



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

Learning Activity Design

Activities and Resources
for Learning & Teaching
in Higher Education



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Introduction

The purpose of this book is to introduce you to a wide variety of activities and resources for learning & teaching. The list of possibilities is extensive but not exhaustive. For every suggestion here there are a dozen lecturers who have taken the basic idea, tweaked it, adapted it, put their 'spin' on it or otherwise made it theirs. We encourage you to do the same.

No-one could possibly use every idea presented here and, in fact, would be foolish to try to do so – they wouldn't know if they were coming or going and neither would their students! However, within these pages, waiting to be found, are the handful of ideas that can transform your practice.

The starting point for any learning design activity is always, 'What do I want the students to learn?', so before you jump in, consider that question very carefully. The answer will almost certainly relate to module learning outcomes, but it may also relate to softer skills and attitudes that you want to develop in your students. If you want to develop teamwork, or communication or IT skills, for example, consider which of the activities available will do just that.

This book is designed to be dipped into rather than read from cover to cover (though don't let us stop you if you want to), so make use of the contents page to guide your search or just dive in to find out about one of the intriguing sounding names – anyone for 'fishbowls'?

You will notice that we do not share any theoretical background to, or research supporting the usage of, any of the techniques described here. In truth, practically everything here makes sense in terms of a [constructivist or social constructivist](#)

[approach](#) to learning and teaching and if you are interested in pedagogical theory then by all means use the link above as a starting point. Similarly, there is research available into these kind of activities if you want to go and look for it. However we encourage people to adopt a critically reflective approach to these activities. Once you have adopted them and tried them out in your context, reflect on the efficacy of the approach and decide whether they are worth keeping, adapting or rejecting. You should also include the student voice in your reflections – ask them what they think, what they would like to see more of (or less of!). If you are undertaking the PGCert Learning & Teaching in HE or an M level qualification in L&T in HE, then you will be encouraged to adopt more formal approaches to evaluation such as, for example, undertaking an Action Research project, to fully understand how these approaches can impact on your teaching.

Finally, this is the first edition of this book and we hope there will be many more to come. If you have an idea for an activity, or variation on an activity that isn't included here, please let us know and we will be happy to include it in a later edition.

Graham Lowe, Head of Academic Practice, Education Development Service

Instructional Activities

Lecture or Presentation

Until recently, and still so in some quarters, the lecture has been a dominant teaching method of the modern mass higher education system - replacing the more individualised and personalised tutorial systems of days gone by. Despite the popularity of the method (influenced largely by cost) there have been many studies

that show how ineffective the method can be in helping students to achieve their learning outcomes particularly higher order outcomes. One of the major criticism concerns the



passive nature of the student experience and the difficulty in maintaining concentration for more than 20 minutes (recent studies suggesting that attention spans are falling well below this figure).

The suggestion here is that lecturing is not sustained for more than twenty minutes without adding a learning activity for the students to engage with. Perhaps the easiest way to achieve this would be to select an activity from the [Discursive Activities](#) or [Feedback from Students](#) sections. It is also worth encouraging students to employ some of the activities in the [Study Skills](#) section, perhaps making notes in a work-book for example rather than simply looking at successive PowerPoint slides and collecting the print-outs.

More radical approaches (such as 'Flipped Learning') replace the face-to-face lecture completely with a video lecture resource linked to from Moodle. This allows the class contact time to be redesigned using activities from the [Applied Activities](#), [Discursive Activities](#), and [Support Activities](#) sections.

However, a really good face-to-face lecture with a lively delivery, humour, and engaging visuals can enthuse students, help generate a love of the subject, and motivate students to learn more outside of the class. It is suggested here that short face-to-face lectures are used for this purpose, and not to deliver too much content to the students as students can acquire knowledge in many other ways!

Demonstration

For vocational curricula and practical subjects in particular, demonstrations of particular techniques and skills by the tutor are especially valuable to students. Typical examples might include how to take a blood pressure reading, how to make a dart in dressmaking, or setting a stone in jewellery. For this to be effective, group sizes often need to be small. For this reason, some demonstrations perhaps could be recorded and made available to students as a Moodle Resource. This is particularly true where the technique requires attention to fine detail and a very close view. The other advantage of a video resource is that students will be able to see the technique from the correct angle not upside down as is often the case with face-to-face demonstrations!

It is expected that any demonstration given by the tutor would be followed by considerable opportunity for the students to practice the technique please see the [Applied Activities](#) section. Careful thought will also need to be given to [Summative Assessment](#) if the learning outcomes concern a practical skill.

Discursive Activities

Seminar

The term seminar (and workshop) is a rather vague term that can be interpreted in many ways. It is generally a more informal activity when compared to lectures, often in smaller groups, with the focus on dialogue. However, this might involve students presenting papers, solving problems in groups, or a combination of some of the activities described in the [Discursive](#) and [Applied Activities](#) sections. So, far better to itemise all of the activities involved, rather than use such a vague term.

Brainstorming

Stage one involves the launching of ideas without discussion elaboration or criticism. These ideas may be recorded in a variety of ways, although on large sheets of paper with marker pens or post-its is probably the most common. Stage



two requires the group to select several of the more promising ideas and to discuss them in more detail. If a large group has been broken down into smaller groups for this activity, the second stage is often followed by a reporting stage back to the whole

group. If this technique is to work effectively it's important to remind your students that they should obey the strict rules of brainstorming which require participants to separate the creative from the analytic stages. In order to make brainstorming work effectively it may be necessary to appoint a referee in each group to call foul if the rules are broken.

Buzz Groups



Ask your students to tackle a small task in pairs or in threes. It's almost impossible for even the most reticent of students to stay silent in these circumstances and the chances are that when you open up the discussion the shyer students are more likely to speak 'in public'. A buzz group works best when a

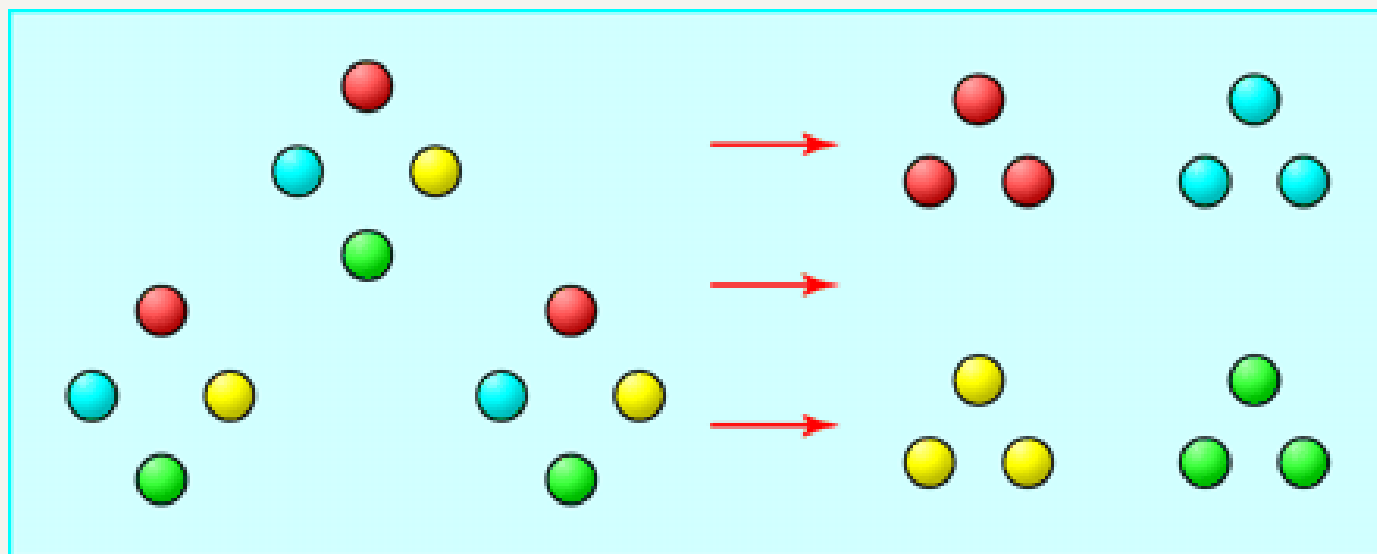
specific output is required. For example, rather than saying, 'Discuss the ways that you can do X...' a better approach is to say, 'Get ready to tell me 3 different ways you can do X...'. This can be done in even the largest of raked lecture theatres although obviously a classroom set up makes it easier.

Crossover Groups

Crossover groups are one of the best ways of sharing some content with students that you might otherwise have been tempted to get across using more passive methods such as lecturing. You might choose to introduce some new material by asking your students to read about it first before you discuss it with them. You can do this using a simple crossover technique.

