# ASSESSMENT OF LEARNER PERFORMANCE

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# MDE-413: Learner Support Systems and Services

*(New Course in place of ES-313: Learner Support Services)*

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### MDE-413 : LEARNER SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

#### BLOCK 1 : LEARNER SUPPORT: AN INTRODUCTION

- **Unit 1** : Learner Support: A System’s Approach
- **Unit 2** : Learner Support: Some Basic Issues
- **Unit 3** : Support Services: Institutional Arrangements and Models
- **Unit 4** : Developing a Self Directed Learner

#### BLOCK 2 : LEARNER SUPPORT: DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS

- **Unit 1** : Cognitive Skills
- **Unit 2** : Study Skills: How to Study Better
- **Unit 3** : Reading and Writing Skills
- **Unit 4** : Problem Solving Skills

#### BLOCK 3 : COUNSELLING AND TUTORING SERVICES

- **Unit 1** : Counselling
- **Unit 2** : Tutoring
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- **Unit 4** : Organizing Counselling and Tutoring Services

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- **Unit 1** : Learners’ Expectations in Distance Education
- **Unit 2** : Management of Support Services
- **Unit 3** : Monitoring Learners’ Progress
- **Unit 4** : Library and Information Services to Distance Learners
INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

Learner support services are indispensable components of the ODL system (ODLS). It is important not because of its relation to the Distance Education theories, but it is a key for learners’ successes and their persistence in the ODL system. It is a fact that in Distance Education, there is the geographical separation of teacher and learner. In addition to it, sociopsychological factors affect the learners in their learning and completing the courses. The sociopsychological factors include language, culture, motivation, inadequate skills or preparation, anxiety, time and work or family constraints. Distance learners, therefore, need various support services that would help them to be successful learners. Learner Support Services (LSS) are treated as learner centered facilitating functions of ODLS which take into account problems of distance learners at pre entry stage, during the course of studies and at the course completion stage. In this regard, it is noted that learner support not only bridges sociopsychological distances, but also fosters learners for their personal development and the accomplishment of learning goals. In the light of the separation of the learner from the teacher, the techniques and mechanisms to provide support assume a significant dimension in the teaching-learning transactions through the distance mode. This course MDE-413 discusses about the concept of various Learner Support Systems and Services and their interrelationship with other elements of ODL, theoretical background of LSS and factors affecting the nature of support services. Some important mechanisms of learner support namely contact programmes, counselling, and distance teaching through tutor comments on assignment responses have been discussed thoroughly. It also describes the institutional mechanisms for providing learning support. After working through this course, you should be able to:

- describe the basic principles and methods of learner support,
- explain the importance of support services in the ODL system,
- discuss learner support services as a sub-system of any ODL institution,
- organize academic counselling and other support services,
- assess and report the performance and progress of distance learners,

This course consists of five blocks. These are:

Block 1: Learner Support: An Introduction — This block discusses the concept of support services as a major component of ODL and various institutional models and arrangements in providing Learners Support Services (LSS).

Block 2: Learner Support: Development of Skills — Various learning skills such as Study skills, Cognitive skills, Problem solving skills, Reading and Writing skills have been discussed to develop a self directed learner.

Block 3: Counselling and Tutoring Services — All the issues related to Counselling and Tutoring services like skills, qualities, media and technology in counselling and organizing counselling and tutoring services have been analyzed.

Block 4: Assessment of Learner Performance — Various components of Assessment in Distance Education like Tutor Comments, Tutoring through Correspondence and Supplemental Interaction have been emphasized.
Block 5: Management of Learner Support — Some important aspects of LSS such as Learners’ Expectations in DE, Management of Support Services, and Monitoring Learners’ Progress have been analyzed.

Each block of this course consists of four units. We begin each unit with the section ‘Introduction’ followed by ‘Learning Outcomes’. It articulates briefly:

- what we have presented in the unit, and
- what we expect from you once you complete working on the unit.

