



ASSESSMENT POLICY

PURPOSE OF THE POLICY:

The purpose of this policy is to:

- i. Guide all assessment practices at Style Design College
- ii. Ensure that all assessment practices are aligned to the national higher education legislative and policy environment
- iii. Ensure that assessment is an integrated process within the learning experience.

This policy rests on the understanding that academics are best able to decide how assessment should take place within their disciplines and programmes and that the primary responsibility for the monitoring of assessment practices at the College is located in the Faculties. The intention of the policy is not to be prescriptive in terms of assessment practices, but to create a space within which academics can make choices with respect to assessment in their own environments.

Integrated assessment of integrated assignments is used (as opposed to examinations) as the internalisation and application of theory and skills in context is appropriate to learning in the creative disciplines.

Style Design College employs criterion-referenced assessment in preference to norm-referenced assessment as it is a more reliable instrument for gauging learning in a diverse population in the creative industries.

Formative assessment is used for progress marking and summative assessment for marking of completed assignments.

The assessment instrument must also accommodate a diverse student population. In a 'transformed' education situation, an authentic assessment system that measures the true competence of its students must also be developmental and formative in nature. Style Design College constantly explores the use of alternative assessment methods to help measure true student competence.

FUNCTION OF ASSESMENT:

Assessment can be used for a number of different functions:

- Assessment for diagnostic purposes takes place when students' strengths and weaknesses on academic level are determined in order to decide on the appropriate remedial action, selection, admission and placement.
- Assessment for formative purposes (i.e. assessment for learning) serves primarily to enhance the learning process by giving students the opportunity to develop the valued knowledge, skills and attitudes of the discipline.
- Assessment for summative purposes (i.e. assessment of learning) serves to inform decisions and judgments about students' achievements for purposes of, for example, promotion or certification.
- Assessment can form part of the information that is used for feedback purposes (i.e. assessment for quality promotion) to inform judgments about the quality of the learning and teaching program.

It is important that academic environments take care to ensure that the different purposes of assessment are thoroughly understood by both the assessors and the students that are assessed.

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK:

Style Design College subscribes to the principles of the National Qualifications Framework. These principles are implemented in our curriculum development process so that they may be implemented at assessment. Exercise and project assignments are assessed in accordance with the internationally accepted assessment principles of the NQF.

Validity and reliability of assessment:

Style Design College employs the NQF Principles of Assessment which are:

- **Appropriateness:**

The method of assessment is suited to the performance being assessed.

- **Fairness:**

The method of assessment does not present any barriers to achievements, which are not related to the evidence.

- **Manageability:**

Assessment should be manageable – that is, not too difficult or expensive to implement – and it should be time efficient. Good assessment practice should be cost effective; that is, assessment should not be carried out by expensive means if adequate information about student performance could be obtained by equally valid, alternative, less-expensive means. Quantity and type of assessment should also allow lecturers to achieve reliable results in a reasonable period of time. This also relates to timely feedback to students in order to improve their learning at the next step in the learning process.

- **Integration into work or learning:**

Evidence collection is integrated into the work or learning process where this is appropriate and feasible.

- **Validity:**

Assessment must be valid or fit for purpose; that is, it must measure predetermined outcomes, using appropriate assessment methods. Three important aspects of validity are:

Face validity: This means that the assessment should be perceived to be fair, giving students a reasonable opportunity to show what they know and what they have mastered. For example, any suggestion of bias that may be to the detriment of some would reduce face validity for students (e.g., gender or ethnic bias). It should not advantage or disadvantage any student. Tuition and assessment are equitable when they take into account the instructional context and the special background of students (e.g. prior knowledge, cultural experience, language proficiency, cognitive style and interests). In distance education these characteristics can only be broadly determined based on the learner profile for individual modules.

Active learners are involved with the learning experiences in a variety of media in discovering, contributing to, recognizing and interrupting discourses in a discipline in interaction with lecturers, tutors, other learners, their communities, workplaces, etc. and reflecting on what they are learning.

Content validity: Assessment should be appropriate for the stated outcomes of the course and should cover the knowledge (ideas and skills) adequately. Assessment should focus on testing mastery of important knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, and not on peripheral details.

Construct validity: This refers to the extent to which assessment succeeds in measuring and evaluating the abilities (theoretical or practical 'constructs') that it intends to assess.

- **Direct:**

Assessment should be as direct as possible; that is, it should be directly related to the real-life use of the knowledge and skills outside educational settings. Authentic assessment also includes assessment of processes, practices, skills and reflection that occur in the learning situation. To ensure relevance and validity, the focus should be on measuring students' mastery of significant, not trivial, outcomes. During the planning for a new module/ learning programme, tuition and assessment methods should be developed simultaneously in relation to student learning and the meeting of learning outcomes to ensure that assessment is relevant. Directness has to be balanced with manageability.

