

Tip Sheet: Open Written Assessments

Description

Open written assessments are tasks completed independently by students outside of a controlled environment, i.e. unsupervised.

Common formats may include:

- **Take-home essays:** Extended responses to prompts requiring critical analysis and synthesis.
- **Reflective journals:** Personal reflections on learning experiences or professional practice.
- **Research reports or case studies:** Structured analysis of a problem or scenario using evidence.
- **Creative or professional writing tasks:** Discipline-specific outputs such as lesson plans, policy briefs, or design proposals.

These assessments are typically submitted online and may span several days or weeks.

Best Suited Learning Outcomes

Open written assessments are particularly suited to outcomes that require students to:

- Demonstrate independent research and inquiry.
- Apply theoretical knowledge to real-world or simulated contexts.
- Construct well-reasoned arguments or interpretations.
- Communicate clearly in written form to academic or professional audiences.
- Reflect on personal learning, development, or practice.
- Engage ethically with sources and tools, including AI.

These tasks are commonly used in fields such as theology, philosophy, education, health, sciences, law and business.

Learning Design Considerations

Designing effective and valid written assessments requires careful planning and alignment:

- **Validity:**
 - Ensure the task assesses higher-order thinking (e.g. analysis, synthesis, evaluation) rather than rote recall. Design prompts that require original thought and application.
 - Align the written task directly to unit and course learning outcomes.
- **Scaffolding:**
 - Support student success through provision of clear task instructions.
 - Provide exemplars to guide students.
 - Integrate opportunities for draft feedback or peer review.
 - Provide workshops on academic writing, referencing, research skills, time management and planning; liaise with Academic Skills Unit to support these skills.

- **Transparency:**
 - Clearly communicate the conditions of the task (e.g. task expectations, marking criteria, word limits).
 - Clearly communicate permitted use of resources, including AI tools, and academic integrity expectations.
- **Equity and inclusion:**
 - Provide flexible deadlines where appropriate.
 - Ensure accessibility for students with diverse needs, including reasonable adjustments or alternative formats.
- **Reliability:**
 - Use detailed rubrics or marking guides to ensure fair and consistent marking.
 - Conduct consensus moderation processes at pre-, peri-, and post- points.
 - Feedback needs to be constructive and timely.

Integrating Generative AI into the Task

Generative AI can be integrated into written assessments in ways that enhance learning, support critical thinking, and reflect real-world practices. It can be used for brainstorming and creating drafts, refining and editing, or summarising and synthesising sources. Ethical and responsible use of GenAI will require students to disclose how they used AI, what they learned from it, and how they ensured academic integrity. This builds AI literacy and accountability.

Examples include:

- A **theology student** might use AI to summarise dense theological texts to better understand key themes before writing their own analysis. They could also use AI to generate contrasting interpretations of a biblical passage and then critically evaluate them in their essay.
- A **marketing student** uses AI to brainstorm campaign ideas and then evaluates their ethical and strategic fit within a real-life context.
- A **psychology student** can use AI to summarise recent journal articles on cognitive bias, helping them integrate key findings into their essay.

Resourcing Considerations

- **Staffing:**
 - Plan for marking time, particularly for longer or more complex tasks.
 - Allocate staff to marking if required, or source casual academics to support grading.
- **Technology:**
 - Ensure the LMS supports secure submission and plagiarism detection
 - Provide access to AI tools if required, with guidance on ethical use and academic integrity.
- **Moderation and quality assurance:**
 - Complete moderation processes to ensure marking is consistent across multiple markers.