertation

Alternative assessment method

Solution: The student produced a multi-media CD ROM – as part of an interactive web site design.

Student feedback

Student was able to communicate more effectively using multi-sensory media.

5 Conclusions

Each approach to assessment has points for and against it. At present at LSE, our assessment mix in terms of tasks is quite limited, and in terms of the people marking the assessment is usually limited to only the tutors and external examiner, with little or no use made of self or peer assessment. It would be possible to increase the range of assessment methods and improve the match between assessment and course aims without moving too far from our fundamental approach.

On the whole, the School's approach has been to opt for more 'valid' but less 'reliable' assessment approaches for formative assessment, and then focus on exams for summative assessment. This achieves reasonable reliability, reduces the potential for cheating, and possibly offers a 'fairer' assessment, but can reduce the value of assessment to the learning process.

If we continue to require some exam element for every course (other than those assessed by long essay/dissertation) then we will, by definition, increase the workload of anyone prepared to consider increasing the assessment mix, for whatever reason. The requirement that everything should be double marked adds to this work load.

Where a new approach is introduced, then it needs to be accompanied by detailed thinking and documentation on what the students are expected to do and may require new assessment criteria, geared to the new assessment format and expectations.

Options for consideration

- Innovate within the framework of the sit down exam. This might include stronger enforcement of course work requirements prior to students being admitted to exams; the introduction of more pre-exam preparation work (eg giving students the data set, or broad question areas but not specific questions a month or so in advance); allowing students to bring core text(s) into the exam setting; use of greater variety of exam questions.
- Train, carefully moderate (and pay) part-time teachers more as markers of formally assessed work.
- Make more of the link between assessment and the learning process in the courses, not by way of 'cramming' or 'priming' but by writing exam questions which address the kinds of questions you also expect students to engage with in class.
- Develop the independent research element within undergraduate assessment. This need not be a long essay, and it could have a group work component to it. Handing work in throughout the year helps deal with workload, can reduce cheating, and provides timely feedback to students which they can build into their subsequent work.

For further discussion contact

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http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/resources/resourcedatabase/id353_senlef_guide.pdf

Rust, C. (2001a) A Briefing on Self, Peer and Group Assessment, *Assessment Series no. 9*, LTSN Generic Centre.

Rust, C. (2001b) A Briefing on Assessment of Large Groups, *Assessment Series no.12* LTSN Generic Centre.

Online resources

The **Higher Education Academy** has a number of resources on assessment:
<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/assessment>. Its Assessment Series can found at http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/ourwork/tla/assessment_series.

Subject Centres

Sociology, Anthropology, Politics (C-SAP): <http://www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk/resources/guides/assessment.htm>

Social Policy and Social Work (SWAP)
<http://www.swap.ac.uk/resources/themes/assessment.html>

UK Centre for Legal Education:
<http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/resources/assessment/index.html>

Economics Network, The Handbook for Economics Lectures, section 2,
<http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/handbook/assessment/>

Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archeology
<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/hca/themes/assessment>

Centres for Excellence

Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange (ASKe), University of Oxford Brookes:
<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/resources.html>

Centre for Excellence in Teaching & Learning in Assessment for Learning, University of Northumbria, http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/cetl_afl/

The **Scottish Enhancement Themes** has material on Assessment
<http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/Assessment/outcomes.asp> and
Integrative Assessment
<http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/IntegrativeAssessment/themes.asp>.

Appendix: Strengths and weaknesses of different forms of assessment

Literature based & written research based assessment with variable time limit		
Factor	Strengths	Possible problems
Validity	<p>Provides opportunities to make clear linkage between the assessment task and learning outcomes or broader course aims, dependent on the task set, and the detail of the wording.</p> <p>Valuable where you want students to demonstrate complex intellectual skills, especially theory/ application balance, evaluation/synthesis and demonstration of independent research skills.</p>	<p>The validity can only be determined in relation to the course and its learning outcomes, however defined.</p> <p>Students need clear guidance on what is required for each distinctive type of assessment task, along with assessment criteria to be used. Students may focus on a limited range of topics and fail to address the breadth of the course, unless care is taken in setting or agreeing assignments.</p>
Integration with learning	Can be highly integrated.	The assessment can dominate and overshadow the learning and give students less opportunity to determine their own goals or explore special interests.
Feedback to students	<p>Often used to provide on-going feedback through a course, hence useful for building on past experience.</p> <p>Possibly works best with cumulative approach (eg best of 4 essays which are draft marked and then developed).</p>	Excess workload for tutors may mean that quality and timeliness of feedback is compromised. The inclination of tutors is often to provide detailed feedback, but unless there is a cumulative effect built into the assessment, this can be wasted effort.
Student understanding of rhetorical forms	Possible where detailed assessment criteria are provided, where there is opportunity for discussion between student and tutor on the nature of the assessment, and/or where self/peer assessment is part of the process.	Needs to be planned in order to be realised.
Reliability	Research evidence indicates that if criteria for marking are well established, it is possible to ensure reliability in marking.	Many of the methods encourage considerable diversity in student response. As such, a wide range of variables may impact on the final product and influence grades.
Sensitivity	Because there is no time pressure, those with learning difference can make use of back-up support (special use of IT facilities, etc).	<p>Students with experience of varied assessment formats may cope better than those used only to exams.</p> <p>There are pay-offs between reliability and sensitivity – the more you specify to students exactly what is required, the more likely it is that you end up with most of the students achieving the required end result!</p>

