**Summary**

This guide has been written for people who are new to teaching in the Faculty of Business and Economics at the University of Melbourne. It is one of a number of teaching and related guides provided by the Williams Centre for Learning Advancement (WCLA). The guide is intended to be a useful source of ideas and advice for good teaching practice, based on sound educational principles and research.

For more information, advice and resources available to teaching staff, visit the WCLA website.

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**What is Authentic Assessment?**

In general, assessment refers to “any judgment (appraisal, or evaluation) of a student’s work or performance made by a teacher or a competent person, whether for purposes of improvement or certification” (Sadler, 1987, p. 191). Authentic assessment is one of the many forms of assessment that lecturers can do in their subject, together with performance-based assessment, portfolio assessment, and a host of other assessment types.

Assessment can generally be formative or summative – a part of an ongoing assessment or a final assessment to conclude the semester (see: Assessment and Marking). Authentic assessment can be embedded in either a formative or summative assessment. What makes it distinguishable is that it specifically refers to connecting assessment with real world practices, often through simulations, where it requires students to create products or performance that apply to situations outside the university. Archbald defines authentic assessment as:

> ...any type of assessment that requires students to demonstrate skills and competencies that realistically represent problems and situations likely to be encountered in daily life. Students are required to produce ideas, to integrate knowledge, and to complete tasks that have real-world applications. Such approaches require the person making the
assessment to use human judgment in the application of criterion-referenced standards (1991, as cited in North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004, para. 3).

Authentic forms of assessment do not necessarily replace traditional forms (e.g., multiple-choice exams). Indeed, lecturers might be doing authentic assessment already without knowing it! Lecturers might have gained industry practice in the past and might be aware of how knowledge and skills are applied in workplace settings. They may also realise how they have been assessed (e.g., by way of performance review) to ensure the effective application of knowledge and skills in their job.

As a lecturer, you can share some of those experiences. With authentic assessment, you can design assessment tasks that simulate those in workplace settings. For example, you might have worked in a bank as a provider of advice to business loan applicants. You have an idea as to what indicates quality advice. These indicators are what you could use as criteria when assessing students’ knowledge and skills.

The criteria are based upon real-world scenarios. The work students do then are practice-based, realistic, and simulate workplace settings.

Mueller (2010, para. 12) presents the distinction, along a continuum of attributes, between authentic assessment and traditional assessment in this way:

<table>
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<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Authentic</th>
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<td>Selecting a response</td>
<td>Performing a task</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contrived</td>
<td>Real-life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recall/recognition</td>
<td>Construction/Application</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher-structured</td>
<td>Student-structured</td>
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<td>Indirect evidence</td>
<td>Direct evidence</td>
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That is, traditional assessment tends to fall towards the left end of the continuum while authentic assessment to the right. By recognising these attributes, lecturers can think about assessment tasks that they can use that are more about ‘doing’ than simply ‘knowing’.

Traditional assessment commonly refers to ‘paper-and-pencil’ tests. They take a variety of forms but commonly they are true-false or
simple multiple-choice type tests that tend to focus on testing lower order thinking skills. These types of tests often only require memorised concepts or facts. By using such forms of assessment knowledge can be decontextualised as bits of information stored in memory. Learners may find it difficult to reproduce that knowledge and apply it in different decision-making contexts.

Another way to distinguish authentic assessment from traditional assessment is by examining the tasks related to each. In traditional assessment, often students are asked to recall what they have memorised from texts. In authentic assessment, because the tasks are derived from real settings, the tasks require students to act as if they are the key players involved. As Wiggins (1998, p. 229) point out, authentic tasks are:

Engaging and worthy problems or questions of importance, in which students must use knowledge to fashion performances effectively and creatively. The tasks are either replicas of or analogous to the kinds of problems faced by adult citizens and consumers or professionals in the field.

What are some of the advantages of using Authentic Assessment

In contrast to traditional assessment, authentic assessment focuses on the importance of the efficient use and application of knowledge in diverse settings than simple recall of information. It helps to ensure that learning is contextualised and can be applied in different situations. There are a number of other advantages of authentic assessment compared to traditional assessment for both lecturers and students.

