Alternatives to Traditional Exams and Papers*

In designing assessments or assignments for a course, instructors often think of exams or term papers, but there are many other types of assessments that may be appropriate for your course. If you are willing to think creatively about assignments that go beyond traditional exams or research papers, you may be able to design assignments that are more accurate reflections of the kind of thinking and problem-solving in which you want your students to engage. In addition, these types of nontraditional assignments are also useful if you are trying to design more motivating and engaging assessments that may discourage the use of generative AI.

In developing creative assessments of your students' learning, it is helpful to think about exactly what you want to assess. The questions below will help you focus on exactly what skills and knowledge your assessment should include.

- Do you want to assess your students' acquisition of specific content knowledge, or their ability to apply that knowledge to new situations (or both)?

- Do you want to assess a product that students produce, or the process they went through to produce it, or both?

- Do you want to assess any of the following?
    - writing ability
    - speaking skills
    - creativity
    - use of information technology

- Is a visual component to the assessment necessary or desirable?

- Is the ability for students to work in a group an important component of the assessment?

- Is it important that the assessment be time-constrained?

To help you think outside the box in developing assessments of your students' learning, here are some alternatives to multiple-choice exams that can be used in many disciplines and contexts. They are organized based on what kinds of cognitive processes or skills they require.

Alternatives that <u>draw on students' creativity</u>:
- Advertisements
- Development of a product or proposal (perhaps to be judged by external judges)
- Diary entry for a real or fictional character
- Letter to a friend explaining a problem or concept
- Brochure from a real/imaginary business or organization
- Performance: e.g., a presentation to the class or a debate
- Poem, play, or dialogue
- Web page or video
- Work of art, music, architecture, sculpture, etc.
- Newspaper article or editorial

Alternatives that <u>require analysis or evaluation</u>:
- Analysis and response to a case study
- Analysis of data or a graph
- Analysis of an event, performance, or work of art

- Chart, graph, or diagram with explanation
- Debate
- Legal brief
- Review of a book, play, performance, etc.
- Literature review
- Policy memo or executive summary
- Diagram, table, chart, or visual aid

Alternatives that <u>require work similar to what is required for a term paper, but that result in shorter documents</u>:
- Annotated bibliography
- Introduction to a research paper or essay (rather than the full paper)
- Literature review
- Executive summary
- Research proposal addressed to a granting agency
- Scientific abstract
- Policy memo or executive summary
- Start of a term paper (the thesis statement and a detailed outline)

Alternatives that <u>require only that students understand course material</u>:
- Explanation of a multiple-choice answer (students must explain why the answer they chose to a multiple-choice question is correct, or why the alternative answers are wrong)
- Meaningful paragraph (given a list of specific terms, students must use the terms in a paragraph that demonstrates that they understand the terms and their interconnections).
- Short-answer exam (rather than asking multiple-choice questions, make some questions short-answer, to require students to show their understanding of key concepts)

Alternatives that <u>require integration of many skills and types of knowledge</u>:
- Poster (which could be presented to the class or a larger audience in a poster session)
- Portfolio to demonstrate improvement or evolution of work and thinking over time
- Powerpoint presentation
- Reflection by students on what they have learned from an experience

*Adapted from Indiana University Bloomington's Center for Innovative Teaching & Learning