Ask your students to work in pairs and to quickly identify which of them will be student A and which will be student B. The A's should then be asked to read page number 3 (say) of your handout while at the same time the B's should be asked to read (say) page 4. These sections should be carefully chosen items which might, for example, illustrate two similar but conceptually different ideas which you want to get across. It's very important to ask your students to read their section of the handout with the intention of telling your colleague all about what it is that you have read. This will raise the students' concentration levels. You should also

encourage your students to highlight the key ideas and even to jot down notes in the margin. When you can see that most students are ready, ask them to take it in turns to share what they have been reading.



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The technique can also be used for sharing the outcomes of syndicate work. For this example, let's say you have 24 students in class. Imagine that you have four different but related items of printed information to share with your students. Start by breaking down the group into 4 subgroups of 6 students. Each sub group is then given one of the 4 items to read (a different item for each group) and they are told to study what they have been given with the intentions of telling two or three colleagues all about what they have read. Give them plenty of time, depending on the size of the task, and then re-mix the groups so that you have 6 new groups each consisting of one member from each of the 4 old groups. This way every student has the responsibility of teaching a crossover group. The method generates considerable discussion and is an excellent vehicle for learning.

Debate

In simple terms a debate is a contest where two or more speakers present their arguments intent on persuading one another. Students will learn how to properly

form an opinion about a topic and appropriately and accurately defend it to the best of their abilities. Informally, students could be organised into pairs to perform this activity, but in formal debates students are normally organised into small teams adhering to strict rules with the tutor judging the winners of the contest. This may take place in a purpose built debating chamber, or a room layout that distinguishes the two sides. Here is an example of a topic for those studying education:

Quality assurance assessments in Higher Education do more harm than good

In order to take part in a debate, students need to:

- Research the topic in question
- Collect evidence
- Formulate their own opinions
- Prepare logical arguments
- Listen actively to other perspectives
- Ask cogent questions

Advocates of this activity suggest that students develop critical thinking and analytical skills while fostering teamwork and communication. While attention usually focuses on the process of the debate itself, interesting summative assessments can also be designed that include recording the collection of evidence in a portfolio together with reflective statements in a blog.

Five Minutes Each Way

Give your students the opportunity to check through their lecture notes or an assignment on a particular topic in preparation for this activity. Next tell them to work in pairs and to take five minutes each in order to think through the topic out loud in front of their colleague. The rules of this particular activity derive from co-counselling. It is very important that the listener pays close attention and does not

say anything even when his/her companion is struggling or is silent. Students find this activity to be very challenging but extremely rewarding.

Themes for this process might include:

- The main issues that this topic raised for me were...
- The way I tackled this stats problem was to...
- The way I might go about writing this essay...

Line-Up

You may find that students are somewhat taken aback when you ask them, literally, to stand up and take up a position on an imaginary line down the middle of the classroom. Your job is to define what the line is, the dimensions of the views, and to encourage discussion between individuals as to exactly where and why they are standing with relation to the others. An example of typical dimensions for a line up is as follows:



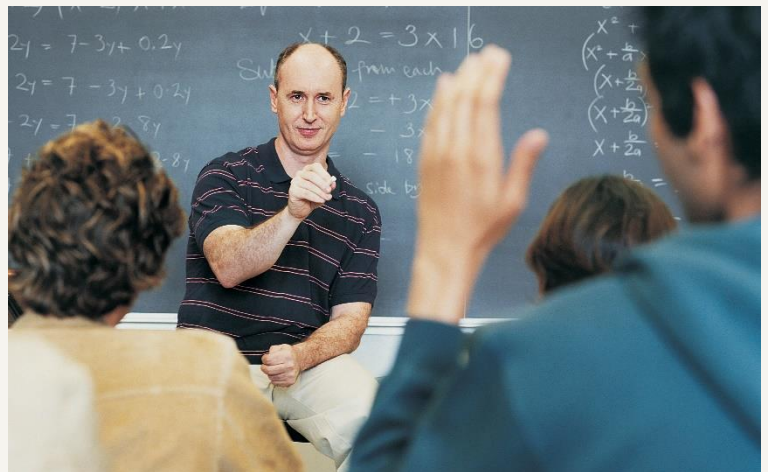
It is important to follow up the line-up with questions about why people are standing where they are, whether the issue is 'normal' (most people towards the middle) or polarising (most people at the ends) or whether someone can convince others to move to their position with argument.

Fishbowls

It is possible to follow on from a [Line Up](#) by asking one or two students from each end of the line to sit in the centre of a circle of chairs occupied by the remainder of the students and to discuss their views on the subject. You may then wish to elaborate on this strategy by giving the option to those outside the circle to tap out those in the Fishbowl. This is an excellent technique if you find that in more general discussion one or two students tend to dominate the proceedings.

Question and Answer (Q&A)

The Questions and Answers activity is not really a true discursive activity, and it would be rare if spontaneous discussion arose simply because the tutor asked a load of questions. However, a simple Q&A session can be useful following an assignment briefing so



that students can clarify requirements for example. Also, some tutors may start a session by selecting students to answer a particular question relating to some activities that should have taken place in between face-to-face sessions. Knowing this is going to happen can be a good incentive for students to prepare for the class.

Rounds

Rounds are an excellent way of starting a session. They break the ice and encourage everyone to speak. It works best if students sit in a circle and take it in turns to complete a sentence or a number of sentences displayed on the screen. A typical sentence for starting a round might be:

One of the most important things I learnt from the exercise we completed for the last assignment was...



Clearly, the size of the group will be important in determining whether or not this activity is possible, and the room layout may also play a part so these are considerations to think about when designing your module.

Snowball Groups

Start by carefully choosing a task for your students that will not involve too much reading but which will nevertheless require some 'higher order' skills such as analysis, synthesis or making judgements. A typical task might be a 'marking' exercise in which students are asked to mark two very different answers to the same essay question. Now ask your students to carry out the task on their own and to come up with what they consider to be a reasonable answer. Next get the students to share their answers in pairs and later in fours or sixes. You will find that in pairs the students are prepared to explore the problem in a tentative way and to come to some speculative answers before being faced by the larger group. The final plenary session involves all groups of four or six pooling their points from each group in turn before you invite general discussion. This method can be used successfully with large groups of 30 or more students.

Applied Activities

Case Studies

Case studies are topics demonstrating theoretical concepts in an applied setting. Using a business studies example, Amco Trading Ltd might be suffering cash flow problems, and if students analyse given data sets from finance, sales, and stock control, they should be able to identify the underlying cause. Good case studies present realistic, complex, and contextually rich situations often addressing human issues via the characters involved in the case. While early case studies were written documents, multimedia has been utilised in recent years to bring the cases alive. This has tended to blur the distinctions between this and some of the other activities in this section.

Tutors tend to direct the students in the use of the case study, and students may work individually or in groups. Feedback from the students can take a variety of forms depending on the learning outcomes, presentations for example, when communications skills are one of the desired outcomes.

The case study approach can engage students, and the application of theory in applied settings should lead to greater understanding, rather than simple memorization of concepts.

A case study may be used as a summative assessment, either on its own, or as part of a [patchwork assessment](#) including many other patches.

YouTube Links:

[Harvard Business School - Inside the Case Method Part 1](#)

[Harvard Business School - Inside the Case Method Part 1](#)

Exercise

Exercise are in-class activities where students are expected to perform a small task such as:

- Re-arrange this list in order of priority;
- Make a note of the advantages and disadvantages of this approach;
- Complete the matrix in the hand-out.

Note that such an activity is on a much smaller scale than say a Problem-based Scenario or even a Case Study. If the exercise is of a practical nature, then using the [Practice Technique](#) activity might be a better option. Exercises can be done individually, or using some group structure as in a [Buzz Group](#) ([Discursive Activities](#)) for example.

Games/Game-based/Gamification

There are many definitions of game, many categorizations and classifications, and far too many types to identify here. But in simple terms a game is a form of play with goals and structure. The key benefit of gaming techniques in education is the fun element, and the fact that students can learn without really knowing they are learning! The challenge for tutors is to create games that match the curriculum and designed learning outcomes.

YouTube Link:

[What is Game-based Learning?](#)

Master Class

Definition of a Master Class:

A master class is a class given to students of a particular discipline by an expert of that discipline usually music, but also painting, drama, any of the arts, or on any other occasion where skills are being developed.

The difference between a normal class and a master class is typically the setup. In a master class, all the students (and often spectators) watch and listen as the master takes one student at a time. The student (typically intermediate or advanced, depending on the status of the master) usually performs a single piece which they have prepared, and the master will give them advice on how to play it, often including anecdotes about the composer, demonstrations of how to play certain passages, and admonitions of common technical errors. The student is then usually expected to play the piece again, in light of the master's comments, and the student may be asked to play a passage repeatedly to attain perfection. Master classes for musical instruments tend to focus on the finer details of attack, tone, phrasing, and overall shape, and the student is expected to have complete control of more basic elements such as rhythm and pitch. The value of the master class setup is that all students can benefit from the master's comments on each piece.



