Chapter 6: Activity 6.1

Evaluating and Improving Essay Tests

# 1. Directions

Use the scaffolded steps below to develop and evaluate a prompt for an essay designed to assess some aspects of students’ language or other subject-based learning. Review the essay prompt yourself or get a colleague to review it, drawing on the scaled checklist below in Step 6. If necessary, redevelop the prompt based on the evaluation.

# 2. Context for Essay.

Identify students’ age/year group and curriculum area of inquiry.

Age/Year: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Subject: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# 3. Learning Outcomes.

Identify learning outcome(s) to be achieved by students in engaging with the essay.

The student should:

1.

2.

3.

# 4. Content & Skills.

List they key content knowledge and skills that should be demonstrated by students.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Content knowledge | Skills |

# 5. Essay Prompt/Question.

Now write an essay item designed to assess the learning outcome(s) you have identified.

# 6. Evaluate the Prompt.

The rating scale below will help you to evaluate the quality of the essay prompt. Apply this scale to your prompt and then revise your item to improve it.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **No** | **Unsure** | **Yes** | **Comment/modification** |
| 1 | This is the most appropriate type of task to use, given learning outcomes |  |  |  |  |
| 2 | The prompt assesses higher order learning outcomes. |  |  |  |  |
| 3 | Students can demonstrate relevant knowledge and skills. |  |  |  |  |
| 4 | Students will know what they are expected to do in responding to the prompt. |  |  |  |  |
| 5 | Students are told the basis on which their answers will be evaluated. |  |  |  |  |
| 6 | The importance attached to quality of language in assessing responses is clear to students. |  |  |  |  |
| 7 | Students have sufficient time to complete the essay. |  |  |  |  |
| 8 | Prompt is equally appropriate for all students in the class. |  |  |  |  |
| 9 | Rubrics are available to guide assessment of the responses. |  |  |  |  |
| 10 | Rubrics are equally appropriate for all students in the class. |  |  |  |  |

# 7. Revised Essay Prompt.

Depending on your reflections above, redraft your essay prompt.

# 8. Differentiating the Prompt.

If appropriate, use the space below to develop separate prompts or grading rubrics to reflect the needs of different learners in class.