



onTrain

Online Training, the treasure within

## C. Course design

### 3. Methods for assessment

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## Let's start



Assessment in this unit is referred to the learner-centered process with the main aim to know to which extend he/she has acquired the training activity required competencies, skills and attitudes. If you are more interested on the evaluation of the eLearning platform, you should go to the learning unit related to system for evaluation and monitoring. The learner assessment on online environments is very challenging, firstly because it is virtual, secondly because the educational process is more complex, or at least, a lot of dynamics could be hidden, and finally because the final target (that is the learner) does not necessarily need a final mark, but some feedback to keep motivated to improve

### What am I learning here and why?

In this unit you will learn how to proceed with learners' assessment in an online environment. We focus on learners, where there is not a need of accreditation or certification, but rather a way to provide feedback and promote the personal development of the learner. The aim then, is to present and propose procedures and methods for assessment.

### What content will I find here?

We will provide several methods and examples on how to address learners' assessment in an online environment; based on the use of + questionnaires but also based on complex activities. This will make it possible to achieve more reliable assessment results, but also a richer learners experience and gratifying award of accomplishment.

### What is learner assessment?



Learners' assessment is usually the last step to be done in a course, as it? allows to provide mark to the learner, and eventually, a diploma or certificate. While assessment in face-to-face courses is based on exams and questionnaires and it is usually placed at the end of online courses, there are a lot more other methods for learners' assessment and it can be done in a continuously way. In our context, we have to take into account the aims and interests of the learners, therefore, the learner assessment is quite different from the usual young learners, with some characteristics:

- Learners are not enrolled in a course because they need an accreditation or a better job qualification, but to enjoy the learning experience, while acquiring knowledge that they feel interested. Still, in some educational institutions, they should assess the learner to provide a fail or pass mark. Even those are not formal courses, the fact of having a mark provides a way of acknowledgment and self-recognition that happens in third age universities and in other senior education institutions. Therefore, it is still necessary an assessment procedure, soft and flexible, but still someway to provide feedback to the learners about their level of accomplishment.

- Contrary to what everybody thinks, final learner assessment should never be done at the end of the course. By that, we mean that assessment should be done in a continuous way. The main reason is firstly because information should be gathered during all the stages of the course, and secondly because information should be provided to the learner along the course.
- Evaluation should be constructive, not only provide a mark, but also give advice. It would allow to know if the learner is doing great, it will increase self-confidence and provide feedback to become a better online learner.
- Learner assessment is usually done according to the knowledge and competences required, that is the proficiency on certain indicators established by the trainer and that are related to the course or subject. We name those hard skills as those are related to technical, practical or specific-area knowledge. Soft skills are related to interpersonal and personal capacities. We propose here methods or processes to assess both, hard and soft skills, as we consider both important in a lifelong learning context.

## Questionnaires

This is the most traditional way for learner assessment. That is to ask at the end of the chapter some questions to verify to which extend he/she has acquired the knowledge and skills required. In online environments, it is very common to create questionnaires, with multiple choice or single choice, or on the other hand, with free text. The first one can be automatically scored. The second, needs to be revised by the trainer. We do not advise to have this kind of assessment, the main reason is that when applying a questionnaire or exam in a physical room you can guarantee the learner is not coping, getting the information from the Internet or chatting with other classmates. With online questionnaires, you cannot verify if learner is cheating or not. Therefore, questionnaires are not a good idea for online assessment, but still, if you prefer to include them, you can include time restrictions, so the learner has to fill the questionnaire once he/she opens it. It will make more difficult to lose time by searching the answers. Also, ask questions that require a narrative answer, where the learner has to justify a certain position or to explain how he/she reached a conclusion, not a simple answer. As a complementary idea you can propose to make an oral exam, using a video-conferencing method. It could be very time consuming if you have a lot of learners, but also you can make them shorter or complementary to other evaluation systems.

On the other hand, online questionnaires are perfect for self-evaluation purposes, or to raise the interest on certain topics as well as for making visible the interesting aspects or the complexities of a subject. It can be also a starting point for a discussion forum. Once you create a questionnaire, in most common eLearning platforms, it is common to include also feedback for the learner.