- **Authenticity:**

The assessor is satisfied that the work being assessed is attributable to the person being assessed.

- **Sufficient:**

The evidence collected establishes that all criteria have been met and that performance to the required Standard can be repeated consistently.

- **Systematic:**

Planning and recording is sufficiently rigorous to ensure that assessment is fair.

- **Open:**

Students can contribute to the planning and accumulation of evidence. Assessment candidates understand the assessment process and the criteria that apply.

- **Consistent:**

Assessment should be reliable or consistent; that is, it should produce the same results when:

- a.) particular students are assessed across time for the same knowledge, skills, attitudes and values using a variety of methods.
- b.) different markers assess the same piece of work.

The amount of work assessed should be sufficient in proportion to the comprehensiveness of the study package.

Value judgments (such as passing or failing marks) should be as objective as possible. There should be academic and administrative quality control before, during and after the assessment. If a student's marks differ significantly depending on who marks the assignment/ examination, assessment is not reliable. Guidance for marking must also be transparent and defensible.

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- **Formative assessment**

Formative assessment refers to assessment that takes place during the teaching and learning process. It is thus designed to support the teaching and learning process and is developmental in nature. It is sometimes referred to as 'continuous assessment' and is useful in creative industries.

Formative assessment:

- a) is a 'learning opportunity', not just a test of student performance;
- b) assists in planning future learning;
- c) diagnoses the student's strengths and weaknesses; and
- d) provides feedback to the student on his/ her progress.

Assessment tools should include group critique and verbal feedback. A moderator may present to provide an additional perspective. Group critiques are usually more beneficial. Results and comments are communicated to the students there and then to facilitate the learning process.

Marks are assigned to the appropriate Specific Outcomes categories: skills, knowledge, creativity and values, allowing the student to evaluate their own achievement in relation to the expected outcomes and associated assessment criteria specified in the brief.

- **Summative assessment**

Summative assessment refers to assessment that is used for making a judgement about the achievement of outcomes in order to certify that a student may progress in his/her studies or may graduate. Such assessment is carried out at the end of a section of work or at the end of a module/ learning programme/ qualification. It determines whether the student is competent or not yet competent in respect of pre-determined outcomes. There should be continuity between formative and summative assessment so that students are adequately prepared for summative assessment.

Completed work is critiqued and marked as soon as possible after work is submitted to ensure it is still fresh in the students' minds. Once again, group critiques are usually more beneficial and a moderator may present to provide an additional perspective. Results and comments are again communicated to the students there and then.

- **Integrated assessment of applied competence**

Integrated assessment refers to

- a) assessing a number of outcomes together;
- b) assessing a number of modules together;
- c) using a combination of assessment methods and instruments for an outcome/ outcomes;
- d) collecting naturally occurring evidence (such as in a workplace setting);
- e) acquiring evidence from other sources such as supervisors' reports, testimonials, portfolios of work previously done,
- f) logbooks, journals, etc.

The use of different types and combinations of integrated assessment will be dependent on the nature of specific disciplines. Applied competence refers to the foundational, practical and

reflexive aspects of learning. In other words, students must demonstrate their understanding of the knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with a particular discipline or field of study (foundational knowledge), be able to apply this knowledge in given contexts and be able to reflect on the knowledge and application in a critical way.

- **Criterion-referenced assessment**

Outcomes-based education is associated with criterion-referenced assessment, particularly in terms of the assessment of the individual and his/her achievements. The lecturer makes judgements about students by measuring each student's work against pre-determined outcomes and related assessment criteria. These criteria state the quality of the performance of students at different levels of competence. The relationship between assessment and learning outcomes, the definition of standards, the performance expectations held of students and feedback on performance can all be more easily and explicitly expressed when criterion-referenced assessment is used. Other advantages of criterion-referencing are transparency, student involvement and greater inter-marker reliability. While the use of criterion-referenced assessment supports the educational purposes of assessment, it does not impede the functional purpose. Students can be marked and graded according to their levels of achievement against well-defined criteria. The fact that the criteria are explicit means that the judgements made are more readily defensible in terms of rigour and consistency.

These well-defined criteria can be expressed as a statement of standards or by the use of examples that are provided in advance so that students can direct their learning accordingly. More precise explanations may be provided after assessment has taken place because it is possible to point to the characteristics of the students' performance that led to the judgement that a particular outcome was or was not achieved. While such judgements may sometimes be fallible, their overall reliability is likely to be enhanced by the explicitness of the criteria used.

