

Assessing Student Performance

This presentation deals with:

- the **subjective nature and meaning** of assessment,
- **marking process and implications**,
- **assessment strategies and forms** (presentations, essays, group work, dissertations).

The focus will be on how to **ensure high quality of assessment**.

What is it that you are assessing when it comes to 'language'?



Let's start with some stimulating thoughts:

http://www.ted.com/talks/elif_shafak_the_politics_of_fiction?language=en

Part I:

The role of the teacher is not to preach but to inspire.

You can teach knowledge but not wisdom.

Buddha (c.528 BC)

1. On Knowledge:

- Knowledge arises from **human practices** – making changes to the environment
- Can be captured in **books, artefacts, stories, procedures**, taxonomies and **traditions**.

- Might be **canonised** and some types of knowledge given higher value than others.
- Makes up one human **cultural system** at any time.
- Can develop our ability to **make changes to our environment** (our agency) => tacit or embodied knowledge.
- **What counts as knowledge** and who may access it are **social and political questions**.



Education v. Indoctrination

Doris Lessing:

2007 Nobel Prize-winner for Literature

“**You are in the process of being indoctrinated.** We have not yet evolved a system of education that is not a system of indoctrination. What you are being taught here is an amalgam of current prejudice and the choice of this particular culture. The slightest look at history will show how impermanent these must be.”

2. Pedagogic Authority:

- **Student** has to accept / be prepared **to understand the cultural constructions** in something she is hoping to learn.
- But what is learnt from **exteriorised knowledge** is from the past; past practices in other contexts – shadows of a world that was.
- The student has to **exercise agency** in the current world.



3. Unlearning:

- Learning needs to be followed by a moment of **unlearning**.
- **The process of the application of the knowledge** in the student's own life and context requires that some things are unlearned – what is no longer useful, what is not helpful in student's context because the world has moved on.

- Knowledge develops critically.
- For this student needs power and authority.
- The pedagogic authority needs to let go.

4. Language:

“Ideas do not exist separately from language”.

Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913):
(Structural linguistics)

Language is central to our understanding of the world.

Words are collective products of social interaction, essential instruments through which human beings constitute and articulate their world.

Meaning is to be found within the structure of a whole language rather than in the analysis of individual word.



Sentence as a unit of language, not *word*:

Example 1:

I love you
I am in love with you.

Example 2:


She helped me (statement)
Past Tense
Simple Aspect
Meaning: Complete

She is helping me (statement)
Present Tense
Progressive Aspect
Meaning: Temporary

Present simple tense = universalising truth claims

Galileo: The earth orbits the sun.

Darwin: Humans are descended from apes.



Structuralism in linguistics: "...elements of human culture must be understood in terms of their relationship to a larger, overarching system or structure..."


Its focus: the **underlying patterns of thought in all forms of human activity** – all the things that humans do, think, perceive, and feel.

Claude Levi-Strauss (1908–2009):
(Structural Anthropology)

Language is a **system of signs whose meaning** and order do not derive from social life or the creative intentions of the individual speakers but solely **from the relations of signs to other elements in the system.**

The **"savage" mind** had the same structures as the **"civilized" mind** and that human characteristics are the same everywhere.

Myths as a type of speech through which a language could be discovered.



Sign (**semiotics**): the basic unit of meaning.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951):
(Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 1921)

Meaning depends upon a relation between the basic elements of language + direct empirical experience.

Word = Basic unit of language:

But in his *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953:

Sentence = Basic unit of language

Conceptual confusions surrounding language use are at the root of most philosophical problems.

- Richness and diversity of language
- Competing modes

- Language and games:



The meaning attached to what we say depends upon the rules constituting the particular *language game* in which we are participating.

Meaning of words is constituted by the function they perform within any given language-game.

The Purpose and Forms of Assessments

“The highest reward for a person’s toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it.”

John Ruskin (1819-1900)

Formative Assessment:

- Formative evaluation, formative feedback, or assessment for learning, is a range of formal and informal assessment procedures conducted by teachers during the learning process in order to modify teaching and learning activities to improve student attainment.
- **Examples:** Logs / Reports / dissertations / Projects.

Summative Assessment:

- The assessment of participants where the focus is on the outcome of a program.
- To evaluate student learning at the end of an instructional unit by comparing it against some standard or benchmark.
- Summative assessments are often **high stakes**, which means that they have a high point value. **Examples:** a mid-term exam.



