

The AssessWell Plate: Creating a Modern, Balanced Assessment Diet for Students and Staff

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Why do we assess?

Assessment serves autonomist purposes of helping students develop by providing feedback that **helps learners understand their progress, identify areas for improvement, and enhance their skills**. It also serves more paternalistic perspectives of assuring defined standards and perhaps being able to say which students are “better” than others [1]. Whether autonomists or paternalists, teachers use assessment to ensure learners meet learning outcomes and demonstrate appropriate competency of skills.

But there may be some cultural and historical assumptions at play. Students may assume that they must be assessed and can often disregard unassessed content, while teachers may believe that because something is taught it needs to be assessed, which could lead to **a repeating culture of assessment for assessment's sake**.

How do we assess?

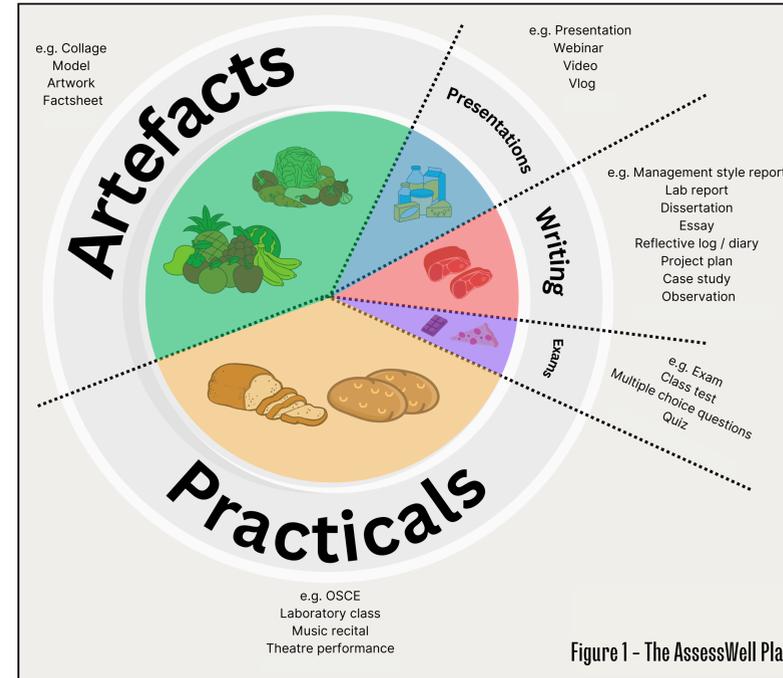
The practice of assessment is multifaceted, requiring a range of skills such as design, communication, clarification, and the application of standards, stimulating and enhancing student engagement with the task and feedback. Although each facet warrants consideration in its own right, focusing on any one element in isolation could be to the detriment of the overall process [2]. Higher education institutions have made significant progress in making programmes, learning resources, and facilities more inclusive, however, **a significant proportion of assessments remain restrictive in relation to student choice, timing, duration, and structure**.

Why does assessment need to change?

Assessment is a highly influential factor in student learning [3, 4] and the student experience [5] given how it frames students learning and achievement. Underperformance in assessment is frequently positioned as a failure in student behaviour. However, the **assessment might also be inequitable**, excluding students inappropriately [6]. Any form of assessment is constructed within a particular time and place, so inclusive practices need to take account of this.

Assessment tends towards solo, unaided performance at the expense of working with others [7], or **removing students from the typical practice** (e.g., internet access, the advice of colleagues) that employed graduates would engage in. While certain types of assessment, such as examinations, have use as methods of giving insight into student knowledge or how they think, these can lack authenticity by not adequately reflecting their areas of study in real-world practice.

There is a need for a simple academic development tool to aid reflection and correction in assessment practice.



The AssessWell Plate

A segmented plate graphic was first used in 1994 to help medical professionals educate patients in healthy eating. “The Balance of Good Health” [8] was the first widely distributed dietary guide used in the UK, and its simplistic design, using five sectors to represent the five main food groups, effectively communicated this important information.

Since its introduction, there have been several iterations, each of which have become more inclusive of a wide variety of commonly consumed foods and additional important dietary information such as front-of-pack “traffic light labelling”. The current version, The Eatwell Guide [9] was launched in 2016 and is considered the most comprehensive and easily understood version to date.

The use of the highly visual, intuitive infographic has been shown to be an effective means of comprehensively communicating dietary information in a simplistic manner for over 30 years [10].

It helps identify balance and starting points for change. Food is so much more than sustenance and fuel for the body; it acts as a vehicle to bring people together in social settings and helps to break down boundaries; it is a common language for us all.

As with dietary choices, a healthy and balanced approach (Figure 1) could be adopted to selecting assessment. Assessments should be genuinely authentic whilst also suitable for measuring achievement of the learning outcomes. The provision of a balanced assessment profile will result in healthy and happy students and staff alike.

- **Carbohydrates** are excellent but not always long-lasting sources of energy. Practicals demonstrate non-conceptual skills, but benefits can be short lived without repetition.
- **Fruit and vegetables** are valuable sources of vitamins and minerals, bringing colour and variety to the diet. Producing artefacts brings diversity, variety, and balance to the student experience, however ambiguity can arise in grading.
- **Dairy** is essential for skeletal health but can be laden with unhealthy fats. Likewise, presentations can be the backbone of professional skill development but may be anxiety inducing.
- **Proteins** are integral to growth and repair just as written pieces can demonstrate understanding of key information. Similarly, as the range of non-traditional protein sources is expanding, the incorporation of innovative written pieces can bring variety and diverse benefits to the student experience.
- **High fat, salt, and sugar foods** bring flavour and satiety to the diet, but overconsumption causes problems. Exams may enable demonstration of breadth of knowledge, but they favour memorisation of content, especially short-term memorisation.

Using the AssessWell Plate in course design

The AssessWell Plate has been developed with the objective of being **a fun and interactive tool which is thought provoking and sparks conversations** amongst module and course teams. Individual contributors are encouraged to sketch out their “plate” representing the module assessment weightings as is or create a pie chart using software packages, comparing this to the plate as a reflective tool. This can also happen at programme level to ensure a balance of assessment types and to have weightings that are most appropriate for fostering positive outcomes for students. Recommended percentages of assessment types have been viewed as indicative, and we are not recommending that those percentages must be strictly followed. The assessment profile for any module or course will be impacted by the discipline and course requirements therefore should be appropriate. It is intended to **aid educators in highlighting imbalances in assessment profiles and, more importantly, to help them visualise suitable alternatives**.

Conclusion

Our simple yet intuitive framework encourages instructors to move away from restrictive, repetitive assessment practices to a more balanced and authentic assessment profile aligned to post-graduation skills and challenges. **This framework fosters deeper and more authentic learning experiences**. We call for the promotion of a positive assessment culture, such as through demystifying the hidden curriculum, improved accessibility and inclusion, and the provision of regular, timely, and useful feedback. This innovative approach aims to cultivate a more holistic assessment diet for staff and students.

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