Assessment/performance criteria specify how much learning has to be evidenced, at what level of complexity and responsibility and how well.

Assessment criteria complete the stem: 'Evidence must show that students ...': for instance, 'Evidence must show that students use words according to standard dictionary definitions and the demands of context'. Assessment criteria have to indicate how to determine whether a student has achieved the outcome to a satisfactory standard and what makes the difference between acceptable and unacceptable performance of the outcome.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

- **Student's responsibility**

Students are responsible for incorporating feedback from lecturers in their learning; making use of the assessment criteria that they are given; being aware of the rules, policies and other documents related to the assessment of a course; and providing lecturers with feedback on their assessment methods and practices.

- **Grading**

Exercises usually relate to a single subject and take the student between one day and one week to complete. A mark of between 10 and 100 is allocated.

Projects measure knowledge, skills, values and creativity across a range of integrated subjects in a meaningful whole. They typically take between a week and a term to complete and are usually allocated 100 marks.

Mark sheets have been specially developed for assessing both exercises and projects. As projects may be expected to carry a greater weight, the marks awarded may have to be analysed in greater depth than those for an exercise.

All marks are filed in a secure place accessible to the academic staff and Programme Co-ordinators as soon as possible after assessment.

In the case of projects, the critical outcomes are analysed, where appropriate, within the specific outcomes. Example sheets are provided to assist lecturers.

Just as exercises and projects will be weighted differently according to their importance in the scheme of work for that year, so the individual outcomes within exercise or project may be weighted according to their importance in that particular exercise or project.

Lecturers evaluate the extent to which the student has successfully met the requirements of the brief (achieved the desired associated outcomes). The lecturers then digitally record the marks awarded on the appropriate mark sheet and where necessary the marks are moderated. The mark sheets are then uploaded into the college database so that academic reports may be produced.

Once the mark sheets have been uploaded into the college database, this will be used to generate an overview schedule of marks awarded to the class for all work done in that year for evaluation by the lecturers. A more detailed report is also generated for each student, which is forwarded to the student at midyear, at the end of the third quarter and at the end of the year.

- **Portfolios**

Portfolios are assessed at the end of each year and constitute an “exam” mark.

At least two lecturers and two competent and impartial external moderators, one of whom is a respected academic and the other a recognised practitioner in the relevant industry, are appointed to assess final year portfolios.

The moderators are briefed on the requirements of the assignment and on the assessment criteria by the final year lecturer. Each moderator assesses examples of work at each end of the mark spectrum and at midrange without consulting with one another, and awards marks in accordance with the assessment criteria. The average of the marks is awarded for each portfolio. If there is a less than 10% discrepancy between their marks and those the Style Design College lecturers, the lecturers’ marks are not changed. Otherwise, the assignments must be remarked by alternate Style Design College lecturers.

Assignment Submission

Work must be submitted for assessment to the lecturer no later than (the time and) the date stipulated on the brief.

Deadlines, Extensions and Penalties

Normally, extensions for work submission are not granted, however, a lecturer may, at his/her discretion and with good reason (evidence must be provided), grant an extension on a hand-in deadline of a maximum of 24 hours, without applying a late submission penalty; thereafter, an extension may only be granted, under critical circumstances, with the permission of the Programme Co-ordinator, after receiving a written request from a student and convincing motivation such as a Doctor’s note.

If the Programme Co-ordinator decides not to grant the extension s/he must indicate reasons to the student concerned. If the Programme co-ordinator grants the extension, the submission must be made by the student within 2 days of the last sick day of the note.

- **GOOD PRACTICES**

Based on the above principles of assessment Style Design College will provide assessment services that are well planned, based on transparent standards and structured to support learning.

- **Team approach to design and development**

Formative assessment will be designed, developed, produced and evaluated as part of the learning design process (study materials, tutorial letters, textbooks, media, etc.) in course teams. An assessment plan will be drawn up that is student-centered and demonstrates continuity and progression in assessment activities.

Summative assessment will be developed by lecturers employed by the College, in consultation with SAQA if necessary, and in line with College policies and procedures.

- **Criterion-referenced assessment and reliability**

The assessment system will be criterion-referenced. Assessment criteria will be provided with all assessment tasks and state the quality of the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be evidenced in relation to the levels of achievement. Agreement must be reached on what counts as competence and what counts as excellence.

- **Marking rubrics**

Marking rubrics will be used as good practice to ensure inter-marker reliability when subjectivity might affect reliability. Memorandums will be used for tasks that are more objective. A student will be judged competent if he or she can provide evidence that he or she meets pre-determined criteria.

