SECTION 6: PLANNING ASSESSMENT

OVERVIEW OF SECTION 6

This section is about applying well-tried assessment principles and methods to the practicalities of ODL.

General principles

The section starts with a short overview of some of the key ideas in assessment, including formative assessment (very important in ODL), summative assessment, validity and reliability. It includes a look at ways to select valid assessment methods for each level of Bloom's taxonomy.

Planning and writing self-assessment

Putting end-tests into units of study material has already been discussed. These are self-assessment items, important in ODL because of the limited time for student-tutor contact. In this part you will look at what makes a good self-assessment test, what to test and how to design the questions. You will see that, as far as possible, questions should be of a diagnostic nature.

Planning and writing assessments

In this topic you will look at how ODL courses can be summatively assessed, including how to select the number and types of assessments in order to produce a valid and reliable assessment.

Planning and writing tutor-marked assignments

The final topic under assessment is that of planning and writing tutor-marked assignments. These assignments are often the main (sometimes the only) source of tutor-student contact, so their design is very important. This part looks at the many purposes (sometimes conflicting) that tutor-marked assignments serve, what sort of tasks and questions work best in tutor-marked assignments and how to produce marking criteria for assignments.

6.1 GENERAL PRINCIPLES

6.1.1 INTRODUCTION

Arguably, there is nothing special about the assessment of distance learning; the same principles apply as in face-to-face teaching. What is different is that you may have to assess your students under certain practical constraints (e.g., you may have to assess them without being able to observe them). This viewpoint is supported by Morgan and O'Reilly (1999) who discuss a wide range of assessment methods that are equally useful for ODL and face-to-face assessment.

You may wonder how important assessment is in instructional design. The answer is 'Very important!' This is for two reasons:

- First, many of the decisions you need to make (what to teach, to what depth, etc.) are best answered by referring to the assessment plan for the course. The course should reflect the assessment and vice versa.
- Second, most students are assessment-focused – that is, they look at what is to be assessed and then base their study around those topics. You can use this behaviour to help your students study more deeply and effectively. All you have to do is design 'deeper' and more effective assessment tasks.

Issues for instructional designers

1. How can I meet learners' needs for formative assessment?
2. How can I meet learners' needs for summative assessment?
3. How can I make sure that the assessment is valid and reliable?
4. What should be the balance between continuous and final assessment?

6.1.2 THE ROLE OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

According to Morgan and O'Reilly (1999), 'Formative assessment comprises all those activities designed to motivate, to enhance understanding and to provide learners with an indication of their progress.'

In the classroom, formative assessment often takes place informally as the teacher asks questions, responds to learners' questions and walks around giving advice. Although this form of learner-teacher interchange is often informal and unplanned, it is an important part of teaching.

In ODL, there is almost no opportunity for any informal interchange, since learners and tutors rarely meet. This means that formative assessment must be consciously designed into the learning materials. This can be done using devices such as:

- in-text questions
- activities
- self-assessment tests
- quizzes.

These devices are of great importance in ODL. Without them, learners have little idea as to how much progress they are achieving and may be unaware of any mistakes they are making.

Formative assessment methods in ODL include:

- activities and their feedback,
- self-assessment tests (print and online),
- non-assessable tutor-marked assignments and their feedback, and
- comments from peers in group work, both face-to-face and online.

6.1.3 THE ROLE OF SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

ODL institutions need to provide summative assessment on each course in order to:

- inform learners of the standard that they have achieved,
- find out whether the course is effectively reaching its aims,
- certify to third parties (e.g., employers) the level of knowledge that each student has reached, and
- make decisions about students' eligibility for further courses.

Summative assessment is carried out against the stated aims and objectives of the course. That is, summative assessment answers the question 'To what extent have the learners met the stated aims and objectives of the course?' (See section 3.3, 'Setting Aims and Objectives for Your Course'.)

Summative assessment methods in ODL include:

- tutor-marked assignments,
- computer-marked assignments,
- course work, and
- exams.

