

## Selecting Meaningful and Relevant Alternative Assessments for Online and Face-to-Face Teaching

A common form of assessment is the use of multiple choice and true-false questions, including ones that may be pre-created by a textbook publisher. These tried and tested methods are appealing because they are automatically graded when administered through a Scantron, a web-based assessment system, such as Akindi, or one of the learning management system (LMS) tools. Because this approach has been effective and reliable in the past, instructors may be reluctant to investigate and administer alternatives.

While traditional testing may work well when meeting with students in an on-campus classroom, there are shortfalls when transitioning that experience to the online environment. Challenges associated with online testing have ranged from academic integrity violations to complaints about the use of proctoring technologies. A great deal of resources are being spent trying to perfect this online testing process even though it only measures low-level skills and content knowledge. In contrast, meaningful, relevant, and authentic assessments reduce or eliminate many of the concerns about online testing. They also give students the opportunity to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills that can lead to more effective learning.

### **Alternative Assessments: Criticisms and Benefits**

As with any assignment type, educators have raised concerns about the use of alternative assessment techniques. Nevertheless, they are a more accurate reflection of the learning that should take place in the class and can be valuable to student outcomes. Despite the criticisms listed below, the benefits illustrate the positive impact alternative assessments can have on students in the class and beyond.

#### **CRTICISMS**

- Investment of time
- Subjective nature of human grading
- Validity and reliability concerns

#### **BENEFITS**

- Active rather than passive
- Creative thinking
- Greater engagement and motivation
- Higher achievement levels
- Learning not cramming
- Multiple ways to demonstrate learning
- Problem-solving rather than straightforward recall
- Transformative learning experiences

### **Where to Begin**

When instructors design their online courses, they start by considering the learning goals. What do they hope the students have learned and will still find valuable several years after the course has ended? In terms of assessments, instructors select ones that will enable their students to demonstrate that they have achieved those learning goals.

The goals and options outlined in the next table may be used as a guide when selecting alternative assessments that are appropriate for you and your students.

## ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS – GOALS AND OPTIONS

COGNITIVE PROCESSES	ASSESSMENT GOAL	ASSESSMENT OPTIONS
Create	Produce a new product, process, or point of view	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construct posters that are presented to the class or an external audience</li> <li>• Prepare and deliver a presentation</li> <li>• Develop a critical reflection about the course learning experience</li> <li>• Make a portfolio to demonstrate improvement and showcase best work</li> <li>• Use information technology, such as a web page, video, or podcast, to convey course concepts</li> <li>• Design a brochure or an advertisement</li> <li>• Write a newspaper article or editorial</li> </ul>
Analyze and Evaluate	Distinguish between and among different pieces  Justify a position or a decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in a debate</li> <li>• Conduct a survey of the literature</li> <li>• Draft a review and/or analysis of an event, a play, a performance, or a work of art</li> <li>• Describe a cause-and-effect relationship in a case study or demonstration</li> <li>• Design a visual aid, such as a diagram, table, or chart</li> <li>• Develop a policy memo</li> <li>• Compose an executive summary</li> </ul>
Apply	Use content knowledge in new ways or contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply a theory or process to an application</li> <li>• Select a theory or procedure that could be applied to solve a problem</li> <li>• Complete an activity and describe decisions made at different points in the process</li> <li>• View a procedure depicted in a video or a picture and describe next steps</li> </ul>

COGNITIVE PROCESSES	ASSESSMENT GOAL	ASSESSMENT OPTIONS
Remember and Understand	Recall or remember specific content knowledge  Explain ideas or concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete short-answer exams that require a description and interpretation of ideas or concepts</li> <li>• Label diagrams or photos</li> <li>• Respond to multiple choice questions that require an explanation of the selected answers</li> </ul>

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### SC&I IDTS

If you need assistance selecting and designing alternative assessments, please contact the IDTS team at:

[sci-idts@comminfo.rutgers.edu](mailto:sci-idts@comminfo.rutgers.edu)

### Other Guides

- Alternatives to Proctored Exams (Rutgers)
  - <https://it.rutgers.edu/remote-instruction/knowledgebase/alternatives-to-proctored-exams/>
- Authentic Assessment (Indiana University Bloomington)
  - <https://citl.indiana.edu/teaching-resources/assessing-student-learning/authentic-assessment/index.html>
- Teaching Excellence: Authentic Assessment (Spalding University Library + Academic Commons)
  - <https://library.spalding.edu/c.php?g=623364&p=4472359>