



Assessing Your Learners: Culminating Assignment

Instructions

In the following scenario, you will provide help to one of your colleagues about how to assess learners effectively. Provide your answer based on the questions posed.

Initial Conversation

You are talking to Julia, a colleague who is extremely skeptical about online courses – especially when it comes to assessment. Julia says, “I don’t see how you can assess learners in an online course. How do you keep them from cheating?”

How would you respond to Julia?

Your answer to the question:

While it may seem like it could be difficult to prevent cheating in an online environment, there are several ways to promote digital academic honesty. Thomas Keith at the University of Chicago wrote a very interesting literature review about academic honesty in 2018. His suggestions work well for online learning.

First, Keith (2018) asserted that it’s important to understand reasons why students cheat. He suggested the following as common reasons for academic dishonesty: poor time management, academic pressures, feeling anonymous online, failure to understand academic conventions, cultural factors, feeling like low-stakes assignments aren’t important, and the increase in technological ways to cheat.

Keith (2018) then recommended these methods for counteracting reasons for academic dishonesty and heading off ways academic dishonesty often happens:

- Make your academic integrity policies available to students at the very beginning of a class, like through your syllabus, introductory module, etc.
- Give a quiz on the policy or use another method of ensuring that students actually read the policy.
- Offer connections to resources so students who are struggling can get help as early as possible.
- Build your relationships with your students.
- Encourage originality and specificity in projects.
- Change paper topics often.
- Use a detailed rubric.
- Use a scaffolding system in which students must turn in smaller pieces of a large project according to a schedule.
- Mix it up on exams by having different versions of the same test.
- Use LMS features like locking course files and having quizzes pull random questions from question pools.
- Employ antiplagiarism software.

- Give students help with citations

Follow-up Question 1

After hearing your response, Julia wants to know more about the assessment integrity policy you use to communicate integrity expectations to learners in your online course. She asks, “What kinds of information do you put in your policy? How does this help maintain assessment integrity?”

Your answer to the question:

Based on Keith’s advice (2018), here’s what I have put into my academic integrity policy

- **Let me be very clear upfront.** You are an intelligent and capable person, and I want to help YOU learn in my course. I, therefore, do not tolerate academic dishonesty in any form on any assignment, large or small.
 - Here are some rules to live by.
 - You may not take credit for any type of work you did not do.
 - You may not give tests, papers, answers, or any kind of class materials to someone else for them to pass off as their own work or use to cheat.
 - You may not cheat on tests or quizzes in any way.
 - You may not include the thoughts, studies, or work of others in your work without a proper citation. (If you are at all unclear about how citations work, visit the university citation guidelines [here](#).)
 - You may not hire or otherwise compensate someone to create a course assignment or take a test or quiz for you.
 - You may not have someone create a course assignment for you or take a test or quiz for you for free.
 - You may not use items from online assignment repositories. (Plagiarism checker software easily finds these submissions.)
 - In a group situation, you may not take credit for the work of another group member (unless a joint grade for a project is specifically given).
 - This is not an exhaustive list of academically dishonest practices. If you think something might be academically dishonest, don’t do it.
 - YOU can do the work of this course, and I am here to help you do it (more info on support below).
- **School Policies:** While in my course, you are also subject to the university’s academic integrity policies. Please review those policies [here](#).
- **Penalties:** If you are caught in any form of academic dishonesty, you will immediately fail that assignment/test/quiz. This will have a significant negative impact on your grade in the course, and there is no make-up work allowed to recover any of these points. If you engage in academic dishonesty again, you will immediately fail the entire course and be referred to the school administration for further disciplinary action. And...when you are academically dishonest, you cheat yourself of the learning you could have had and the person that that knowledge could have helped you become. That is the saddest consequence of them all.
- **Course Features:** I do my best to make sure that the requirements of this course are reasonable, you know the timelines for project completion and studying for tests, you have detailed rubrics

and study guides, and the projects allow you to create something original and specific to you. I switch versions of tests and quizzes often, and I also employ question pools, which means that there may be many versions of any given assessment.

