Effective Structures for Assessment

When an instructor creates an assessment, he or she should first determine its purpose and then structure the assessment so that students can communicate their comprehension and learn from the assessment process itself. Structuring effective assessments includes the following.

Describing assignments clearly and indicating the criteria by which student responses will be evaluated.

Example of an unfocused essay question: What was the impact of early American religious movements on American society?

Example of a more focused essay question: What impact did Puritan, Deist, and First Great Awakening ideals have on education and political thought in the colonial and revolutionary periods, and to what degree do these religious movements continue to have an impact on education and political thought today?

Making assessments reasonable with respect to time and resources. For example, if you assign in-class presentations, you need to expect that some of your students might not have delivered a presentation before; because of this you should consider giving extra time for this assignment and weighting your grading of the assignment to emphasize the content of the presentation and not the sophistication of its form. Alternatively, if this is a group project, verify that at least one member of each group has experience with this sort of assignment.

Assessing material at the same depth in which it was explored in class. For example, avoid creating tests that assess only recall of facts if you emphasized higher-order thinking during class. Similarly, if you emphasized only factual or procedural understanding in class, you should not expect students to be able to demonstrate their understanding in complex analyses.

Letting your students know what to expect on in-class tests, quizzes, and exams. Discuss the structure, format, and grading standards for assignments. Consider making old tests and exams available to the class or providing a list of possible exam questions.

Giving assessment feedback as soon as you can. In order for students to learn from their performances, it is critical they receive timely feedback. Whenever possible give back assessments within a week so that the assignment is fresh in your students' minds. With a rubric (see below), this turn-around time is achievable.

Distributing a scoring rubric with the assignment so your students will know your assessment criteria. A rubric is a tool that details the gradations of difference between understanding something well and not understanding it at all. Teachers use rubrics to assess writing, lab reports, class presentations, class participation, and all other types of assessments.
What follows is a rubric for an individual presentation. Professor Lois Vietri (GVPT) shared this form from her GVPT 479A during a spring 2005 CTE workshop on grading rubrics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Outstanding</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Marginal</th>
<th>Unacceptable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td>Material related to thesis; all points clearly made; material related to seminar theme</td>
<td>Many good points related to the seminar theme, thesis</td>
<td>Great deal of information not clearly connected to seminar theme, thesis of author</td>
<td>Thesis not clear and the information presented not related to the author's thesis or seminar theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coherence &amp; Organization</strong></td>
<td>Examples appropriate; presentation flows well; well-organized; within 3-5 minutes of the allotted time</td>
<td>Mostly logical and organized; need better transitions; within 5-7 minutes of the allotted time</td>
<td>Concepts and ideas loosely connected; choppy; lacks clear transitions; within 8-10 minutes of the allotted time</td>
<td>Quite choppy, disjointed; no correspondence to author's ideas; beyond 10 minutes of the allotted time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speaking Skills</strong></td>
<td>Poised, clear articulation; enthusiasm for the material; confidence, good volume, eye contact with peers</td>
<td>Clear articulation but not as polished</td>
<td>Some mumbling; little eye contact; little or no expression</td>
<td>Inaudible; no eye contact; disinterested; spoke in a monotone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience Response</strong></td>
<td>Involved the audience and maximized their learning with a handout; presentation generated questions</td>
<td>Involved the audience most of the time; handout not as polished</td>
<td>Tended to go off topic; lost the audience at times; no handout or hastily prepared</td>
<td>Incoherent; off topic; audience lost interest; no handout or use of blackboard to guide audience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outstanding (5)  Good (4)  Marginal (3)  Unacceptable (1)

Content  
Coh. & Org.  
Speaking Skills  
Audience Resp.  

SCORE  X 5 =  GRADE