Assessment Guidelines and Tools
for the Southern African Master's in Climate Change and Sustainable Development

General assessment principles

- Assessment is an integral and critical component of the entire teaching and learning process rather than a final adjunct to it, thus assessment *for* and *of* learning are equally important.
- The overarching aim of the curriculum is for the student to be able to demonstrate achievement of the curriculum-level outcomes.
- At module level, students are expected to achieve and demonstrate the module outcomes. For summative assessment, the basis on which PASS and FAIL is awarded must be made explicit to the assessors and the students.
- Criteria/ rubrics for ALL learning and assessment activities should be provided to and discussed with students (or developed by the class under guidance of the lecturer) in advance of the activity (see Standard assessment rubrics).
- Assessment tasks at Master's level should assess the capacity to analyse, synthesise and integrate new information and concepts rather than simply the ability to memorise and to recall information.
- Assessment tasks should assess both skills and knowledge relevant to the learning required. Tasks indicate continuous student learning progress toward the achievement of learning outcomes.
- A variety of assessment methods are employed to assess a diverse range of competencies and outcomes demonstrated by learners.
- Student and staff workloads are considered in the scheduling and design of assessment tasks. The principles of sequencing and pacing are critical to authentic assessment. .
- Students should be made aware of the consequences of plagiarism through explicit discussion so to ensure firm understanding of what constitutes 'plagiarism'. To mitigate the possibility of plagiarism, the curriculum requires careful task design, transparent assessment criteria, multiple opportunities for assessment, scaffolding of student learning, regular gauging of progress toward achieving module and curriculum outcomes, and appropriate monitoring of academic integrity.

Types of assessment

There are two key types of assessment in the curriculum: formative and summative.

1. Formative assessment

'Formative assessment is the intervention that has more impact on student learning than any other' (Gibbs 2010)

Formative assessment takes place by way of frequent and continuous formative feedback. Ideally, such feedback should be provided for every assignment and must be based on clear criteria. Assessment criteria could be provided by the lecturer or co-developed by the lecturer and students, in advance of the task. In both instances, formative feedback is 'low stake' assessment (i.e. not for marks). This feedback highlights both strengths and areas for improvement to achieve learning outcomes. Students are afforded opportunity for reflection based on this feedback, thus supporting continuous learning acquisition and development. Formative feedback enables the student's development towards these outcomes and summative assessment judges the extent to which s/he has attained these outcomes.

To be most effective, formative feedback should be **frequent, prompt and specific.**

2. Summative assessment:

The goal of summative assessment is to measure student learning by comparing it against a set standard or benchmark. Summative assessment tasks provide students with the opportunity to achieve marks that contribute to their module grades / marks. Summative assessment tasks should be assessed by the lecturer. Explicit assessment criteria should be provided by the lecturer and discussed with students in advance of the task. Since assessment is an integral component of the teaching and learning process summative tasks are spread throughout the module. However, at least one summative assessment task should be an integrated module assignment (a final project/ report/ paper/ presentation), which covers all the module learning themes. This requires students to integrate and synthesize learning themes spanning the complete module. This is a critical Master's level learning requirement and enables collaborative assessment criteria development among lecturers. Summative assessment is for marks, thus 'high stake', and potentially has a motivating effect on students provided that it is applied according to authentic assessment principles of fairness, reliability, transparency and integrity

Standard assessment rubrics

Before using the rubrics below, please note the following:

- The following rubrics provide guidelines for assessing standard activities in the TLA Plan. They are to be adapted and customised as necessary. In each case, criteria should be provided to and discussed with students in advance of the activity.
- The rubrics are to be used for both formative and summative assessment activities.
- The rubrics aim to indicate achievement of the desired module and learning outcomes, but no single activity can achieve all the outcomes. Therefore, each rubric has a different focus.

