Examinations: Aims, Making, and Marking

Mohammad Awwad
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Philadelphia University

28th September, 2010

Aims and Function of Examinations

Examinations should aim at:

- Directly improving the teaching-learning process
- having an impact on achieving the outcomes of the course.
- Assessing knowledge, practical, professional and cognitive skills.
- Leading to a reconsideration and enhancement of curriculum content and delivery.
- Linking student performance to specific learning outcomes.
- Reflecting the interaction between the teaching process and the lesson or lecture outcomes.
- Helping instructors, tutors, and lecturers become better teachers.
- Helping students manage their progress in the course.
- Contributing to meaningful learning.

Types & Exams

- 1- Formative
- 2- Summative
- 3- Criterion Referenced
- 4- Norm Referenced
- Formative Exams (and assignments) give feedback on the progress and success of learning. They aim at developing the students' skills and knowledge through an educationally sound method and approach. Examples of formative assessment are: quizzes, short written tasks, short oral presentations, etc. All forms of on-going assessment fall within this category.

- Summative exams are usually given at the end of courses or programmes of study. All final exams are summative. Mid-term exams are both formative and summative.
- The following proficiency and achievement exams are further examples of summative assessment: TOEFL, GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT, etc.
- Criterion referenced exams scoring is done according to predetermined standards.
- Norm referenced exams are scored according to a curve.

More on formative examinations

- The UK government has stated that personalised learning depends on teachers knowing the strengths and weaknesses of individual learners and that a key means of achieving this is through formative assessment, involving high quality feedback to learners included within every teaching session. (Duckett et al 2007).

The Assessment Reform Group has set out 10 principles for formative assessment. These are that assessment for learning should:
- be part of effective planning of teaching and learning.
- focus on how students learn.
- be recognised as central to classroom practice.
- be regarded as a key professional skill for teachers.
- be sensitive and constructive because any assessment has emotional impact.
- take account of the importance of learner motivation.
- promote commitment to learning goals and a shared understanding of the criteria by which they are assessed.
- enable learners to receive constructive guidance about how to improve.
- develop learners' capacity for self-assessment so that they can become reflective and self-managing.
- recognise the full range of achievements of all learners.

** (http://en.wikipededia.org/wiki/Formative_assessment

Benefits of Formative Assessment for Teachers (Boston, 2002)

- Teachers are able to determine what standards students already know and to what degree.

- Teachers can decide what minor modifications or major changes in instruction they need to makes so that all students can succeed in upcoming instruction and on subsequent assessments.

- Teachers can create appropriate lessons and activities for groups of learners or individual students.

- Teaching can inform students about their current progress in order to help them set goals for improvement.

- In 2008, Katy Bainbridge began work on Align Assess Achieve, a method of teaching formative assessment. (http://www.Qualityinstruction.org) to administrators and teachers.

Benefits of formative assessments for students (marzano 2003; stiggens et. al, 2006)

- Students are more motivated to learn.
- Students take responsibility for their own learning.
- Students become users of assessment.
- Students learn valuable lifelong skills such as self-evaluation, self-assessment, and goal setting.
- Student achievement can improve from 21-41 percentile points.

Steps in Assessment

Steps in Assessment

1. Establish the specific objectives and outcomes of the course as regards Bloom's taxonomy 1964 comprising the following:

- Knowledge: To know specific facts, terms, concepts, principles, or theories.
- Comprehension: To understand, interpret, compare and contrast, explain.
- Application: To apply knowledge to new situations, to solve problems.
- Analysis: To identify the organization of structure of something, to identify parts, relationships and organizational principles.
- Synthesis: To create something, to integrate ideas into solutions, to propose an action plan, to formulate a new classification scheme.

- Evaluation: To judge the quality of something based on its adequacy, value, logic or use.

(*OAPA Handbook Course-based Review and Assessment* UMASS Amherst, 2001, p. 11)

2. Develop tools of evaluation.

3. Collect data and analyze it.

4. Use results of analysis to improve/ adapt curricula, pedagogy, and goals.

What are rubrics?