Lecturers can:

- offer a variety of assessment tasks and challenges to students.
- focus on the development of knowledge and skills students will require in the future.
- bring into the classroom the experiences of professionals in various industries (e.g., presenting a business idea to potential investors, analysing a statement of financial performance, evaluating the impact of a new product to competition)
- can take advantage of using real data to illustrate how concepts or theories are or can be applied (e.g., company reports of listed companies, stock reports, news, statistical reports and analyses, advertisements, and so on).
- allow for more student co-ownership in learning by allowing students to commit mistakes in the process and learn from them.
Students can:

- visualise themselves as real professionals at work when doing authentic tasks.
- find meaningful connections between what they do in class and in the workplace in the future.
- experiment on how they can best approach a particular problem or assessment task.
- learn during the process of solution generation and their solutions can be used to assess how meaningfully they are able to apply concepts (Mueller, 2010).
- analyse, apply, and evaluate than to simply know and understand concepts.
- develop teamwork, presentation and communication skills, analytical skills, decision making, problem solving, and critical thinking skills that are necessary for and demanded by real future work.

Thus, authentic assessment offers real-world problems, real-world solutions, and real-world experience—all in the classroom.

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<th>What makes a Task Authentic?</th>
<th>An authentic task should:</th>
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<td>- be realistic. The assessment task should be situated in workplaces where actual people face a particular problem, issue or task.</td>
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<td>- be a simulation. A replica of a real-world problem, issue or task.</td>
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<td>- require a repertoire of skills. It requires students to use and apply a range of skills and competences to tackle a particular problem, issue or task that most usually resemble the same sets of skills and competences required in the workplace.</td>
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<td>- allow for feedback. The task should give students the opportunities to refine their work or performance.</td>
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There are a number of other things that indicate authenticity. These are:

- The task provides students the opportunity to explain, apply, self-adjust, or justify answers, not just provide the correct answers using facts.
- The parameters by which work will be judged are known in advance—e.g., performance criteria and standards are discussed with students.
- The task allows problem clarification, trial and error, and adjustments.
- The task involves the important aspects of performance and/or core challenges of the field of study, not the easily scored.
- The work is designed to reveal whether the student has achieved real versus pseudo mastery, or understanding versus mere familiarity, over time.
- The task evokes student interest and persistence, and challenging to both students and teachers.
- The assessment is designed to inform future performance.

(Wiggins, 1998, p.23)

Whether you are a lecturer in Marketing and Management, Finance, Accounting, or Economics, you can decide on the types of authentic tasks that are most suitable to your students. An example would be presenting students with an actual human resource management issue (e.g., a lot of staff from a local café calling in sick on Mondays and Fridays) or a marketing problem (e.g., corporate branding of a new brewery). Combined with your expertise, industry knowledge and professional contacts, you can bring in the world of work into the classroom and design assessments that simulate problem-solving and decision-making.
How to Assess Authentic Tasks?

Students need to perform based on some standards of performance and these should be communicated to students beforehand. Further, these standards are not norm-referenced but should be in reference to some specific criteria. For example, we expect students to produce excellent business reports, essays, case studies, and so on. Thus, ‘an excellent business report’ is a standard and should be benchmarked with reports by industry, along with criteria describing what we mean by ‘excellent’. A business report can be judged on the basis of its structure, clarity of purpose, appropriate identification of a business problem, feasibility of solutions, etc. then you should be able to articulate what it means to be excellent in each of these criteria.

Conclusion

Authentic assessment can help lecturers bring their industry practice into classrooms and make effective use of their networks in industry. By examining practices in the workplace and the kinds of problems people in the business sector face and how they solve them, lecturers can bring these experiences into the classroom, focus on developing skills that actual work requires, and capitalise on their industry networks. In addition, students can appreciate authentic assessment because they are authentic and closely resemble the kinds of tasks expected of them when they are employed in the future.
References and Resources


