If you are a student new to studying at university you need to know what to expect in the way of assessment at university level. This may be different from the assessment that you have experienced at school or college. This guide gives you information on the kinds of assignments you are likely to encounter in your first year of study. It is based on some of the most common questions that students ask before they enrol on courses and the worries that they have told us they have.

What's in this guide

The first section deals with the different types of assessment you may be asked to submit for subject area. The second section deals with frequently asked questions (FAQs). Finally a list of useful links is given.

General tips

✔ Get to know the key people who can support you, i.e your subject tutor, module leader, personal tutor, level leader and course leader. Note their names and contact details.

✔ Be aware of deadlines which you must meet and make use of any support available, for example showing your tutor a draft of your essay, if you are getting into difficulty. It is better to get help early, rather than wait until the hand-in date, when many students may be requiring the help of the same tutor.

✔ Don’t leave things until the last minute, as you might be ill when it comes to doing the work. Have a contingency plan to make sure you can still get to the assessment if, for example, the bus does not turn up in time or your car breaks down.

✔ Be aware of progression regulations and the maximum amount of re-assessment you can do. Your module marks appear on your transcript and may be available to your future employer.

✔ Students sometimes worry about getting their referencing right so they don’t plagiarise someone else’s work. Be aware of the University’s guidance on this.
**TYPES OF ASSESSMENT**

Formative assessment is where your work is assessed but a mark is not formally recorded. Its purpose is mainly as feedback for further development.

Summative assessment is where you are awarded a mark for the piece of work and it counts towards your final degree mark. Some assessments carry more marks than others and those which you do towards the end of your course are likely to carry more marks. Be aware that the earlier assessments provide the grounding for the later ones and so they are still important in terms of your learning and development.

It is really important to understand the assessment criteria and learning objectives for each piece of work. You may be assessed in many different ways, for example, self-assessed, peer-assessed or tutor-assessed.

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### Methods of assessment include

- Exams
- Posters
- Essays
- Critiques
- Reports
- Group Working
- Presentations

### Exams

Exams are used most often in subjects related to the professions, such as law and accountancy. Some exams are ‘open book’, which means that you can take appropriate books or notes into them, whilst others are ‘closed book’, which means that you are not allowed to take anything in to help you. You will be told what you can and cannot take into an exam and it is essential that you observe the exam rules.

### Essays

**What they are about** – on many courses you will be given an essay title and asked to write on a topic of the tutor’s choosing, or you may be given the option of creating your own topic within a set range.

**How many words?** These may be more than you are used to writing, but it is possible to break up the task into bite-sized pieces and deal with it a bit at a time. For guidance on how to write essays well you can make use of **Skills for Learning** – they are there to help you develop study skills.

**What tutors expect** – different tutors look for different things when it comes to essays and so you need to understand what your tutor is expecting from you.
TYPES OF ASSESSMENT

You also need to look at the learning outcomes for the module and the marking criteria for each piece of work in order to find out what exactly is required. If you are unsure then ask your tutor.

**Reports**

Often, reports will be linked to practical work you do, on your own or with one or two other students. In particular, tutors who are marking reports are looking for your own interpretations of the results or observations that you’ve made during the practical work, not just a blow-by-blow description of what you did. You may also be expected to link your findings to appropriate work from the literature in your field. Tutors will normally give some guidance on exactly how you might go about this. You will need to use the library and other on-line resources in order to inform your work. Don’t just rely on your own views; examine the views and ideas of others and shape those into a coherent argument. If you are not sure where to find resources in the library then ask the academic librarian for your subject area.

**Getting on with it** – write up as soon as you can, as after a week or two it becomes much harder to remember what you did, and what you noticed at the time. Get a diary, and break down each assignment into its component parts and set yourself mini-deadlines. Work given out at the start of the semester will usually require the whole of the semester to complete. Don’t wait until the end, when you may have other work to complete as well. If you are unsure about how to write a report you can get some help from Skills for Learning.

