

**Assessment workshop:**

**Tasks and mark schemes**

**Student Workshop**

The outcomes of GCSE and A level assessments are of great significance to learners, their parents and their teachers. The process of preparing appropriate assessments tasks is therefore crucial. These tasks must, as far as possible, be valid (in that they assess the knowledge and skills that they are intended to assess), must be of the level of demand required for the standard of the qualification, must be fair to all learners who take the assessment, and must, facilitate reliable marking from examiners.

**Learning Outcomes**

* To consider the likely validity and reliability of individual assessment tasks.
* To consider whether an assessment task is fair to all of the learners who may be required to take it.
* To consider the inherent challenges when designing assessment tasks.
* To think about how the above may impact upon a leaners mark and therefore the overall performance standard observed within the assessment.

**Materials**

We have provided three different assessment tasks and their accompanying mark schemes. The materials have been designed such that they are similar to those used by real examination boards at GCSE level.

* Assessment Task 1: GCSE Biology
* Assessment Task 2: GCSE English Language (creative writing)
* Assessment Task 3: GCSE Mathematics (problem solving)

**The Activity**

Please read the assessment tasks and their accompanying mark schemes. Think about these materials from two perspectives: first, that of a learner who is presented with the task and, second, that of an examiner who needs to assess the learners’ performance. Consider the following:

1. Do you think the task will elicit the knowledge and skills that it is setting out to assess? *You may like to consider the stated ‘Assessment Objectives’ (AOs) for the task, which are included.*
2. Is the task sufficiently clear for all learners who might undertake it?
3. Are there any elements of the presentation that may confuse or mislead the learner?
4. Are the marking criteria sufficiently clear? Does the examiner need expertise in the subject?
5. Do you think any aspects of the mark scheme might cause examiners to be inconsistent? What might cause two examiners to give the same learner different marks?
6. Do you think the task is of appropriate demand for the learners who are likely to be assessed (for example, does it reflect the correct standard)? Is this reflected by how marks are awarded in the mark scheme?

Once you have had an opportunity to complete the questions above:

1. Draft a question and mark scheme for assessing learners in your own subject. This question should assess a specific skill or understanding of a certain topic. Think about how you might specify exactly what is to be assessed, how you might ensure that the task is accessible to all students taking it, and how your mark scheme might ensure consistency across different markers. Discuss your questions and mark schemes as a group, providing your peers with constructive criticism.

**Information for tutors:**

The assessment tasks and their accompanying mark schemes have been designed to present your learners with different contexts and to introduce some of the key principles and challenges around assessment. We estimate that the task could be completed in 30 minutes as part of a broader session about assessment – but there is much to discuss and it could easily be expanded.

Depending on your own specific needs and expertise, you may prefer to provide your students with your own assessment tasks and mark schemes for discussion. For us, the main learning objectives of the workshop are:

1. To consider the **validity** of the assessment.

* Is the task assessing the knowledge and skills that it sets out to assess?
* Does the mark scheme provide credit for the targeted knowledge and skills and not for anything else?

1. To consider the **clarity** of the assessment task.

* Are there varying ways in which learners may interpret the task? Does this matter?
* Are there any words that are unrelated to what is being assessed that may confuse or mislead the learner?
* Are graphs, figures and images relevant to the question and necessary (also a validity issue)?

1. To consider the **fairness** of the assessment.

* Is it possible that the task may be interpreted differently by different groups of learners?
* Is there any risk that the question might be biased against certain groups of learners?

1. To consider whether the assessment materials are likely to facilitate **reliable** marking.

* Is it possible that the mark scheme may be interpreted differently by different examiners?
* Are there any ambiguities and what further information might promote consistency?

For the examples we have included, you may want to discuss some of the key points below.

**Notes about the assessment tasks:**

The following are examples of some of the points that you may wish to discuss with your students in relation to the examples we have provided. We do not usually provide a clear opinion on whether something is appropriate, as providing fixed rules can be unhelpful and stymie creative question writing. Instead, we raise questions and potential issues that are worthy of consideration.

