



Assessment: for much more than awarding a mark

Examples of practice from ODL

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MSc Biodiversity, Wildlife and Ecosystem Health

Running for 8 years
> 100 graduates

- Diverse student backgrounds, high proportion changing careers, all part-time, most combining study with work and many have specific interests.
- Short, intense courses need to convey complex topics and have maximum learning impact.
- Carefully developed learning materials are enhanced with discussion and peer engagement.
- Assessments take both written and online forms.

Is a mark not enough?

What else can assessment do?

- NO! Assessment is a journey not an end-point and feedback is key.
- Assessment can help build confidence, competence and key graduate attributes in our students.
- It can promote engagement and build community through sharing knowledge, ideas and practice.
- It can be the basis of an authentic, inclusive learning environment.

What do we do?

Online Assessment Portfolio

- Innovative online discussion forums are tailored to each course and contribute to 40% of the course marks.
- Discussions can **enhance engagement**, allow **sharing of practice** and co-creation of content. Giving everyone a voice develops an **inclusive learning environment**.
- Examples of assessed discussion activities:
 - **Open questions** for free discussion (only with small groups)
 - Short **summary postings** from each student, with responses from others and followed by wider discussion
 - Summary postings are used to share **case studies**, **interview findings** and **website reviews** for example
 - Students are assigned sides to argue in **debates** or stakeholder positions for **role play**
 - Discussions with **invited expert alumnus** or **guest lecturers**

Written Assessment Portfolio

- Written assignments vary from course to course to develop student competence in a wide range of communication methods and purposes, and contribute to 60% of the course marks.
- Assessments usually have an element of **choice** so students can tailor the content to direct their own assessment journey, to make assessment **relevant** to their interests or employment. Assessing a variety of key writing styles **prepares graduates** for future in conservation sector.
- Examples of written assessments:
 - **Essay**, **technical report** and **research paper**
 - **Grant proposal**, **abstract** and **letter to editor**
 - **Poster** and **infographic**
 - Alternative **powerpoint** for lay/professional audience
 - **Reflective writing** and **self-assessment**

How do we do it?

Evolution and Biodiversity Case Study

Rationale: this is the first assignment in the first course so we want it to be **accessible**, **relevant** to each student and organised to build a wide range of **shared** examples.

Written Assignment

- Student choose species of interest to them, giving them **ownership** and encouraging **engagement**
- The basic brief is very structured and simple, giving weaker students or those new to this field a chance to succeed (**inclusive**) and **build confidence**
- Ways to gain higher marks are signposted so experts can explore the topic in greater depth and **demonstrate their abilities**

Online Assignment

- Students present a summary post about their species and peer discussion follows. Sharing examples encourages **collaborative learning** and **builds community** as people get to know each other
- Small groups create an **inclusive** environment where all can contribute and experts can shine

Conservation Ethics Group Research Project

Rationale: this is the final course in year 1 and we want students to develop relevant **research skills** and encourage **collaborative working**.

Online Assignment

- Small groups discuss and develop a research question and agree a research strategy, working **collaboratively** so that everyone has an input and data is shared. This **prepares graduates** to build similar working arrangements.
- Inexperienced students **learn from peers**, and experienced students **share practice**. Close group working develops **online community**

Written Assignment

- Students used shared data to prepare an individual research paper, developing **graduate skills** in quantitative data analysis and scientific writing
- Inexperienced students can develop their understanding of how research is developed and published, and competent students **apply prior learning** and **demonstrate potential**

Conservation Psychology Research and Application

Rationale: this is an elective course in a relatively new field. We want students to develop relevant **research skills** and **apply their learning** to a real-world problem.

Online Assignment

- Students conduct an interview using a semi-structured **interview technique** on a topic of their **choice**, then present their findings to the group for discussion
- Students **develop confidence** in conducting their own research, **develop skills** in qualitative data analysis and practice **communicating** their findings to their peers

Written Assignment

- Students are asked to **use their learning** to write a conservation campaign for a real organisation
- Students in the wider MSc programme are asked to propose an organisation/campaign that would be suitable, making this an **authentic assessment** for a real-life application that involves the whole **MSc community**