3

ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING IN YOUR BLENDED COURSE

What Do We Know About Assessing Student Learning in Your Blended Course?

According to Suskie (2009),

> Assessment is the ongoing process of
> - establishing clear, measurable expected outcomes of student learning;
> - ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to achieve those outcomes;
> - systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well students' learning matches the course expectations; and
> - using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning. (p. 4)

Maki (2010) similarly describes an assessment cycle that includes identifying outcomes, gathering evidence, interpreting that evidence, and implementing changes based on the interpretations.

Planning assessments for your blended course will not be all that different from what you do in a traditional classroom. You will still want to create activities and assignments that are aligned with your course goals and learning objectives (see Chapter 2), space out your assignments to afford students time to process and synthesize information, and create opportunities for formative and summative methods of assessment. Formative assessment methods are often low-stakes, not always graded "check-in" points to help you gauge student learning in the moment and make changes to future classes based on students' level of comprehension. Formative assessments can also help students with metacognition, or the process of intentionally reflecting on their own learning. Summative assessment methods are often more high-stakes, graded, and formal assignments to evaluate students' comprehension of the course material. For large summative assessments, it can be helpful to scaffold the assignment, or break it down into smaller parts for students to complete in manageable and sequential pieces. When possible, building in the opportunity for students to practice with low-stakes activities or assignments before completing a high-stakes assessment is recommended. Some examples of formative and summative assessment examples are listed in Table 3.1 (see also, Angelo & Cross, 1993).

TABLE 3.1.
Formative and Summative Assessment Examples

Formative Assessment Examples	*Summative Assessment Examples*
• Minute papers (short reflections where students respond to one or two questions regarding the course content for that day) • Discussions • Graphic organizers (a way to express knowledge visually that can also be used to illustrate the relationship between ideas or concepts; a common example is a mind map or brainstorming map) • Practice tests or assignments • Rough drafts • Peer or self-assessments • Journals or reflective writing	• Midterm or final exam • Paper • Final project • Portfolio • Statewide or national tests • Placement exams • Performances

BOX 3.1
Holistic Rubric Example

An "A" discussion board post will be thoughtful, include references to the course readings, and respond to more than one other post from a peer. A "B" discussion board post will include at least one reference to course readings and respond to at least one other post from a peer. A "C" discussion board post will include a reference to course readings, but the reference may be incorrect or unclear and only tangentially responds to a post from a peer. A "D" discussion board post will lack references to course readings and will not respond to any posts from peers. Students will earn a failing grade for not posting to the discussion board at all.

Creating rubrics for each of your assignments can serve as a helpful guide for students in your course. Rubrics are made up of criteria that (a) provide students with an understanding of your expectations and (b) offer feedback to students regarding their performance in the course. Often, rubrics are tied directly to course goals and learning objectives. Holistic rubrics may be written in paragraph or bullet formats and will describe criteria in an overall fashion (see Box 3.1). Analytic rubrics are often in a table format and will break down criteria into smaller parts (see Box 3.2).

Sharing rubrics with your students before they turn in assignments can help to guide students' work as well as provide a roadmap for success. Rubrics can also help students to better understand their strengths versus the areas that they need to give more attention for the next assignment. Rubrics provided ahead of time can also be utilized for peer- and self-assessment purposes for rough drafts before a final draft is submitted. Lastly, rubrics can be a huge time-saver for instructors when grading because the specific criteria for assessment is already drafted. Additional rubric

BOX 3.2
Analytic Rubric Example

	Excellent (A)	*Good (B)*	*Acceptable (C)*	*Revision Needed (D)*
Inclusion of Course Readings	Author includes multiple references to course readings	Author includes at least one reference to course readings	Author includes a reference to course readings, but the reference may be incorrect or unclear	Author lacks any references to course readings
Responding to Peers	Author responds to more than one peer	Author responds to at least one other post from a peer	Author only tangentially responds to a post from a peer	Author does not respond to any peers

examples can be found in Walvoord and Anderson (2010, pp. 107–114) and in Stevens and Levi (2005). The Association of American Colleges and Universities has also created 16 different VALUE rubrics that can serve as models for instructors who are creating their own assessment tools (learn more at www.aacu.org/value/rubrics).

