

Using Alternative Assessments in Your Online Course

Online learning has broadened the possibilities of assessment through leveraging the digital environment, resources, and tools. Alternative assessments offer a more creative approach for evaluating student learning by involving higher learning orders from Bloom’s Taxonomy (e.g., applying, analyzing, evaluating, creating). A subset of alternative assessment, authentic assessments are specifically designed as practical tasks to apply and foster real-world skills. Through careful planning of alternative and authentic assessments in your online course, you allow your online students to integrate real-world relevance into their learning.

In this issue of the Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter, we review the characteristics of alternative and authentic assessments. We’ll provide some examples of how to use these evaluation methods in online courses.

What are Alternative and Authentic Assessments?

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS



Alternative assessments represent more creative and experimental approaches to evaluating student learning compared to traditional assessments, like multiple-choice tests.

BENEFITS

- Promotes the application of skills to real-world situations
- Promotes higher-order thinking that involves application, analysis, evaluation and creation
- Helps students focus on learning

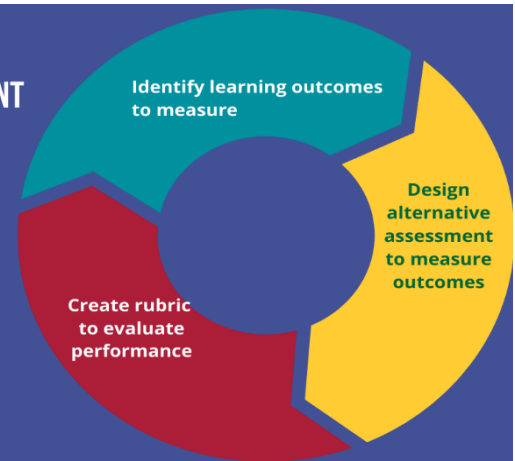


STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

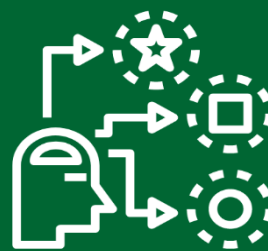
- **Pro:** Student prefer alternative assessments and opportunities for creative expression
- **Con:** Students may become frustrated over the lack of clear "right" answers



HOW TO IMPLEMENT



TYPES OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS



- Case studies
- Collaborative projects
- Collaborative testing
- Debates
- Infographics
- Open-book exams
- Portfolios
- Posters
- Presentation
- Process plan
- Role playing
- Storytelling

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENTS

Authentic assessments are a form of alternative assessment that involve real-world application. All authentic assessments are alternative assessments, but not all alternative assessments are authentic assessments.

View [Alternative and Authentic Assessment infographic online](#) | Read [“Assessments in a Virtual Environment” \(Faculty Focus\)](#)
Watch Stearns Center Webinar Recording, [“Rethinking Assessment” \(46:57\)](#)
Download Handout, [“Tips for Planning Alternative Assessments” \(PDF\)](#)

Examples of Alternative Assessments in Online Courses

Note that Alternative and Authentic Assessments may be formative, summative, or both.
[Click on the name of each example in the table for link with more information]

Infographics

What? Infographics are visual representations of information. Infographics allow a quick way to convey information. As an alternative assessment, you can assign students to prepare an infographic about a specific topic, instead of writing a traditional research paper.

Why? By creating infographics, students can show you what they've learned, allow for their creativity, and also demonstrate their thinking in a clear way that is easy to analyze and assess. Preparing clear, informative, and engaging infographics is a useful "real-world" skill. Through infographics, students can learn to communicate ideas clearly to a public audience.

How? Make sure that you provide clear instructions, including a rubric or a list of required components, just as you would for a written paper or project. Share list of possible tools that students might use to prepare their infographics, such as [Piktochart](#), [Canva](#), [Visme](#), PowerPoint.

Role-Playing in Online Discussions

What? Enhance student-student interaction within your online course by assigning each student with a specific "role" in each online discussion. Each role will help frame their participation, engagement & participation.

Why? Assign roles so that every student has a specific responsibility within the discussion. Roles may include facilitator, summarizer, researcher, task manager, etc. Have the roles shift every discussion.

How? You can make discussions more authentic and engaging, by relating students' assigned roles to real-world or case-based discussion scenarios. For example, for an online discussion in an environmental science course, discuss the use of pesticides in a community by assigning each student a different role, such as concerned parent, local business owner, pesticide producer, and local, state or federal government official.

Case Studies

What? Case studies are alternative assessments which mimic real-world situations, scenarios, or practices. Students must answer an open-ended question or develop a solution to an open-ended problem with multiple potential solutions. You can create and post case studies for students to use and revisit throughout your course. For advanced courses, you might have your students create case studies for the entire class.

Why? Through case studies, students learn how to make decisions, rely on their own judgment, evaluate evidence, and develop confidence. There usually is not one right answer, which might frustrate some students.

How? You can assign a simple scenario-type case study or a complex case in which students must evaluate data, supporting evidence, etc. It all depends on your learning outcomes. Case study assignments may be done individually or in teams. Use [Blackboard groups](#), [discussion forums](#), or tools like [VoiceThread](#), for students to share their case-study solutions in the online course.

E-Portfolios

What? An E-Portfolio is a form of alternative and authentic assessment which allows students to reflect on how their course work is relevant to what they will be doing after they graduate in "real world".

Why? By curating relevant samples of their work, students can validate technical, communication, and critical-thinking skills for themselves, and for potential future employers. Using E-Portfolios in your course, students can demonstrate their formative and/or summative progress and achievement.

How? Use [Blackboard Portfolio tool](#) to create portfolios in your online course. There also are other external tools available for portfolio creation, such as [WordPress](#), [Googlio](#), [Wix](#). Please check to make sure your portfolio tool is accessible, private, and secure. Also provide students with instructions for how to curate and manage their portfolio artifacts, in order for them to reflect on and track their learning. See [Teaching with E-Portfolios](#) for guidance.

Contact Us!

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