- **Support:** I am tough on academic dishonesty, but I am equally kind to students who have difficulties and/or seek my help. I know that life has many challenges, students have different strengths and weaknesses, and learning methods that work well for one student may not make sense to another, so PLEASE just talk to me if you are having a hard time.
 - At this [link](#), you can sign up for an appointment during my office hours, which are _____.
 - You can email me at any time at _____. I typically respond within 24 hours on weekdays and by Monday morning if an email comes in over the weekend.
 - I will also be more than happy to connect you with wonderful people who provide university-level resources, like the writing center, the counselling center, and the tutoring center.
 - I care about providing you with the best learning experience I can, and I care about you as a person. If you are willing to put in the work, I am confident that we can come up with a plan for your success together.

This policy is in the introduction of my classes, and students must take a quiz about the policy so that I know they have read it thoroughly. When students understand the serious negative consequences of academic dishonesty and see that there is a lot of support available to them for doing the right things, choosing honesty becomes easy.

Follow-up Question 2

Julia seems to be more receptive to the idea of online courses now that she has heard your explanation of assessment integrity. Now she is asking you about monitoring progress in an online course. “How do you know what’s going on in the course if you don’t actually see the learners so many times a week? How do you keep track of their progress, and what do you do if someone is not doing well?”

Your answer to the question:

I may not be able to physically see my students, but I can easily see what they are doing in an online course. My course materials are housed in the Canvas learning management system, which has several useful student tracking features. I can check on students' grades through the group gradebook, individual gradebook, gradebook history, and learning mastery feature based on set course outcomes. Canvas also has New Analytics capabilities, which include interactive charting for course grades and weekly online activity plus statistics about each student and report generation.

If I notice that a student isn’t doing well, I send a check-in email to remind them that they can succeed in the course with effort and that I am available to help them. I also ask to meet with them through Zoom so we can identify any barriers to completing and doing well on assignments, make an improvement plan, and connect them to any needed outside resources. I also stay in extra contact with the student through emails, Zoom meetings, etc. until I am sure that they are able to self-manage their success.

Follow-up Question 3

After hearing your response, Julia seems a little skeptical again. She says, “It sounds like you really have to be a babysitter if you are an online teacher. I don’t have time to be a babysitter. Is there anything you can do to make the learners responsible for keeping track of how they are doing and whether or not they are learning?”

How would you respond to Julia?

Your answer to the question:

Like I mentioned before, I do my best to make sure that the requirements of a course are reasonable, students know the timelines for project completion and studying for tests, students have detailed rubrics and study guides, and the projects allow students to create something original and specific to them. If students don’t feel overwhelmed, they have more confidence in their abilities to stay on top of course requirements. I give students downloadable schedule checklists so they can make sure they are managing their time for projects and preparing for tests well. For every assignment, I provide a rubric that details what needs to be in the assignment and how I will be grading it. For every test, I provide a thorough study guide and ensure that the test items are all covered in the study guide. And if students are allowed to do projects in which they are interested, it is much easier for them to stay on task. Also, Canvas allows students to easily check their grades, view a calendar with important class dates, and get course reminder announcements.

Follow-up Question 4

Julia likes what she heard in your last response. Now she wants to know if you know anything about rubrics. “I always hear other teachers talking about the ‘rubrics’ they use to grade their learners. How do I make one of these? And once I do, how do I use it to grade the learners?”

What would you say to Julia to answer her questions about rubrics?