Practice Technique



In any practical subject it would be expected that students have the opportunity to practice particular techniques for real, probably following a demonstration from the tutor or perhaps a video resource. Where

practicing these techniques might be dangerous, logistically difficult, or too expensive, then the suggestion is to expose the students to simulations of such techniques.

Problem-based Scenario

A problem-based scenario should be considered where a problem-centred curriculum has been adopted by the tutor, and therefore large, multi-faceted, open-ended scenarios drive the student learning. It is



not for simple [problem solving](#) that might break up a lecture for example. Problem-based learning is characterized by:

- Students need to define what they need to know in order to solve the problem, and information is not necessarily given in lectures. Some students may require more knowledge acquisition than others;
- Students decide how they will solve the problem and what learning strategies to employ;
- The process in solving the problem is valued, and there is rarely one right answer;

- Students typically work in groups, and the tutors facilitate rather than direct the process;
- Summative assessment typically focuses on both inter and intra personal skills, so it is common for both group reports and individual reflective diaries to be included.

A WIKI is a particularly good way to monitor individual contributions to a group report (see [Moodle Activities](#) section). A group [Mahara page](#) may also be useful, and [journals](#) and other activities in the [Mahara Activities](#) section will be valuable in recording the student's reflections and evidence of engagement.

Many problem scenarios can be represented by multimedia to really engage students in the learning process. Developments include immersive virtual worlds where students can explore environments for themselves and engage with very realistic scenarios. BCU has been exploring this through the development of [Shareville](#).

Question Practice



Question practice is a major activity in some subjects such as mathematics or accountancy, and generally follows a worked example by the tutor. In professional courses in particular, where examinations are set and marked externally, the opportunity to practice previous exam questions is greatly appreciated by the students.

Role Play

In a role play students are assigned a particular character and asked to act out the role with other students in a situation defined by the tutor. The instructions need to be clear, and the tutor needs to provide enough detail and contextual information about the characters to enable the students to get into role. Role plays may be conducted in pairs or in larger groups. The debriefing is a key aspect of this activity, and while the process could be summatively assessed, it is more likely that it is the student reflections that form the basis of any assessment.



Advocates of role playing suggest that it fosters a greater understanding of the complexity of professional practice and therefore has many applications in a vocational curriculum.

Simulation

Definition of a Simulation:

The imitation of some real thing, state of affairs, or process. The act of simulating something generally entails representing certain key characteristics or behaviours of a selected physical or abstract system.

Using this definition, simulations could be based upon case studies, involve role playing, have some elements of problem-based learning, and even appear as a game. In a physical simulation, physical objects are substituted for the real thing a manikin for a real patient for example. However, this activity should mostly be used

in situations where there is an element of modeling. This means that students will



change certain variables, and the consequences of these will be seen. So, for example, if a student increases the dosage of a drug being administered the patient will start to convulse. Clearly, most

simulations will therefore be computer-based, and more recently be represented with multimedia. The scenarios may look similar to those used in problem-based learning (PBL), but in PBL there are no pre-determined outcomes within the system, and the approach is much more open ended and fuzzy.

Simulations are particularly used when exposing students to real-world situations might be dangerous, logistically difficult, or too expensive.

Work Experience

Work experience is an incredibly valuable activity in most courses. For full-time students this might be a formal placement or simply some organized visits. Part-time students in particular can bring much insight to the classroom to share with others. An experiential model of learning is very relevant here, and modules can be designed where students plan to put theories into practice, perform that practice for real in the workplace, and then reflect on that practice, sharing experiences with other students. Often, Summative Assessment will be achieved via [reflective diaries](#) or [reflective portfolios](#), and an [action learning set](#) may be the main form of [Support Activity](#). [Moodle](#) and [Mahara Activities](#) can be very effective in supporting students while they are away from campus.



YouTube Link: [Making a New Higher Education Experience](#)

Feedback Activities

Muddiest Point

The muddiest point is one of the simplest and least threatening classroom techniques. It consists of asking students to jot down a quick response to one question: "What was the muddiest point in...?" The technique can be used at strategic points within a lecture, for example, at a particularly important and difficult explanation, or, more usually, at the end of the session. It is extremely important however, for teachers to respond as quickly as possible to the feedback. The distinguished statistics professor from Harvard who invented this method would always start his next lecture with the words "It would seem that a number of you had some difficulty with... in the last lecture, so I would like to clear up some of these points before we move on." It was claimed that this simple technique, used on a regular basis, helped to develop its own positive 'micro culture' which influenced the complex mixture of variables which affect learning.

One Minute Paper

The 'One Minute Paper' is a slightly more elaborate version of the 'Muddiest Point'. In it the teacher stops the class five minutes early (it does take longer than a minute in practice) and asks the students to respond briefly to some variation of the following questions: "What was the most important thing you learned in this class?" and "What important question remains unanswered?" The results of this anonymous feedback are analysed after the lecture.

Personal Response System (PRS)

Personal Response Systems, commonly called zappers or clickers are hand-held devices that students use to give immediate responses to questions asked by the tutor often in the lecture theatre. Multiple-choice questions are the dominant basis of these polls and the results are analysed and displayed immediately to the whole group via the projector. These results may identify individuals or may be anonymous. In essence this is no different to hand-raising or using coloured cards to hold in the air, but advocates suggest there is considerable benefit in the students not being able to see how others vote. Some studies also show the systems can improve attentiveness and engagement, as well as increased knowledge retention. The main benefit to the tutor is that understanding of key points in the lecture can be confirmed immediately. One study from Harvard University describes the process of using a poll, prior to the students working in buzz groups, and then polling



the same question again. This is said to increase understanding because of the added step of students explaining issues to each other.

Systems are now available that allow students to vote by mobile phone. [Socrative](#) and [Poll Everywhere](#) are examples of these types of applications and have free to use versions.

Poster Tour

Posters are a very effective way of encouraging groups of students to come up with creative solutions to a problem. Often posters are used to de-brief syndicate work, but they can also be used for sharing the outcome of laboratory work when different groups have undertaken different experiments. If you wish to make posters more interactive, you can ask one member of each group to stand by their poster to answer questions. Alternately you can ask students to place large sheets of blank

paper next to each poster and then set up a poster tour in which participants are encouraged to write comments and questions (graffiti).

If you want to preserve these posters for further use, then capturing the image can be done with a digital camera. Some interactive whiteboards can achieve the same principle.

Questionnaire

Mini questionnaires can be used in class to give feedback to the tutor on a variety of issues. Key to this approach is the speed at which the questionnaire can be analysed, and in most situations a [PRS](#) is a neater solution providing the technology is installed!

Student Presentation

Oral presentations are frequently used as a [summative assessment](#), and if this is the intended use please refer to that section. In the context of feedback to the tutor, presentations can be a very effective way for students to feedback what has



happened in any group process such as a [brainstorming](#) exercise or [Applied Activity](#) such a [case study](#) or [problem-based scenario](#). It helps the tutor to check understanding. Creating and delivering the presentation encourages active learning for those particular students, but

bear in mind if other students have to listen to these it becomes yet another very passive experience for the rest of the class. Most students will still be worrying about their own turn, rather than engaging with the current presentation!

Students could present (and share) presentations electronically for example via a [Mahara page](#) where fellow students could be required to leave feedback if desired.

Support Activities

Action Learning Sets



An action learning set is a much formalized group activity with strict rules. The group size is usually five or six, and the time devoted to this activity is divided between the number of students so each has exactly the same time allowance. Frequently, roles are allocated for timekeeper and note-taker.

The group is not functioning as a team working towards a collaborative assignment. Instead, each student is there to support each other in the progress they are making this might be towards a common assessment patch but it is more frequently concerning very different projects or work-based situations. For this reason, action learning sets are often used to support an experiential learning strategy where students face very different experiences away from the class.

In each turn of the set:

- One student describes the progress they have made towards their action plans which were identified and recorded in the previous set;
- The student may describe problems encountered and ask for help;
- The other students in the set listen, probe the progress being made, and offer advice;
- Action plans are revised and recorded.

Sets meet regularly, and while the first few are best supervised by the tutor to establish the process, the remainder can be student managed.

Peer Review

A peer review is an activity whereby students give formative feedback to each other concerning an element of work. Typically, this is designed into a patchwork assessment at regular points in the module. In Art & Design based subjects this activity is frequently called a Crit or critique. Various group structures can be employed, and the role of the tutor can be active or passive but it is essential that students have guidelines detailing what they are giving feedback about and how to give it.

