



- ▶ How can I use an oral (viva) assessment to increase authenticity and minimise cheating?
- ▶ How can interactive oral assessments (vivas) be graded?

What are Vivas?

Vivas (short for viva voce meaning live voice) is a test conducted by spoken word rather than in writing and it is assessed on the spot. In recent years this traditional form of assessment has been mostly used for defending a thesis. Currently, however, vivas are recommended to counteract contract cheating as it is not possible for a student being tested by viva to submit work prepared by somebody else. Vivas can be used to enhance student learning by encouraging students to focus their learning on critical matters. A group from Griffith University re-characterised vivas as interactive orals, stating: 'An interactive oral (previously known as a viva voce exam) is an opportunity for genuine and unscripted interaction between a student and other students or a student and an examiner. Specifically, students can demonstrate knowledge verbally in an authentic setting representative of what would be encountered in the workplace' (Sotiriadou et al, 2019, p. 1-2).

Designing the assessment task

As in any assessment the design of the assessment task is important. Considerations such as ensuring that the unit assessment validates student attainment of unit learning outcomes are critical. Linking to the learning outcomes may suggest aspects that need to be included in the viva.

One important consideration is whether the viva should be related to previous written work or is a standalone task. If it is related to written work, then the student can be questioned on the previous work in the viva and encouraged to probe more deeply into the ideas expressed in the previous work. This can be a way of checking that the work is the student's own as well as an opportunity to explore the implications for the topic further.

The viva may also provide an opportunity for students to adopt a professional role related to the unit or course, such as a nurse or consultant. This can provide additional authenticity and motivation to learn and prepare for the viva.

DESIGNING AND ASSESSING VIVAS

Examples of design approaches from different disciplines

The following examples may provide some guidance on designing the viva:

- ▶ In a unit focussed on designing and planning an MA, students were asked to write a short paper outlining their potential dissertation project, articulating and justifying the theoretical basis and intended methodology. Two weeks later they had a ten-minute viva with their tutor. The focus of the viva was on following up what they had written with questions that would help the student to identify and overcome design weaknesses or flaws in methodology. Through this process students could increase or decrease their grade, depending on their ability to think through the issues raised in the discussion and to resolve potential problems with their proposal (Sayce, 2007).
- ▶ In a fundamentals of pharmacology subject in a medical school, vivas are used to test theoretical knowledge, combined with attitude, skill and communication that cannot be evaluated by written tests or exams. The format used was called the objective structured viva examination. The objective structured approach was developed to eliminate marker biases in assessment. Questions for the viva were structured with an initial query and a follow-up leading question. Questions are set with increasing levels of difficulty in accordance with Bloom's Taxonomy of cognitive outcomes, to ensure that higher order outcomes are tested. The viva format was found to correlate well with written examination formats, showing that a comprehensive and meaningful assessment can be achieved in this format (Imran et al, 2019).
- ▶ Occupational Therapy students were given a performance skills assessment using a viva. Anecdotally, students often express feelings of anxiety when faced with a viva – probably due to lack of experience with this assessment format. This study found that while the students experienced high levels of anxiety before the skills assessment, these feelings reduced during the assessment and did not impact negatively on their performance. The students also reported that anxiety was not necessarily more than that experienced before a written exam (Welsh, 2012).
- ▶ In a sport management course, students focussed on an authentic task by conducting a case study of a local sport organisation. In a written assignment students investigated the organisational structures, governance and decision making, and strategic management using a SWOT analysis. The final interactive oral examination (viva) assessment took the form of a mock job interview for a position in the organisation they used for their case study. The unique content in their written work was used as a basis for question in their interactive oral (Sotiriadou et al, 2019).
- ▶ In an international management course students worked in small groups in the role of management consultants for an Australian organisation that wanted to expand its business operations in other countries. Each student wrote a report to the company about opportunities in a particular country. The final interactive oral examination took the form of a client interview in which students were asked questions relating to their report. This, as in the example above, was intended to add authenticity and complexity to the assessment task, to motivate student learning with an appropriate focus, to develop employability skills, as well as ensuring academic integrity. The process is illustrated in Figure 1 (Sotiriadou et al, 2019).