A Step-by-Step Guide to Assessing Student Learning in Your Blended Course

As you prepare the assignments and assessments for your blended course, start with these guiding questions:

Assessment Breakdown: Guiding Questions

1. How can students best provide me with evidence of their learning?

2. Given the intended outcomes for my course (drafted in Chapter 2), are there aspects of student learning that will benefit from an online assessment?

Major Assignments: What Should Be Face-to-Face Versus Online?

Table 3.2 presents a translation for some common traditional assessment techniques used in the college classroom as you shift to a blended format. Box 3.3 explains why many of the suggestions in Table 3.2 are not one-to-one correlations (although some are).

TABLE 3.2.
Transitioning Traditional Assignment Techniques to a Blended Format

Bloom's Taxonomy	Face-to-Face (Traditional)	Blended
Knowledge	Ask students to complete a multiple choice question check-in test at the start of class.	Ask students to complete an online multiple choice question check-in test before the start of next class.
	Ask students to write a one-minute paper that gets them to recall the major themes from the previous class session.	Ask students to complete an online crossword puzzle that reinforces the main concepts from the previous class.
	Ask students to work in pairs to outline the major talking points from today's class.	Ask students to find two resources that pertain to topic X and post these resources to the class LMS site.
Comprehension	Ask students to write a summary essay that explains their interpretation of the assigned reading.	Ask students to listen to a podcast on topic X and to provide their own written interpretation on the class discussion board of the main message(s).
	Ask students to describe in their own words the main message of author X's reading in no more than three minutes at the start of class.	Ask students to create their own online concept map that shows how the main themes from an in-class discussion relate to one another.
	Ask students to draw a diagram or take a photograph that captures the essence of what was discussed in the previous class.	Ask students to contribute keywords to a glossary posted on the class LMS site.
Application	Ask students to construct an argument for or against topic X using the theories discussed in class.	Ask students to participate in an online simulation of topic X.
	Ask students to construct the key steps of X method as it relates to gathering data to understanding topic Y.	Ask students to pose three questions to the class discussion board that shows their application of the central themes of context X to context Y. Have students respond to each other's questions.

(Continues)

TABLE 3.2. *(Continued)*

Bloom's Taxonomy	Face-to-Face (Traditional)	Blended
Application	Ask students to find a headline news article that illustrates a key concept discussed in class. Have students bring in the newspaper article to class and explain to the class how the article demonstrates the concept they have selected.	Ask students to find an online headline news article that illustrates a key concept discussed in class. Have students post the newspaper article on the class LMS discussion board and explain to the class how the article demonstrates the concept they have selected.
Analysis	Ask students to compare two sets of data.	Ask students to compare the blog posts of author X and author Y on topic A in a discussion board post of their own on the class LMS site.
	Ask students to explain to the class the visual representation of data shown in graph X.	Ask students to conduct their own analysis on a set of online data. Have students post the results to the class LMS site with an explanation of their findings.
	Ask students to provide a detailed comparison of the writing style of author X in readings A and B.	Ask students to find two online articles that show a contrasting writing style of an author. Have students post these articles to the class LMS site with some guiding questions for their peers' exploration of the readings.
Synthesis	Ask students to generate a thesis statement based on the assigned readings.	Ask students to post their thesis statement to the class discussion board. Have students critique at least two of their classmates' statements.
	Ask students to design an ideal species to live in location Y based a set of conditions (e.g., climate) known to exist in location Y.	Ask students to watch two short online videos on topic X. Based on their observations from these videos ask students to outline a thesis statement to extend the understanding of the topic according to a set of research parameters. Have students post their statements to the class discussion board and offer feedback to at least three of their classmates' statements.