6.1.4 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

All assessment (whether in ODL or face-to-face teaching) is based on two fundamental principles: the need for validity and the need for reliability.

Validity

Validity refers to the extent to which a given assessment method assesses what it is meant to assess. So, for example, if a course contains the learning aim 'to be able to conduct a simple conversation in Russian', a written exam in Russian would not be a valid assessment since that would test *writing* skills, not *speaking* skills. Generally, validity is a problem in all education since the classroom environment limits both what can be taught and what can be assessed. For example, business courses concentrate on discussing and writing about business – not on running businesses; and teacher training courses concentrate on theorising and writing about education, not on teaching. As a result, most assessment tends to lack validity. Unfortunately, the constraints under which ODL often operates also create problems of validity in ODL assessment. In ODL, we tend to assess what is practical to assess rather than what should be assessed.

That said, it is important to strive for validity as far as is possible. One way to do this is to ensure that the assessment method matches the active verb in the learning outcome. For example, three possible learning outcomes on a first-aid course might be:

- **describe** the ABC (airway, breathing, circulation) procedure for resuscitating a patient,
- **explain** the ABC procedure for resuscitating a patient, and
- **use** the ABC procedure for resuscitating a patient.

The active verbs in each case (in bold above) are at three different Bloom levels (knowledge, comprehension and application) and so require different assessment methods if they are to be validly assessed (Bloom [editor], 1956). For example, we could assess these three items as in Table 24. In the first column, the main verb for each of the three learning outcomes is emphasised. In the second column, the key word that describes an appropriate assessment method is emphasised.

TABLE 24. Matching the test item to the desired Bloom level

Outcome	Assessment method
Describe the ABC	Ask for a verbal or written **description** of the ABC procedure.
Explain the ABC procedure	Ask for a verbal or written **explanation** of the ABC procedure.
Use the ABC procedure	Ask the student to **simulate** the ABC procedure on a dummy.

A more complete listing of assessment methods matched to the Bloom taxonomy levels is given in Table 25.

Reliability

Reliability simply refers to the idea that, if a person is assessed on more than one occasion, the outcome should be the same. For example, suppose you have a class of 30 students and you give each one a pass/fail exam at the end of term. You would hope that, if you had given them the same exam on a different day, the same students would have passed or failed.

In practice, there are always variations in assessment outcome: learners perform differently on different days, different teachers give different marks, and learners perform differently according to the type of test used.

These variations can be reduced by applying the following procedures:

- Have more than one assessment. Three assessments, for example, are much more reliable than one.
- Spread the assessments out over time.
- Use more than one assessment method – some learners do better with certain methods.

6.1.5 CONTINUOUS VERSUS FINAL ASSESSMENT

The final issue is whether to use continuous or final assessment. As you have seen above, having more than one assessment increases reliability, so that is one argument in favour of continuous assessment. Other arguments for and against continuous and final assessments are set out in Table 26.

TABLE 25. Valid assessment methods for certain 'Bloom verbs'