In the last section of each unit, under the heading, ‘Let Us Sum Up’, we summarise the whole unit for purposes of recapitulation.

Besides, we have given self-check exercises under the caption ‘Check Your Progress’ of Self-check Exercises at a few places in each of these units which invariably end with possible answers to the questions set in these exercises.

What you are expected to do is to go through the units and jot down important points in the space provided in the margin. This will help you to make notes and prepare for the examination. At the same time, you will be able to save time during your revision. Therefore, we advise you to use these margins.

We hope that we have given enough space for you to work on the self-check exercises.

The purpose of giving self-check exercises will be served satisfactorily if you compare your answers with the possible ones given at the end of each unit under ‘Feedback to Check Your Progress Questions’. You may be tempted to have a furtive glance at possible answer(s), as soon as you come across an exercise. But we do hope that you will overcome the temptation and turn to these possible answers (which are not the best answers necessarily) only after you write your own. These exercises are not meant to be submitted to us for correction or evaluation. Instead, the exercises are to function as study tools to help you keep on the right track as you read the units.

Besides this, counselling is also provided at your study centres for this course. Attending a counselling session will help you to clarify your queries and doubts. Counselling sessions are also the time when you can meet other learners, and see the diverse nature of the learner profile. If your learning style is discussion and interaction based, it is always suggested to attend the counselling sessions. Along with the counselling sessions, there are other media materials, and services available in this course, and you may like to take advantages of these by attending the teleconference sessions/virtual classes as and when conducted. You will receive information about special arrangements regarding this from time to time.

In this course, you have to submit one assignment consisting of both essay type and short answers type questions which carries 25% weightage. We suggest the following norms to be strictly practiced while you are working through the assignments:

- Write you roll number legibly as indicated in the Programme Guide.
- Before you put down anything in words, assimilate what you have read and integrate it with what you have gathered from your experience to build your answer.
• Make the best use of the block and the additional reading materials for diligently working through the assignments.

Beside the assignment, you have to appear for term-end examination for this course which carries 75% weightage.

About this block:

This is the fourth block of the course “Learner Support Systems and Services”. After discussing the issues related to Counselling and Tutoring Services like skills, qualities, media and technology in counselling and organising counselling and tutoring services in the third block, now we will make an attempt to focus on some issues related to assessment of learners’ performance in distance education such as, Tutor Comments, Tutoring through Correspondence and Supplemental Interaction in this block.

We all are familiar with assessment and evaluation. We know the value of examination and its sacred nature to uphold the quality of the teaching-learning process. In distance education as well, these are treated in a similar manner. In spite of the similarities of the rigour in the method of examination, there is certain “newness” in the distance education system with regard to assessment, particularly because of its integration into the teaching-learning process. Therefore, we have discussed various components of assessment of learners’ performance in distance education elaborately in all the units throughout this block.

In the first unit, we have discussed about the unique features of assessment in distance education, and also highlighted different types of assessment and issues related to grading and marking of learners’ performances. You as a distance education professional may use some of the ideas and concepts discussed in this unit in your future engagements with distance education.

The second unit is solely devoted to the analysis of ‘tutor-comments’, their types and significance in the context of distance education. While comprehending the concept ‘tutor-comments’, we have listed out the role of a classroom teacher and identified the crucial tasks performed by a distance tutor, who is to teach effectively through written comments on learners’ assignment responses. We have highlighted all sorts of comments and their significance for learners’ understanding and benefit.

In the third unit we intend to inform you about some fallacies which continue to stand in the way of the successful functioning of distance education programmes. We have also discussed the significant biases which stand in the way of successful two-way communication between distance learners and distance teachers and we have also suggested the means for overcoming these fallacies and biases.

