Tip Sheet: Supervised Oral Exams

Description

Supervised oral exams are real-time, interactive assessments that involve students speaking to and responding to questions from an examiner or panel. These assessments can take a range of formats including:

- **Interactive oral presentation**: Student presents an idea, argument, or solution and responds to probing questions.
- **Viva voce**: Student explains or defends a written assignment or project.
- **Portfolio interview**: Student presents selected artefacts from a portfolio and explains their development and relevance.
- **Thesis defence**: Student defends a major research project or dissertation in a structured interview.
- **Debate**: Student presents and defends a position, often in a dialogic or adversarial format.

These formats are typically individual or small-group and are conducted in-person or via video conferencing.

Best Suited Learning Outcomes

This assessment type is best suited for outcomes that require students to:

- Explain and justify disciplinary reasoning
- Demonstrate critical thinking, synthesis, or judgment
- Apply theoretical knowledge to real or simulated contexts
- Communicate effectively to disciplinary or professional audiences
- Reflect on and evaluate their own work, process, or development
- Defend a position, proposal, or interpretation under questioning

Learning Design Considerations

To ensure this assessment type supports student learning effectively, consider the following principles:

- **Validity**: Ensure the oral format aligns with what you are intending to assess (e.g. reasoning, judgment, communication, or application, rather than memorisation).
- **Scaffolding**: Support student success through activities that prepare them for oral interaction:
    - Practice interviews or mock vivas
    - Guided reflections on written work
    - Opportunities to receive formative feedback on presentation content and delivery
- **Transparency**: Clearly communicate the format, expectations, marking criteria, and the types of questions or topics that may arise.
- **Equity and inclusion**:

    - Consider linguistic, cultural, neurodiverse, and anxiety-related factors. Offer flexibility in scheduling and format (e.g. camera on/off policies, structured prompts).
    - Provide reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities in line with ACU's policies.
- **Consistency and reliability**:
    - Use marking rubrics and shared question prompts to ensure comparability across examiners.
    - Consider panel assessment or moderation if the stakes are high.

Integrating Generative AI into the Task

Generative AI can be integrated into the task design to reflect authentic, ethical, and discipline-relevant practices. The key is to require students to engage critically with AI tools and demonstrate their own judgment in how they use them.

Examples include:

- A **business student** uses a GenAI tool to draft an initial business proposal for a client and then, during the oral assessment, explains how they refined it, where the tool was helpful, and what limitations or inaccuracies they encountered.
- An **education student** uses AI to generate examples of lesson activities and is then questioned on their pedagogical appropriateness and adaptations for specific learner needs.
- A **health sciences student** might use AI to summarise recent research and then defend or critique those summaries in a viva setting.
- A **communications student** might be asked to use an AI tool to generate social media content or a campaign draft, and then reflect on its alignment with ethical guidelines and target audience strategy.

Oral assessments can include requirements for students to disclose and explain how they used GenAI in their preparation and decision-making. This supports critical AI literacy and enhances transparency.

Resourcing Considerations

- **Staff time**: One-on-one or small group assessments are time-intensive. Scheduling, consistency, and moderation processes should be planned in advance.
- **Technology**:
    - Reliable video conferencing tools are essential for online delivery.
    - Secure storage of recordings for moderation or appeals may be needed.
    - AI tools, where integrated, should be accessible and appropriate for the student cohort.
- **Training**:
    - Examiners may require guidance on questioning techniques, applying rubrics consistently, and recognising valid versus superficial AI use.
- **Accessibility**:
    - Ensure alternative formats or adjustments are available where needed, such as rest breaks, additional time, or written prompts.