Surgeries

Surgery sessions are the name given in this tool to describe short private sessions between the tutor and one student (or possibly a small group). This may be known elsewhere as a tutorial, but as this term tends to have a variety of meanings it is not used here. Usually, tutors will state dates and times when they are available, and students simply book a convenient slot. The [Moodle Scheduler](#) can be useful in managing this process.

The surgery is most useful when students are working autonomously on significant pieces of work (such as a [problem-based scenario](#)) and need some direction or extra clarity in what is required or how to proceed. Surgeries can also be useful with more pastoral elements of a course.

Tutor Feedback

The feedback that tutors give to students can have a significant impact on their learning. If this feedback is concerning summative assessment, it is most important that students can see where the marks come from. With this in mind, assignment assessment sheets where structured feedback can be given against set criteria are very useful. This is particularly beneficial when the criteria can be graded, so that students can see what they need to do to achieve a higher grade. For example:

Learning Outcome 1: Use evidence appropriately in support of an argument.		Mark	%
80-100% Exceptionally Strong Pass (Distinction)	Work graded at this level surpasses the quality of very strong work and is very nearly, or actually at a standard suitable for publication or other dissemination routes.		
70-79% Very Strong Pass (Distinction)	Analytical and clear conclusions well-grounded in theory and literature, showing development of new concepts.		
60-69% Strong Pass (Merit)	Good development shown in arguments based on theory or literature and beginnings of synthesis.		
50-59% Pass	Evidence of findings and conclusions grounded in theory or literature.		
40-49% Retrievable Fail	Limited evidence of findings and conclusions supported by the literature and theory.		
0-39% Irretrievable Fail	Unsubstantiated or invalid conclusions, based on anecdotes and generalisations only.		

However, a problem with many traditional assessments is that this feedback comes too late to influence the student learning and the marks that can be gained. Perhaps this is the reason why many assignments are not collected by the students. What is needed is an assessment strategy that creates a 'feedback loop' in which feedback comments on one task, draft or set of questions can be fed directly into a subsequent task or draft, or will aid preparation for an exam (feed forward).

Therefore, you can and should refer to the [patchwork assessment](#) and some other forms of [support activities](#).

Study Activities

Collaboration

Collaboration underpins many of the activities in this tool. It's important to realise that many students will not naturally be good collaborators, and therefore activities that help students to understand the issues involved in effective collaboration are very important. This is particularly true where the stakes are higher. A team-based report submitted as a summative assessment to solve a problem-based scenario being perhaps the most extreme. Group work (most frequently team-based) is often the approach most criticised by students, and yet the ability to function as part of a team is consistently valued highly by employers. Apart from not understanding the various roles and processes involved in team work, one of the most common problems is the perceived lack of equity in summative assessments. Comments from students might be "I've done nearly all the work on this assignment, and yet he/she got the same mark as me!".

Activities that record and reward the process of team work (such as regularly submitting the minutes of team meetings to Moodle or Mahara) rather than focussing just on the final report can be very helpful. Individual reflective diaries can record how individuals feel about how the group is functioning, and [Moodle Forums](#) can be a very valuable in documenting some of the group processes. In terms of the final group report, a [Moodle Wiki](#) can be very effective in recording the various contributions of group members. These online activities are particularly beneficial to part-time students who may struggle to meet other students outside of class.

Memorisation

Memorisation activities are usually based upon mnemonics - methods for remembering information that is difficult to recall. Common approaches involve the creating of an acronym such as BOSCARDI to remember the sections of a Terms of Reference in project management **B**ackground, **O**bjectives, **S**cope, **C**onstraints, **A**ssumptions, **R**esources, **D**eliverables, **I**ssues. The fact that this rhymes with the drink Bacardi might help!

Other approaches involve re-writing notes, creating index cards, drawing mind maps, and for auditory learners, telling others. Many activities could be created in class or online to engage students in this process. This is particularly beneficial when the summative assessment requires the recall of factual knowledge.

Mind Mapping

A mind map is a diagram with a central key word or concept, around which other words and pictures are arranged to organise and structure thoughts in a very visual way.

This is a really good follow-up activity to [reading](#) and [note-taking](#), and because mind



maps are produced on one piece of paper, they are easily shared. Software is available to draw these on a computer, and so these can now be easily uploaded into a e-portfolio such as Mahara for sharing, submitted as a Moodle Assignment, or even attached to Moodle Forum post for example.

Note-taking

In a lecture situation note taking can be encouraged by the design of hand-outs or work-books ([Sundry Resources](#)). When tutors design a PowerPoint presentation the opportunity for note taking should be carefully considered. A slick presentation may result in spoon feeding rather than engaging students in active learning.

Note taking is a natural follow-up activity to reading, and should underpin many other activities in this tool. For example, to be able to take part in a [debate](#) (discursive activity) students would be expected to research a topic and take notes in preparation. Why not design such an activity whereby students uploaded these notes to a Mahara e-portfolio as evidence, rather than just focussing on the debate itself?

Problem Solving

Problem-solving activities can be extremely varied depending on the subject, and can include many different strategies, techniques, tools, skills, and steps. The approach may be very formalised or creative.

Problem solving activities are to be used where there isn't necessarily a problem-centred curriculum driving the whole learning experience ([problem-based scenarios](#)) but where solving problems is part of a traditional curriculum a 30-minute activity in the middle of class for example.

Reading

In class, asking students to read can be a very good alternative to the passive experience of listening to the lecturer. After a short presentation from the lecturer, it is often a good idea to explore greater detail by asking the students to take part in a cross-over activity, where students read different resources and then explain what they have read to others.

Outside of class, reading is obviously a key activity. While reading around the subject should be encouraged as a general activity, this tool expects the tutors to guide what the students read, and have a purpose for doing it in a follow-up activity. Often a common problem is that Moodle modules will have far too many uploaded files provided by the tutor as well as links to web sites and library resources. Tutors might want to ask the following questions:

- How long would it take the average student to read these resources?
- Will the students actually do this reading, and when?
- How can good design influence this activity?

Tutors may want to follow-up this activity with other online activities such as a [Moodle Quiz](#) (to test factual recall and understanding) or a [Moodle Forum](#) to discuss issues that arise from such reading. An alternative might be to encourage students to use some of the other study skills described in this tab, such as representing the subject matter as a [mind map](#). What will influence whether students engage in such an activity is what happens in the next class. So, if the tutor expects students to share mind maps in the next face-to-face session then that will be a good incentive. That incentive will be increased if such an activity becomes an [assessment patch](#).

Revision

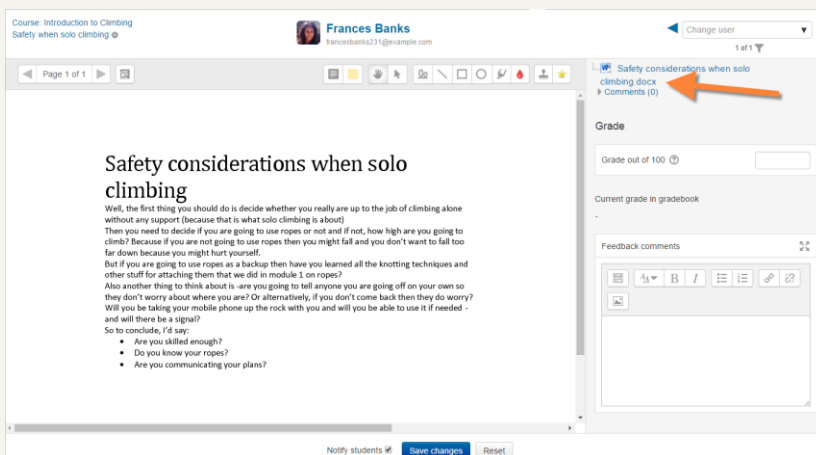
Revision is obviously a major activity in subjects where the summative assessment takes the form of an examination. In this case it would be expected to see this shape appear regularly, not only in flexible learning time, but also in face-to-face classes accompanied by [question practice](#) and also [tutor feedback](#).

Time Planning

To be successful, students need to learn how to manage their time. This is particularly true for those juggling studies with work and family commitments, and for all students this becomes a critical issue close to examinations and when multiple assignments need to be submitted. There are many tips that tutors can pass on to the students such as maintaining a study plan, creating lists of things to do, and tackling the most difficult task first. However, rather than hoping that students manage their time effectively, it might be better to have in-class activities focussing on this issue, online supplementary resources, or activities that require students to submit study plans and priority lists as part of a Mahara e-portfolio or Moodle activity.