In the last unit we aimed at justifying our discussion on the biases of a conventional teacher and highlighting the significance of supplemental communication. We have also touched upon issues such as the ‘prerequisites’ which a distance teacher may expect from his/her teaching more in order to better his/her performance and make his/her teaching more purposeful. Then, we have discussed notions of submission density of assignment-responses, and tutorials. In this way we have tried to discuss all the components related to assessment of learners’ performance in distance education throughout this block.
UNIT 1 LEARNERS’ ASSESSMENT IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

Structure

1.0 Introduction
1.1 Learning Outcomes
1.2 Types of Assessment in Distance Education
  1.2.1 Self Assessment
  1.2.2 Continuous Assessment
  1.2.3 Term End Examination
  1.2.4 Alternative Assessment Methods
1.3 Marking and Grading
1.4 Reliability and Validity of Assessment
1.5 Let Us Sum Up
1.6 References and Further Readings
1.7 Feedback to Check Your Progress Questions

1.0 INTRODUCTION

We all are familiar with assessment and evaluation. We know the value of examination and its sacred nature to uphold the quality of the teaching-learning process. In distance education as well, these are treated in a similar manner. In spite of the similarities of the rigour in the method of examination, there is certain “newness” in the distance education system with regard to assessment, particularly because of its integration into the teaching-learning process. In this unit we shall discuss about the unique features of assessment in distance education, and also highlight different types of assessment and issues related to grading and marking of learners’ performances. This unit is an important aspect of the support service to the learner, and you as a distance education professional may use some of the ideas and concepts discussed here in your future engagements with distance education.

1.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this unit, you are expected to be able to:

• Describe the components of assessment in distance education;
• Distinguish between grading and marking;
• Explain the importance of marking schemes;
• Develop a suitable marking scheme;
• Identify factors affecting the notion of ‘perfect grading’; and
• Discuss reliability and validity of assessment mechanisms.
1.2 TYPES OF ASSESSMENT IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

In the field of educational evaluation a number of terms are used commonly and interchangeably. However, they are not synonymous and have specific connotations. Before, we delve into the issues of assessment in distance education and its types; let us try to define these terms.

Test is a device to obtain quantitative data. This consists of a standard set of questions to be answered or tasks to be performed. It is a most commonly used form of measurement in education. A test usually presents a uniform set of tasks to all members of a given group at a scheduled time with prior notice.

Measurement is an act of assigning numerical index (i.e., quantification) to whatever is being assessed in some meaningful and consistent manner. For example Suresh scored 32 out of 50 in English test. When we assign a score 32/50 on a given test performed by Suresh, we are doing an act of measurement. Measurement only quantifies the data obtained through observations, tests or any other devices.

Assessment refers to the process of obtaining information about a learner’s learning, progress and achievement, that is what and how well the learner has learned during and at the end of a course and assigning a value to the performance. For example, Suresh got an ‘A’ grade or 75% in an assignment response.

Evaluation is a wider and more inclusive term. This includes all the three: test, measurement and assessment. When we compare the score of a learner with those of other learners and judge whether it is good/average/satisfactory/unsatisfactory/bad, we are doing the act of evaluation. In other words, evaluation includes quantitative description, qualitative description and a value judgment.

Evaluation as a process can be categorized into: formative and summative.

Formative Evaluation: It is concerned with identifying learner weaknesses in attainment of specific objectives with a view to help the learner to overcome the same. Tests for formative evaluation are given at regular intervals during a course. Therefore, formative evaluation is also termed as continuous evaluation. In distance education, formative evaluation is done through assignments and self assessment questions in the learning materials.

Summative Evaluation: As the term indicates, it is evaluation at the end of a course, and aims at certifying and grading the attainment of the learner with respect to objectives of a given course. Summative evaluation may also take into consideration the result of the formative evaluation to finalize learners’ attainment. As such it includes all such forms of measurement that would give a measure of success of the course as a whole.