**Presentations**

Some people feel absolutely terrified at the very idea of talking in front of others, but being able to give a presentation is a useful skill to take into the workplace, so make the best of your opportunity to practise this at university. You won’t be asked to do it without being given time to prepare. There is useful information to help you, on the presentations section of Skills for Learning.
TYPES OF ASSESSMENT

**Preparation** – if you feel nervous about giving a presentation, make sure that you have prepared well. It’s best not to prepare a full script to read out. Instead, prepare some notes which you can read easily to jog your memory. Practise your presentation, and then it will be more natural on the day.

**Using computers** – it often helps to prepare a visual presentation using PowerPoint or something similar, so you’ve got some slides you can talk to and can use to jog your memory. Have a plan if the technology fails.

**Presenting in groups** – when presentations are involved, usually first-year students will work in groups for their earliest presentations and the audience will normally be a few of your fellow students. It is useful to be able to watch what other students have done as it gives you the chance to learn from each other. Make sure everyone knows what bit they are doing and in what order. Work as a team: reflect on each other’s performance in advance, support each other and improve together.

**Posters**

Posters show, in words and pictures, your views or research into a particular topic. The tutor could assess your poster by asking you questions on the day and considering your answers. There is help on Poster Presentations on Skills for Learning.

**Critiques**

Creative subjects, particularly those in art & design, often require students to present their projects in a ‘crit’ or critique. ‘Crits’ are similar to presentations and you should prepare for a ‘crit’ in the same way. As well as being an appropriate way to assess your work, crits develop your ability to communicate, build confidence (in yourself and your work) and develop your professional skills as your tutor will give you constructive feedback (critique) on your work.
What happens in a crit?
Details can vary but generally in a crit each student is asked to display their work (whether it be work in progress for an interim crit or a more polished exhibition for a final crit), talk about the key points to a small audience of staff and fellow students, answer questions and give and receive feedback comments about the work.

How will I know if what I have produced is good?
You will get immediate feedback from a range of people and can learn from other people’s work as well as your own. A really good crit should result in a lot of discussion and exchange of ideas and leave you with valuable suggestions as to how you can develop your project work in future.

How long does it take?
The length of an individual student’s crit can vary between 5 minutes and half an hour (or more) depending on the level of study, the type of project and the size of group. Whatever the length of time, you should prepare for the crit and be willing to contribute to the discussion of other students’ work as well as your own.

What’s the best way to prepare for a crit?
Avoid the temptation to talk about absolutely everything you have done. Give a brief overview and concentrate on the key points that you want your audience to remember. Listen attentively to other students’ presentations and be ready with questions or comments about their work. Crits can be stressful for some people and there is a tendency to switch off with relief once you’ve done your bit. Try not to do this as you will need to think about how you are going to record the comments you receive so you can reflect and act on them later.

Group Working
You may be asked to work together as a group to produce the assessed piece of work. It is important to work together as a team and use the time appropriately at the beginning of the task to decide who will do what. Set each other deadlines, agree how people will work together and play to people’s strengths.
OTHER TYPES OF ASSESSMENT
BY FACULTY/SUBJECT

Accountancy

Exams
In the faculty of Business & Law many of the courses are professionally accredited. The assessment is, therefore, determined by the professional body. Many of these bodies use exams to assess students and some of these are of 3 hours duration and may be ‘closed book’. You will be given details of what is acceptable for each exam.

Business

Business Simulation
This is a team game played with your peers, where each team has a budget and has to come up with a business plan. Each team competes against the other teams in order to become the most successful company.

Events Management

Table Top Assessment
This means bringing together a variety of objects: work completed and artefacts which signify how an event (wedding, new car launch, golf tournament) etc is built up. Or you could be given an Ordnance Survey map and a range of aerial photographs and asked to plan the layout for a rock concert on a green field site and show where the staging, band, audience, parking and emergency vehicle access will be.