Questionnaires are good to assess the knowledge and skills related to the main competences of the subject you are teaching, but very difficult for other interpersonal skills. Questionnaires can include quantitative and qualitative questions. Quantitative questionnaires can be automated; in an eLearning platform you can indicate which is the correct option and in case of a wrong answer, depending on the platform, you would be able to provide feedback which will help the learner in case he/she answers wrongly. In a qualitative question, student will

answer with a description. That requires the trainer to review the text and write a mark and feedback manually. The second option is the best as it allows to be sure the learner understands the question and is capable to provide a comprehensive reply. Unfortunately, it is more time consuming for the trainer. Therefore, quantitative questions are better for huge groups of students, but there is not a personalised feedback from the trainer.



### Example:

In a course about ancient history you can ask questions as following, “The Greek agora was a place aimed at” and provide several answers, one of them has to be true. That would be a very simple and basic question, which we do not advise to use online. Try to propose questions that are not simple to find on the Internet and link concepts as “Which will be the similar building in the present society to the Greek agora?”. Then you are also ensuring that the learners understand things, not only remember words. Other example to the subject about prehistoric heritage “Which period of time belong the Stonehenge megalithic stones?” this is easy to find on the internet, or “what scientific thinks was the function of Stonehenge?”. Better propose questions as “what do you think was the function of Stonehenge?” and ask the learner to justify his/her answer. As said before, questionnaires are not convenient for assessing the learner, but you can propose a questionnaire for self-assessment and to raise interest on certain topics during the course.

## Assessment based eLearning stats

eLearning environments provide a complete list of statistics about what things a user has done; content accesses, post messages, replies, etc. That is good to know if a learner has been active recently, but does not proof the learner has read the text, understand the lesson or provide useful replies to other colleges. Unfortunately, this kind of assessment require more effort from the trainer.

In classrooms we can propose activities for the learner to be sure that he/she has understood the lesson. In an eLearning environment, we only have available forums or other kind of discussion boards where trainer and learners can share messages. What we propose here is that messages to be rich and useful, not messages that provides short and quick answer, but allow shared discovery, discussions between different positions and students helping each other.

Here then it is possible to asses on the messages the learners provided. It is different than a learner participates in a forum with a simple message saying “I agree, it is very interesting”, than a message where learner try to provide some examples, more questions, or new perspectives. Trainers here have a lot to say, for example, if you find a learner that says “I

agree”, trainer can try to act as the devil’s advocate, and ask her/him directly why, or to propose a completely opposite approach to verify the learners position.

### Example

Following the previous example about ancient history, instead asking the learners in a forum “Write here your questions and doubts related to the lesson”, better ask “Which were the good and bad things of greek way of organization, which things could be applied nowadays?”. You as a trainer then can verify all the forum participation and check what learners have answered and qualify the forum participation but not only in terms of quantity, but also quality.

## Assessment based on the process

” The best approach is to apply an assessment based on the training process. You could only apply this method if you also plan active activities that goes beyond reading materials or watching videos. The training-learning process we propose involves activities where learners should be capable to understand, analyse and link concepts, also to be creative and collaborative. Here we can start to think about assessing hard skills and soft skills.

On collaborative activities you can check how learners behave and participate. It is not that important learners finish a collaborative work (in a shared document or any other kind of common activity) but to check how they are doing it: that is proposing ideas, supporting their points of view and providing constructive feedback to the whole collaborative process. There, the learning happens before reaching the final product. That is when having to agree and negotiate; deciding with topics should be included in a shared work, or when playing a role simulation game, assuming that each learner is defending one position. Soft skills as the capacity to communicate, analyse a problem, propose a creative solution, etc. are facilitated while activities are shared online, and you only need basic tools as forums.

Process-based assessment is done as in formative evaluation, that means that is a continuous process. Formative evaluation is done at the end.



For example, if you propose a group of learners to collaborate to write in a shared document, in a summative-based assessment the final rank of each person would be the same for the whole group, and it would be based on the quality of the final document. If you apply a formative-based assessment, the final qualification of each student would be based on how much they participated on the creation of that document, corrections applied, feedback to other colleagues done, etc.



You are in a course about recent European history, you ask the learners to order the most relevant person that helped to build Europe. This task can be done in a forum, but it is not only about ordering people, but the learners will have to decide and defend the order they have chosen in the forum with other learners, say and explain why they think the person they have chosen is more important than other and try to convince others. Communication skills, leadership and responsibility among other soft skills are then permeable to the course knowledge about European history. As a trainer you can observe here if learners acquired the necessary competences and knowledge about the course of history, but also if they are capable to apply that knowledge. Assessment here happens without the learner awareness.