TABLE 3.2. *(Continued)*

Bloom's Taxonomy	Face-to-Face (Traditional)	Blended
Synthesis	Ask students to write a poem/song/short story that communicates their understanding of the material discussed in the previous class.	Ask students to design a wiki for a topic they are interested in and that is connected to the course material.
Evaluation	Ask students to critique the theoretical statement(s) of author X.	Ask students to create their own podcast (either on their own or in groups) that distills the main message of the readings for next class.
	Provide students with a logic puzzle based on the facts presented in class; ask them to solve this puzzle in groups.	Divide the class into two teams— one for and one against—a particular viewpoint of a current contentious debate. Have students debate with each other in their groups online to convince the opposing team why their viewpoint is the correct one.
	Ask students to write an editorial piece for a newspaper of their choice that presents their thoughts/reflections on topic X.	Ask students to complete an online (real-time updated) survey about topic X. Have students assess their own responses in comparison to the responses of the rest of the class.

BOX 3.3
Best Practice Tip

It is not always recommended to transition face-to-face activities to an online environment, even when a one-to-one correlation is available in an online format. For example, some instructors who wish to maintain a lecture format in their blended courses will choose to post a video of a one-hour lecture that was given in a face-to-face environment. Although this is technically a one-to-one correlation of the activity, the video may not be able to accomplish the same learning that would occur in a face-to-face environment where students can ask live questions. Just because a one-to-one correlation is available, that does not mean another, technology-enhanced option might not be better. In this situation, an instructor might want to re-record his or her lecture in smaller pieces, perhaps offering short online quizzes at the end of each one to help engage students in the material and to check their learning. (See Chapter 10 for more about creating multimedia components for your course.)

When shifting traditional classroom components to a blended format, think about your learning objectives (notice Table 3.2 is organized according to Bloom's Taxonomy; see Chapter 2) before deciding how best to incorporate the assessment into a blended classroom environment. You can use Table 3.3 (a blank version of Table 3.2) to think about what assignments might work well online versus face-to-face. The online tools described in Chapter 4 will also help you to decide what might work best as an online assessment.

You can start to map out the major assignments for your course using Table 3.4. Write down each learning objective for the course in the first column. Then, map out the formal assessments that will carry a percentage of the students' overall grades. As you map out these assignments, make a note about whether you think the assignment will take place in the traditional classroom or if it will be conducted as part of your students' work in the online component of your course. (If needed, you can read about online assessment tools in Chapter 4 before completing this step.) This map will allow you to see which learning objectives are not being formally assessed, as well as how many assessments will be occurring in-class versus online.

Now that you have the larger assignments mapped out for your course, you can decide where you can include smaller, low-stakes formative assessments using the template in Table 3.5. This template allows you to map out a schedule for the formative and summative assessments included in your blended course by week. In this map, you can decide whether they will be online or face-to-face and get a sense of the frequency of assessments across the term.

Guiding Questions and a Checklist for Overall Blended Course Assessment

Once you have mapped out your formal assessments and have created informal measures of student learning using the suggestions from earlier in this chapter, ask yourself the following questions about the overall plan that you have developed for assessing student learning:

1. Does this plan reflect how I can best assess my students' learning in this blended course?

2. Am I giving my students multiple opportunities to provide me with evidence that they are achieving the learning objectives of my blended course?

Table 3.6 offers a checklist for assessments in your blended course so that you can assess the overall plan that you have developed.