Healthcare

Computer-based simulations/scenarios
Virtual Wards are used to provide a real-world simulation exercise for healthcare professional students. This approach allows tutors to set questions for students within settings where they would not normally be allowed to practise as students, e.g. in areas of learning disability. The students have access to virtual patient records, which are derived by anonymising real patient records, and are asked to answer questions and undertake activities relating to the scenario which they have been given. The activities may include debates when they will be expected to present arguments in support of or against a particular course of treatment within the scenario, or to comment on case notes. Infection control is another subject area where students learn in a simulated environment, thereby reducing the risks to patients.

Law

Court Room role play
We are lucky to have a large room, fully furnished as a court, where mock trials can be conducted. Students can participate in full court room dress and act on behalf of the defence or prosecution.
Multiple choice questions
Multiple-choice questions are used in computer-based tests, where your job is to pick the right (or best) option from several in front of you. Don’t just look for what is ‘right’. Look at all the other options quite carefully, and work out what’s wrong with them, until you’re left only with the best one to select.

Objective Structured Clinical Exams
This type of assessment is often used in medical and other health-related university education. You may come across a version of it in other courses, particularly where there are practical components to the skills that you are taught.

Getting full marks
In some assessments the pass mark has to be 100% owing to the nature of the subject area being tested. For example, ‘Authentic World’ is an innovative computer-based learning package which helps students to understand medication dosage calculations. Throughout their learning, students will work with the package to develop skills and can make mistakes in a safe environment. Later in their course the students will use the the same software to undertake an assessment to test their knowledge in this area. As giving an incorrect dosage to a patient can be life-threatening, this is the sort of area where students are expected to achieve a 100% pass mark. If you think this is high, would you want to be given medication by a student who got 99%?

Group work and collaborative assessments
The nature of some professions is that it is an essential skill to be able to work within an intra-professional team. Some of the assessments will therefore test the ability of students to work together and share information. Assessments may involve working together to produce an information booklet or undertaking case study work.

Computer-based tests
These may be new to you, but you’re very unlikely to be given such a test ‘cold’. Normally, there will be computer-based learning materials to practise on, and it’s a really good idea to get up to speed with working at a computer using such materials, so that when you get a computer-based test, you know the ropes, and don’t waste time trying to work out what to do.
What exactly is an OSCE? An OSCE is a series of stations where at each station you complete a different task within a set time limit and you will be marked on how well you did by the tutor. You may also be asked questions by the tutor at each station. The tasks you will be asked to complete will have been covered in class and you may have had time to practise them before the OSCE.

How many stations will there be? This will vary dependent on the number of individual tasks you have been asked to prepare but it could be anything between 5 and 20. An alarm is often used to tell you to move to the next station.

What will the tasks be like? If you are doing a health-related course you may find that it entails doing something to a model who may be a fellow student or an actor playing the role of the patient, e.g. listening to their chest sounds using a stethoscope or measuring how much movement they have in one of their limbs.

Music

Use of Recording Studios
You will be shown how to use the recording studios but before you are allowed to use them by yourself you are asked to pass a simple test. This is usually on how you set the equipment up safely and properly, e.g. making sure you make the right connections and set appropriate audio levels, and observing any safety practice relating to the dangers of electricity and loud audio.

Visual Arts

Portfolio
Your visual development work such as sketches, mood boards, colour schemes etc will also be used for assessment. This is an important place to keep your work as you progress through your course.

Performance

Practical Performing - you will be asked to perform live in a variety of ways, including self-devised, in collaboration with others, or in response to a client.

You may also be asked to respond to critical texts (theory) after creative investigation from a given angle.

Scoring Performance Assessments - you will be assessed on how you score a script which in effect means inserting notes on how the character moves or the intonation of the voice.

Critical reflection - this is where you look back on a performance and reflect on how you would have improved it.

Sport & Education

Video Interviews
At the end of the first year, as part of Personal Development Planning, you may be asked to illustrate your development by bringing along your work and talking through it. This allows you to develop your CV and interview technique.

