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Assessment in pi LVs (courses with continuous assessment) (3)

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Designing partial achievements

Overview

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Your **student learning outcomes** serve as starting point when you design partial achievements, which are typical for pi LVs. Learning outcomes allow you to derive intermediate steps, i.e. partial achievements, that guide and support students in achieving the overall learning outcomes.

Since the examination process in pi LVs covers the entire duration of the course, it is important to create **opportunities for learning** that are either not **assessed at all or count little toward the final grade**. This helps to establish a teaching/learning culture in which making mistakes and learning from them can be used productively.

When you design partial achievements, consider the following interrelated aspects:

1. Number of partial achievements

When considering how many partial achievements to include in your course, keep in mind one fundamental provision of study law: A course (pi LV) has to include at least two oral or written partial achievements. As a teacher, you have great freedom in deciding the number of partial achievements

in your course, unless your programme's curriculum regulates them. Considering the number of partial achievements also requires thinking about their weight toward the overall grade [see 5. weighting].

As you decide how many partial achievements to include, also consider how reliably they measure student performance (more information on quality criteria of exams). In general, several moderately difficult tasks will lead to higher reliability than two very difficult tasks.^[1] However, designing more partial achievements, assessing them, and providing feedback to students usually results in a heavier workload for teachers.

Tip

Start with three to five partial achievements for your course. At the end of the semester, evaluate your assessment strategy, paying special attention to how your assessments' reliability relates to the amount of time you spent on them. If necessary, make adjustments when you teach the course again.

2. Design principles

Make sure to communicate to your students the **significance and purpose** of each partial achievement. Furthermore, create the **assignments** that make your expectations explicit. Doing so helps students stay oriented in your course.

Therefore, when you **design** partial achievements (or any task), devise them in such a way that the **significance is clear** to students and that they understand the task's **connection** to the **student learning outcomes** of the course. For more information, please see **assignments** (<https://infopool.univie.ac.at/en/start-page/teaching-advising/assignments/>).

You may offer students the **option to choose from different assignments**. However, it is important that these are comparable in difficulty and relate to similar competencies. Here are some examples:

- giving a short presentation or recording a discussion;
- creating a poster presentation or writing an analysis of a text.

Providing different options **benefits heterogeneous groups** of students who are at different levels in their competencies and skills. Furthermore, having options is desirable in terms of enabling **alternative or individual formats of learning and assessment**.

3. Designing accessible assessment

If **students with impairments** do not have equal opportunities in the specified mode of assessment, it is necessary to **compensate disadvantages** through different formats. The mode of assessment will be **adapted or flexibly designed** for the individual student, covering the **same content and requiring comparable performance**. Here are some options:

- **Alternative modes of assessment**, such as extended examination times for written examinations, oral examinations instead of written ones or vice versa, using sign language interpreters or speech-to-text interpreters, extended submission deadlines.
- **Alternative performance evaluation**, such as recording a presentation on video instead of giving an in-person presentation, written or oral delivery of an agreed assignment instead of attendance in courses with continuous assessment.

Students with impairments have a **legal right to be accommodated in assessment**. Teachers **proactively** provide relevant information to affected students, hence taking on a supportive and empowering role. Please contact the Accessibly Studying Team (<https://studieren.univie.ac.at/en/accessible-studies/changes-to-exams-and-teaching/>) for more information and advice. Students with impairments may **discontinue an examination or a course with continuous assessment** if they have a valid reason, in which case the attempt (in case of an exam) or deregistering (in the case of a course with continuous assessment) is not counted. Discontinuing an exam or deregistering from a course therefore has **no consequences** for the students concerned. Please contact the Accessibly Studying Team (<https://studieren.univie.ac.at/en/accessible-studies/changes-to-exams-and-teaching/>) for more details and information on procedures.

4. Sequencing

When you design partial achievement tasks, make sure they constitute a **meaningful order** in terms of knowledge and competence development, along with appropriate degrees of complexity. Consider what a **suitable sequence of tasks for setting up the learning process** might look like and which **chronological order** makes sense for these partial achievements. A solid temporal sequence throughout the semester is **particularly relevant for formative partial achievements**. They usually include feedback, and often require corrections and further work steps, which needs sufficient time.

Sequencing partial achievements can follow **different logic**.^[2]

- **Repetition:** You choose an assignment format and vary its content several times. For example, you could choose the analytical essay format and require students to write several short essays on different texts throughout the semester. This approach uses repetition to consolidate and refine students' competencies.
- **Scaffolding:** Simple partial achievements, which may constitute preparatory work for the final product, are followed by increasingly complex tasks.
- **Portioning:** When you have a complex partial achievement that is of central importance for your course, you break it up into smaller, component parts. Students work on these different elements separately, which may support them in successfully completing the larger task.

In a **course with several small partial achievements** and assignments, it is particularly important to convey to the students **how these relate to each other** and to **establish their relationship to the overall learning outcomes**. Clarifying the purpose and the goal of each partial achievement regarding the big picture supports students in their goal orientation.