A rubric is a cross-referenced grid giving performance criteria and levels of achievement/standards for each criterion. It makes expectations clear to students and assessors.

- **Transparency**

The outcomes and their associated assessment criteria will be available to students and other stakeholders so the learning and assessment system will be transparent, reliable and accountable. Students will know what is expected of them and employers will know what a person who holds a particular qualification has achieved.

The criteria by which a student's level of achievement will be judged and an indication of who will make the judgment for that piece of assessment should also be provided to students well in advance of the submission date for the assessment item.

Lecturers will give students information on why a particular assignment task or type has been chosen in relation to how it will help them to achieve the learning outcomes of the module.

- **Assessment plans**

An assessment plan will primarily contain assignments and assessment criteria. Weighting of assignments and their contribution to the year mark should also be included. The assignments must be included with the study package that the student receives on registration.

- **Formative assessment**

Style Design College students will be involved in formative assessment that will add value to their learning, while also providing them with effective cognitive skills (foundational and reflexive), practical skills, and learning attitudes and values that they will need for further study or in a workplace situation or for any other goals after certification. The actual number of assignments will be determined on educational grounds but must be sufficient to merit formative assessment contributing not less than 10% of the student's final mark. Assignments can be weighted so that earlier assignments where students might be less competent are weighted less than later assignments where they are more competent. Where self-assessment is used in formative tasks in study guides or assignments, students will be given guidelines on how to self-assess in relation to given criteria.

Formative assessment should comprise 10 – 15% of the notional hours allocated to a module (that is, 12 – 18 hours for a 12 credit module of 120 notional hours).

Such tasks will include self-assessment in study guides, research for and the writing of assignments, etc. Active learning requires that students be given many opportunities to check their understanding of the foundational elements of the module, apply what they are learning, and reflect on what they have done.

- **Range of assessment techniques**

Lecturers will use a range of assessment techniques to ensure that assessment is educationally sound, appropriate to the discipline or field of study, all outcomes are assessed and the criteria of validity, reliability, authenticity and feasibility are met. No single assessment method can assess a student's learning fully. It is necessary to use a set of assessment methods to achieve consistent and fair results. The total assessment package for a module/ learning programme should be carefully designed to cover all learning outcomes. The assessment type(s) used will also be suited to the underlying teaching/ learning principles outlined in the Tuition Policy, the learning students need to evidence, the level of the module and diverse student abilities, learning styles, and contexts.

- **Level of assessment**

The choice of an assessment method will take the level of the students and the qualifications framework level of the learning into consideration. Assessment in the course will provide more support and guidance at the entry levels. First-year students have particular assessment requirements that need to be addressed in order to maximize their learning. The transition of first-year students from school to College will be assisted by the following assessment strategies:

- a) formative assessment that helps students to pace their studies, gives constructive feedback and an idea of college-level methods, standards and expectations before summative tasks are undertaken;
- b) reasons given for the choice of task and how it relates to the achievement of the stated outcome;
- c) exposure to assessment methods that will be used for summative purposes;
- d) advice on the use of feedback in learning.

However, at all times, assessment should have adequate cognitive complexity to engage higher levels of thinking appropriate to tertiary education.

- **Feedback**

Instructional feedback is fundamental to the learning process. Lecturers will provide timely feedback that identifies where misunderstandings have occurred and the ways in which the student can improve, on both marked and self-assessed assignments. Feedback should be individualized to the specific student's attempts whenever possible and practicable. Generic

feedback should also be given in answers/ guidelines to self-assessed tasks in study materials and lecturer-marked assignments. Feedback on assignment or in tutorial letters must reach students before they write summative assessments.

- **Students with disabilities**

Style Design College is committed to ensuring fair treatment for all its students. Management will collaborate with the academic departments to make arrangements for students with special needs resulting from disabilities including aspects such as venues, time for completion of examination and mode of the examination (taped, oral, braille, etc).

- **ETHICS**

Style Design College is accountable to its students and society at large for the validity and reliability of its assessment procedures and policies. This policy and all relevant information pertaining to the fair treatment of assessment and students at the College will be freely accessible to the public at all times.

- **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

The Management of Style Design College will oversee and monitor the implementation of the Assessment Policy.

- **Policy review and revision cycles**

This policy will be reviewed every third year by Management and revised every six years unless circumstances, such as a change in higher education policy, dictate an earlier revision. Departmental teaching and learning committees will periodically review criteria in particular subjects, giving immediate attention to new subjects and 'problem' subjects.

- **Assessor and moderator functions and training**

Style Design College in principle accepts SAQA legislation which mandates the use of moderators for teaching and assessment practices. The procedural rules, functions and application of moderation will form part of the Assessment Manual.