Evaluation of learners’ attainment of objectives is normally done by three types of questions used in the pen and paper based examinations. These are: Objective type, short answer type and long
Learners' Assessment in Distance Education

answer type/essay type. The short and long answer type questions are generally used to assess the higher order cognitive objectives such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Objective type questions are best suitable, to provide feedback to the learners. The following six major types of objective questions are normally used to assess students’ performances:

- True-False
- Matching
- Fill in the blank
- Completion of sentences
- Multiple choice
- Sequencing

In distance education, both formative and summative evaluations are done using a variety of questions: objective, short-answer and long-answer type. These are grouped into three categories: Self-assessment, continuous assessment, and term-end examinations. Besides, we will also discuss some alternative forms of assessment that can be used in distance and online learning situations.

1.2.1 Self-Assessment

In Self Learning Materials (SLM), the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) or Check Your Progress (CYP) questions are spread throughout the text to help the learners’ check their progress in developing the relevant knowledge and skills and successful attainment of learning objectives. A distance learner would like to know his/her progress. But, there is no teacher to give the feedback (unlike class room face-to-face system). The SAQs are the means to provide feedback in distance learning materials. These are used as formative evaluation tools to help the learners to learn better. These mostly include objective type questions and short-answer questions. Learners are expected to work on these in the space provided or in a note-book. The self-learning material provides answer/feedback to each of these questions. Learners are expected to use this feedback to compare and self-assess their learning.

Check Your Progress 1

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.
      b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

What is self-assessment?

Continuous Assessment

Continuous assessment is done in distance education through assignments. Normally assignments carry 25-30% weight in overall
Assessment of Learner Performance

Of the various forms of assessment, there are different methods commonly used. These could be computer marked or tutor marked and normally include questions of different types. The tutor marked assignments are commonly used as a two-way communication tool between the learner and the distance teaching institution or the tutor/teacher. The distance learners are expected to work on some assignments (usually specified in the Programme Guide) and submit them in their Study Centres. The assignment responses are evaluated by an academic counsellor, who provides grade/marks and teaching type comments to encourage and motivate the learners (more about comments in the next unit). Assignments also help the learner to decrease the sense of isolation as a distance learner.

The feedback on written assignment is important as it is expected to improve the student performance in the next assignment submission. However, for the assessors this is mostly dispiriting, as students return assignments repeating the same mistakes again and again (Crisp, 2007). This may be due to the poor quality of feedback, and yet again point towards the importance of good feedback with sufficient and clearly explained comments.

1.2.3 Term-End Examination

This is the final examination, you are familiar with. It could be organized once or twice in a year depending on institutional policy. These are examinations that are organized as end of course activity, and are mostly pen and paper based. However alternatives such as practical and project are also used to assess learner performance and are treated as final examination. Distance learners are expected to appear in a term-end examination of a course once they have completed the minimum duration and have acquired the necessary knowledge and skills specified in the course. They are normally given option to decide when to appear for the term-end examination. Of course, this flexibility is subject to rules applicable for the course/programme of study. The term-end examination normally carries about 70-75% weight in overall assessment.

1.2.4 Alternative Assessment Methods

While the above three types of assessment are common practice in distance education, and within this objective, short-answer and long answer types questions are used, there are some other forms of assessment that can be used effectively in distance education. We will discuss some of these, in brief, in this sub-section. These are: peer assessment, projects, portfolio, viva-voce/oral examination, internship, and seminar presentation.

**Peer Assessment:** This method of assessment is used to assess the work done by people of equal status. Mostly peer assessment is used in review of professional publications (books and journal articles). It is believed that in a professional context, the peer-group knows best about developments in a field, and are the best experts to judge a piece of work. Using the same principle in the context of student learning, feedback of peer group can be used in assessment. However, it also brings in resistance and a distrust of the process, when the grade/marks/feedback of the learners is used without moderation for the final grading. Peer assessment is highly useful, when you want your learners to develop skills of assessment and judgment in a particular discipline. Besides, peer assessment is useful in developing
critical understanding of the discipline/topic/subject, and promotes skills of group work. It is most widely used in online group discussions in the form of peer rating of the postings. However, to use the peer assessment in the final grading, many give only a fifty percent weight to the summated rating of the peer group, and add the tutor assessment as the other fifty percent weight.

