

Transitioning to Pass/Fail Assignments



Look for the 'bare necessities'

It can be difficult to modify your plans if you had originally intended to use a traditional, end-of-term exam to assess your students' learning. However, when trying to move from an exam to a pass/fail assignment just remember to stick to the **bare necessities**.

Students' performance on the exam should be **just about good enough**. It is no longer about assigning students grades like As Bs, Cs or Ds. Instead, if the essentials have been demonstrated, then the student should pass.

So, what do you need to look at or do when trying to design these assignments that test the 'bare necessities'?

1



Look at your Learning Outcomes (LOs)...

Try to answer these key questions:

Which of my LOs are *essential* for progression? Are they all essential?

Have my students had the opportunity to engage with the LOs following the suspension of face-to-face teaching?

... and decide which ones you're going to assess.

Based on your answers to the previous questions, you should know which LOs need to be assessed in a pass/fail assignment.

Next question: *How can the assessment capture the essential knowledge, skills and/or attitudes for my module?*



Infographic by Paula Lehane
using venngage.com

2



Design an Assessment

You should first decide if the assessment will involve a *single* assignment or a *number of smaller* ones. These assessment(s) should capture **just enough learning to ensure student progression** in their course of study. Students should also be made aware that the assignment is a 'bare necessities' one.

3



Design a Marking Guide based on Pass/Fail Decision

Your marking guide should have very clear success criteria, which, in this case, are focused solely on the **cut-off point between pass and fail**. This is where the pass criterion would be decided e.g. 40% or 65%, having all 2 or 3 elements correct etc. It should be clear how individual elements of a single assignment or how multiple small assignments were combined to reach a pass.



What does this look like?

Original Exam Question

Discuss some of the key methods and models social scientists use to investigate significant social, political, economic and moral public issues.

Pass Criterion: 40%

Pass/Fail Assignment

Discuss one method and one model that could be used by social scientists to investigate the fallout from the Covid19 pandemic.

Pass Criterion: 65%

This task:

- Is less complex.
- Requires less knowledge to answer.
- Should be easier to mark.
- Has a higher criterion for a pass (65%) than a normal exam (40%) as the lecturer has decided that this required to capture the 'bare necessities' in this particular assessment.



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