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Literature based & written research based assessment with variable time limit		
Factor	Strengths	Possible problems
Fairness	<p>Allows for extra time, IT resources and provision of advice and guidance not possible in seriously time-constrained circumstances.</p> <p>'Blind' marking ensures that grades are not influenced by possible examiner bias.</p>	<p>Markers tend to have higher requirements on a range of technical elements (eg referencing; breadth of reading, etc).</p> <p>Each different type of assessment requires clear guidelines, on such matters as style, format, referencing conventions, etc., particularly where these are part of the assessment criteria.</p> <p>Several methods in this group involve building work and receiving feedback over time, hence blind marking is often not an option.</p>
Efficiency Student time	Where assessment is well linked to course structure and learning outcomes, it is an effective way of focusing student study.	<p>Can be problematic when assessment starts very early in a course, when students do not feel ready.</p> <p>Impact on student workload is a significant factor. Very stressful where students have multiple simultaneous deadlines.</p>
Efficiency Tutor workload	Depends on length and nature of assignment and detail of feedback; e.g.: 1,000 words = less weight of marking, and may get more focused work from the students. But at times, long pieces of work are necessary. Various ways of mitigating heavy workload, eg use of self/peer marking; occasional teachers as markers; clearly specified and staged tasks with clear criteria; use of structured feedback sheets or checklists; feedback on the basis of sampled work or of the group as a whole, rather than individualised comment.	High workload, especially where detailed, individual feedback is provided. Students often don't appreciate the methods that can cut down on tutor workload (especially group rather than individualised feedback), though self/peer marking CAN be a very useful addition.
Efficiency External examiner workload		High – unless the format is used primarily for formative rather than summative assessment purposes.
Can students cheat easily?	Yes! This is particularly the case where tutors only see the final products of a student's work. The situation has become more acute with the development of the web, student essay banks, etc.	Increasing range of devices available for detecting cheating, but these inevitably lead to increased workload for those involved in the examination process
Pressure on library and other resources	Varied – but needs to be managed.	Requires careful management to avoid surges of students all requiring a limited range of resource materials in a short term period.

Written assessment with set time limit		
Factor	Strengths	Possible problems
Validity	<p>Develops the skills to work under pressure and within acute time limits, and to be highly selective in putting together arguments.</p> <p>Can ensure that breadth and depth of learning are addressed.</p> <p>Good at assessing knowledge, conceptual understanding etc.</p> <p>Where assessment is at the end of the course, it allows for ideas to be developed, and built up over time, enabling students to see linkage between the various parts, evolving a holistic approach to the subject, rather than splitting it into discrete elements.</p>	<p>Can encourage 'surface' and 'strategic' approaches to learning, ie superficial learning geared to passing the exam.</p> <p>May be better at assessing students ability to pass exams than their ability to apply or use the materials, ideas and concepts they have been learning.</p>
Integration with learning	<p>Where exams are clearly related to on-going work through the year, they can be well integrated, and act as a positive motivator. Revision sessions can provide opportunity for overview, integration and cross linkage. Where exams are confined to the end of a course, tutors and students may experience greater freedom for learning without the complications that come from the tutors having to take on the rather different role of being assessors.</p>	<p>In the LSE end of year context, especially where lecturers distance the exam process from the course as a whole, exams may work counter to the learning process as a whole. This has been the experience of some occasional teachers, and commented on by students vis-à-vis their attention to and willingness to do course work.</p>
Feedback to students	<p>Can provide useful insight if there is feedback on exam outcomes, which advises on ways of improving performance subsequently (eg use of mock exams).</p>	<p>Often very little by way of feedback other than the final grade – which does nothing to guide the student's future action, study patterns or study focus.</p>
Student understanding of rhetorical forms	<p>Exams may enable students to demonstrate their insight into conventions and writing style, but where feedback is limited to marks, the exam per se will not develop this further.</p>	<p>Few new teachers are confident about standards expected by their department, discipline or institution which suggests that they have had little prior experience of assessing standards.</p>
Reliability	<p>Can be reliable, where clear assessment criteria are developed and applied consistently. Helps where numbers being graded are high and choice of questions limited (though important here to mitigate against marker fatigue).</p>	<p>Can suffer similar problems to any more open assessment format, especially where there are few students, there is a wide choice of questions and there are no explicit and agreed assessment criteria.</p>
Sensitivity	<p>Discrepancies due to student differences can be mitigated by, for example, mock exams, access to past papers and exam assessment criteria, guidance and advice sessions.</p>	<p>Good at distinguishing between students who are good at exams vs. those who are not! Pay-offs between reliability and sensitivity.</p>