Moodle Activities

Assignment



The assignment feature in Moodle does not have to be used only for the summative assessment. Work can be submitted to Moodle electronically, feedback given online, and a record maintained in the Moodle Gradebook. This

can be a very efficient way to manage formative assessments, particularly for part-time and distance learning students. For formative assessment, voice files can also be added to give audio feedback.

Big Blue Button



The Big Blue Button is a very elaborate software application that can replicate face-to-face teaching in an online environment. Very useful for distance learning courses and part-time course where attendance is minimal. It might also

be used for virtual seminars, or group tutorials in a situation where students and staff might find it difficult to meet face to face.

It is synchronous so the tutor and students need to log-in at the same time for the class. The tutor can present PowerPoint slides while also showing a video of himself (using a simple web cam) talking though the presentation. Video streams can be seen of all participants, and students can ask questions live on camera or even be allowed to present themselves. In practice too many cameras on at the same time can clutter the screen. There is a shared electronic whiteboard to illustrate certain points and students can be given the permissions to write on this. So, for example, the tutor could present an X-ray image and ask individual students to identify a broken bone. From their own PCs students can draw a circle around the break and the whole group will see this appear on the whiteboard. This activity can therefore be very interactive indeed, and in some ways even more interactive than being face-to-face.

Chat

This is a synchronous, real time style of communication unlike the Moodle forum. Its text based, so students who are online at the same time simply send text messages to the chat room that all other students in the room can see. In practice, typing speeds will have an impact on how meaningful any discussion is, and it is easy for messages to get out of sequence due to the delays in responses being typed. This activity tends to be used for a small number of students (possibly with

the tutor) to have a meeting when it would be difficult to get to the campus. A much more sophisticated alternative would be to use [Big Blue Button](#) that can utilise web-cam to web-cam video conferencing. Although, with the proliferation of mobile devices that are connected to the internet, apps such as WhatsApp and Google Hangouts can replicate much of this functionality without the need to log in to additional systems.

Choice

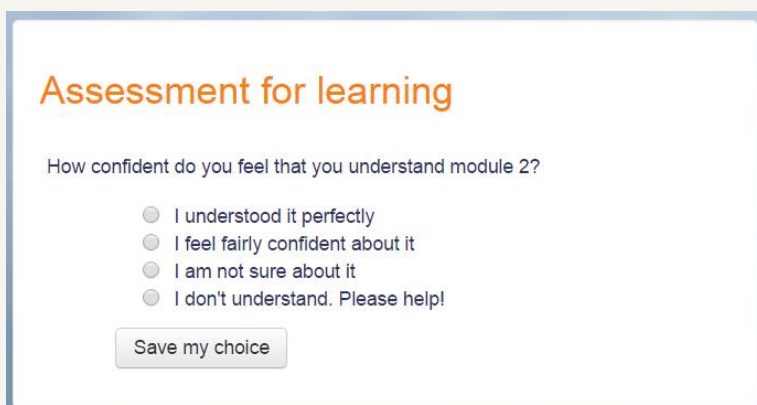
A choice is a good activity to get a response from a group of students, so it's really an online way of achieving some of the activities in the [Feedback from Students](#) section. The results can then be used to stimulate other activities. So, for example, a choice could mimic a [line-up](#) by posing the question What impact has the Internet had on the world? Responses could be designed as:

1. Revolutionised life for the better of mankind;
2. More positive impacts than negative;
3. More negative impacts than positive;
4. A curse on civilisation.

Students select a response, and the tutor can see all of the student profiles under each of the responses. Students may also see each other's responses if the tutor selects the appropriate setting. It's now possible to start the next

face-to-face session with a [buzz group](#) where the groups are deliberately composed of students with opposing views.

A choice is also an easy way for tutors to enable students to select what group they want to join.

A screenshot of a web-based assessment form titled "Assessment for learning" in orange text. Below the title, the question "How confident do you feel that you understand module 2?" is displayed. There are four radio button options: "I understood it perfectly", "I feel fairly confident about it", "I am not sure about it", and "I don't understand. Please help!". At the bottom of the form is a button labeled "Save my choice".

Assessment for learning

How confident do you feel that you understand module 2?

☐ I understood it perfectly

☐ I feel fairly confident about it

☐ I am not sure about it

☐ I don't understand. Please help!

Save my choice

Conditional Activity

Conditional activities enable teachers to restrict the availability of any activity or even a course section according to certain conditions such as dates, grade obtained, or activity completion.

Database

The database activity allows the tutor to design their own database by defining a series of records and fields into which data can subsequently be added. The data types include a variety of media files, so it would be possible to build a database of images for example, where each record comprises of the fields: image, title, author, date, and location. Students simply upload their images and add the data into the fields as requested. This can have a variety of uses where students need to gather data, perhaps on field trips, placements, visits, and other fact finding activities. It is possible for students to leave feedback on the work of other students, so there is also scope for an element of peer review.

Forum

The forum is an asynchronous (not occurring at the same time) discussion as opposed to a real-time discussion that happens face-to-face, or online in a [Moodle Chat](#) or via [Big Blue Button](#). This can give a number of significant advantages. Firstly, the time delay between reading a post and replying gives the reader time to reflect, and it is therefore often the case that such discussions can be more meaningful than the rapid fire of synchronous communication. Secondly, research suggests that this medium is more democratic allowing shyer students to actively take part, and for certain cultures to gain a voice. This is particularly true where peer pressure in face-to-face situations deters some students from contributing.

However, this medium also has a number of disadvantages. The main one is the lack of facial expression, gestures, and tone of voice, which can lead to misunderstandings and inappropriate postings that in extreme situations can lead to flaming where things get out of hand. The role of the tutor in moderating these discussions is of paramount importance, and the time commitment to this process should not be under-estimated. Also, remember that any posting made will be viewable by the whole group or sub-group if the Moodle's group facility is applied.

The screenshot shows a Moodle forum interface. At the top, there's a section titled "Class discussions" with a text box that says: "Add your response to each forum post by clicking 'Reply' at the bottom. Don't write the first thing that comes into your head: think a little first!". Below this is a button that says "Add a new discussion topic". To the right, there's an "Administration" sidebar with links for "Forum administration", "Optional subscription", "Unsubscribe from this forum", "Course administration", and "My profile settings". Below the text box is a table of discussions.

Discussion	Started by	Replies	Last post
Saving the revolution	Jeffrey Sanders	1	Barbara Gardner Mon, 20 Jan 2014, 10:05 AM
Most important factor	Jeffrey Sanders	0	Jeffrey Sanders Fri, 22 Nov 2013, 5:53 PM

This can deter some students from contributing, as they don't want to look silly in front of the whole group, especially as the postings will still be

there until the module is finished. Therefore, it is common for forums to engage a small number of students in posting while many more simply read and lurk in the background. The interesting fact is that often this will be a different group of students to those dominating face-to-face discussions.

The key to a successful forum activity is design. If there is no need to communicate in this way, then it is suggested that a forum activity will have limited engagement. Many success stories involve experiential learning models where students write postings about their work experiences, and share the results of applying theory to practice in different contexts. [Action Learning Sets](#) tend to function well when students find it difficult to meet. Groups working on [problem-based scenarios](#) can get much benefit from the forum in between meeting face-to-face. And of course, forums are often a major component of distance learning courses. Thoughtful design might mimic some of the activities in the [Discursive Activities](#) section and support some of the activities identified within the [Applied Activities](#) section. Where

tutors use a forum to post your questions here following a lecture there will tend to be little engagement especially when students meet most days on the campus.

Glossary



The glossary is a way of providing explanations of key terminology used in subject content written directly into Moodle pages. This can provide considerable additional support for students, and if used imaginatively can provide additional teaching for those in

need. The glossary entry can utilise sound files and video making it a powerful feature. One example use could be to provide sound files of pronunciations for overseas students. At a more elaborate level, even a video lecture could be shown for those lacking prior knowledge. Students can be assigned, individually or in groups, to different concepts and have to upload entries (which can be approved by tutors) providing a form of formative assessment.

Journal

Like the forum activity, the journal is asynchronous, but it is a private dialogue between the student and tutor not a public one within a group. Essentially, students append journal entries one after the other, and the tutor gives feedback. So, this is a good way to maintain dialogue, especially if journal activities are kept brief and regular and the tutor is prompt in giving feedback. This is a good way for students to maintain a reflective diary. Once a student makes an entry, there is little they can actually do with the entries once written. For this reason, a [Mahara Journal](#) might be a better activity, as the whole journal or selected entries from it can be published in a variety of [Mahara pages](#) to a variety of audiences. Maraha journals and other

content can also be exported, which means that the student can keep their own records of all their Mahara activity outside of Mahara itself.