Level	Typical active verbs	Valid assessment methods
Knowledge	Describe	Ask for a verbal or written description
	List	Ask for a verbal or written list
	State	Ask for a verbal or written statement
Comprehension	Explain	Ask for a verbal or written explanation
	Outline	Ask for a verbal or written outline
	Predict	Ask for a verbal or written prediction
	Translate	Ask for a verbal translation if objective is 'to speak' Ask for a written translation if objective is 'to write'
Application	Construct	Require the learner to construct (e.g., create a spreadsheet, build a wall, bake a cake)
	Solve	Require the learner to provide a solution, being clear as to whether he or she is to show the method (e.g., when solving a maths problems) or just to show the result (e.g., a solution to a crossword puzzle)
	Use (a method)	Require the leaner to apply the method. This may be written (e.g., use the net present value method to evaluate an investment) or physical (e.g., use the ABC method to resuscitate a patient; carry out a heart by-pass operation).
Analysis	Analyse	Ask for a verbal or written analysis of a given scenario
	Compare	Ask for a verbal or written comparison of two or more scenarios/ situations
	Contrast	Ask for a verbal or written contrast of two or more scenarios/ situations
	Distinguish	Ask for a verbal or written distinction of two or more scenarios/ situations
	Explain	Ask for a verbal or written explanation of one or more complex situations. (Simple explanations are at the comprehension level.)
Synthesis	Compose	Ask the learner to compose a piece of music
	Construct/create	Ask the learner to construct something original (e.g., a statue, an electronic circuit). (Note: At this level, 'construct' implies 'design' as well.)
	Create	Ask the learner to create an original work (e.g., a poem)
	Design	Ask the learner to design something (e.g., a stage set)
	Plan	Ask the learner to produce a plan (e.g., a plan for a new traffic system, a plan for a new garden)
Evaluation	Choose	Provide data and ask the learner to make a choice
	Decide	Provide data and ask the learner to make a decision
	Justify	Provide data and ask the learner to justify a choice, decision, etc.
	Prioritise	Provide data and ask the learner to prioritise it
	Rate	Provide data and ask the learner to rate it against certain criteria (the criteria may or may not be provided)
	Select	Provide data and ask the learner to select one or more options

TABLE 26. Comparison between continuous and final assessment

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Continuous assessment	• encourages course designer to plan a build-up of knowledge and skills • helps students consolidate what they have learnt • helps students reflect on their progress • may be less stressful for students than a final assessment • more reliable	• may be more costly • requires more organisation • requires more record-keeping • may lead to a fragmentation of the curriculum • may lead to over-assessing lower level (cf Bloom) objectives
Final assessment	• students can relax more while taking their course – they are not repeatedly being assessed • students have time to reflect and consolidate material before being assessed • assessment is 'whole course' rather than topic-based • simpler to organise	• stressful for some students • one assessment is a less reliable measure of learning than several assessments

6.2 PLANNING AND WRITING SELF-ASSESSMENT

6.2.1 INTRODUCTION

Self-assessment is not of much importance in face-to-face teaching, but it is in ODL.

In the classroom, learners have many opportunities to (informally) measure their progress: they answer questions set by the teacher, they do short tests and they hear discussion of problems raised by other learners. For the ODL learner, there are far fewer opportunities to assess their own progress. At the same time, learner-tutor contact is necessarily limited (because of expense)

in ODL. Overall, then, ODL learners generally have insufficient means to judge their own progress. Self-assessment tests are one means of making up for this deficiency.

Generally, self-assessment tests cover a specific section of a course – say, one unit or one chapter. Each test aims to:

- provide learners with summative feedback on their learning of that section,
- help learners identify any errors and misunderstandings they may have, and
- provide learners with advice on additional (remedial) study to deal with those errors.

Issues for instructional designers

1. What methods can I use to build self-assessment into the learning materials?
2. What should the self-assessment test?
3. How much self-assessment should I build into the ODL courses?
4. What types of questions make good self-assessment?
5. How can I give feedback as a result of the self-assessment tests?

6.2.2 WHAT SHOULD BE THE FORMAT OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT TEST?

A good self-assessment test:

- takes the minimum amount of time necessary to give the learners a clear picture of their progress,
- tests as much of the content of the section as possible,
- is a reasonable length in comparison with the length of the study section,
- uses questions that are diagnostic in character, and
- provides feedback on correct answers and likely wrong answers.

More detail on the latter four points is provided below.

Testing section contents

Ideally, a self-assessment test should test all the new learning in a section, that is:

- all new vocabulary
- all new concepts

- all new rules
- all new facts
- all new theories
- all new methods
- all new problem-solving methods
- all new methods of creating things (e.g., reports, spreadsheets)
- all new skills of analysis.

However, there are two practical reasons why it is not always possible to test all of these items. First, such a test might be too long (see below). Second, some things are very difficult to test by self-assessment (e.g., synthesis) and are best assessed by tutors. So, in practice, the contents of a self-assessment test are a compromise between the ideal and the feasible.