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Presentation Rubric To be adapted and agreed on in advance of activity	Weighting	Sophisticated	Competent	Not yet competent
Producing & communicating information				
Delivery: Student adheres to time allocation for presentation				
Clarity: Main argument is clear, logically sequenced, easy to follow, tells a story				
Visuals: Slides are easy to read and to interpret				
Meaning: Graphics reinforce text and contribute to the meaning				
Delivery: Complete sentences; clear enunciation; variation of tone and pitch				
Audience interaction: Key points are highlighted; presentation holds attention; pace is allows the audience to follow				
Q&A: Student is confident and professional ; able to defend position and/ or acknowledge deficiencies graciously				
Specialist knowledge				
Major themes well covered, main points are qualified				
Research literacies				
Sources are acknowledged				
Problem solving				
The presentation is focused on addressing the question/ task				
Context and systems thinking				
Student demonstrates understanding of the context				
TOTAL SCORE				

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Report Rubric

To be adapted and agreed on in advance of activity

Criteria	Weight	Sophisticated	Competent	Not yet competent
Problem solving				
Introduction: Purpose and objective		Purpose and objective of the report is made clear; Report addresses the objective(s) in a focused and logical manner.	Purpose and objective of the report is made clear; Report addresses the objective(s).	Purpose not clear; Report does not clearly address the objective(s).
Conclusions/ recommendations		Conclusions are relevant and accurately reflect the key findings; Recommendations are specific, action-oriented, relevant, and logically organized; Conclusions/ recommendations logically flow from the document in a manner which is evident to the reader; Conclusions presented clearly	Conclusions are relevant and reflect the key findings; Recommendations are specific action-oriented suggestions, oriented to the problem provided; Conclusions/ recommendations flow from the document but the logic may not always be clear; Conclusions presented clearly	Conclusions/ recommendations do not clearly flow from the document and/or miss key findings; Conclusions not well organized or clear
Specialist knowledge				
Body of the discussion		Discussion is clearly oriented to the purpose; Discussion is considered, relevant and leads logically from the findings to the conclusions; Argument effective and clear; Question clearly and comprehensively answered; Appendices are effectively integrated into the discussion	Discussion is reasonably oriented to the purpose; Discussion provides justification and explanation leading to conclusions but this is not completely clear; Argument reasonably clear; Question answered adequately; Appendices are somewhat integrated into the discussion	Discussion is poorly organised; does not lead to conclusion; Argument confused/ unclear/ over-complicated; Question not clearly answered; Appendices are not integrated into discussion
Producing & communicating information				
Presentation		Professional presentation; Informative table of contents; Figures/ tables appropriately labelled	Reasonably well presented; Table of contents useful; Figures/ tables appropriately labelled	Unprofessional presentation; Table of contents inaccurate/ inadequate
Language skills		Language technically correct; Highly appropriate, well chosen, precise and varied vocabulary	Occasional lapses in spelling, punctuation, grammar, but not enough to seriously distract the reader; Generally correct vocabulary and terminology	Spelling errors, incorrect punctuation, grammar errors that interfere with understanding; Limited or inappropriate or repetitive vocabulary/ incorrect use of terminology
Research literacies				
Choice of literature		Sources are exceptionally relevant/ cutting edge; Sources are well-integrated and support claims argued in the paper	Sources are relevant; Sources are integrated and support the paper's claims	Sources are outdated/ limited/ unsuited; Sources support some claims made in the paper, but are not sufficiently integrated
TOTAL SCORE				