DESIGNING AND ASSESSING VIVAS

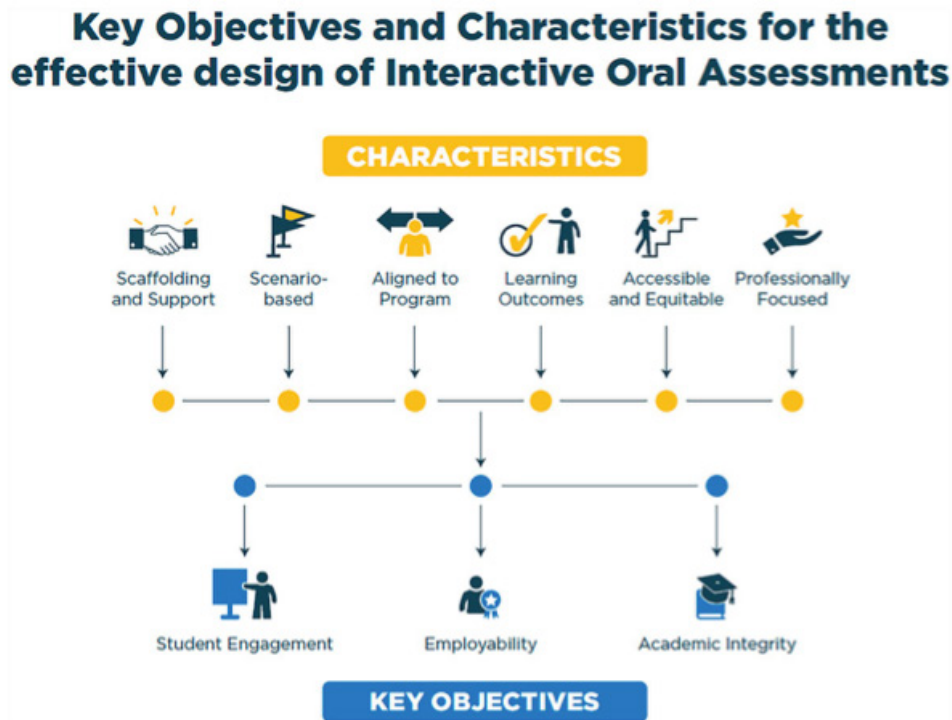


Figure 1. Proposed Framework for Authentic Assessment Design: Interactive Oral Assessment as Authentic Assessment Design (Sotiriadou et al, 2019).

Preparing students for vivas

It may help students to know what to expect when they are faced with a viva assessment. In the example above on sport management, the team at Griffith University prepared students for the viva by making a video of a mock interview, and sharing this along with assessment guidelines and the marking rubric.

Marking viva assessments

As can be seen from the discipline specific examples above, viva assessments can be designed to enable in-depth questioning to probe for strengths and weaknesses in the student's learning. This is a way to encourage deep learning as there are no standard responses that the students can simply reproduce or prepare to ensure success. Vivas can therefore contribute to ensuring that higher order learning outcomes are being attained and should be assessed accordingly.

Rubrics should be developed to clarify the range of criteria and standards required, so that they can be assessed in the same way that a written assignment is assessed. An important difference is that vivas are assessed on the spot, so that the rubric needs to be structured to support this. Ensure that the criteria and standards are clear to enable consistent marking and to remove perceptions of bias if different markers are assessing the same viva task for different students.

Please follow the links below to see examples of rubrics that can be adapted for your purposes:

- ▶ [Assessment resource](#) from Hong Kong University
- ▶ Developed by Griffith University for [interactive oral examinations](#)
- ▶ [Viva rubrics for medicine](#)

DESIGNING AND ASSESSING VIVAS

Technical considerations

Vivas are live interactions. When face to face is not possible, Zoom, Blackboard Collaborate, Teams, or any other video interactive system may be used. If the markers do not know their students well, students may be required to show their student card photo ID at the beginning of the viva as an identity check.

Useful links

See the previous links in the section on marking for example rubrics. Other useful links are:

Griffith University resources on interactive oral examinations:

- ▶ [Interactive Oral Assessment: an authentic and integral alternative to examination](#)
- ▶ [Interactive Oral Assessment Resource - OER](#)

References

Imran, M., Doshi, C., and Kharadi, D. (2019). Structured and unstructured viva voce assessment: A double-blind, randomized, comparative evaluation of medical students. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, Vol. 13, Issue 2.

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Welsh, P. (2012). How first year occupational therapy students rate the degree to which anxiety negatively impacts on their performance in skills assessments: A pilot study at the University of South Australia. *ergo*, vol. 3, no.2