Rubrics are scoring tools that teachers use to assess student learning after a lesson. Using a set of criteria and standards (directly tied to the stated learning objectives), educators can assess each student's performance on a wide variety of work, ranging from written essays to class projects.

When a rubric is agreed-upon and communicated prior to the student's work being completed, the grading process is very clear and transparent to all involved. Often, it is helpful to have more than one evaluator grade each piece of work. Then the rubric scores can either be averages or added together for a final score

Advantages of rubrics

- Rubrics improve student performance by clearly showing the students how their work will be evaluated and what is expected.
- Rubrics help students become better judges of the quality of their own work.
- Rubrics allow assessment to be more objective and consistent.
- Rubrics force the teacher to clarify his/her criteria in specific terms.
- Rubrics reduce the amount of time teachers spend evaluating student work.
- Rubrics promote student awareness about the criteria to use in assessing peer performance.
- Rubrics provide useful feedback to the teacher regarding the effectiveness of the instruction.
- Rubrics provide students with more informative feedback about their strengths and areas in need of improvement.
- Rubrics accommodate heterogeneous classes by offering a range of quality levels.
- Rubrics are easy to use and easy to explain.

- http://edtech.kennesaw.edu/intech/rubrics.htm

Marking guidelines and general guidance on the various grades

It is very difficult to give general guidance on appropriate grading but the following may help in standardizing your approach to particular questions. These notes are for guidance to help you make decisions when marking. Also, please note the point below about differentiating between FAIL grades and between mid-range marks.

PASS 1 (85-100)	Excellent answers, showing a confident and wide-ranging knowledge of the core material, a good understanding of any relevant theory, and a capacity to address the question in a structured, direct and effective way, thoughtfully and with insight. Originality of thought, or ideas from outside the course are not essential to achieve this grade.

PASS 2 (70-84)	Good answers, showing a secure knowledge of course materials, if appropriate adopting an analytical approach and providing relevant discussion covering most of the key issues. Distinguished from Pass 1 answers by a less insightful or a less comprehensive knowledge of the course, and/or in being less well structured.
PASS 3 (55-69)	Competent answers, reflecting adequate knowledge of the more directly relevant course material and concepts, with a reasonable structure and an adequate coherence related to the question set.

PASS 4 (40-54)	Bare pass answers, which show an awareness of some relevant material and attempt to relate it to the question, but omit important concepts/evidence and/or lack coherence/structure, and/or make substantial errors while still demonstrating a basic understanding.
FAIL* (30-39)	Bare fail answers which attempt to draw upon relevant material, but do not know the course sufficiently well and/or neglect the focus required by the question, and/or are incomplete in some important aspects whilst being acceptable in others.

FAIL* (15-29)	Clear fail answers typically show little or no knowledge of the course, ignore the question, or are very difficult to follow/understand, but still muster a little relevant material worthy of some credit.
FAIL* (0-14)	Bad fail answers offer nothing substantial of relevance, whatever its source, and leave a serious question as to whether any (relevant) section of the course has been studied. Characterized exclusively by opinion/anecdote/polemic. A few marks may be gleaned for points which could form part of an acceptable answer if developed.

It is important to differentiate between marks in the FAIL bands. They represent a range of 39%, and when averaged out, fail score (s) may easily make the difference between the student passing or failing the course.

Taken from: <u>DD122 Tutor notes for tutor marked assignments 2002/2003</u> (copyright C 2002 The Open University

- **Marking criteria and rubrics**

Generic Marking criteria

Your tutor will primarily make use of the following criteria in deciding what mark to give your assignment.

The relevance of your answer to the question as set

Your tutor will look for evidence that you have clearly understood the question and directed your answer accordingly.

Your knowledge and understanding of the course material

Your tutor will look for evidence that you have understood and can draw effectively on research evidence, ideas, concepts and arguments that are central to the course.

Your ability to discuss and evaluate alternative explanations and arguments

Researchers and other commentators may provide different (and sometimes competing) explanations for linguistic events and processes. Your tutor will look to see whether you are able to discuss these, and evaluate any arguments put forward in support of a particular viewpoint.