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Analytical Essay Rubric

To be adapted and agreed on in advance of activity

Criteria	Weight	Sophisticated	Competent	Not yet competent
Specialist knowledge				
Conceptual clarity		Key concepts and theories are accurately and comprehensively explained	Key concepts and theories are explained	Key concepts and theories are not explained
Coherence and academic rigour		Exemplary work; critical, analytical and reflexive approach above expected level; shows high ability to integrate theoretical and/or empirical material and analysis	Good work; critical and analytical skills are in evidence; theoretical and empirical material and analysis are not always successfully synthesised	Below expected level; ideas may be uncritically reported rather than analysed
Knowledge literacy				
Sensitivity to sources of evidence		High level of sensitivity to sources of evidence; Awareness of methodological processes is effectively exploited in analysis	Sensitivity to sources of evidence; Awareness of methodological processes is indicated in analysis	Lack of sensitivity to sources of evidence; Lack of awareness of methodological processes
Research literacies				
Knowledge and understanding of the literature		Very wide range of reading; uses of academically sound sources; sophisticated appreciation of broader intellectual frameworks; critical engagement with current literature	Good range and use of suitable reading; some relevant areas may be lacking in coverage; Some critical engagement with literature	Limited range of reading and source materials; shortcomings in terms of coverage; Inadequate understanding of relevant literature
Producing and communicating information				
Use of argument		Argument is logically structured; narrative is coherent throughout; clear which claims are being used as premises, and how these premises support the thesis; If there are sub-arguments, it is very clear which argument is the main one, and which are secondary	Argument has some gaps; narrative does not progress entirely logically. It is reasonably clear which claims are being used as premises, and how these premises support the thesis. If there are sub-arguments, it is reasonably clear which argument is the main one, and which are secondary	Argument is unconvincing; narrative does not progress logically .It is unclear which claims are being used as premises, and/or how these premises support the thesis. If there are sub-arguments, it is unclear which argument is the main one, and which are secondary
Use of examples and facts		Good, clear examples are used to illuminate concepts and issues; Information (names, facts, etc.) is accurate and well substantiated	Examples are clear and apt; Information (names, facts, etc.) is accurate and substantiated	Examples are unhelpful/ insufficient; Information (names, facts, etc.) is inaccurate or unsubstantiated
Language skills		Excellent sentence structure; Correct choice of vocab; Very few spelling errors, rhetorical questions or slang	Sentences are complete and grammatical; Most words are chosen for their precise meanings; Few spelling errors, rhetorical questions or slang	Many sentences are incomplete and/or ungrammatical; Word choice is inappropriate; Paper has several spelling errors, rhetorical questions and/or uses of slang
Context and systems thinking				
Understanding of the context and bigger picture		Essay shows • Possible objections to the argument; • Implications of the conclusion for a larger problem; • Ideas for further work in this area	Essay hints at • Possible objections to the argument; • Implications of the conclusion for a larger problem; • Ideas for further work in this area	Lack of awareness of • Possible objections to the argument; • Implications of the conclusion for a larger problem; Ideas for further work in this area
TOTAL SCORE				

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Basic Writing Skills Rubric (basic requirements for academic writing)

To be adapted and agreed on in advance of activity

Criteria	Weight	Sophisticated	Competent	Not yet competent
Problem solving				
Main argument		Clearly presents a main argument and supports it throughout the paper.	Main idea supported throughout most of the paper.	Vague sense of a main idea, weakly supported throughout the paper.
Producing and communicating information				
Structure appropriate to genre		Well-structured, contents link to headings	Good overall structure	Poorly structured, contents do not link to headings
Use of paragraphs		All paragraphs have a clear central idea; Smooth transitions between paragraphs	Most paragraphs have a central, clear ideas; Most transitions are smooth	Most paragraphs do not have a clear central idea; Transitions are weak
Style: Discourse suited to target audience		Style suited to target audience and purpose; Paper holds the reader's interest with ease	Style suited to audience and purpose; Paper doesn't fully hold the reader's interest	Style unsuited to target audience; Paper doesn't hold the reader's interest
Use of examples		Good, clear examples are used to illuminate concepts and issues	Examples are clear and apt	Examples are unhelpful/ insufficient
Grammar & mechanics of language		Excellent grammar, syntax, spelling, punctuation	Several grammar, syntax, spelling, punctuation errors	Many errors in grammar, syntax, spelling and/or punctuation
Research literacies				
Integrating research		Claims effectively argued and well supported; References are well integrated	Claims supported by sources; References are integrated	Some claims not supported; References inadequately integrated
Referencing		Reference list and in-text referencing conform to requirements	There may be occasional errors, but referencing conforms generally to requirements	Referencing fails to conform to requirements
TOTAL SCORE				

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Group work: awarding individual scores for PRODUCT and PROCESS

In assessing group work, there are several considerations:

- What is being assessed: product and/or process?
- Is the group being assessed as a whole, or is each individual student in the group getting an individual mark?
- Who is best placed to do the assessment: lecturer and/or student/s?