## Assessment based on soft skills

Probably you are not interested on assuring that your learners could develop their soft skills which involve a huge variety of social and personal capacities such as leadership, personal decision-making, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, etc. but only through this approach you will be able to promote a rich learning experience and also to assess the learner acquisition of hard skills related to your subject. So let's think the opposite way, aiming at promoting soft skills. Following some activities that could help you to assess learners competences on hard skills:

- Peer review: that's when other students have to assess other classmates works. In this context, you are not only requiring learners to be able to create a work and deliver it as a task, but also you are asking other learners to review first learners' works and provide a mark or feedback.
- Common agreements: that happens when learners have to reach a common position on a certain problem or challenge you raise. They have to understand your challenge and apply the knowledge and resources you have included in your lessons. The way learners apply that information and skills will provide you information about how well they have acquired the necessary competences
- Relate and link the course knowledge with existing information. This makes possible to assess the capacity your learners have from a practical point of view, and more important; with learners, it allows them to use their existing experience and personal interests and motivations. Therefore, allow them to be creative, to find new information, or to make visible hidden aspects the topics of your subject.
- Allow learners to be involved in your subject. It can happen by creating stories, new perspectives or challenges by letting learners to imagine themselves with a role. That will increase hugely the understanding of the subject they are learning, but also enjoyment and pleasure of an activity that could be very creative.

Previous are only some scenarios and examples, you can apply them depending on specific course or subject, but be aware that those will require time for your learners to understand the

rules and later to be able to play. Fortunately it is not necessary to finish the activity to be able to learn and get a better understanding.

## Assessment as a way of feedback

As said during the introduction of this learning unit, assessment of knowledge and learners' skills should have the purpose of providing a feedback and not important a final mark. Online education is based on the self-responsibility and independence of the learners; they are leading their learning process, and in those cases, online learning can me also they feel lost or confused about if they are proceeding in the correct way. In any case, even if they are doing it wrongly, they need to know what they need to do to make it better. This is something that happens to most first-time online learners, no matter their age or the subject, so it is better to reinforce the sense of usefulness of this learning method, the learner perceived control and finally, the learner capacity to direct their learning.

Be positive when assessing learners proficiency, encourage them to keep learning and sharing their success, it will increase their self-esteem. Have in mind that they are not only facing the challenges of having to learn your subject, but also technological tool and a new way of learning.



### Exercises

#### Exercise 1: Group discussion



Look up in google following methods for assessments. Some topics you could look for are the keywords that appear in this unit: summative, formative, qualitative, quantitative, questionnaire, evaluation, or any other key word you are familiar with because of your work as a trainer.

In a forum, all students put the words they found on the internet or words they are aware about.

The next step is that the participants in this group choose one keyword. When a keyword has been chosen, nobody can choose that again.

Google the keyword you have chosen on the internet, look for advantages, disadvantages, potentialities, scenarios, etc.

Share with the rest of the group your findings; you should be able to define, summarise and the most important, explain the others how that keyword is related to student assessment.

Once the activity has ended, all the participants should decide who has been the best participant and why. You are not voting for the best keyword, but for the best communicator;

probably because he/she has been able to provide the best examples, or has described the benefits very practically.

## Exercise 2: Designing an evaluation activity



Based on your area of knowledge, image one of your courses. Describe which method for assessment would you apply with your subjects. You can explain this your open forum:

1. The subject you are teaching, and the general aims. Are you teaching hard skills or also aiming students to reach other competences or attitudes.
2. An example of a chapter or learning unit, with an activity that involves a learner or a group of learners
3. Your proposal to assess the learner competence on that activity. Include in your proposal challenges or doubts you have in this assessment design.

Once your colleagues have answered in a message in a forum, you can read their messages and help and suggest them.

## Summary



In this unit you have learnt about methods for assessment, you will have seen different options and you will be able to use the ones that are most beneficial according to the target group and the activity.

## Sources and Bibliography

Cooperative learning strategy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euhtXUgBEts>

Motivation Questionnaire Example Questions: <https://www.shldirect.com/en/assessment-advice/example-questions/motivation-questionnaire>

Practice online Assessment: <https://www.cut-e.com/online-assessment/free-assessments/>