Setting test length

If the test is over-long, learners will not complete it. A good guide to length is to say that the length of the test should not be disproportionate to the length of the section of learning that it tests. Thus, if you have a 2-hour unit of learning, 15 minutes might seem a sensible maximum test time. On the other hand, a 10-hour unit of learning might merit a test of 45 minutes.

Using diagnostic questions

If the learning material is well written, most of the students will correctly answer most of the questions in the self-assessment test. However, when they make mistakes, they need to know where they went wrong and what to do about it. This means that the questions should be of a diagnostic nature, where you (the question writer) can predict likely wrong answers.

Consider the question ‘What is the value of 2^3?’ This has one correct answer (8). Additionally, learners make three common errors in answering questions of this type. A question like this – one with a single correct answer and a small number of predictable wrong answers – makes an ideal self-assessment question, as in Example 73. Depending on the answer that the learner chooses, it is possible for the teacher to identify where the learner went wrong. Thus, the question is diagnostic in its purpose.

EXAMPLE 73. A diagnostic-style self-assessment question

What is the value of 2^3?
A 6
B 5
C 8
D 9

Providing feedback on answers

Once you have a diagnostic-type question, you can give feedback that is precisely matched to the error the learner makes (see Example 74).

EXAMPLE 74. Giving feedback to a diagnostic-style self-assessment question

Feedback
The correct answer was C.
If you chose A, then you have calculated 2 × 3. In fact the question asks you to calculate 2 to the power of 3 (i.e., 2 × 2 × 2 = 8).
If you chose B, then you have calculated 2 + 3. In fact the question asks you to calculate 2 to the power of 3 (i.e., 2 × 2 × 2 = 8).
If you chose D, then you have calculated 3 × 3. In fact the question asks you to calculate 2 to the power of 3 (i.e., 2 × 2 × 2 = 8).

6.2.3 WRITING THE TEST QUESTIONS

The following steps will help you create questions that work well in self-assessment tests:

1. Start with an idea for the question.
2. Write down the *answer* that you expect.
3. Use the answer to help you write a question that requires the answer that you want.

4. Write down the common mistakes you expect students to make. (If you can't think of any likely common mistakes, look for another question idea.)

5. Write the feedback to those common mistakes.

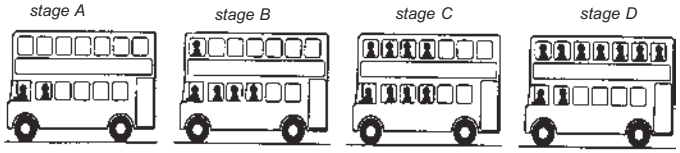
By writing down the answer (Step 2) before you write the precise question, you will be better able to choose exactly the right wording for the question.

Some examples of typical test questions are shown in Examples 75 and 76.

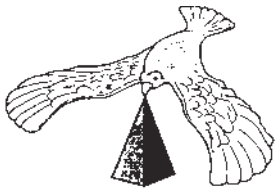
EXAMPLE 75. The first page of a physics self-test

Self Test taken from Physical Science IGCSE

1. The diagrams show a bus at four different stages of a journey.
   At which stage does the bus with its passengers have the **lowest** centre of mass?



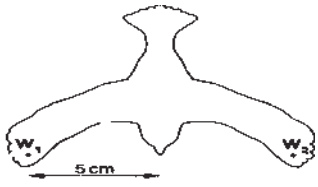
2. The diagram shows a toy bird which balances on its beak.



(a) The weight of the bird is 0.65 N. Calculate its mass. (g = 10 N/kg)

(b) Mark, **on the diagram above**, a possible line on which the centre of gravity of the bird lies.

(c) The diagram shows a view from above the bird.



plan view

The bird balances because there are weights in each wing. The weights (W_1 and W_2) are each 0.3 N. Stating the formula you use, and showing your working, calculate the moment of W_1 about the bird's beak.