- The **big difference** is when the assessment takes place in a student's learning process.
- **Formative assessment is an ongoing activity.** The evaluation takes place during the learning process.
- A **summative evaluation** takes place at a complete other time.



Direct methods of assessment ask students to demonstrate their learning. Tests, essays, presentations, etc. are generally direct methods of assessment

while **indirect methods** ask students to reflect on their learning. Indirect methods include surveys and interviews.

Assessment Criteria?

- How well students use syntax and vocabulary.
- Check for pronunciation.
- Pay attention to coherence and fluency.
- Watch interactions to assess the ability to think and respond in English.



Authentic assessment for English language learners:

- which model real-world topics and skills that students will be exposed to outside of the classroom.
- Rather than assigning multiple-choice questions to test a student's content knowledge, **teachers allow students to demonstrate their learning in a meaningful way.**

Assessment Forms:

University of Buckingham

University of Westminster

Individual Presentation	Group Presentation
Essays	Projects
N/A	Logs, portfolios
Dissertation	Dissertation
Exams	N/A

So, what is it that you assess? And how do you do it?

Part II:

Objectivity and the Assessment Process

Objectivity:

- Of a person or their judgement: **not influenced by personal feelings or opinions in considering and representing facts.**

Synonyms:

- **Impartiality:** absence of bias/prejudice,
- **Fairness:** fair-mindedness, equitableness, equitability, even-handedness, justness,
- **Justice:** open-mindedness,
- **Disinterest:** disinterestedness,
- **Detachment:** dispassion, dispassionateness,
- **Neutrality:** the ideals of journalistic accuracy and objectivity



Objectivity is also a philosophical concept of being true independently from individual subjectivity caused by perception, emotions, or imagination.



Individual and Institutional dimensions:

1st Marker: Module Leader / Seminar tutors

2nd Marker: Module Leader / Seminar tutors

External Examiner: from another university

Part III:

Assessment at Buckingham

Assessment Criteria for project / Essay / Exams: In marking students' written work, we will be considering:

- the extent to which the remit of the assignment brief has been met
- the accuracy with which relevant theoretical arguments, concepts and data are described
- the degree to which the theories and concepts discussed are integrated and contextualised
- the range of source material used
- the coherence and integration of the structure of the work presented
- the clarity (spelling, grammar, etc.) and technical accuracy with which ideas are expressed
- the use of properly referenced sources to support the arguments made

The following guidelines are designed to help you understand why you have received a particular mark so that you could further improve your performance:

A **first class** mark (70%+) will therefore be appropriate to work which:

- addresses all the requirements of the brief or question given, within the stated word limits
- provides a full and accurate account of relevant arguments and concepts and their theoretical context
- demonstrates the ability to draw out key comparisons between theoretical perspectives
- demonstrates the ability to identify and make use of an appropriate range of sources
- follows a clear and structured sequence
- uses clear, correct English
- is fully and accurately referenced
- includes a full bibliography

An **upper second** class mark (60-69%) will be indicated for work which meets all of the above criteria but which:

- may lack depth in the degree to which the theories and concepts discussed are integrated and contextualised, or
- may draw upon a more limited range of source material

A **lower second** class mark (50-59%) will be indicated for work which meets most of the above criteria but which:

- lacks depth in the description of relevant theoretical arguments or concepts or contains very minor inaccuracies
- or is limited in the contextualisation and integration of the theories and concepts discussed
- or draws upon an overly narrow range of source material
- or exhibits weaknesses in structure and presentation
- or exhibits serious inaccuracies/omissions in referencing/bibliography

Third Class (45-49):

Such an answer demonstrates some knowledge and understanding of the area, but tends to be weak in the following ways:

- does not answer the question directly;
- misses key points of information;
- contains important inaccuracies;
- coverage of material is sparse, possibly in note form;
- does not support assertions with proper evidence.

Pass (40-44):

This grade is used to indicate an answer which narrowly avoids the fail category. It represents the minimum acceptable standard at the bottom of the third class category. There is just sufficient information presented to indicate that the student has general familiarity with the subject area. Such answers contain:

- some appropriate or accurate material;
- cursory coverage of the basic material, but may contain numerous errors, omissions or irrelevancies;
- loose structure;
- poor or non-existent development of arguments.

Fail (less than 40):

Answers on the wrong topic and short general answers should at least score 20 marks, unless the marker wishes to register that there is no real content. Short answers on the correct topic in general terms should score at least 30.

Part IV:

Summing Up

Participants' concluding discussion / remarks summing up the implications of what we have learnt in relation to possible opportunities and challenges ahead.