- *The ability to present and pursue an argument*
- Your tutor will examine the structure of your answer to assess how well you can put together the material you use to sustain and support an argument.
- *The ability to express yourself clearly using academic conventions as appropriate*
- Your tutor will look for clarity in your work, in the way you make points, present research findings and make critical comments. You are not expected to make extensive use of technical vocabulary, but you should be able to refer to key terms and concepts from the course materials. You should also acknowledge clearly any sources you have drawn on.

- For assignments that include practical work with language data, your tutor will take into account:
- *Your ability to make a clear analysis and interpretation of language data as specified in the assignment*
- Your tutor will look to see whether your analysis is appropriate, whether it draws on relevant ideas and concepts from the course, and whether any interpretation you give is justified by reference to relevant aspects of the data.
- The comments from your tutor should explain why you received the marks given. They will cover the content of your assignment (e.g. your understanding of key issues, the argument you have constructed). Comments may also include teaching points about aspects of your work which could have been strengthened or extended. In addition, they may suggest ways of improving your performance in future assignments.
- The detailed marking criteria your tutor will use in marking both your TMAs, and final examination paper are as indicated on the following page.

An illustrative example of rubrics and marking Criteria

	Criteria Mark/Band	Relevance to question	Knowledge and understanding of course material	Approach to alternative explanations and arguments	Construction of argument	Clear expression and use of academic conventions	Approach to language data (where appropriate)
F	0<35 Fail	None or slight	Very little from course/fundamental misunderstandings	None or with no support from course	Slight	Expression and sentence structure needs attention/insufficient referencing	Slight
	35<50 Bare Fail (F)	Some relevant material but failure to address question	Little appreciation of main idea or inadequate knowledge/insufficient reading	No evidence of critical thinking	Lack of organization	Deficiencies	Insufficient/not enough detailed discussion of data
D D+	50< 70 Satisfactory	Some ability to identify main issues	Very basic understanding of course material/substantial omissions and/or misunderstandings	Lacking /heavily descriptive	Lines of arguments may be clear for short sections but not sustained or developed	Bare bones of structure/coherent expression/attempts at referencing	Analysis barely appropriate /related to course. Interpretations barely justified

	Criteria Mark/Band	Relevance to question	Knowledge and understanding of course material	Approach to alternative explanations and arguments	Construction of argument	Clear expression and use of academic conventions	Approach to language data (where appropriate)
C	70<80 Good +	Clear evidence of understanding question and overall direction of answer	Effective drawing on evidence/ideas/concepts and arguments central to the course	Recognition and limited discussion of competing explanations for linguistic events/processes	Clear, sustained argument	Good structure/ expression/referencing	Analysis barely appropriate/ related to course. Interpretations justified
B	80<90 Very Good +	Utilizes a wide range of relevant and contemporary material to produce a cogent and insightful argument	Comprehensive and judicious use of relevant literature	Good discussion of competing explanations and arguments	Assertions are made with evaluated evidence; all sections contributing	Very good structure, expression and ability to employ sources appropriately	Very good analysis. Judicious interpretations.
A	90-100 Excellent	Creative /original relevant stance	Excellent knowledge and understanding	Critical approach	Cohesive/and original/creative	Excellent structure, expression and use of evidence	Excellent analysis/ interpretations

*These marking criteria are informed by and mostly extracted from the UKOU U210A Assignment Booklet 2004 (p. 30). They are to be used as general guidelines for marking TMAs, tests, and the final examination .

References:

1. Duckett, Ian & Brooke, Di, Learning and Skills Network (2007), p1.

2. Boston, Carol (2002), The concept of formative assessment, practical assessment, research & evaluation, 8(9).

3. Marzano, Robert J. (2003), What works in schools: translating research into action, Alexandria, VA:ASCD.

4. Stiggins, R.J., Arter, J.A., Chappius, J. & Chappius, S. (2206), Classroom assessment for student learning: doing it right-using it well, Portland, OR: Educational Testing Service.