Tip for portioning a partial achievement into smaller parts

If the assignment is to write an exposé on topic x, for example, treat each component separately (topic, literature review, research question, ...). For example, to support your students before they tackle their own literature reviews, have them analyse various literature reviews to learn about the format, procedure, and language. This also establishes an important link to the overall project, as the literature review is crucial for identifying research gaps in a topic and for developing appropriate research questions.

5. Weighting

In addition to selecting and sequencing partial achievements, you also decide how much they weigh toward the final grade. Again, use the courses' learning outcomes as starting point for your considerations. Making different competencies visible requires different assignments. Using partial achievements can therefore serve different purposes. Keep the following **principle** in mind: The weight of the student learning outcomes influences how to **weight the partial achievements**.

Example: Weighting a seminar paper

In a seminar, the teacher decides on the ability to discuss theories from a comparative perspective as a central student learning outcome and communicates this to the students. At the same time, the final seminar paper is the main indicator for the teacher to reveal the extent to which students have acquired this skill. Thus, it makes sense to choose the seminar paper to carry the heaviest weight for the final grade.

Note on study law: If a failing grade on a single partial achievement can result in a negative overall grade, you are obliged to offer students a so-called opportunity for improvement. In the case of seminar papers, this can mean to choose an earlier deadline so that students have time to react to your feedback, either by revising the seminar paper or in a different form (e.g. an oral conversation with the teacher or a written test).

According to study law, partial achievements have to be **used for final assessment in an appropriate, fair and comprehensible manner**. Please consider the following points:

- **Spread partial assessments across the semester** in order to realise the potential of pi LVs by using feedback on several assignments to support student learning.
- Assign weights in such a way that **a positive grade is based on more than one partial achievement**. If there are good reasons for only one partial achievement to decide the grade, you have to prepare students well for it and provide an opportunity to improve their work if necessary.
- You can ensure comprehensible assessment by making the **assessment criteria** transparent, reasonable and coherent for students, especially regarding how the individual partial achievements are weighted. If you modify the criteria, the changes must be to the advantage of the students. Furthermore, you are required to notify your class and communicate the changes in the course directory.

6. Class Participation

If you decide to grade participation, define it and explain your expectations. Students need information about what teachers **expect content-wise** and when and how participation is assessed.

Study law does not allow equating mere student attendance with participation.

Participation can include oral, written, and practical **student contributions in class**, as well as completing **homework assignments** and various other work relating to **preparing and following up on course content**. These activities can be carried out **individually**, in **pairs**, or in **groups**, meaning that participation can be more than active involvement in on-site classes.^[3] Especially when we consider digital teaching formats with asynchronous work phases, it becomes obvious that a narrow understanding of participation as oral participation in the classroom is inadequate.

If you decide to include **participation** in your assessment plan, we recommend you consider the following points for orientation and transparency:

- Describe **all aspects** that count as participation in as much detail as possible. Keep in mind that the desired participation must be **attainable** for students. For example, in large classes participation in the form of oral contributions can be an unattainable goal because of time constraints.
- Provide **options for active participation**. Participation, understood as active and reasonable engagement in and outside the classroom, opens up many possibilities: minutes or proceedings, a learning journal, content-related or reflective self-assessment on participation in the course, homework, online quizzes, forum posts, etc.^[4] These tools also work well in remote teaching or in hybrid teaching formats (i.e. a combination on-site and remote teaching). Communicating your **assessment criteria** or perhaps even developing them together with your students clarifies your expectations and helps to avoid misunderstandings.
- Explain when you grade the **quantity** (the number of times a student contributes) and when you assess the **quality** of participation. For example, you could assess oral and written contributions to what extent
 - they include the discipline-specific discourse is taken up or
 - new perspectives are expressed or
 - contributions refer to text, theories or concepts or whether they are mere opinions.^[5]

References:

- [1] Bücken, Susanne, Meike Deimling, Janina Durduman, Julia Holzhäuser, Sophie Schnieders, Maria Tietze, Sharmina Sayeed and Michael Schneider. „Prüfung.“ In *Gute Hochschullehre: Eine evidenzbasierte Orientierungshilfe: Wie man Vorlesungen, Seminare und Projekte effektiv gestaltet*, edited by Michael Schneider and Maida Mustafić, 119–152. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2015, 127.
- [2] Schoenike Nowacek, Rebecca, and Brad Hughes, "Sequencing Assignments over the Course of a Semester." [last accessed on 08.10.2020]
- [3] Higher education literature differentiates between "class participation" and "course participation". The latter means activities in and outside the classroom. See Peterson, Robert M. . "Course Participation: An Active Learning Approach Employing Student Documentation." *Journal of Marketing Education* 23, Nr. 3 (2001): 187–194.
- [4] Wright, Jessey. "Participation in the Classroom: Classification and Assessment Techniques." *Teaching Innovation Projects* 4, Nr. 1 (2014). <https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/tips/article/view/3654/2877> [last accessed on 23.09.2020]
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