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Written assessment with set time limit		
Factor	Strengths	Possible problems
Fairness	<p>Apparently level playing field as everyone has the same time and resources available to them. Measures can be put in place (eg extra time; alternative formats) to ensure that students with disabilities are not put at a disadvantage.</p> <p>'Blind' marking ensures that grades are not influenced by possible examiner biases.</p> <p>Students who have only had experience of sit-down exams for summative assessment may feel more confident with this approach.</p>	<p>Puts pressure on students who may need more time than the average student to gather their thoughts, organise ideas, and write fluently in English.</p> <p>Limited mitigation possible through, for eg time extension; use of appropriate IT facilities.</p> <p>Past experience of what is expected is an issue (ie students used to exams testing core knowledge/ presentation of fact are at a distinct disadvantage at LSE when faced with the requirement to be more critical and analytical). This needs to be addressed through study skills development, use of mock exams and feedback (which then start to increase time pressures on students and tutors).</p>
Efficiency Student time	Keeps assessment focused into specified time-slots, allowing other time to be used more creatively.	<p>Can lead to an inefficient learning approach, ie not enough motivation to focus and apply yourself at some times of the year, followed by high stress at other times.</p> <p>Students need a lead-in time to exams for revision, which cuts out extended learning. (This is especially significant for MSc courses, where students perceive that they are paying high fees for essentially only 6 months of teaching.)</p>
Efficiency Tutor workload	<p>Grading, without detailed individual feedback (a common format for exams) is much quicker than marking with feedback that is normally associated with more open format assessment.</p> <p>Marking load is dependent on class size, and diversity of the paper (ie the simpler the paper, the simpler and quicker the marking).</p>	If there were a move to more detailed feedback on exam outcomes to students, then the obvious benefits of exams would diminish.
Efficiency External examiner workload	Can be controlled.	
Can students cheat easily?		
Pressure on library and other resources		Pressure on study space rather than books and other resources (but this can be handled in a variety of ways). Students with disabilities may require alternative assessment formats.

Oral assessment <i>(also largely relevant to assessment of other practical skills)</i>		
Factor	Strengths	Possible problems
Validity	Often as important for students to be able to express their ideas orally as it is for them to express ideas in writing - possibly more important in many of the contexts where they will subsequently be working. Develops their ability to think on their feet - even more so than in the sit down exam.	Tutors are often reticent to assess oral presentations, where the medium can totally overshadow the substantive content.
Integration with learning	Oral presentation is often used as part of the teaching strategy. If it was assessed, it might improve quality, and hence improve the learning experience for the students as a whole.	In some cases, students may pay too much attention to the medium, at the expense of the substantive content. This can be addressed through making assessment criteria and relative weighting of content and presentation transparent.
Feedback to students	Potential for instant feedback.	If feedback is not immediate oral assessment may be of less value in terms of student learning.
Student understanding of rhetorical forms	Works best if students actively engage in the assessment process ie through self/peer assessment.	Needs to be planned in order to be realised.
Reliability	Quite possible to train tutors, and students, to ensure reliable results in terms of presentation skills.	Does require development of oral assessment skills. Even if oral presentations are recorded on video or audio tapes, any re-marking is problematic as recordings give a poor reproduction of the live event.
Sensitivity	Oral presentation is a skill many students actively want to develop and to have feedback on.	Given the potential of the medium to take centre stage, oral assessments can prove stressful to students worried about their oral language skills
Fairness	Depending on the disability, oral assessment could provide a viable alternative to written assessment.	Requires confidence in speaking. Some second language students may feel disadvantaged if they are not fluent.
Efficiency Student time	Can combine learning and assessment, and be a vehicle for instant feedback to groups as well as individuals – as such it can be efficient, as it can be done in class contact time.	Requires time commitment of preparing content and then attending to delivery.
Efficiency Tutor workload	Time/cost effective for helping to deal with exceptional cases (ie viva).	Can become very time consuming if grading and feedback take place after the event, through use of audio/video recording.

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Oral assessment <i>(also largely relevant to assessment of other practical skills)</i>		
Factor	Strengths	Possible problems
Efficiency External examiner workload		If the external examiner has to view orals via video, it is time-consuming and the live event can often be perceived quite differently from the video replay of it
Can students cheat easily?	Possible on substantive content, but performance not open to cheating. If tutor questioning is part of the process, then the opportunity for cheating on substantive content is minimised.	
Pressure on library and other resources	Depends on timing, but shouldn't be significant.	If student are reliant on, for example, PowerPoint, the system should be in good working order so that students' presentations are not compromised by matters beyond their control.

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