Your answer to the question:

Rubrics make life so much easier for instructors and students. There are 2 common types of rubrics: analytic and holistic (DePaul, n.d.). I, personally, use analytic rubrics, so that’s what I’ll tell you about. An analytic rubric is basically a grid with grading criteria on the left side and achievement levels across the top. For a simple student essay, the grading criteria might be things like organization, word count, analysis, and grammar. The achievement levels could be numbers of points (3, 2, 1, 0) and/or descriptive words like outstanding, competent, needs improvement, or unacceptable. Once you have your grid parameters set up, then you fill out each of the grid cells based on what the grading criteria would be for that achievement level (DePaul, n.d.).

Here’s what that example essay rubric I’ve been talking about might look like:

ESSAY RUBRIC	Outstanding (3 points)	Competent (2 points)	Needs Improvement (1 point)	Unacceptable (0 points)
Organization	Presents a very clear thesis in an introductory paragraph of at least 3 sentences, 3 supporting paragraphs with their own clear arguments that are at least 5 sentences long, and a conclusion of at least 3 sentences.	Presents a thesis in an introductory paragraph, 3 supporting paragraphs with mostly clear arguments of at least 3 sentences, and a conclusion.	Has some of the following elements but not all: introduction with thesis, 3 supporting paragraphs of any length, conclusion.	Essay is not organized into an introduction with thesis – support – conclusion format at all.
Word Count	At least 1500 words.	At least 1100 words.	At least 700 words.	Less than 700 words.
Analysis	Thesis is an original or exceptionally well thought out argument. Each paragraph topic strongly supports the thesis. The conclusion draws meaningful insights.	Thesis is mostly well thought out and may not be very original but is supportable. All paragraph topics support the thesis. There is a conclusion with some final thoughts.	Thesis is not very well thought out, original, or supportable. Paragraph topics only offer weak support. Conclusion may not be present or is very short and/or superficial.	All analysis is superficial and does not represent adequate reflection. Thesis is not supported by further ideas. Conclusion is not on topic.
Grammar	No more than 2 grammatical errors or typos.	No more than 4 grammatical errors or typos.	No more than 6 grammatical errors or typos.	More than 6 grammatical errors or typos.

When you give an assignment to students, also provide the rubric on which they will be graded so they can create their work with those criteria and achievement levels in mind. When you go to grade the assignment, first review the student’s work, and then compare it with the achievement levels for a particular criterion. Start with the highest achievement value and see if there is anything which disqualifies the student’s work from that level. If there is a disqualification at that level, try the next level down and so on until you do not find a disqualification. When you’ve reached a level without a disqualification, make sure that the overall description is accurate. If it is, you’ve found the right criterion achievement level for the student’s work. If you are still unsure about the accuracy of that level’s description, compare the student’s work to that level and the one above it. Decide which description fits the student’s work best and assign that level. Once you have done this process for every

criterion, you will be able to give the student’s work an overall rating by combining each of the criterion achievement levels into one score.

When the student receives the graded assignment, you can include the rubric assessment so the student understands why that grade was given. For example, a graded version of the essay rubric might look like the following:

ESSAY RUBRIC	Outstanding (3 points)	Competent (2 points)	Needs Improvement (1 point)	Unacceptable (0 points)
Organization	Presents a very clear thesis in an introductory paragraph of at least 3 sentences, 3 supporting paragraphs with their own clear arguments that are at least 5 sentences long, and a conclusion of at least 3 sentences.	Presents a thesis in an introductory paragraph, 3 supporting paragraphs with mostly clear arguments of at least 3 sentences, and a conclusion.	Has some of the following elements but not all: introduction with thesis, 3 supporting paragraphs of any length, conclusion.	Essay is not organized into an introduction with thesis – support – conclusion format at all.
Word Count	At least 1500 words.	At least 1100 words.	At least 700 words.	Less than 700 words.
Analysis	Thesis is an original or exceptionally well thought out argument. Each paragraph topic strongly supports the thesis. The conclusion draws meaningful insights.	Thesis is mostly well thought out and may not be very original but is supportable. All paragraph topics support the thesis. There is a conclusion with some final thoughts.	Thesis is not very well thought out, original, or supportable. Paragraph topics only offer weak support. Conclusion may not be present or is very short and/or superficial.	All analysis is superficial and does not represent adequate reflection. Thesis is not supported by further ideas. Conclusion is not on topic.
Grammar	No more than 2 grammatical errors or typos.	No more than 4 grammatical errors or typos.	No more than 6 grammatical errors or typos.	More than 6 grammatical errors or typos.
Total Points: 9/12				

Follow-up Question 5

Now Julia's interested in your thoughts on group work online. "Participation in group work is so hard to assess," she says. "How do you do it?"