**Project Assessment:** The use of project as assessment provides the learners with practical skills, and also abilities to communicate their work effectively. The projects can be product based or a process based activities, but at the end both result in reports. Project based assessments are useful to help students to:

- explore a topic of interest deeply;
- develop skills of independent inquiry;
- develop time and project management skills;
- provide personal ownership of learning; and
- foster scientific and creative problem solving skills.

In order to use projects as assessment methods, you need to be clear about the primary objective of the course. Particularly in distance education set up, it is important that a comprehensive manual is available to the learners to clarify doubts. The project manual should cover and explain the issues related to supervision, assessment procedures, length of the project, duration of work, referencing style etc. Most institutions use oral examination as additional assessment to authenticate the work done by the distance learners in project.

**Portfolio Assessment:** Portfolios have generated a good deal of interest in education in the recent past. Portfolio is a systematic record of the works of a student to showcase achievement of certain set of objectives over a period of time. It may include work samples, description of the work, student reflection, etc. The portfolio has the following advantages:

- It measures student’s ability over a period of time.
- It is criterion oriented, and the criteria is known to the student.
- It is embedded in the instructional process, and support and guidance are given throughout.
- It helps the learner to do self assessment.
- It captures different facets of learning.
- It helps the learner to be creative and independent.

The use of portfolio as an assessment tool is used in professional and vocational subjects such as fashion, art and management. However, portfolio is getting popular in other disciplines with the advent of online portfolio systems. E-Portfolio has become an important way to show the progress a student over a period of time to the prospective employers. It is through portfolio that we can understand the willingness of a person to learn, and his/her ability to take feedback positively, and also use of personal reflection in the process of learning and development.
Assessment of Learner Performance

Oral Examination: This is normally done in the form of viva-voce at the end of a project or when we want to know the language proficiency of a learner. Oral examinations can also be used in the form of group discussions. Mostly it is used to screen candidates in job placements to know about leadership and team abilities. Oral examination is also possible with the use of online technology, particularly synchronous audio conferencing.

Seminar Presentation: Besides the language proficiency, leadership abilities and team spirit, it is also important to know and develop students’ ability to make effective presentations. In professional courses, it is expected that learners are proficient in the art of presentations. When a student has done in-depth study and research in an area, his/her confidence is shown in the clarity of the presentation and the way he/she makes the presentation. It also shows the persuasion ability of the learner, as the presentations can be made creatively using many technologies. In online examinations that use term papers to assess student learning, online presentations are also used.

Internship: The use internship is not normally done for the purpose of assessment. It is usually done in the form of giving actual work experience to the learner. So, in highly skill based courses, internship is used to give hands on experience to the learners to handle actual projects, machines, and tools to work and learn the tricks of the trade on the floor. Students are attached to supervisors/mentors who provide critical inputs and support to the learners to rectify their mistakes and learn. In some institutions, the learners are expected to prepare a report of their experience in the internship for assessment. In such a case the supervisor also provides a specific confidential report to the faculty about the work experience of the learner, which forms part of the total assessment.

Check Your Progress 2

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.
   b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

What do you understand by Oral Examination?

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1.3 MARKING AND GRADING

Learner performance vis-à-vis the course objectives can be reported with the help of numerical marks. However, in all forms of education, either classroom or distance, grading is slowly replacing marks. In distance education both quantifiable marking and grading are used to report student performance. Though grading is the favoured practice world over, in Indian situation marking is also used to avoid the problem of conversion of grades into marks particularly to facilitate mobility of distance learners to other institutions. We are familiar with the marking scheme that follows a 0-100 scale, and accordingly
absolute scores are given to student performances in examination/test/assignment within this scale. However, the scale in the grading pattern could be five points, seven points or nine points. IGNOU follows a five point grade system with the notional values given in Table-1.1.