TABLE 3.3.
Template for Transitioning Traditional Assignments to a Blended Format

Bloom's Taxonomy	Face-to-Face (Traditional)	Blended
Knowledge		
Comprehension		
Application		
Analysis		
Synthesis		
Evaluation		

TABLE 3.4.
Assignment Mapping Template

Learning Objective to Be Assessed	*Traditional Face-to-Face Assignment/ Assessment*	*Percentage/ Weight*	*Online Assignment/ Assessment*	*Percentage/ Weight*

TABLE 3.5.
Template to Map Online and Face-to-Face Formative and Summative Assessments

Week	*In-Class*		*Online*	
	Formative	*Summative*	*Formative*	*Summative*
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				

TABLE 3.6.
Blended Course Assessment Checklist

	Yes	*No*	*Comments*
Is each one of my learning objectives measurable via some activity or assessment?	☐	☐	
Is each learning objective aligned with an activity/ assignment/assessment that will assess my students' progress toward meeting this objective?	☐	☐	
Do I have a mix of individual and collaborative activities/assignments/assessments?	☐	☐	
Do I have a range of both online and traditional activities each week to develop my students' understanding of weekly course content?	☐	☐	
Do I have different kinds of online and traditional activities that develop my students' understanding of the course content?	☐	☐	
Do I have clear instructions for each activity explaining what I want students to do?	☐	☐	
Do I provide clear grading rubrics to guide my students' completion of the activity?	☐	☐	
Do I provide clear instructions for where students will find the online activities?	☐	☐	
Is there clear evidence of continual methods of assessment that are aligned with my learning objectives and that provide my students with informed feedback about their learning?	☐	☐	

Lastly, using Table 3.7, consider how each of your course goals are covered by the assessments you have planned for your students. This will help you to double-check that all of your course goals are being assessed and to look at assessment for the course as a whole. For each course goal, consider the ways you have planned to assess if and how the course is accomplishing this goal. These ways include the following:

- In-class activities
- Formal, graded assignments
- Exams or tests
- Online components
- Student feedback (i.e., self-assessments or formative assessments)

TABLE 3.7.
Mapping Course Goals and Assessments

Course Goal	In-Class Activities	Formal Assignments	Exams or Tests	Online Components	Formative Assessments

Key Ideas From Chapter 3

- Effective assessments of student learning are aligned with course goals and learning objectives.
- Instructors should plan a range of assessment activities that are both formative and summative.
- Mapping out assessment activities for the entire term can help instructors to ensure that they have a good balance between forms of assessment that will occur in class versus in an online environment.

Questions for Faculty

- What kinds of assessments do you already use in your traditional courses? Are these assessments something that could be transitioned for your blended course?
- Do you already use a mix of formative and summative assessments in your traditional courses? What ratio do you find works best to ensure student learning throughout the term?

Questions for Administrators

- Does your institution have a teaching and learning center, research office, or assessment group that could help faculty members develop assignments or assessment tools to measure student learning in a blended environment?
- As you get blended courses off the ground, what kinds of institutional-level data will need to be collected to measure student learning?
- Do you have an institutional research office or assessment committee that could aid in the collection of data from blended courses?
- What are the most important components of blended courses that you will want to measure?

Documenting Your Course Design Progress

TABLE 3.8.
Documenting Your Course Design Progress

Course Design Steps	*In Your LMS Sandbox*
• Using the reflection questions in this chapter, consider which assessments will best measure student learning in your blended course. • Using Table 3.3, decide which of your assignments will be fully online, fully in-class, or a mix of both online and in-class components. • Map the major assignments for your course using Table 3.4. • Complete Table 3.5 to map out your formative and summative assessments in a weekly schedule. • Apply the checklist in Table 3.6 to your course assessment plan. • Review the overall assessment plan and how it relates to your course goals using Table 3.7. • Create the assignments and assessments from Table 3.4 and Table 3.5. • Create rubrics, as appropriate, for your assignments using the tools and templates provided.	• Build an assignment in your LMS sandbox (there may be a special tool for this). • Find out if your LMS has a rubric tool and decide whether you plan to use it within your course. • Begin to explore the Grade Book function included in your LMS, and find out if there are training opportunities or online resources to learn how to use this tool.

NOTES