Assessment Task 1: GCSE Biology

* Is the use of an image appropriate? The item requires close reference to it, and it may be difficult for the learner to interpret (particularly if they have a visual impairment). Though probably not a significant issue in this case, it is usually worth considering whether the use of an image is necessary.
* Is the answer space that is provided appropriate? For (a) the line is much shorter for labelling A than it is for labelling B, which might confuse learners by making them think that one answer should be longer than the other. For (b), learners are given a large amount of space for a 2-mark answer. This might lead them to think more detail is required than is actually necessary, perhaps causing them to spend longer on the task than they should.
* Are the Assessment Objectives (AOs) suitably mapped to the task? The use of AO3 for (b) is somewhat tenuous and might be worth discussing. It is important that all of the questions in the assessment are broadly aligned with the overall assessment objectives.
* Is the use of the term ‘diameter’ in (b) fair? This is a technical mathematical term and one might question whether knowledge of it should be part of the assessment. The mark scheme itself only really makes reference to the diameter of the artery with regard to the first available mark. If the learner focusses only on the diameter of the artery, they may only receive a single mark despite answering the question as written.
* Does the mark scheme provide adequate guidance about spelling errors? For example, for (a) the word ‘Endothelium’ may easily be misspelt. How far should benefit of the doubt be extended for misspellings? One might argue that spelling is not part of the assessment, but that the response will need to be spelt such that it is unambiguously correct.

Assessment Task 2: GCSE English Language (creative writing)

* Does this task provide appropriate guidance for students about how long their response should be? Some might argue that setting clearer expectations (perhaps using a word limit) would support learners. The line “*You may use as many pages in your answer book as you like*” might be unhelpful and create some anxiety about the length of the required response. That said, the number of marks that are available for the question is reasonably clear and provides some indication of how much work might be required.
* Do you think the mark scheme is suitably clear about how to award credit for the learner’s performance? Might different markers make different decisions in some cases?
* With more specific regard to the mark scheme, you may wish to discuss the differentiation both between the levels in the mark scheme and how one might go about selecting a specific mark within each level.
* The reality is that, for an examination question of this type, good examiner training (standardisation) and sensible quality assurance of marking is very important. A mark scheme such as this would usually be accompanied by ‘indicative content’ so that examiners are able to get a sense of the different levels of performance that they might see. For example:
  + Differentiating between Levels 4 and 5 relies on examiners consistently distinguishing between ‘good’ and ‘excellent – there is not much guidance about how to make this distinction.
  + Level 2 is the only place where reference is made to ‘depth and complexity’. It is also the only level which does not make reference to the engagement with the question prompt/topic. This might have an impact on how likely examiners are to select that level in comparison to the others.
* What do we think of the prompt at the beginning of the question? It is arguably irrelevant to the task itself. At best it adds a little context, at worst it might confuse to students into thinking that they need to write in a certain style to impress the fictional judges! There is no specific reference to this in the mark scheme, so this might be unhelpful.
* What do we think about learners being provided a choice of question? This can often be a good way of allowing learners to play to their strengths, but it is important to consider whether one version of the question is more demanding than the other. Providing such ‘optionality’ in a paper has implications for how standards are set and maintained.
* The number of marks available at each level of the mark scheme is not consistent. This might affect the likelihood of certain marks being awarded and may have an adverse effect on the mark distribution.

Assessment Task 3: GCSE Mathematics (problem solving)

* Is the question context likely to confuse? Learners of the age at which the task is targeted are unlikely to have laid a patio. Is the text accessible, and is there any risk of misunderstanding based on prior knowledge? There is not likely to be an issue here, but these are good questions to discuss. It is worth also noting that the word ‘patio’ is similar to the term ‘ratio’, which is another potential source of confusion.
* Would it be fairer to break the question in to two parts, to provide more guidance, or scaffolding, to the learner? There are two clear steps, the first is calculating the area of the garden and the second is reducing the cost of the tiles by 30%. Or is this combination of techniques key to what is being assessed, given that this is a problem-solving question? Again, these are good questions to discuss in terms of assessment validity, rather than questions with a definitive answer.
* Is the diagram likely to cause any confusion because it is not to scale? The fact that the proportions in the diagram are noticeably misaligned with the numbers is probably distracting and could therefore be problematic. Perhaps even more problematic is that the diagram does not make it clear that all of the angles are 90 degrees.
* The mark scheme provides a fairly rigid outline of how to complete the task and the order in which the learner is expected to do things. Ideally, alternative approaches may also be reflected in the mark scheme (e.g., working backwards from the homeowner’s budget).
* Assessment Objectives (AOs) are absent from this mark scheme – you would usually see the marks mapped to AOs, even if the entire question targeted a single objective.

