This short guide to oral assessment “deals with any assessment based on the spoken word, including levers, oral presentations, and a host of other forms of assessment”.


Available from  www.leedsmet.ac.uk/100317_36668_ShortGuideOralAssess1_WEB.pdf

About this guide
This guide to oral assessment deals with any assessment based on the spoken word, including vivas, oral presentations, and a host of other forms of assessment. It is designed to be of use to anyone currently using oral assessment to make judgments about their students’ learning, and anyone considering introducing oral assessment into their courses. It is not about assessing students’ language or communication skills per se, but it is about assessment that calls on students to use the spoken word to express their knowledge and understanding.

In this guide we will be considering:

- the nature of oral assessment
- the advantages (and some disadvantages) of oral assessment
- key dimensions of oral assessment to use in planning oral assessments
- marking and grading
- preparing students for oral assessment; and
- ensuring that judgments based on oral assessment are sound, reliable and fair.

The guide will cite a number of articles where different forms of oral assessment are described. Most of these are the work of higher education teachers from various disciplines (rather than of educational researchers or theorists) and provide practical illustrations of how oral assessment can be carried out.

Despite the metaphor of a balanced assessment diet, this guide will not provide a recipe for designing and implementing oral assessment, but it will introduce a range of ingredients to use in various combinations in developing assessment tasks, and practices that will help you and your students make the most of the oral medium. (Joughin 2010, 2)

Some key points made in the guide:

- Oral assessments can take many forms including presentations on prepared topics, interrogations in which students are quizzed by one or more examiners, and applications such as the OSCE which is frequently used in nursing or medicine where students are questioned as they rotate around a series of stations (p. 3).

- Reasons for using oral assessment are:
  - The learning outcomes demand it
  - It allows probing of the students’ knowledge
  - It reflects the world of practice
  - It improves learning
• Its suits some students
• The meaning of questions can be clarified
• It helps to ensure academic integrity (p. 5)

Disadvantages of oral assessment include undue anxiety, hearing or speech difficulties, time required, lack of anonymity, bias, novelty, organising recording, articulateness vs knowledge (p. 7).

The benefits of oral assessment are only fully realised when the task is genuinely oral, that is, the student is not allowed to simply read a written paper (p. 9).

There are six dimensions or considerations that guide the planning of oral assessment tasks: (1) What is being assessed: (2) Level of interaction: (3) Authenticity: (4) Structure: (5) Who assesses? (6) Purely oral or a combination of modes? (pp 10-12).

Oral assessment is valid when it allows students to fully demonstrate their knowledge, skills and values in relation to the course they are studying (p. 13).

Oral assessment is reliable when we can be confident that the student would do equally well if they were asked other questions (p. 14).

Oral assessment is fair when students who are equally knowledgeable do equally well in an assessment (p. 15).

Oral assessments can often be marked quickly, especially with the support of a marking guide or criteria and standards rubric (p.16).

Students need to be well prepared for oral assessment and several steps that can be used for this are illustrated (p 17).

The guide concludes with a list of useful references and information about other publications in the same series available from Leeds Metropolitan University including “Writing and using good learning outcomes”, “Designing first-year assessment and feedback: a guide for university staff”, “Using assessment to support student learning”, and “Course design for increased student satisfaction”.

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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