Phil Race, the author of this month’s ‘brief’, has written extensively on various aspects of teaching, learning and assessment.

Phil has a number of resources on his website (http://phil-race.co.uk/). His “Assessment compendium (2893)” is available at http://phil-race.co.uk/wp-content/plugins/download-monitor/download.php?id=67 (Retrieved 13 August 2010). “Pros and cons of fifteen assessment techniques” (pp. 38-71) is only one of a number of extracts in this freely downloadable booklet.

Concerns about assessment
The section on “Pros and cons of fifteen assessment techniques” follows immediately after two sets of assessment concerns (pp. 35-38) – the first listing concerns about traditional exams and the second concerns about continuous assessment.

Fifteen assessment techniques
The fifteen assessment techniques discussed are:

1. Traditional unseen, time-constrained written exams
2. Open-book exams
3. Open-notes exams
4. Structured exams
5. Essays
6. Reviews and annotated bibliographies
7. Reports
8. Practical work
9. Portfolios
10. Presentations
11. Vivas – oral exams
12. Student projects
13. Poster-displays and exhibitions
14. Dissertations and theses
15. Work-based learning

The structure of each section
Each of the fifteen sections follows a fairly similar pattern:

- Advantages
- Disadvantages
- Practical advice on the use of the assessment technique.

For example, the discussion of “Reviews and annotated bibliographies” (pp. 51-52) is organised under the following headings.
Advantages

- Reviewing is an active process
- Reviews are useful for revision
- Reviewing involves important cognitive processes
- Reviewing other papers and articles is useful practice for research writing
- Reviewing helps students to develop critical skills
- Compiling annotated bibliographies is a way of requiring students to survey a considerable amount of material.

Disadvantages

- Reviews are necessarily quite individual
- There aren’t enough books!
- Reviewing individually can be lonely.

Setting assessed review tasks

- Promote variety
- Promote awareness of audience
- Get students to assess existing reviews
- Helps students to see that reviewing is not just a matter of summarising what everyone has said
- Decide about credit to be awarded to ‘search’ tasks
- Consider limiting the parameters
- Set a tight word-limit for the review
- Think about combining collaborative and individual work
- Ask students to look at the same texts, but give them different focuses
- Encourage qualitative judgement
- Involve your library or information services staff
- Think hard about resource availability
- Consider setting annotated bibliographies as formative group tasks
- Consider making the final product ‘publishable’
- Explore the possibility of involving library staff in the assessment.

This is a useful resource, especially in alerting coordinators to the advantages and disadvantages of assessment techniques they may be planning to incorporate into their course assessment plans. The practical advice included in each section also suggests a number of ways in which a familiar and commonly used technique may be given a new lease of life through the incorporation of novel modifications or variations.

This series of briefs on assessment topics has been prepared by the UQ Teaching and Educational Development Institute (TEDI) for UQ teaching academics. “UQ ASSESSMENT BRIEFS” of journal articles, book chapters, reviews, websites, reports etc are distributed to Faculty and School Teaching and Learning Chairs in a form designed to encourage wider distribution.

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