

# Alternative Assessments

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## PURPOSE

This job aid provides faculty with a variety of alternative assessment strategies designed to engage students in meaningful, authentic, and creative demonstrations of learning. These assessments go beyond traditional tests and essays to foster critical thinking, collaboration, communication skills, and deeper understanding of course material. They also support diverse learning styles and can be adapted for both in-person and online environments.

## BACKGROUND

Traditional assessment methods often emphasize rote memorization or narrowly defined tasks that may not fully capture students' abilities or real-world skills. Alternative assessments are designed to address these limitations by providing students with opportunities to apply knowledge in practical, creative, and reflective ways. They encourage higher-order thinking, problem-solving, and self-expression—skills essential for academic success and professional readiness. Additionally, alternative assessments can increase student motivation and engagement by offering varied modes of demonstrating learning.

## CASE STUDIES

Case studies present students with real-life or hypothetical scenarios relevant to their discipline and potential career experiences. They can be multidisciplinary, encouraging students to apply course concepts, conduct research, evaluate sources, collaborate, and present findings. Cases can range from short and simple to long and complex.

### A strong case study typically:

- Has no single correct solution
- Includes sufficient detail to allow for thorough analysis
- Requires critical and analytical thinking to develop recommendations

### Assessment Strategies:

- **Individual submission (Moodle):** Post the case in Moodle and have students submit individual responses via the Assignment tool.
- **Email correspondence:** Send the case study by email; students respond via return email.

- **Collaborative work (Moodle):** Use discussion boards for group analysis; assess individual contributions and/or group submissions.
- **Collaborative work (Microsoft Teams):** Form groups in Teams for collaborative analysis and presentation.
- **Case study quiz (Moodle):** Create open-book quizzes using case-based questions.

#### Resources:

- [The Chronicle – Teaching Students to Write a Case Study](#)
- [UNSW – Assessment Using Case Studies](#)

## PODCASTS

Podcasts are short audio narratives where students express their understanding and analysis in creative, engaging ways. These should be more than just a reading of a paper—they may include interviews or storytelling elements.

#### What to Consider:

- Share example podcasts for analysis and discussion.
- Keep the assignment simple (e.g., 3–5 minutes using a phone).
- Require a written script or speaking notes to accompany the audio file.
- Use a clear rubric to assess both content and delivery.

#### Assignment Design:

- Presentation Voice Memo Assignment
- Essay-to-Podcast Assignment
- Discussion Podcast Assignment (partners or small groups)

#### Resources:

- [AAC&U Oral Communication VALUE Rubric](#)
- Kaziewicz, J. (2012, April 24). *Podcasting in the Classroom*.

## CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

Students reflect on course readings by connecting them with personal experience or prior knowledge. Prompts might include: *What challenged your thinking? What do you agree or disagree with, and why?*

#### What to Consider:

- Provide strong and weak examples for comparison.
- Use discussion boards to explore students' approaches and ideas.
- Emphasize that reflections should be analytical, not diary-style.

**Resources:**

- [Creating Critical Reflection Assignments](#)
- [Models of Reflection](#)
- [Reflection Rubrics \(Word document\)](#)

## CONCEPT MAPS

Concept maps are visual tools that illustrate how ideas connect and relate. They help students organize knowledge and demonstrate understanding.

**What to Consider:**

- Can be individual or group assignments.
- Paper and pen is acceptable; digital tools may enhance flexibility.
- Require students to submit a brief explanation (written or audio) of their map.
- Provide a detailed rubric or expectations in advance.

**Resources:**

- Digital Tools: [Mindomo](#), [Coggle](#), [Lucidchart](#), [Miro](#)
- [Assessing & Evaluating Concept Maps](#)

## STUDENT-CREATED INFOGRAPHICS

Infographics communicate complex information through visuals—charts, icons, colour, and minimal text. Students must analyze content, choose key information, and communicate it effectively. Submissions may include a reflective note or short explanation.

**Application Ideas:**

- Pair the infographic with a voice or written summary explaining the design process.
- Post to discussion boards or use in online student presentations.

**Examples:**

- [Infographic Project Gallery](#)

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES

Annotated bibliographies help students explore a topic deeply by reviewing and summarizing key sources. They develop research, synthesis, and critical evaluation skills.

**Variation:** Ask students to use non-academic sources (e.g., government documents, trade articles) and reflect on relevance to professional practice.

### Assignment Samples:

- [Santa Rosa Canvas Example](#)
- [Hostos Community College Guide](#)

## ONLINE DISCUSSIONS



Online discussions foster collaboration, idea-sharing, and critical engagement. Use prompts from course readings, news stories, or videos to spark dialogue. Require students to post an original comment and reply to a peer.

### Resources:

- [Online discussion rubric](#) by Dr. Susan Wegmann, Professor of Education and the Director of Program Development and Special Programs at the Baptist College of Florida
- [Online discussion participation rubric](#) by Dr. Kelvin Thompson
- [Designing and Orchestrating Online Discussions](#) by David Baker (2011)
- [The methods and means to grading student participation in online discussions](#)

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, alternative assessments offer faculty flexible and inclusive approaches to measuring student learning. By prioritizing real-world application, creativity, and student engagement, these strategies help cultivate richer educational experiences. Whether used to replace or supplement traditional assessments, they encourage learners to demonstrate their knowledge in ways that are relevant, personalized, and aligned with course outcomes—enhancing both academic success and long-term skill development.



*Assiniboine College is privileged to provide learning opportunities on the lands of the Dakota Oyate, Nakoda Oyate, Ininiwak, Nehethowak, Nehiyawak, Anishininewuk, Denesuline, Anishinaabeg, and the National Homeland of the Red River Métis.*