Table-1.1: Grading Pattern at IGNOU

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Quality Level</th>
<th>Point Grade</th>
<th>Point Grade Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.5 and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.5 but less than 4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5 but less than 3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5 but less than 2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Below 1.5</td>
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At IGNOU different programmes follow different schemes: marking and grading. In some 35% is pass mark, in others 40% is pass mark; while courses that use grading system C is pass in some, whereas in some D is pass grade. In some programmes average ‘C’ in term-end examinations and assignment is pass grade, while in others students have to receive ‘C’ in both assignments and term-end examinations to pass. In the grading pattern, each answer is evaluated and graded separately, and at the end a cumulative grade is given based on the point grade. Thus, missing questions in a test or assignment affect the average grade in a course.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1973 through a publication entitled “Examination Reform – A Plan of Action” emphasized the need for making the assessment system accurate, familiar and simple. It said, the student result should depict accurately the level of academic achievement of the learner whether grading or marking is used. The meaning of the mark/grade should be clear to all the stakeholders, and it should be simple to interpret. The Monograph on Grading for Universities published by the Association of Indian Universities in 1977 gives the following reasons against the marking system:

- The marking system does not reflect accurately the academic achievement of the learners due to marker variability.
- The 80 marks received in Mathematics and History is not comparable, due to subject difference.
- The marks are not absolute, though they show numerical position. Research shows that there is a variability of 5% in student marks. Thus a student getting raw 41 marks would range between 36 and 46.

Grades on the other hand use a smaller scale in comparison to marks (0-100) and shows brevity in assignment of value to student performance. The variability of mark and the difference between 59 and 60 gets reduced with emphasis on the relative qualities associated with the grades. It is not clear as to why a paper is always 100 marks, and when a grading system is followed, the focus shifts from marks to the content and what the student has learned vis-à-vis the expectations as different levels of the grading system. Even if subjectivity in
assessment can’t be ruled out due to marker variability, it has also been observed that there is lesser variation in grades awarded by various examiners than in the marks awarded by them. However, the grades are also criticized for lack of clarity of meaning, lack of sufficient empirical evidence, and difference in the scales used. Thus, a ‘perfect grading’ or flawless grading is impossible to ascertain. Even if, we do get a system in place for flawless grading, it will be difficult to convince others of its validity and reliability (issues that we will discuss in the next section). We will discuss in this section some issues related with grading and marking to make the process of assessment error free to the best possible extent.

Marking/Grading Scheme

The use of a marking/grading scheme is one of the best ways to reduce marker variability. Morgan and O’Reilly (1999) suggested marking scheme often contain the following:

- Criteria to evaluate the assignment, such as understanding of the concept, argument, structure, presentation, etc.
- Details of each criterion including what is expected; and
- Percentage weight or actual mark for each criterion.

While marking scheme should be prepared for every set of question separately, it is a difficult and time consuming process. So, marking scheme can also be generic in nature. One such generic scheme that has been tested in many disciplines is the Structured Observation of Learning Outcomes [SOLO developed by Biggs (1999)]. We present here two examples of generic marking scheme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example 1: Marking Scheme (Source: Morgan &amp; O’Reilly (1999))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High distinction</strong> (85-100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distinction</strong> (75-84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Credit</strong> (65-74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pass</strong> (50-64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fail</strong> (below 50)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Example 2: Grading Criteria based on Biggs (1999) Structure of the Observed Learning Outcomes (SOLO) Taxonomy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOLO Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pre-structural</td>
<td>The task itself is not attacked in an appropriate way. The student has not understood the point.</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Uni-structural</td>
<td>One relevant aspect of task is picked up and there is no relationship between facts or ideas. Understanding is nominal.</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Multi-structural</td>
<td>Several (two or more) independent aspects are picked up or understood serially but are not interrelated.</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Relational</td>
<td>Relevant aspects are integrated into an overall coherent structure.</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Extended abstract</td>
<td>The coherent whole is generalised or re-conceptualised to a higher level of abstraction.</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assessor’s Perception of the Lesson/Unit**

In distance education the first task of the assessor is to study the unit carefully and see what the course-writers want to convey through it, and that while assessing an assignment-response he/she should not be carried away by his/her own knowledge of the subject-matter but should instead see what the learner is expected to achieve, and judge the learner’s performance accordingly. However, it has been observed that assessor’s own understanding of the subject matter being assessed play a significant role in his/her assessment of the work on hand.

