Generating ideas for assessment tasks and questions

There are several reasons you need to generate new assessment items and revise existing ones. These include:-

- maintaining academic integrity and assessment security
- changes to program and course curriculum
- responding to student feedback
- assisting guest lecturers who teach into your course contribute assessment for their area of expertise
- self-reflection on our teaching and assessment practices and continuous improvement

The assessment we design should not only move student activity in the intended direction and provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate course learning outcomes, but should be engaging and purposeful to our students.

Because the assessment in your course should be designed for students to demonstrate achievement of course learning outcomes, one of the easiest ways to start thinking about new assessment ideas is to ask, *how do I make that learning outcome visible*?

This is a great platform from which to generate new ideas for assessment tasks and questions so that your students can demonstrate their acquisition of knowledge, skills and attributes.

Using the *how do I make that visible?* strategy can also help make it easier for students to appreciate their own learning and development. If they can more readily see their progress it can help to position them as more independent, self-regulated learners.

How do I make the activity required visible?

Encourage students to look at the verb you use in your question, for example, define, classify, apply, analyse, predict, evaluate, justify.

Verb	Possible question types
define	• an MCQ where students have to select the correct definition • a 'fill in the blanks' question where students have to select the correct alternative from a drop down list to complete the definition • a short answer question where students have to write out the definition
classify or sequence	• a 'matching' question where students have to classify symptoms and match them with their associated ailments • a 'matching' question where students have to match the step in the sequence to the correct number
apply	• a series of multiple choice or short answer questions in relation to a short (60-100 words) scenario or other stimulus material (e.g. an image or a quote) • a short answer problem-based question
interpret and analyse	• ask multiple choice or short answer questions in relation to a data set or other stimulus
predict, extrapolate, hypothesise	• follow up the analysis question* and ask students to predict what might happen next, or in a different set of circumstances, or to a person with different characteristics • provide an incomplete diagram/graph/data set and ask an MCQ where students need to select which option would accurately complete the diagram/graph/data set. e.g. what belongs in the bottom right cell of the table or what would you expect to see in the upper right corner of the diagram? Students may be required to demonstrate that they can identify trends/patterns, perform calculations, extrapolate or hypothesise. You could follow up this question with a short answer question* asking students to explain their answer, which makes the thinking behind their selection more visible.
evaluate	• ask a multiple choice question that directly asks students to judge something (an assertion or a choice or a decision). Avoid phrasing the distractors as simple binary options e.g. the assertion is 'wrong' or 'right' or 'valid' or 'invalid'. • provide a short scenario (60-100 words). Ask a multiple choice question with a question like *Which one of the following actions is the most appropriate in the circumstances?* Students have to exercise judgement to select the right option.
justify	• follow the evaluative MCQ* with a short answer question asking students to justify why they selected that answer and not the others.
* *If you are using MCQ and short answer questions in combination to get at higher order thinking skills, do not randomise the order of those questions.*	

How do I make that kind of thinking visible?

Sometimes we need more than just a learning verb to express what knowledge, skills and actions we'd like students to be able to demonstrate.

Another way to generate assessment question/task ideas, is to focus on the kind of thinking you would like students to demonstrate. Again, ask *How do I make that kind of thinking visible?* to help you formulate a question or task that is going to allow students to demonstrate that capacity.

The list below is not exhaustive, but is a good platform from which to generate new ideas.

Kind of Thinking	Assessment Question / Task Ideas
Open minded - explore alternative views; alert to narrow thinking; ability to generate multiple options	
Sustained intellectual curiosity - probe; find problems; inquire; be alert for anomalies; ability to observe closely; formulate questions	
Clarity and seek understanding - ability to build conceptualisations; alert to lack of clarity; seek explanation and make connections	
Intellectually careful -seek precision; organisation and thoroughness; ability to process information precisely; alert to errors & inaccuracies	
Seek and evaluate reasons - demand justification and supporting evidence; ability to weigh and assess reasons	
Planful and strategic - formulate and set goals; make and execute preparation plans; alert to their own lack of direction	
Meta-cognition and reflection - monitor flow of their own thinking; monitor their own performance of the task	

Tishman, S., Jay, E., & Perkins, D. (1993). Teaching Thinking Dispositions: From Transmission to Enculturation. Theory Into Practice, 32(3), 147-153. Retrieved April 27, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/1476695

An example of how this table was used to generate new assessment ideas in law is below.

What ways of thinking and practising are key to your discipline?

For example, diagnosing, reasoning, generating questions, analysing, problem solving, forecasting, risk analysis and so on. *What kinds of tasks give students the opportunity to demonstrate these ways of thinking and practising?*

This is a question you can ask yourself to ensure that your assessment has a degree of authenticity and that it engages students in 'becoming' the person and professional they are going to be beyond university.

Generating Assessment Ideas: Using the "Magnificent 7" thinking dispositions from the work of Ron Richart, David Perkins & Shari Tishman

research, inquiry or statutory interpretation problems

assess the actions of a solicitor in a problem scenario including justified recommendations of alternative action

prepare a working tool to be used by others e.g. decision matrix

represent new key understandings or concepts as an analogy or model

Students critique authentic legal docs. (expert reports, transcripts, leases, contracts) &/or generate questions from them

peer review of each other's "case briefs"

collaborative creation of an 'artefact'

What matters will you want to address in your advice / contract?

What strategies would you use initially to attempt to resolve any immediate points of conflict / difficulty?

Is there anything that needs to happen on an interim basis? Justify your answer.

What evidence / case law do you need to obtain to support your case / drafting of particular clause?

Identify any areas of ambiguity and outline how you will address them.

Explain the responsiveness of your plan to varying conditions and outcomes.

Open Minded
explore alternative views; alert to narrow thinking; ability to generate multiple options

Sustained intellectual curiosity
probe; find problems; inquire; be alert for anomalies; ability to observe closely; formulate questions

Clarify & seek understanding
ability to build conceptualisations; alert to lack of clarity; seek explanation and make connections

Intellectually Careful
seek precision; organisation and thoroughness; ability to process information precisely; alert to errors & inaccuracies

Seek and evaluate reasons
demand justification and supporting evidence; ability to weigh and assess reasons

Plan & be strategic
formulate and set goals; make and execute preparation plans; alert to their own lack of direction

Meta-cognition & Reflection
monitor flow of their own thinking; monitor their own performance of the task

Investigate key dilemmas of the subject area

Assessment question provides the finished product (or students find one) and asks students to Work Backwards from e.g. a contract or a lease. *What legal problem has this document been designed for? What issues must the client have had for this clause to have been written?*

Staged Assessment
1. Collaborative collation of key cases/readings that make up principles/doctrine of a subject.
2. classify; compare and contrast; examine dissenting views
3. from this body of data, students build conceptualisations, make connections

Students collaboratively produce a relevant legal artefact based on a problem scenario. Examine student exchanges for evidence of:-
- accurately interpreting evidence, statements and questions
- identifying salient arguments, reasons and claims
- thoughtful analysis and evaluation of alternative viewpoints, drawing warranted, judicious, non-fallacious conclusions; justifying key results, decisions and procedures
- explaining assumptions and reasons
- revising opinions when warranted by feedback

define tasks and sub tasks needed to complete the activity

Attached to any task:
What did I learn?
How did I learn it?
Why does it matter?
What will I do/change in light of it?

a drafting plan, rather than actual drafting

introduce ambiguity at significant decision points in the problem scenario – what are the possibilities now?