**Assessment Task 1: GCSE Biology**

**1. Figure 1.1** isa diagram that shows a coronary artery.

**Lumen**

**A**

**B**

1. **What are the tissues represented by A and B?**

(2 marks)

A: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

B: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. **What would be the difference between the diameter of a lumen for a healthy individual and the diameter of a lumen of an individual with heart disease?** (2 marks)

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| **No.** | **Marking guidance** | **Marks available** | | | |
|  |  | AO1 | AO2 | AO3 | Total |
| 1a | A = Endothelium (1)  B = Muscle layer (1) | 2 |  |  | 2 |
| 1b | Lumens would be narrower / smaller diameter (1)  Mention of plaque / fatty deposits (1)  Build up of fat / cholesterol (1) |  |  | 2 | 2 |

AO1 = Knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas.

AO2 = Application of knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas.

AO3 = Analysis, interpretation and evaluation of scientific information and evidence.

**Assessment Task 2: GCSE English Language**

**2.** Your school newspaper has organised a creative writing competition. A panel of judges, learners from your year group, will award prizes for the best entries.

**Either**

1. Write a description of a haunted castle (25 marks)

**Or**

1. Write a story about two rivals who become friends (25 marks)

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*Note:* *You may use as many pages in your answer book as you like*

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| **Level** | **Mark range** | **Level descriptor** |
| 5 | 22-25 marks | **AO1**   * Excellent level of engagement with the prompt or topic * Excellent creativity and originality * Excellent narrative structure   **AO2**   * Technical skills are excellent, there are no errors * Descriptive techniques are utilized to an excellent standard to create imagery and evoke emotions * Learner provides a memorable reading experience |
| 4 | 18-21 marks | **AO1**   * A good level of engagement with the prompt or topic * Good creativity and originality * Good narrative structure   **AO2**   * Technical skills are strong, there are few errors * Descriptive techniques are used effectively to create imagery and evoke emotions |
| 3 | 12-17 marks | **AO1**   * Strong engagement with the prompt or topic * Original and imaginative ideas presented with clarity and coherence. * Coherent narrative structure   **AO2**   * Technical skills are effective, with few errors that do not detract from meaning. * Descriptive techniques are used to enhance the writing. |
| 2 | 6-11 marks | **AO1**   * Some creativity and originality in ideas * Some depth and complexity * Sufficiently clear narrative structure   **AO2**   * Technical skills are competent, with occasional errors that do not significantly detract from meaning. * Descriptive techniques may be used effectively to enhance the writing. |

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| 1 | 1-5 marks | **AO1**   * Minimal engagement with the prompt or topic * Ideas lack creativity and originality. * Unclear narrative structure   **AO2**   * Technical skills are rudimentary, with numerous errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. * Descriptive techniques are not used or are ineffective |
| 0 | 0 marks | No meaningful writing to assess. |

AO1 = Creativity and Originality**,** encompassing ability to generate unique and imaginative ideas and express these ideas in an inventive, engaging and sophisticated manner.

AO2 =Technical Skill and Language Proficiency, encompassing command of language (including grammar, punctuation, spelling) and use of descriptive techniques.

**Assessment Task 3: GCSE Mathematics (problem solving)**

**3. Figure 3.1** is a diagram showing the area of a garden

6m

8m

4m

6m

The homeowner would like to cover the area with a patio.

* One patio tile is £10 and covers an area of 1m2
* There is a discount of 30% off the cost of patio tiles
* The homeowner has £300

**Has the homeowner got enough money to complete the patio?**

You must show all your working.

(5 marks)

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| **No.** | **Answer** | **Mark** | **Notes** |
| 3 | No, the homeowner needs £308, so is short by £8. | 5 | * Dividing the shape into two rectangles as a preliminary step for calculating the area (1) * Correctly calculating the total area, for example (6x6) + (2x4) = 44m2 (1) * Using a correct method for applying the discount, for example cost x 0.7 (1) * Correctly calculating the total cost of the patio, after the discount is applied, for example (44 tiles x £10) x 0.7 = £308 (1) * Drawing the correct conclusion (see answer) on the basis of their calculation (1) |