Give Julia at least three strategies for assessing learner participation in online group work.

Your answer to the question:

Assessing group work is tricky. I approach it according to the recommendations of Carnegie Mellon's Eberly Center (n.d.a), which are as follows:

- Assess individual, as well as group, learning and performance.
 - Having an individually graded portion of a group project combined with an overall group score can help to motivate learners who might otherwise not want to put in effort.
- Assess process as well as product.
 - Having students complete team evaluations, peer evaluations, and/or self-evaluations for part of a group assignment score also helps to motivate students to be actively involved in the project.
- Make your assessment criteria and grading scheme clear.
 - Using a group rubric and making grading methodology clear (like how much weight process evaluations might have or how much of the group project grade is based on group performance versus individual contributions) from the beginning of a project helps to set up a successful experience for students and instructors. For good examples of group rubrics, look at these ones from Carnegie Mellon (n.d.b): <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/examples/courselevel-bycollege/hss/tools/jeria.pdf>.

Follow-up Question 6

"One last question," Julia says. "How do you know that what you're doing is working? In other words, how do you assess your *teaching*?"

Give Julia at least three ways to assess the effectiveness of teaching in online courses.

Your answer to the question:

The 3 main ways that I have used to assess my online teaching are observation of student success, inviting student feedback, and peer review.

- Student Success: If students are meeting objectives on schedule and generally getting good scores on assignments, then I know I'm doing something right. And if they are not, I know adjustments need to be made.
- Inviting Student Feedback: Whether obtained through informal emailed questions, casual polls, or formal surveys, feedback solicited from students on course content, my teaching, and their overall satisfaction levels with their online learning experience is important.

- Peer Review: Having another instructor go through my online course materials provides lots of good insights on what's working well in the course and areas for improvement.

I also recently came across Chickering and Gamson's 7 Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (University of Florida, n.d.). These principles are based on decades of research about best practices in teaching and learning at the undergraduate level. And while some of these principles are harder to implement online than others, they are good "food for thought" for online instructors.

Here are the 7 principles:

1. Encourage contact between students and faculty.
2. Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students.
3. Encourage active learning.
4. Provide effective and prompt feedback.
5. Emphasize time on task.
6. Communicate high expectations.
7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning.

References

Carnegie Mellon University. (n.d.a). *How can I assess group work?* Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence & Education. Retrieved July 5, 2022 from <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/design/teach/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/assess.html>

Carnegie Mellon University. (n.d.b). *Tools for Assessment*. Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence. Retrieved July 5, 2022 from <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/examples/courselevel-bycollege/hss/tools/jeria.pdf>

DePaul University. (n.d.). *Creating rubrics*. Teaching Commons. Retrieved July 5, 2022 from <https://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching-guides/feedback-grading/rubrics/Pages/creating-rubrics.aspx>

Keith, T. (2018, November 16). *Literature review: academic dishonesty – what causes it, how to prevent it*. The University of Chicago Academic Technology Solutions. Retrieved July 5, 2022 from <https://academictech.uchicago.edu/2018/11/16/literature-review-academic-dishonesty-what-causes-it-how-to-prevent-it/>

University of Florida. (n.d.). Chickering and Gamson. Center for Instructional Technology and Training. Retrieved July 5, 2022 from <https://citt.ufl.edu/resources/the-learning-process/designing-the-learning-experience/chickering-and-gamson/>