Source: Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL)

EXAMPLE 76. Using an activity as self-assessment

Self Mark Activity

1. Looking at Mrs Angula's activities for one day, fill in the following grid to decide whether she is a good leader.

Leadership Quality	Does Mrs Angula show this quality? YES/NO	Pick out one phrase from the diary entries above to illustrate your answer.
Has vision		
Leads by example		
Coordinates		
Communicates		
Listens		
Delegates		
Supervises		
Supports		
Is transparent		
Is fair		
Understands		
the team		
Networks		

2. In your own words, please say whether or not Mrs Angula is a good leader and give reasons for your answer.

Source: Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL)

6.2.4 SELECTING THE QUESTION FORMAT

Some question formats work better than others at the various Bloom's taxonomy levels. Table 27 summarises some of the more common matches. Notice that methods suitable for self-assessment appear in column 2.

TABLE 27. Choosing an appropriate question format

1 Category	2 Suitable self-assessment formats	3 Additional methods suitable for teacher-marked assessments
Knowledge	• multiple choice (one or more correct answers) • true/false • matching • fill in the blank • short answer	
Comprehension	• multiple choice (one or more correct answers) • true/false • matching • fill in the blank • short answer	• essays
Application	**Where recognition of how to apply is sufficient:** • multiple choice (one or more correct answers) • true/false **Where actual application of a theoretical method is required:** • short answer • fill in the blank • create/do something (e.g., type a letter; create a database; change a car wheel) **Where actual application of a practical method is required:** • create/do something (e.g., type a letter; create a database)	• short answer
Analysis	**When you wish the learner to identify elements/relationships that you regard as being the correct answers:** • multiple choice (one or more correct answers) • true/false • matching • short answer • fill in the blank **When you wish learners to produce original analyses where you are unable to predict the answers:** • short answer • essay outline • report outline • project outline	• essay • essay • report • project
Synthesis	• essay outline • report outline • project outline	• essay • report • project
Evaluation	• multiple choice (one or more correct answers) • true/false • short answer • fill in the blank • essay outline	• essay • report • project

6.3 PLANNING AND WRITING ASSESSMENTS

6.3.1 INTRODUCTION

This handbook is not the place to provide comprehensive guidance on planning and writing assessments and, in any case, assessment in ODL follows the same principles as face-to-face assessment. Therefore, this part just touches on some of the questions that you need to ask yourself in order to arrive at a sensible plan for the assessment of an ODL course. If you wish to go into more depth on the topic of assessment, you will need to consult a more specialised work such as Brown et al. (1997), Freeman and Lewis (1998) and Morgan and O'Reilly (1999).

In this part, the general word 'assessment' is used rather than the more specific 'exam'. You may decide to assess your course using one or more end-of-course exams, or you may decide to use other assessment methods such as projects and portfolios. Whatever you choose to use, the same principles discussed here will apply.

Issues for instructional designers

1. How do I decide how many assessments to provide?
2. How do I decide what assessment methods to use?
3. How long should the assessments be?
4. At what points in the course should I place the assessments?
5. Which outcomes should I test in the assessments?
6. How can I ensure that the assessments are valid and reliable?

6.3.2 HOW MANY ASSESSMENTS?

You have seen that having more assessments helps to increase reliability so, in general, you should always have more than one assessment. However, having *too many* assessments is a burden for students (and expensive to the institution), so you need to choose a sensible balance. Typically, shorter courses might have two assessments and longer ones have three.

6.3.3 WHAT TYPE OF ASSESSMENTS?

The type of assessments should be primarily determined by the learning outcomes to be assessed. Recall that for self-assessment (Table 27), your choice of methods was restricted to the

middle column of the table. For teacher-marked assessments, you can use any of the methods, including those in the third column of the table.

6.3.4 HOW LONG SHOULD THE ASSESSMENTS BE?

Length needs to be considered from two points of view:

- How long will learners have to do the assessment?
- How long will it take a teacher to mark?

How long will learners be allowed to do the assessment?

Assessments need to be long enough to provide a valid assessment of what learners have learnt. For example, you cannot test a learner's understanding of theories of perfect markets in five minutes. Equally, if assessments are too long, learners will become tired and will cease to give a valid demonstration of what they know and can do. As ever, you need to choose a sensible balance, bearing in mind the characteristics of your learners.