Lesson

The lesson is the Moodle equivalent of programmed learning. The tutor writes the subject content as a series of pages that end with a number of questions. The student selects which option to take, and then is presented with another page, which again has a number of options. In this way the resource is branched and the student actively chooses to navigate the resource in a certain way. This can have a variety of uses. Firstly, it can differentiate resources for different contexts, so a generic example could be followed by specific examples each in different contexts, and the student selects the appropriate one for themselves. Differentiation could also be ability based, so students could select easier or harder routes through the resource based upon how they answer the questions set by the tutor. Secondly, the lesson could be used as the basis of some very sophisticated diagnostic testing.

Questionnaire

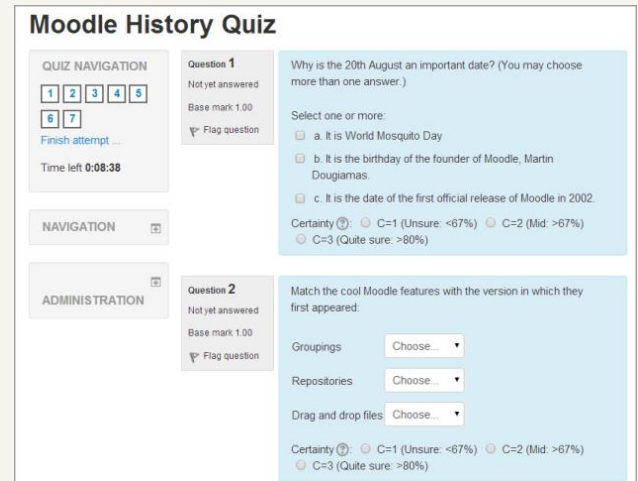
This activity allows tutors to develop their own questionnaires using a variety of styles to get feedback from the students. Obviously, this can be useful for end of module evaluations, but in the context of this tool, questionnaires could be used regularly throughout a module to achieve the same outcome as in the [Feedback from Students](#) section. As the analysis is totally automated, this offers considerable time saving for the tutor.

Quiz

The quiz is an ideal activity for formative assessment, and can frequently be used to follow resources to check for understanding. While objective testing tends to lend itself to subjects that have a lot of factual content and right/wrong answers, if used imaginatively (and not necessarily with multiple choice formats), it can be useful in many subjects.

Designing good questions does require a lot of thought, and it's the quality of in-built feedback that determines how valuable the quiz will be for the students.

The quiz also provides a great deal of valuable information to the tutor. It can be used to identify students that are at risk, either by not engaging in the process, or because of consistent low marks. It can also identify aspects of the subject that many students are struggling with, and therefore perhaps identify areas where the teaching methods need to be modified.



The screenshot shows the 'Moodle History Quiz' interface. On the left, there are three panels: 'QUIZ NAVIGATION' with buttons 1-5 and a 'Finish attempt...' link; 'NAVIGATION' with a list icon; and 'ADMINISTRATION' with a gear icon. The main area displays 'Question 1' and 'Question 2'. Question 1 asks 'Why is the 20th August an important date?' with three multiple-choice options: 'a. It is World Mosquito Day', 'b. It is the birthday of the founder of Moodle, Martin Dougiamas', and 'c. It is the date of the first official release of Moodle in 2002'. Question 2 asks 'Match the cool Moodle features with the version in which they first appeared.' with three dropdown menus for 'Groupings', 'Repositories', and 'Drag and drop files'. Both questions show 'Not yet answered', 'Base mark: 1.00', and 'Flag question' options. A 'Certainty' section at the bottom of each question shows progress indicators for C=1 (Unsure: <67%), C=2 (Mid: >67%), and C=3 (Quite sure: >80%).

Scheduler

Scheduler is a plug-in to Moodle. Tutors simply state dates and times they are available together with the duration of the slot (e.g. 30 minutes). Students can see all of the available slots and book a meeting to see their tutor. This activity simplifies the surgery approach seen in the [Support Activities](#) section.

Survey

The survey activity provides a number of verified survey instruments, including COLLES (Constructivist On-Line Learning Environment Survey) and ATTLS (Attitudes to Thinking and Learning Survey), which have been found useful in assessing and stimulating learning in online environments. Tutors can use these to

gather data from their students that will help them learn about their class and reflect on their own teaching. Note that the questions in the surveys are predetermined you cannot create your own. If you want to create your own survey, then use [Questionnaire](#).

Wiki

A wiki is essentially a web page (or set of web pages) that can be produced collaboratively by more than one person. Most importantly, the wiki has an element of version control so it's possible to see how the document has developed over time by clicking on previous versions. Each version will log who made the changes, this gives the tutor valuable information as to the contributions made by individual students. The wiki is therefore a good activity to evidence a group (team) report where each student will have contributed. Frequently, such team-based activities are criticised because of inequity one student claiming to have done the bulk of the work for example. A wiki can help to minimise that effect.

Workshop

The workshop is a peer assessment activity in which students submit their assignments to Moodle for other students to mark against pre-determined criteria established by the tutor. When done well such an approach can help students to meet higher order learning outcomes such as critique or evaluate. The benefit in using this Moodle activity is that it eases the administration load on the tutor by doing the computations and storing the data.

Mahara Activities

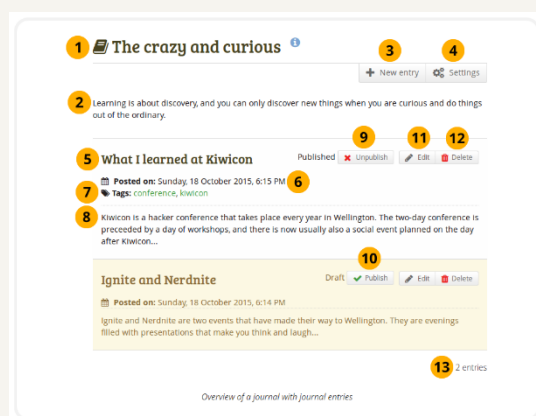
Files

Students are allocated a certain storage limit within Mahara and can upload a number of files until that limit is reached. These files can be simple text, images, sound, and video using a variety of formats. These can be subsequently placed onto any number of pages. Media files can be embedded into a page rather than simply appearing as links, and this can add substantially to the visual appeal of the page. The file and folder artefacts can be used to share files (for example PowerPoint presentations, Excel spreadsheets, Word documents etc.)

Groups

The groups function of Mahara enables students to create their own online groups, share files, create views, and communicate via dedicated forums. Students can therefore use this facility to support teamwork, solve problem-based scenarios, take part in action learning sets, and collaborate in a variety of activities.

Journals



The journal feature of Mahara is especially useful as it allows students to easily maintain a reflective diary. This could detail early opinions of university life, thoughts on how a particular module is going, or reflections on work experience for example. The whole journal can simply be copied to a page, or individual entries

can be selected. Each entry can include a file attachment, so it is now possible to maintain a video diary very simply. Tutors can easily give 'comments' and so maintain a dialogue with students as the journal progresses.

Pages / Collections

Mahara pages are a way in which students can publish online elements of their portfolios to a variety of audiences by simply changing access permissions. So, one page could be private, another available to just selected logged-in users, and others could be available to friends, a



group, all logged-in users, or even the public. It is also possible for students to create secret URLs so that pages can be sent as link in an email to anyone in the world, who can then see just that view without needing a Mahara account. A page can be made up of selected files that have been uploaded, embedded media, a resume, skills and goals templates, and even selected journal entries.

A collection is simply a number of pages that have been 'joined together' by a navigation menu.

Designing a learning activity in which students create pages early in their courses can have a number of benefits. Firstly, this can help to build a learning community amongst the students, break down barriers, and ease some of the issues concerning the transition into Higher Education. Secondly, this can help the tutors to find out much more about their students, prepare them for subsequent placements and career options, and so form an essential part of Personal Development Planning.

The Mahara page is also an exciting media-rich alternative to traditional assessment methods, which can be fun for the students to produce. It can support work experience, and enable experiential learning and reflective practice through the use of [Reflective Diaries](#) and [Reflective Portfolios](#). Capturing evidence while away from the campus, perhaps using a mobile phone or devices such as FLIP video recorders can make the duller of portfolios come alive. Combining this with

the [Moodle Assignment](#) activity may ease the administration of a Patchwork Assessment strategy.

Tutors can make regular comments on students' pages providing help as the e-portfolio is incrementally developed. Maintaining this private dialogue with students is usually well appreciated and goes some way to avoiding any surprises at the end of the module!

YouTube Link:

[e-Portfolios at Solent University](#)

Plans

A very valuable activity within Mahara are Plans. These allow students to plan elements of their study. In an experiential model of learning, students may plan how they will put theory into practice. In a problem-centred curriculum, students might plan how to go about solving a particular [problem-based scenario](#). This activity could also be an important part of a learning contract or agreement, and all students would benefit from planning their study time particularly revision. Sharing these plans in class in subsequent weeks could be most revealing!