**Assessor’s Perception of the Assignment**

When evaluating a response by a student, the assessor uses something which is conceptually called Assessor’s Ideal Response (AIR). This may be a real or imaginary answer. But, this is what the assessor uses to give the grading. However, the assessor may understand the question in a different way than it is expected. Sometimes faulty questioning adds to the problem. A faulty perception of the question may cause errors in assessment. To overcome this difficulty we have suggested two ways (i) guidance from the course writers, and (ii) appropriate orientation for the assessors to help them look through the assignment clearly.

**Tendencies Towards being Lenient or Strict**

Everyone has a tendency to be strict/lenient when it comes to assessment of student performance. This is a personality factor of the assessor, and there is little that can be done other than providing guidance and training in assessing specific course in distance education set up.

**Assessor’s Attention Span**

Research shows that the assessors’ ‘attention span’ reduces as they evaluate more student responses. Attention span here refers to the ability of the assessor to objectively evaluate a response over a specific
time period. Depending on the nature of assignment/final answer script, the attention span may be 2-3 at one go. So, an evaluator with three as attention span may evaluate the 4th script onwards differently than expected. This will significantly affect the results of the learners. While the affect could be increase or decrease in the student grade, the ultimate result is non-reflection of accurate grade. In order to reduce the problem of attention span, the assessors should be given more time to evaluate the answer scripts so that they do not assess student responses quickly and unconsciously be affected by the attention span syndrome. It has been observed from practice by the author that evaluation of one assignment response take about 30 minutes time (this may differ from subject to subject), and thus, evaluating 3-4 assignments continuously brings in fatigue of the mind. Therefore, it is suggested that evaluation of student assignment may be done slowly and carefully.

**Issues in Assignment Handling**

Read the following dialogue between two academic Counsellors.

If you read the above conversation carefully, the following issues would be evident:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AC1: Did you see the live telecast of the cricket match last night?</th>
<th>AC2: No. I evaluated 30 assignments last night and it took about two hours of time. I was tired.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AC1: Really! It takes me much longer time to evaluate assignments. It takes about 30-45 minutes for me to evaluate one assignment response.</td>
<td>AC2: I do the grading rather fast, as I can really see the worth of what the student has done. But, it is so boring, you know…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC1: I don’t just provide grade, but also write the comments after thorough reading.</td>
<td>AC2: Definitely, giving personal tutor comments would take that much of time. But, you know it is difficult to spend so much time for assignment evaluation, particularly when you have hundreds to evaluate over the weekend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC1: I can understand. It is difficult when you also need to maintain a record of the student assignment.</td>
<td>AC2: I appreciate your efforts to write personal comments. I was told of the same in a workshop about assignments in distance education. But, the workload is so high that it is practically impossible to write comments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC1: Students also need to be told about the grades before the term-end examinations…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Turn-around time of assignment
- Number of assignments to be evaluated and workload
- Importance of record keeping
- Writing tutor comments (to be discussed in the next Unit)

Let us discuss the other three issues.

**Record Keeping:** Assignment records are kept at the study centre.
However, if as an academic counsellor, you maintain a register for the assignments evaluated by you, it would be useful to provide personalized comments related to progress and performance of the learners. Record keeping shall also help to reduce unnecessary duplication of work. You can also have a proper accounting of the payments received for the evaluation by keeping a record. Time spent on this account is definitely an advantage.