How long will it take a teacher to mark?

The marking time is an important practical constraint on the design of assessments, since marking costs money. You need to decide, as part of your business planning for your ODL system, how much you can afford for assessment. (See the companion handbook in this series, *Planning Open and Distance Learning Systems: A Handbook for Decision Makers*.)

Where the cost of marking is a problem, one possible solution is to mark part of the assessments by computer. Computerised marking systems can mark most forms of objective question (e.g., multiple-choice, true/false, fill-in-the gap, etc.) and, with reasonable numbers of learners, cost less per assessment than human marking.

6.3.5 WHEN SHOULD THE ASSESSMENTS TAKE PLACE?

If there is only one assessment, it should be at the end of the course in order to assess all the outcomes of that course. With more than one assessment, you need to decide where to place the assessments. There is a case for placing them evenly through the course (e.g., three assessments at intervals of three months), but it is even more important to ensure that each assessment covers a coherent collection of outcomes. For example, the hypothetical course in Example 77 is made up of three coherent topics with durations of 5, 5 and 12 weeks. If each topic is to be assessed by itself, the assessments must necessarily be spaced at irregular intervals.

EXAMPLE 77. Sub-division of a hypothetical course

Topic	Duration	Assessments
1	5 weeks	Assessment 1
2	5 weeks	Assessment 2
3	10 weeks	Assessment 3

6.3.6 DO THE ASSESSMENTS COVER COURSE AIMS AND OUTCOMES?

The starting point of any assessment is the aims and outcomes of the course. To be valid, the assessment (or assessments) must cover as broad a selection of these aims and outcomes as possible. Where (as is often the case) not all can be covered, the selection to be covered must be made with care. Example 78 shows an example of how this might be done. Column 2 shows the spread of course study time over the six levels of Bloom. An ideal assessment system (column 3) would exactly reflect this balance. However, the ideal version might not be feasible within the assessment time available, so the course designers would need to change the balance between the categories. One possible option (column 4) is to decide to not directly assess the knowledge at all, on the grounds that it is indirectly assessed at all the other levels. That leaves more time for the assessment to higher level outcomes. It is important to note that if you need to re-balance the outcomes in order to fit the assessment to the time available, there are no rules to follow. If you decide that your assessment will not be evenly spread over all the learning outcomes, you will have to decide on what basis you are going to select what to assess and what not to assess.

EXAMPLE 78. Example of allocation of assessment time

1 Category	2 Spread of study time (%)	3 Spread of assessment time (ideal) (%)	4 Spread of assessment time (actual) (%)
Knowledge	20	20	0
Comprehension	30	30	40
Application	20	20	25
Analysis	20	20	25
Synthesis	0	0	0
Evaluation	10	10	10

6.3.7 ARE THE PROPOSED METHODS VALID?

As before, you will need to make a valid selection of methods from Table 27.

6.3.8 ARE THE PROPOSED METHODS RELIABLE?

Since reliability is enhanced by having more numerous assessments and a variety of assessments, this question is a reminder to check that:

- there are enough assessments (i.e., more than one, if at all possible); and
- the assessments are as varied as possible (e.g., if you have two assessments, one might be an essay-type and the other a project).

6.3.9 ARE THE ASSESSMENTS PRACTICABLE, GIVEN ANY CONSTRAINTS IN YOUR SYSTEM?

As you have seen, designing an ideal assessment or assessments can result in something that is not practicable – it may be too long for learners, take too long to mark, or involve equipment and assessment centres that are not available to you. In the end, all assessments are constrained by practical factors such as these.

6.4 PLANNING AND WRITING TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

6.4.1 INTRODUCTION

In ODL, the term ‘tutor-marked assignment’ is commonly used as short-hand for any piece of work that a tutor responds to. That piece of work may or may not be marked, and it may or may not be assessed. What is certain, though, is that the tutor will be expected to comment (often in detail) on the learner’s answers.

