

Common Challenges and Potential Solutions for Balancing the Workload, Flow, Organization, and Weighting of Course Assessments



GOAL: Consider common challenges with assessment workload, balance, flow, organization, and weighting, and possible strategies, solutions, and resources towards a more effective course assessment plan.

Common Challenge	As a result, students...	Potential Solutions and Strategies
Assessment does not effectively assess the course learning outcome(s)	Perceive a high workload, assessments as unfair or as “busywork”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use constructive alignment to ensure that assessments effectively assess your learning outcomes Choose different assessment types that align with your outcomes (see our Sample Assessment Strategies for Different Learning Outcomes and Alternative Assessment Formats sites) Use an Assessment Outline to communicate how the assessment is aligned with the course learning outcomes and other relevant goals (page 40 of our Adapting your Assessments guide)
Too many assessments or too much perceived or actual workload associated with assessments	Perceive a high workload, request extensions, miss assignments, submit late or incomplete assignments, commit acts of academic dishonesty or misconduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use Worksheet 1: Identifying Assessment Challenges in my Course and Worksheet 3: Outlining my Course Assessment Plan to visualize your assessments across the semester Use the Student Workload Calculator and Time on Task to estimate the time to complete assessments and other course activities Use the Assessment Outline and Checklist to communicate workload expectations for each assessment (page 39-41 of our Adapting your Assessments guide) Integrate low-stakes assessments so students can practice, distribute the workload, and get feedback prior to high-stakes assessments (see Finding the Balance between Low and High Stakes Assessment handout) Use strategies to support student self-regulation and self-directed learning Use strategies to encourage academic integrity with assessment If students submit multiple assessments within a single category (e.g., weekly discussion posts, quizzes), consider a drop the lowest grade policy to offer flexibility and lessen workload Provide choice with the topic or format of the assessment (e.g., students can choose to submit a podcast, video presentation, infographic, etc.) Have some weeks in the semester when nothing is due



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Common Challenge	As a result, students...	Potential Solutions and Strategies
Weight of an assessment doesn't match the actual effort or time needed to complete it	Students perceive a high workload or disconnect between the workload and the weighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the Student Workload Calculator and Time on Task to estimate the time to complete assessments and other course activities Use the Assessment Outline and Checklist to communicate workload expectations for each assessment (page 39-41 of our Adapting your Assessments guide) Consider changing the weighting of assessments or providing students with choice about weighting (see the Should the weighting of assessments change? section of our Adapting your Assessments guide, page 8)
Assessments were not evenly or effectively distributed throughout the course	Perceive a high workload, request extensions, miss assignments, submit late or incomplete assignments, commit acts of academic dishonesty or misconduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use Worksheet 1: Identifying Assessment Challenges in my Course and Worksheet 3: Outlining my Course Assessment Plan to visualize your assessments across the semester Provide flexible deadline options, such as grace periods, a date range for submitting assessments, or “late passes” that allow students to turn in one assignment late without penalty (see How do I build in student choice or flexibility with my assessments? section of our Adapting your Assessments guide, page 7) Develop a consistent routine of low-stakes assessments so that students have a predictable structure for each week of the course (e.g., discussion posts are due every Thursday). See our Planning the Structure of your Course guide, pages 5-7, for examples.

For general advice related to blended and hybrid course design, see our [Key Effective Practices in Blended and Hybrid Courses](#) handout.

Potential Strategies to Address High Grading and Feedback Workload

If grading and feedback takes too much time, or if students do not typically use the feedback provided by instructor/TAs:

- For **general suggestions** about efficient grading, see:
 - [Grading and Providing Feedback: Suggestions for Efficient and Effective Feedback and Grading](#)
 - [Ten Tips for More Efficient and Effective Grading](#)
 - [Strategies for More Efficient Grading](#)
- Incorporate **different types of feedback** to lessen the grading workload, including self-assessment, peer feedback, and instructor class-wide feedback. See our [Adapting your Assessments guide](#) (page 37-38) and this [Feedback Opportunities in Online Learning](#) resource.
- Create **detailed rubrics or checklists** for student and instructor/TA use. See OpenEd's presentation on [Rubrics and Equitable Assessment](#).
- Use **automatic grading and directed feedback** with [CourseLink quizzes](#)

