

Case Study Title: “Talk to me: dialogic assessments for student empowerment, staff joy, and Gen-AI resistance”

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Assessment Name: Presentation

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1. How would you summarise your practice case study?

The final year university module I teach used to assess students via two 2,500 essays, which encouraged students to engage selectively with the curriculum, put an excessive burden on students with disabilities, and were vulnerable to students’ use of generative AI. The redesigned assessments are now a take-home multiple-choice test and an in-person presentation with Q&A. For the presentation, students choose a case study and examine it by showing engagement with the module as a whole. Crucially, presentation skills or design are not assessed, and the focus is solely on students’ understanding and critical engagement. Extensive tutorial support and opportunities for practice and feedback are embedded throughout the module.

The format has proved effective for both students and staff. Marking is more efficient thanks to on-the-spot marking and use of a custom rubric. Prioritising learning over assessment skills means that the format can more easily be adapted to meet individual students’ needs without compromising fairness. Student satisfaction in the module has increased, engagement is more sustained throughout the trimester, and grade distributions have broadened. The need to police AI-generated work has been removed entirely.

2. Why did you develop or enhance your assessment and what was your rationale?

I wanted to encourage students to engage with the whole module rather than “study to the test” by selectively attending to the lectures relevant to their chosen essay topic. I also

wanted to improve accessibility, as the essays were generating significant anxiety in students with learning difficulties and in students from different programmes who struggled to navigate disciplinary conventions. In turn, this was causing a significant administrative burden on teaching staff. Finally, the rise of generative AI was becoming a huge concern.

3. What enhancements or changes did you implement in assessment in making this more innovative, diverse or inclusive of diverse learner cohorts?

The in person individual presentation with Q&A was designed with focus on assessing learning rather than presentation skills: students are not marked on slide design, speaking style, spelling, timing, or other performative aspects. The Q&A that follows the presentation has several purposes: it can test or expand on concepts included in the presentation; be an opportunity to add information that may have been omitted; and provide a prompt for students to reflect on their learning. Students can refer to notes throughout, and the assessment is centred entirely on students' understanding, critical thinking, and ability to engage with the module content. Equivalent alternative formats tailored to individual circumstances can be easily designed on request.

4. What informed your approach to the changes you made, e.g. student feedback, observations of student difficulty, insights from literature or research findings, assessment pass rates etc.?

I would routinely receive a huge volume of email queries about the essays from students, who seemed largely concerned with meeting assessment requirements rather than demonstrating learning. Student feedback also described the essay assessments as "overly formulaic". Having recently completed PgCert Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education, I used the programme resources and to shape my thinking on assessing learning through more meaningful tasks, allowing students to apply their learning to real world examples and demonstrate their thinking in a dialogic way.

5. What key changes have you seen as a result of this change to your assessment practice?

Thanks to the Q&A, students can demonstrate outstanding levels of reflection, which has increased the number of high distinctions. At the same time, students whose presentation does not go into sufficient depth can still demonstrate their learning in the Q&A, also

increasing their grade. Any students relying solely on Gen-AI to write their assessment simply fail achieved a pass. Having dialogic conversations with my students has greatly increased my own satisfaction with both teaching and the marking process, which is now firmly limited to working hours, improving work-life balance. My admin workload has vastly decreased: making clear to students what is and what is not marked means they are able to focus on demonstrating learning rather than adhering to a standard format, which has made students more confident in taking ownership of the assessment process.

6. How are you evaluating the effectiveness of these enhancements or changes implemented?

Since implementing the changes two years ago, I have been using several avenues to monitor their effectiveness, such as module evaluations, student feedback (both during the module and during assessments themselves), student attainment, grade distribution, and feedback from teaching colleagues, the moderator, and the external examiner.

7. Tips for practitioners:

Do you have any tips for practitioners wanting to make similar enhancements or changes in their assessments that you could add in?

My top tips are:

- Keep it simple: what do you need your students to do to demonstrate their learning?
- Inclusiveness and resourcing do not need to be in conflict: focusing on what is essential and shedding what is not is good both for students' learning and for staff workload
- Design your rubric with on-the-spot marking in mind
- Do not offer a fixed format of alternative assessment: instead, discuss alternatives with the students who need them, based on their individual needs
- Remember to record oral assessments to allow for moderation
- Resist assumptions about what students can do: their adaptability and creativity may surprise you