TOP 10 Considerations When Writing & Reviewing an Assessment Report

This list of considerations may be used in several ways. You may use this as a checklist while writing or reviewing reports to identify items that are missing or need attention.

1 Does the report have all of the necessary and required content?

When writing the assessment report, it is expected that all fields will be completed. Of particular importance when reviewing assessment reports is ensuring that the following fields are included: Program level, name of person(s) completing the report, the term data were collected, the next scheduled assessment analysis term and year, and progress (e.g., "Ready for Review").

2 Ensure that the student learning outcomes are S.M.A.R.T.:

- Specific: Do the outcomes focus on particular skillsets?
- Measureable: Words such as "know," "understand," and "learn" should be avoided.
- Achievable (and Improvable): Can these be met within a reasonable timeframe? Is there room for improvement?
- Relevant: Are outcomes measuring skillsets that give you information about student learning in the discipline?
- Time-framed: When were these outcomes assessed? When will they be assessed again?

3 Are the assessments properly aligned to the student learning outcomes?

For example, if the outcome states that students will analyze literary texts in light of their historical, social, and cultural contexts, the assessment for that outcome should be student work in which there is literary analysis. This is true for both direct and indirect assessments. Also, if the same assignment is used to assess multiple outcomes, an explanation should be provided as to how that assessment aligns with each outcome.

4 Does each student learning outcome have at least one direct assessment?

- Each student learning outcome is assessed by at least one direct assessment that is used to determine the level of student learning achieved against established learning outcomes. Some examples of direct assessments include: Exams, quizzes, oral presentations, dissertations, theses, essays, and portfolios.
- An indirect assessment is used to evaluate the quality of student learning experiences. Some examples of indirect assessments are: Self-efficacy surveys, end of course evaluations, focus groups, and questionnaires for alumni regarding program effectiveness and retention.
- It should be noted that, in general, conference presentations and publications are considered indirect measures of assessment because instructional faculty in the department or program do not typically assess them. While the number of conference presentations and publications may speak to the prestige of a program, it does not speak to student learning relative to the outcome. However, internal review of the presentation or publication using a set of criteria established by instructional faculty in the department or program can serve as a direct assessment of student learning.

5 Make sure that all supporting documentation is included.

Be sure that any assessment tools used are attached to the assessment report. This provides evidence of the process for gathering the data and allows reviewers to better understand the criteria for student work. Some examples of assessment tools include, but are not limited to: Rubrics, scoring sheets, criteria sheets, course assignments, test questions, or student surveys. Please note that any student identifiers (e.g., names, ID numbers) must be redacted from any and all attachments per FERPA policy.

6 There should be a thorough presentation of results.

Include overall results with a breakdown by rubric dimension, scoring sheet item, or question.

For example, "Thirty students' work was assessed. The average across the four questions relating to this outcome was 77%. This meets our benchmark of 75%. The breakdown by question is as follows:
- Question #3 – 85%
- Question #5 – 64%
- Question #8 – 72%
- Question #11 – 90%

So, while the benchmark was met overall, there is room for improvement in meeting benchmark criteria for Questions 5 and 8."

7 The results should be completely analyzed.

A good analysis of data presents the results, states whether or not the benchmark was met, and communicates to the reviewer:
- that the program faculty are using all data collected (from past and present),
- that faculty are thinking about the factors that may have contributed to the results, and
- that faculty are taking steps to plan actions based on student performance.

Additionally, when assessing learning outcomes, it is important to look at multiple years of data to identify trends in terms of growth and/or areas needing improvement. The process of comparing and contrasting data can better inform decisions about the program.

8 The "Actions Taken" should be thorough and relevant to the results.

The "Actions Taken" section of the assessment report provides a rich description of what faculty did or are doing to address the findings from completed assessments. Of particular importance, actions taken should be consistent with the results presented. The following questions should be considered when writing or reviewing the actions taken:
- What accounted for the results, and how will this issue be addressed?
- Who will be responsible for implementing the plan?
- What is the timeline for implementing the plan?
- How will the plan be measured for its effectiveness over time?

9 Make sure that extended cycles are properly documented.

Extended cycle is used by program faculty to gather data over a period of time no greater than 3 years. Some common justifications for extended cycle may include having no or too few students to assess, restructuring a program, changes in faculty that might influence course offerings, or a change in the requirements from an outside accreditor. If an outcome is placed on extended cycle, a justification must be provided in the "Notes" section of the assessment report, and "Extended Cycle" must be selected from the "Program Status" dropdown menu on the report. This allows the institution to track how many programs are on extended cycle.

10 Is there evidence of "closing the loop"?

Effective assessment is always cyclical. Part of the assessment process involves looking at results from previous years to gauge whether or not a program has improved over time. After considering all data (past and present), program faculty can decide on actions that will promote improved student learning. The following year, the faculty examine the data again to determine whether changes made have, in fact, led to improvement. Or, if further changes to the program are required to improve student learning, faculty may identify these steps in future analysis and actions taken, based on assessment results. When faculty have completed all of these steps, they have "closed the loop."