**Number of Assignments:** How many assignments should be evaluated by an academic counsellor at a time? This is a pedagogic question that most of the time answered through an administrative and managerial viewpoint. More assignments for evaluation and less time is a frequent problem faced by evaluators. Ideally 20-25 assignments evaluation per week is OK, if the academic counsellor can spend about two hours daily. In order to reduce this problem, there should be more number of academic counsellors to evaluate the assignment responses.

**Turn-around Time:** By turn-around time we mean the amount of time it takes to reach the evaluated assignment back to the student. At IGNOU, the turn-around time is 6-8 weeks. Ideally, the evaluated assignment responses should be returned before the due date for the next assignment in the same course. If the assignments reach the learners late, the significance of tutor comments for the learners would be lost.

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**Check Your Progress 3**

**Notes:**

a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

What do you mean by turn-around time?

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### 1.4 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF ASSESSMENT

Reliability and validity are two psychological measures of the quality of assessment used. When the assessment is of high value stake, it is important that the reliability of the assessment used is sufficiently high. If the reliability is low, then validity of the assessment is also seriously compromised.

Reliability says is the system reliable every time it is used? Does it assess the same learning outcomes accurately every time it does? It is possible to have reliability in standardized tests and for large scale public examinations. However, teacher prepared questions always show low reliability. The issue of reliability is more prominent at the stage of grading/marking. Especially due to various reasons discussed earlier, the reliability of assessment may decrease. To improve reliability some institutions also use double marking system. However, the use of specific marking scheme shall also improve reliability in assessment, especially in distance learning systems where there are large number of
Assessment of Learner Performance

students to be assessed. The Korean National Open University (KNOU) uses objective type assessment in the term-end examination to improve reliability of the system.

If assessment is valid, then it should measure what it is supposed to. It is something like ‘fitness for purpose’. Mostly validity is determined by a consensus approach, and therefore, Universities use moderation board to validate the question papers. This is also considered ‘face validity’.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we discussed assessment related issues in distance education. While we do assessment almost in all walks of life, and almost in all activities, this is something very critical in the process of certification in education system. We clarified the concepts such as test, assessment and evaluation as related terms with different meanings, and then went on to discuss different types of commonly used assessment techniques in distance education: self-assessment, continuous assessment and term-end examination. We also listed some of the alternative forms of assessment that are becoming popular in distance and online education. Under this, we discussed peer-assessment, portfolio, project, internship, oral examination and seminar presentation highlighting their specific purposes and usage.

In this unit, we also discussed the issues related to reporting to student performance through grading and marking. While, we emphasized that grading has advantages over marking scheme, it was also indicated that in distance education systems both these forms of reporting are used. However, it is important to make the system of assessment more robust by taking care of the issues related to marking scheme, assessor’s perception of the unit, assessor’s ideal response, and assessor’s attention span. We also emphasized that for any assessment system to be credible, its reliability and validity need to be established.

1.6 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

Association of Indian Universities (1977). Monograph on Grading for Universities, New Delhi: AIU.


1.7 FEEDBACK TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

QUESTIONS

Check Your Progress 1

When a learner does the Check Your Progress questions given in the units and compare his/her answers with the answer written at the end of the unit, is known as self-assessment. In this situation, no teacher is involved to assess your progress. This is the result. The Check Your Progress questions are objective type questions and short answer questions.

Check Your Progress 2

This is normally done in the form of viva-voce at the end of a project or when we want to know the language proficiency of a learner. Oral examinations can also be used in the form of group discussions. Mostly it is used to screen candidates in job placements to know about leadership and team abilities. Oral examination is also possible with the use of online technology, particularly synchronous audio conferencing.

Check Your Progress 3

By turn-around time we mean the amount of time it takes to reach the evaluated assignment back to the student. At IGNOU, the turn-around time is 6-8 weeks. Ideally, the evaluated assignment responses should be returned before the due date for the next assignment in the same course. If the assignments reach the learners late, the significance of tutor comments for the learners would be lost.