Resumé

The resume function within the Mahara e-portfolio enables students to create their own resumé or curriculum vitae by completing a series of in-built templates such as employment history, education history, certification, accreditation, awards, skills and goals.

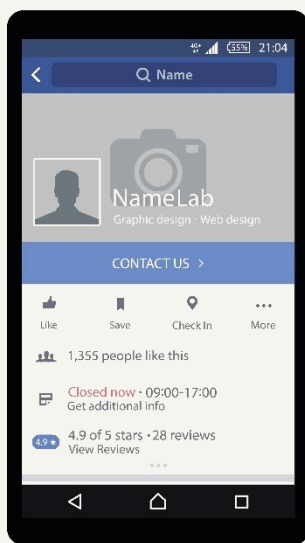
Social Web Activities

Blogs

Blogs enables the maintenance of an online journal or diary to share with the public at large, rather than within the confines of a university or college using systems such as Mahara. Blogging sites such as [Blogger](#) from Google also allows the sharing of images and videos and so overlaps some of the functionality of [YouTube](#) and [Flickr](#). There are many alternatives to Blogger such as [Wordpress](#), and [Tumblr](#).

Facebook

Facebook offers some of the functionality of the institutional system Mahara (with much greater emphasis on communication) to a world-wide public audience. This



activity is therefore particularly useful where there is the wish to involve those people that do not have an institutional network account. Good examples of Facebook activities are seen in pre-enrolment (making friends, joining common interest groups, discovering more about the location and campus, and finding out more about the course and the teaching staff), and within modules where collaboration is required with other universities, colleges, businesses, and a variety of external organisations.

Flickr

[Flickr](#), pronounced “Flicker,” is an online image and video hosting platform. The platform is popular with users who share and embed photographs. Please refer to [YouTube](#) as the issues are the same only Flickr is for user generated images rather than video.

Instagram

Similar to Flickr, [Instagram](#) is a visual social media platform. Many of its users use it to post information about travel, fashion, food, art and similar subjects. There are a number of sites and publications that explore how this social media tool can be used in educational settings. Popular options include:



showcasing student work (art-based although not limited to these subjects); daily diary and plans; Work-based learning and field trip resource/data gathering; sharing recommendations; recording steps within experiments; discover ideas for writing etc. Content hosted/created here, could also be linked within an e-portfolio system.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a popular social media site for professional networking. The website is available in 24 languages and has over 400 million registered users. LinkedIn is great for people looking to connect with people in similar industries, networking with local professionals and displaying business related information and statistics.

Padlet

[Padlet](#) is an application to create an online bulletin boards (walls) that you can use to display information for any topic. Users can add images, links, videos, and more.

You can return to add more later. Installing Padlet Mini in your browser allows you to add the page you are browsing to your Padlet and gives you a shortcut to view your Padlets. Settings allow you to make your wall completely open for public contributions, completely private, or moderated by you (you approve all contributions before they show). This is a device-agnostic tool, available on the web but also available for free as both an Android and iOS app.

Use a Padlet to collaborate in collecting ideas, brainstorming, and more. Use this tool easily in your Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) classroom since all students will be able to access it for free, no matter what device they have. Padlet does not show which work is attributable to which student, so you may want to require that students initial their contributions in order to provide them with feedback. If allowing all students to post to the wall or make comments, you may want to discuss internet safety and etiquette and establish specific class rules and consequences.

Twitter

[Twitter](#) is a micro-blogging site where staff and students can publish very short text/media messages of up to 280 characters that can be accessed via mobile and desktop devices. Uses include:

- Reminding students of deadlines or for last minute news (you don't need their mobile phones for this as they would follow your Twitter feed and set their account to receive message to their mobile phone when updates occur);
- Asking students to focus in a concise way on a particular concept or topic;
- A communication tool for research projects;
- Use by the library (in fact libraries are one of the biggest educational users of twitter) to flag up new books etc.;
- Students sharing URLs relating to group projects etc.

It is worth remembering that Google now lists Twitter sites (many businesses have now got wise to this fact), therefore it is a way of getting yourself noticed on a major search engine (good for staff and students to publicise their research activities).

WhatsApp

[WhatsApp](#) Messenger is a cross-platform instant messaging client for smartphones, PCs and tablets. The app relies on the Internet to send images, texts, documents, audio and video messages to other users that have the app installed on their devices. This could be used as an alternative to [Moodle Chat](#).

YouTube

The video sharing site [YouTube](#) can provide a valuable resource to students as it does contain considerable amounts of instructional information and user generated content of varying quality. As an activity, YouTube can inspire students to create their own videos, promote themselves to a wider audience, and receive feedback from the public. In subjects such as Media Studies this might be planned activity designed by the tutor. More generally, an institutional e-portfolio such as Mahara may be a safer bet!

Summative Assessment Activities

Closed-book Exam



Traditional, unseen examinations are seen as an effective way of measuring knowledge and comprehension. However, some students find it very difficult to demonstrate the higher order skills of reflection, analysis and critical evaluation under severe time restrictions. For this reason, exams often represent only a distorted snapshot of some students' intellectual skills and capabilities.

Open-book Exam

With open-book examinations students are allowed to take sources of reference material in to the exam room. In addition, the timed element is sometimes relaxed or abandoned. Open-book exams have the advantage of moving away from testing memory skills and with careful preparation of the questions it is possible to assess students' abilities to use, apply and find information.

Essay

Essays can assess the depth of a student's understanding, they can also allow for individuality of expression. However, essays have been criticized when they demonstrate a lack of alignment with learning outcomes that call for the demonstration of writing skills in a vocational context. Essay writing is an academic skill that may have to be taught. Students from some backgrounds will need practice and coaching in the art of essay writing. They also need to see the assessment criteria and to know exactly how essays are marked.

Presentations (Group/Individual)

Assessed presentations enable a number of key skills to be assessed including oral communication, the ability to plan and structure material and, in some situations, the ability to work as a member of a team. It is quite common for the students giving presentations to be given some



involvement in creating the assessment criteria. Oral communication skills are highly relevant in professional/vocational courses.

It is unlikely that students will instantly be good at oral presentations some teaching and supporting resources will almost certainly be required, and a good module design would allow opportunities for students to practice this formatively. Filming presentations can help students to analyse their performance and see where improvements might be made.

Patchwork Assessment

Patchwork assessment is a strategy that encourages continuous assessment in a number of discrete stages known as patches, with a final piece of work (usually of a reflective nature) that stitches the patches together to form a coherent whole. It is the final collection of patches that are assessed by the tutor. As each patch is not assessed as it is produced there is opportunity to provide formative feedback at each of the patch stages that can aid and support student with achievement of their final grade. The approach encourages students to engage with active learning throughout the module, rather than being passive until just before the assignment deadline. However, without additional activities some students might still be tempted to leave all of the patches until the end of the module. It is therefore usual to follow the production of each patch with a [peer review](#), and possibly even an

[action learning set](#). Combining these activities with the production of an e-portfolio may help to keep the students on track and ease administration see [Mahara Activities](#).

Patches could include some of the summative assessments mentioned in this section. But a patch is frequently a much smaller piece of work such as:

- A statement identifying an interesting topic for your research and how you might go about researching this area;
- A critical, evaluative or analytic personal account of a piece of subject specialized published writing;
- A journal of ongoing thoughts and feelings about your learning from the module;
- A critical incident analysis;
- A report on a visit;
- An explanation of your own professional practice from the point of view of a client or service user;
- A review of literature;
- A letter to a friend explaining a difficult concept;
- A mind map, as a patch or as the final piece.

Practical

Many areas of study involve practical work. It is usually much easier to test the end point of practical work rather than the process and skills involved in their own right. For this reason, practical work is often combined with [reflective diaries](#) where students are required to reflect upon the process of acquiring practical skills. Without this reflective approach, assessing practical work may only involve measuring the quality of the end product.

Digital story-telling might be useful in some circumstances where students capture processes and skills along the way with a camera on a phone, and present a story of what they have learned as a [Mahara page](#).

Reflective Diary

Students keep a learning journal in which they are required to record their reflections on learning. This process can be use in a wide range of contexts from professional skills on placement to the learning that takes place when students write assignments or solve closed-ended problems in mathematics/computing. Tutors respond in writing to students' entries in their journals, with comments designed to encourage deeper understanding and reflection. Marking is usually done on a pass/fail basis but, as with all assessment, clear criteria need to be established.

Reflective diaries can now be maintained easily online using a [Moodle Journal](#) or a [Mahara Journal](#). The later gives the advantage of allowing the students to set their own permissions and publish elements of their diaries via a [Mahara page](#) to a variety of audiences. Views can be private, submitted to the tutor, shared with the class, viewable by friends, or the whole world!

