

Oral assessment

Oral assessment might take the form of a presentation or viva voce examination. Some disabled students find oral assessment an easier way of demonstrating learning outcomes than written assessment. However, oral assessment may present significant difficulties for students with certain impairments, who may require access to an alternative type of assessment that still provides an acceptable test of learning outcomes. Students with some other impairments may be able to undertake oral assessment but may require some adjustments in order to do so on an equal footing.

Students with **visual impairments** and those with **manual dexterity or mobility impairments** may need additional equipment or human assistance to support them in the delivery of a presentation. For some, assessment criteria may need to be modified if they relate to body language and engagement with the audience.

Specific arrangements will be needed for **deaf students and hard of hearing students** who use lip-reading or BSL to communicate, and those who may not use speech or who may have speech that it is difficult to understand.

Many students with **specific learning difficulties** find oral assessment relatively easy to manage as long as they are well prepared. However, some can become too anxious to take part.

Some students with **mental health difficulties** find the stress and anxiety of presentations intolerable and so, if learning outcomes are tested through a presentation, it may be particularly difficult to assess their achievement fairly. Peer assessment may be particularly problematic as students with mental health difficulties may not have good social relationships with their peers. If no suitable adjustments can be made an alternative assessment activity should be considered.

Making adjustments

Here are some examples of adjustments that you may be asked to consider.

Altering the format of the oral assessment

- Some students may be able to make a presentation but not in front of the group. They could be allowed to present to the tutor alone, or to video record their presentation.
- Students who experience concentration difficulties or pain and fatigue, or who find speech tiring, may find long oral assessments such as a viva exhausting. Such assessment may need to be broken up into chunks with rest breaks.

Assessing skills and performance

- Where presentation skills and techniques are included in the assessment criteria, for example if the tutor is looking for a clear speaking voice and eye contact with the audience, this may need to be sensitively managed.
- Unintentional and inappropriate body movements, speech difficulties or facial grimaces should not be assessed as part of the presentational style.
- Some students may need to sit rather than stand to make their presentation.
- Extra time may be required for repetition and explanation if the student's speech is unclear

Using additional support strategies

- A student may require a practical assistant (e.g. for OHPs or PowerPoint presentations) or may need to support their presentation in a different way, for example by providing handouts.
- Where students are permitted access to prompts or notes for oral assessments then these should be made available in an appropriate alternative format.
- Where a student is using a [communication aid](#) in their presentation, answers to questions could be prepared by the student before the event and held on the communication aid for use during the assessment.

Specific adjustments for students who have communication difficulties or who are deaf or hard of hearing

- A student may need to work with a communicator if they have a speech impairment, or with a BSL interpreter or a lipspeaker. To accommodate this, more time may be required for the oral assessment.
- A room fitted with an induction loop may be required, or the speaker may need to use a radio aid.
- Where a deaf student is lip-reading it is important to remember that up to 70% of lip-reading may be guesswork, and to employ good practice strategies. This may be particularly important when fellow students are asking questions, which you may need to repeat.
- In a viva examination it is important to ensure full access to the questions. If a deaf student is not aware of the context, the question could be misinterpreted and misunderstood. The assessor may need to repeat the question and should allow extra time for this. The deaf or hard of hearing student may need to clarify what has been said. Hearing aid users can sometimes mishear as some words sound the same.

Language assessment

Language assessment can be difficult, particularly for profoundly deaf students without speech.

- Oral assessment, where the student is required to speak in a foreign language, could be replaced or augmented by written assessment.

- Aural assessment, where the student is required to listen to spoken language and then answer questions, could be done via a lipspeaker, but this may not be suitable for all students.
- Aural assessment using tape-recorded speech is inaccessible to many deaf students and an alternative may need to be found.
- These modifications to oral or aural language assessment may actually alter the purpose of the assessment and this may affect the attainment of learning outcomes. The implications of this should be carefully considered by programme leaders.

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