



Oral assessment

What is it?

Students speak to provide evidence of their learning for assessment. At UCL, a wide variety of types of oral assessment are used. Students present posters or use presentation software such as Power Point or Prezi. The presentation may be followed by questions. Oral assessment can also take the form of a debate or students may make a case. Internationally, oral examinations are commonplace. Students' knowledge and skills are explored through a dialogue with examiners. Teachers at UCL have found that oral examinations provide students with the scope to demonstrate their detailed understanding of course knowledge and recommend them.

Why do it?

Good assessment practice gives students the opportunity to demonstrate learning in different ways. Some students find it difficult to write so they do better in oral assessments. Others may find it challenging to present their ideas to a group of people. Oral assessment takes account of diversity and enables students to develop vital verbal communication skills. Oral assessment can also be a boon for teachers. Marking criteria and guides can be carefully developed so that assessment processes can be quick, simple and transparent.

Assessment & feedback quick guides

5

How to organise oral assessment

Oral assessment can take many forms. Audio and/or video recordings can be uploaded to Moodle if live assessment is not practicable. Tasks can range from individual or group talks and presentations to dialogic oral examinations. Oral assessment works well as a basis for feedback to students and/or to generate marks towards final results.

1. Consider the learning which you aim to assess. How can you best offer students the opportunity to demonstrate that learning? The planning process needs to start early because students must know about and practise the assessment tasks you design.

2. Discuss the assessment criteria with students ensuring that you include (but don't overemphasise) presentation or speaking skills. Identify activities which encourage the application or analysis of knowledge. Choose from the OPTIONS in (3) or devise a task with a practical element adapted to students' learning in your discipline.

3. Options:

- Assessment task: presentation, talk, debate, role-play, interview, dialogue, question and answer session.
- Individual or group: if group, how will you distribute the tasks and the marks?
- Timing: allow time between presentations or interviews and keep presentations brief.
- Combination with other modes of assessment: oral presentation of a project report or dissertation, oral presentation of posters, diagrams, or museum objects, commentary on a practical exercise, questions to follow up written tests, examinations, or essays. Decide on the weighting of the different assessment tasks and clarify how the assessment criteria will be applied to each.
- Peer or staff assessment or a combination: groups of students can assess other groups or individuals.

4. When you've decided which options to use, provide students with detailed information. Integrate opportunities to develop the skills needed for oral assessment progressively as students learn. If you can involve students in formulating assessment criteria, they will be motivated and engaged and gain insight into what is required, especially if examples are used.

5. Plan the oral assessment event meticulously. Stick rigidly to planned timing. Ensure that students practise presentations with time limitations in mind.

6. Decide how you will evaluate presentations or students' responses. It works well to create an assessment sheet with a grid or table using the relevant assessment criteria. Focus on core learning outcomes avoiding detail. Two assessors must be present. One can evaluate against a range of specific core criteria while the other focuses on forming a holistic judgment. Leave time to make a final decision on marks perhaps after every four presentations. Refer to audio recordings later for borderline cases.

7. Students will learn from presentations especially if you can use 'audio/video recall' for feedback. Let speakers talk through aspects of the presentation pointing out areas they might develop. Then discuss your evaluation with them. This can also be done in peer groups. If you have large groups of students, they can support each other, each providing feedback to several peers. They can use the same assessment sheets as teachers. Marks can also be awarded for feedback.

8. A great advantage of oral assessment is that learning can be shared and peer reviewed, in line with academic practice. There are many variants on the theme so why not let your students benefit from this underused form of assessment?

Case studies

The UCL Teaching and Learning Portal has case studies on assessment and feedback (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/case-studies/assessment-feedback>), including a report on oral presentations at an undergraduate research symposium, a report on filmed role-play assessments in developmental psychology and a report on students interviewing their teachers in biosciences.