

Case Study: Adding 3 types of optionality in Assessment**University: University of Stirling****Programme: Psychology****Module: Individual Differences (3rd year)****Level: SCQF level 9****Assessment Name: Analysis of Behaviour****Assessment Weight: 50%****1. How would you summarise your practice case study?**

This case study is about embedding 3 types of optionality into my assessment. The assessment itself is called 'Analysis of Behaviour' and asks students to explain someone's behaviour/why they may act the way they do, using the personality theories we have learned about in the module, and/or other theories we may not have discussed. I have embedded the following three types of optionality within this assessment:

Firstly, I allow students to choose the *format* of their submission (i.e. essay, blog, podcast, presentation, etc.). It is crucial to mention here that students are only graded on their content and not on the format of delivery. Secondly, they can choose the *subject* on which they would like to do the assessment on (ranging from themselves to a fictional character, to someone they make up). Finally, in this last year, I have also allowed them to choose *the level of AI-use*, ranging from not using it at all, to using it as a 'copilot' to help them with all aspects of the assessment.

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

I developed this assessment to better suit student strengths but also to allow those who wanted to challenge themselves to try something new and out of their comfort zone. Additionally, assessing all students only using written work would not be inclusive or accessible for some. My rationale was that one-size-does-not-fit-all, as I have seen myself throughout my years of teaching. Some students struggle with writing but excel in visual mediums, while others would rather write an essay as that is what they are used to. This assessment allows all students to decide on what works best for them and their needs.

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

The levels of optionality offered in this assessment mean that all students should be able to excel. It was specifically created to be inclusive and to appeal to diverse learner cohorts, as the module itself has students not only in Psychology but also in Sports Psychology and Education. Indeed, many students have specifically chosen to study Psychology as their programme in order to

understand themselves, and possibly their own mind, brain, and behaviours better. This may mean that we also see higher levels of neurodiversity within our population of students, and an assessment like this is very well placed to allow all to perform to the best of their abilities.

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 wanted to design an assessment which was fun, engaging, and most importantly, inclusive. We know that students with dyslexia can struggle with reading and writing, and sometimes need extra time or support. However, they may excel in creating presentations, podcasts, or infographics, for example. Similarly, from an employability and skills-development angle, allowing students to explore different mediums in which to submit their assessment means that they can tailor their learning journey to suit their needs.

Before I took over the role of module coordinator, there were two other assessments which consisted of a very difficult statistics assessment (lab report-style write-up) and one multiple choice final exam. I removed the timed final multiple choice exam (they are incredibly non-inclusive and accessible to neurodiverse students, as well as creating a lot of anxiety), and instead created this assessment within optionality embedded.

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

Students really enjoy this assessment and have reported this in their evaluation feedback at the end of the module. I have also had some final year students approach me and tell me that this was their favourite assessment from their Psychology programme. Mostly, they enjoy being able to choose any individual they would like to explain their behaviour, with many choosing themselves. Many have also mentioned how they liked the freedom of format. As expected, some played to their strengths. For example one student who had a professional pod-cast set-up in their house chose to do a pod-cast. But others also chose to try something they had never done before, like write a fictional story about a character or create a missing-person's like case-file. These were a great show of creativity. Key changes include higher module evaluation scores, even without an inflation of grades.

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

My evaluation of the effectiveness of this approach is in the form of student feedback (see above section). Additionally, I received our faculty's Dean's award for Inclusive Assessment in 2022.

Lots of assessments can be done in different formats. That is, any assignment that we use to assess critical thinking, knowledge, and even process, can be done through pretty much any medium. Obviously there are caveats and programme-specific modes of delivery that need to be taught (like writing lab reports for Psychology, as part of the preparation for writing their dissertation, which is required for BPS accreditation)... but many of the ones that we historically use (essays, multiple choice exams, etc.) can be adapted to have different levels of optionality as standard.

7. Tips for practitioners:

If you choose to use format optionality in your assessment be clear with students what the expectations are, regardless of format, and share with them the grading rubric in advance (or even co-create it with them!). 😊

Make sure students know that they will not be assessed on format.

Make sure that Intended learning outcomes/rubric don't explicitly hinge on any kind of format-specific details, like 'clear speaking voice' or 'well written'.

There will be a LOT of questions about how to write it, (e.g. 'does it need to be in 1st or 3rd person?', 'How do I begin? How should I structure it?', 'Can it be in the form of an interview with another person?') etc.

I've found that creating an FAQ with all questions that have been asked in previous years is extremely helpful for students. I put it up on our VLE (Canvas) discussion boards every year and amend as needed. It also saves me having to re-iterate the same thing multiple times.

If you choose to use subject (i.e. person/thing) optionality in your assessment:

You will get asked a lot of questions as to whether what they picked is ok ('Is it ok if I do the assessment on myself?', 'Can I do it on a super famous serial killer?', 'Can I do it on a fictional character that I'm currently obsessed with?').

I've found that the FAQ section is incredibly useful here as well.

If you choose to have AI-use optionality in your assessment:

If you allow any AI-use, then prepare for some pretty bland assessments to be submitted. A lot will sound very 'samey' and be quite surface level. They may also use similar theories even if they are looking at different subjects.

This can be combatted with a clear focus on originality and uniqueness in the intended learning outcomes/rubrics. A focus on bringing new perspectives and really having a clear student voice rather than just re-hashing some theories.

Expect a lot of essays...

There is really no way to know whether they did or did not use AI even if you do not explicitly allow it, unless it's 'locked down' or done in a specific place (under exam-style conditions). I decided to just let students use it, but told shared with them that it can really mute their own voice and stifle creativity.

Marks were no better this year (when I allowed any level of AI-use) compared with last year, where I only allowed them to use AI for brainstorming, and going even further back, to when AI did not exist!