Reflective Portfolio

Reflective portfolios are records of achievement that can demonstrate progression and development. Typically, they are compilations of evidence of students' achievements that contain feedback comments from tutors and reflective analyses by the students themselves. Portfolios can reflect attitudes and values as well as skills and knowledge. This makes them particularly valuable on modules that contain professional/vocational elements.

A Mahara e-portfolio allows students to upload evidence electronically including a variety of media such as sound or video to their own space, and publish their pages to a variety of audiences perhaps even potential employers. This media rich

approach can create a very engaging assessment for the students. Digital story videos would be a good example.

Report



Assignments can be written for "real" audiences, especially in vocational contexts. Students may be required to undertake activities such as having to review a book for a journal or a magazine, present a case for an interest group or write a report where specific skills relevant to professional activity can be

expressed. Short written assignments can be both peer marked and tutor marked against clear criteria. For example, students can be asked to explain difficult ideas in their own words by writing a letter or e-mail to a friend.

Viva

Viva-voce exams normally take the form of an interview where students are asked questions about selected part of their work. This form of testing has long been used to consolidate other forms of assessment. However, with well-constructed agendas, a viva has the potential to be more widely used to probe individual levels understanding in circumstances where plagiarism is not possible.

Moodle Resources

Book

The Moodle book allows you to collate a series of pages into a simple book-like format which can be divided into chapters and sub-chapters, allowing students to access materials more easily and without the endless scrolling that sometimes occurs.

You can add photographs and embed video clips and other multimedia. Be aware of Moodle size limits though - if you want to create something very sophisticated it may be better to create a learning resource using [Xerte](#).

File

Many file formats can be uploaded into Moodle, but there is a size limitation, so large files such as video should be held in a separate repository (such as [ExpLOR](#)) and linked to. Uploaded files (directly to Moodle) have the disadvantage that the students will need to have specific software (video codecs) on their computers to be able to open the files. Having content that can be seen with just a browser is an advantage, and where there is not a need for students to be able to edit in an application (e.g. Word or PowerPoint) saving to pdf format using free software is preferable.

Also, a major problem on many Moodle courses is that tutors upload far too many files which are totally overwhelming when the student first enters the course! A solution to both of these problems is for the tutor to create content packages effectively mini websites containing an appropriate amount of information, and to upload these. A content creation and packaging tool such as [Xerte](#). Why not have just one package for each topic or week of study?

Folder

The Moodle folder is a simple way of organizing files and making the course look a little less cluttered one folder name, rather than ten file names.

Label

A label is simply some free text that tutors can add at various locations in a Moodle course. In a content laden course, labels can provide key sign posts for the students, and help usability. A label can also be used to add multimedia content to the page view such as an embedded video.

Page

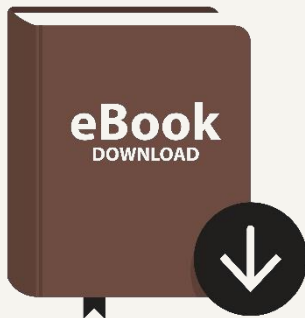
It is through this resource that tutors can provide content to the students by writing directly in Moodle, instead of uploading a file. It has the advantage that this content can be seen through the browser without any additional software being required by students such as Microsoft Word. The down-side is that such content is locked into Moodle should the Virtual Learning Environment be changed then a lot of work may be required to re-create this content. Where there is a lot of information to present, a much better solution is to use a content packaging tool such as [Xerte](#). Beware of information overload!

URL

This can be used to link to external websites, and also content that tutors wish to store in a central institutional repository. Linking to content in a central repository reduces the amount of duplication uploading a common file to many modules for example. As such repositories have good search facilities it can also mean that staff do not need to create as many resources from scratch. Much better to use a resource developed by another tutor than re-create the wheel!

Library Resources

Book/E-Book



When considering referring students to printed books it is essential to liaise with the library and take the number of students who would be expected to use the material into consideration. Particularly when the title is essential reading and/or on several reading lists, only providing a single copy or small numbers of copies for large numbers of students can lead to long reservation queues, frustrations and

complaints from the students who might be working to tight assignment deadlines.

Printed books need to be prioritised using the PERB acronym:

- P = Purchase (i.e. the lecturer will encourage students to buy the book usually the major text(s) in the subject);
- E = Essential (i.e. text should be read by all students on a course at some time, maybe a chapter for a seminar);
- R = Recommended Reading (i.e. text is academically valid, but not essential reading);
- B = Background (i.e. extended reading not necessarily referred to in a reading list, or for those students keen to explore the subject area in more detail).

If a learning activity using this tool directly refers to a printed book then (R) and (B) can be ruled out, placing pressure on either the student and/or the library. For this reason, tutors are encouraged to explore the possibility of using an eBook.

An eBook is simply a book whose text is available in an electronic format for reading on a computer screen, or preferably a dedicated hand-held eBook reader. Some of these eBook readers use electronic ink rather than an LCD screen, and because of the reduced glare, flicker, and need for scrolling, the experience is much better.

The library will subscribe to a growing number of eBooks. One of the main benefits of eBooks is that they are available 24x7 from any computer with internet access. They also often have additional features over their library print counterparts, such as the ability to search the full text of the book, and the ability to add personal notes. Many eBooks are subject to copyright and so the amount of text you can download or print from them is restricted. As a guide copyright law allows you to print / copy no more than one chapter, or 5% of a work, whichever is the greater.

eBooks are proving to be valuable where a large number of students will be using the same text or for students who are away from the campus.

Database (Electronic)

An electronic database is an organised list of published information sources (usually journal articles), either giving directions (a citation) to where you can find the full information or containing the information itself (full-text databases).

Each information source has an individual record. Each record is made up of fields. Each field contains a different piece of information about the source. The database searches for information contained in these fields. Databases do not all function in the same way, but the same basic skills and knowledge will allow you to use most databases.

From a learning activity design point of view, electronic databases are very useful where the tutor requires the students to gain some information processing skills, and find resources for themselves as opposed to being spoon-fed with resources. In particular, learning activities involving the writing of a literature review can be very effective in some subjects.

Dissertations/Projects

It can be useful to refer students to previous projects and dissertations firstly as a source of relevant information for their own project/dissertation, and secondly to help them gauge what is required and what a good one looks like.

Exam Paper

Previous exam papers can be particularly useful where question practice is a major activity within the subject (for example: mathematics or accountancy).

In any subject where the summative assessment is an examination, reference to previous examinations will be helpful to the students as a good aid to revision. This is particularly true when the tutor designs learning activities to identify what the examiner was looking for, best ways to approach the questions, and even examples of answers that illustrate a range of marks from fail to first class.

Journals/E-Journals

Researchers and scholars publish their research as articles (or papers) in journals. These articles are published to disseminate knowledge to other scholars, scientists or experts in a subject area. Journal articles tend to be shorter, more current and focused on more specific topics than books. By reading the published journal literature in their field of study scholars keep up to date with the latest research findings. Journal literature presents a range of viewpoints on a topic and possibly contradictory research results.

Journals are published periodically and may also be known as periodicals or serials. Magazines, trade journals and newspapers are also periodicals but do not publish scholarly articles. Scholarly articles are published in scholarly journals. Peer-reviewed or refereed articles are published in peer-reviewed or refereed journals.

Again, liaise with the library to ensure that the required journal is stocked, and think about the number of students needing to access such articles. An electronic version may provide a number of advantages.

Sundry Resources

Handout

Hand-outs are resources prepared by the tutor to be used in class or to provide the students with supporting information for non-contact time. These might simply be copies of PowerPoint slides, but in this case it is suggested that these include notes and that the tutor does indeed encourage the students to write things down. The tutor might also prepare gapped hand-outs. These provide written notes of the lecture, but also include sections where the student is expected to write their own notes probably as a result of another activity such as a [buzz group](#). However, beware of infringement of copyright.

Media Resource

There are many resources such as: VHS videos; DVDs; CDs; images etc. that might not be held in the library. These might be private possessions of the tutor, or local resources within the faculty for example. Many media resources can help bring subjects alive and engage the students in their studies.

Physical Artefact

Objects from real life or from the real world, as opposed to theoretical constructs or fabricated examples; especially, such objects used as instructional or teaching aids. Use this shape when they are not located in the library.

Workbook

The term work-book is used here to describe comprehensive resources designed by the tutor following open learning design principles. Such work-books for any given topic usually have the learning outcomes stated explicitly, subject content written in a student-friendly style, in-built learning activities with space for the students to write, formative assessments such as multiple choice questions, and previous exam questions. Students bring them to class as an integral part of the teaching process, and also work on them in non-contact time, often in preparation for the next class. Such an approach front-loads preparation for the tutor, but does ease workload in the future.

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