Issues for instructional designers

1. In our course, what will be the purposes of our assignments?
2. What sort of questions will best meet those purposes?
3. What sort of marking guidance will our tutors need?

6.4.2 PURPOSES OF TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

Tutor-marked assignments have many purposes (Rowntree, 1997; Race, 1992). For the courses you are designing, you need to choose the purposes that are most appropriate to the type of course in question and to your students. Some of the most common reasons for setting tutor-marked assignments are to:

- help learners to identify the most important parts of a course;
- help learners to see the standard of work that is expected on the course, if marked formatively;
- contribute to overall assessment, if marked summatively;
- provide an opportunity for tutor-learner dialogue;
- provide detailed and personalised feedback to learners;
- help learners relate what they are learning to their own situation (e.g., assignment tasks based on their job); and
- help pace learners through the course.

It is worth noting that different assignments may have different purposes in the same course. For example, some assignments may be formative and some summative.

6.4.3 SELECTING AND WRITING THE QUESTIONS/TASKS

An assignment will normally consist of one or more questions or tasks. The following guidelines (after Race, 1992, and Rowntree, 1990) will help to produce an appropriate set of questions/tasks:

- Make the task clear by specifying the required format of the answer (e.g., bullet list, essay, table, diagram) and length (e.g., how many words, how many examples learners should give).
- Choose tasks that provide good opportunities for giving feedback to learners.
- Make sure that every learner will be able to do at least one question well.
- Use active verbs in the tasks (see Table 10 in section 3.3). These help give students a clear idea of the type of response that you want (e.g., list, calculate, explain).
- Ensure that the selection of questions/tasks provides good coverage of the learning outcomes for the section of learning covered by the assignment.
- Check that the sort of task required in the assignment has been adequately prepared for in the activities – and if it has not, adjust the activities. (Tasks in assignments should not be

radically different from tasks in the learning material. The assignment is there for learners to show they can do the sort of things taught in the materials.)

- Consider whether you want the assignment to reflect the sort of tasks and the standard of tasks that will be set in the final assessment. (This is likely to be the case only for assignments towards the end of the course.)
- Consider having specific exam-practice assignments towards the end of the course.
- Tell learners what the marking criteria are for each question. This helps students produce a higher standard of work.

6.4.4 MARKING CRITERIA

Two words are commonly used to describe how a tutor responds to an assignment: ‘marking’ and ‘commenting’. At times, only commenting is involved – that is, no mark is awarded and the tutors are expected to respond in a positive, helpful and friendly way to the learner’s work. At the other extreme, a particular assignment may be a part of the summative assessment, so the tutor has to mark it according to precise criteria, as shown in Example 79.

EXAMPLE 79. Sample marking criteria for a task on creating a word-processed letter

Task	**Criteria**
Using your word processor, open a new document and write a letter replying to the following job advertisement: <advertisement not shown here>	• sender’s address correctly laid out • date correctly given • reference given in the advertisement is quoted correctly • appropriate form of salutation • appropriate heading for the letter • appropriate paragraphs of text for a covering letter • appropriate closing to the letter • spelling correct • grammar correct • appropriate choice of font • appropriate layout

Generalised marking criteria can be created for different types of assessment tasks. For example, Freeman and Lewis (1998) provide marking criteria for:

- plans
- reports
- dissertations
- artefacts
- presentations
- diaries, logs and journals
- problem-solving.

6.4.5 MODEL ANSWERS

Distance learning schemes have a long tradition of providing model answers as part of the tutoring process, but some teachers argue that there are no ‘right’ or ‘best’ answers in their subject and so they cannot provide model answers. This, though, ignores the fact that isolated ODL learners have few or no opportunities to compare their work with others and have a strong need to see examples of good practice (Race, 1992).

Where it is not possible (or is too time-consuming) to produce model answers, then outline answers or answer guidance can be given. This might include:

- the appropriate structure for an answer,
- points that should be included in a good answer,
- points to make to gain a good mark, and
- mistakes and omissions that will lose marks.