In the context of group work, we use the following understandings:
PRODUCT refers to the output from the group. This could be a group report or presentation, or a report/ presentation with sections completed by individual students in the group.
PROCESS refers to the manner in which the individual members of the group participated in the group.

Awarding individual scores for group work PRODUCT in teamwork
Translating a group score into individual scores raises issues of fairness and equity. There are three options for a lecturer to award a score for an individual in a group. Either the group is given a mark and all members get the same mark (Option 1), or the group cooperates on a project but each student is responsible for a component of the project and receives an individual mark (Option 2), or the group is awarded a mark and each individual scores differently. In this case, it is best to let the group decide how to distribute the points (Option 3). In each case, the lecturer awards the overall score.

Options for awarding individual score	Assessment method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Option 1. Equally shared mark	Product assessment by lecturer Equally shared mark All group members receive same grade	Easiest to implement - does not require any additional work aside from marking the projects Appropriate if group work mark is a minor part of total mark for the course Group responsibilities are enforced - group succeeds or fails together	Individual contributions are not reflected in the distribution of marks Poor students may benefit from the work of hard-working students Good students may be dragged down by poor students Does not motivate students
Option 2. Each student is responsible for a component of the group project and receives an individual mark	Product assessment by lecturer Project must be divisible into multiple tasks of the same complexity Each student is responsible for one task (e.g. introduction, data collection)	Easy to implement Peer assessment may motivate students to contribute more to the group	Difficult to divide project into equal tasks Open to subjective evaluations by students (e.g., giving friends high marks as opposed to those who contributed the most) Opens the doors to personal conflicts between group members May foster competition May be difficult for students to evaluate each other without objective criteria
Option 3. Group allocates individual scores	Product assessment by lecturer Lecturer awards the group a mark Group divides marks themselves	Easy to implement Peer assessment may motivate students to contribute more to the group	Open to subjective evaluations by students (e.g., giving friends high marks as opposed to those who contributed the most) Opens the doors to personal conflicts between group members May foster competition May be difficult for students to evaluate each other without objective criteria

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Awarding individual scores for PROCESS (participation) in teamwork

A key outcome of the curriculum is Teamwork, or group participation skills, including, among others, respectfully listening to and considering opposing views or a minority opinion, effectively managing conflict around differences in ideas or approaches, keeping the group on track both during and between meetings, promptness in meeting deadlines, and appropriate distribution of research, analysis, and writing. Teamwork is a skill that can and should be inculcated/ facilitated and developed during class time.

Assessing individual participation skills in group work is very difficult for the lecturer and it is recommended that it is generally managed by the students themselves. It is therefore important to develop students' abilities to give feedback on the participation process either through self-assessment or peer assessment. For this reason, we recommend assessing individual participation skills only formatively and not for summative tasks. It is also very important that students help to decide on the criteria in advance of the project when they are being assessed for teamwork.

Rubric for assessing individual participation skills in group work (self-assessment or peer assessment)				
Criteria	Sophisticated 3	Competent 2	Not yet competent	**Formative feedback on strengths and areas for improvement**
Attendance and contribution Attends group sessions regularly and on time.				
Time management and responsibility Accepts fair share of work and reliably completes it in time				
Collaborative knowledge-building Listens for understanding, considers opposing views				
Playing an enabling role in the group Positive attitude, motivates group, supports group decisions and assists with conflict resolution in the group				
TOTAL SCORE				

References

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