Classroom Simulation
You will take it in turn to play the role of a teacher and explain to your peers how you would deliver a particular topic.
FAQs

1. How will I know how good my work is?
2. Will my lecturer give me feedback on my work before I hand it in?
3. What can I do if I can’t finish an assignment in time?
4. What can I do if I think I’m on a course where the assessment is just too hard for me?
5. What can I do if I fail?
6. How long will I get to complete my assignments?
7. Will I get the assignments, for all the modules that I am studying, all at the same time?
8. Will I know when to expect assessments?

How will I know how good my work is?
University staff are here up to help students understand how they are doing by giving them feedback on assignments. Don’t confuse this with some of the negative experiences you might have had at school where markers have concentrated on telling you everything you have done wrong. Feedback at university is specifically designed to tell you how to improve, and to let you know what you’re already doing well. When you know what you have done well you can do more of it, so get feedback from your tutors even when you have done well and are happy with your mark.

Will my lecturer give me feedback on my work before I hand it in?
One of the big differences you may notice between assessment at school and university is that, at university, you won’t usually receive feedback on a piece of assessed work before you hand it in. You really need to ensure that the work you submit is the very best you can do in the time available. Take notice of any feedback so that you can use this to improve future assignments. You may find that work in each of the tutorials leads to the final piece of assessed work. So you can continue to receive feedback during the semester.

What can I do if I can’t finish an assignment in time to hand it in for the deadline or if I have problems getting in for an exam?
Unlike some schools and colleges, at university, a deadline is just that, and you will be penalised if you hand work in late or fail to turn up for an assessed event. There are things that you can do if you have a problem, for example:
- if you can tell the person who set the assignment as soon as you know you are going to have a problem.
- if you yourself can’t phone, email or text, then try to get someone else to do it for you.
- if you are ill, you may be able to ask for an extension, but you would normally need a doctor or the health centre to confirm this. Simply saying you were ill will not normally be enough. It is important to let tutors know as soon as possible.
- if you have other serious problems, for example a family member who is ill or needs your care, let someone at the university know as soon as possible.

**What can I do if I think I’m on a course where the assessment is just too hard for me?**
Most people feel like this at some point on a university course, as the aim is to stretch you in order to develop higher level skills. If you find something really difficult, give it your best go and then make good use of all the feedback you can get on your efforts. Remember, the first time you do something really difficult is the worst time – the second time it may feel much, much easier.

**What can I do if I fail?**
The first thing to say to yourself is ‘this does not mean I am a failure; it simply means I didn’t succeed with this assignment or this particular exam’. Then find out where exactly the shortfall was. Use all the feedback you can get, so that you find out what you need to do next time to get the marks to enable you to succeed. There are numerous very successful people whose track record includes having failed things now and then.

“An expert is someone who has made all the mistakes which could be made…”
Niels Bohr, Nobel Prize-winning nuclear scientist in the last century.

**How long will I get to complete my assignments?**
The time that you get to complete assignments will vary, depending upon the nature of the task. Don’t leave it until the last minute and then discover you should have started it earlier. Plan to start it early and it will give you time to review and refine your work and also cope with anything unexpected which life may throw at you.
Will I get the assignments for all the modules that I am studying all at the same time?
You may receive all of the details about all of the assignments at the beginning of each semester, and you should look carefully at the hand-in dates for each piece of work. As has been said earlier it is useful to break down each piece of work into smaller component and enter each of these into your diary.

Not all university assessments require submitting at the same time, but there are key times, e.g. towards the end of the semester, when you have a number of assignments. You will need to plan your time carefully if you have more than one. Look at the hand-in dates of them all and plan your diary. All things being equal start with the assignment you like most and finish it early – this will build your confidence and motivate you to tackle the others.

Will I know when to expect assessments?
All assessments are planned in advance and your lecturers will be able to tell you when they expect to hand them out and want them in. Consider assessment times when you are planning your work, holidays etc. Holidays should not be taken during the academic year. Look at the calendar of semester dates on the student portal. Assessments are an important part of your time at university so plan to give them your best shot. If you have any other questions about assessments in the first year at university please don’t hesitate to contact us at studentguide@leedsmet.ac.uk.
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