Oral Assessment

What is an Oral Assessment?

An oral assessment is a direct means of assessing students' learning outcomes by questioning them. Unlike interviews which usually have a structured question list, oral assessment does not usually have a structured list of questions; assessors ask questions and request responses depending on the circumstances.

There are three typical types of oral assessments:

1. Oral assessment after a direct observation assessment

    An oral assessment is often used as part of a de-briefing session after a practical has been observed. The time duration is usually 3-5 minutes. There is usually no formal structure, assessors usually ask questions as they foresee, however, assessors may plan some general questions in which all students will encounter during the practical.

2. Oral in the form of a viva voce

    A viva voce is the Latin name for oral examination, often given for a university examination with spoken questions and answers. It is usually used to describe the oral examination at a postgraduate level, conducted after the submission of the thesis for a research degree to ensure that the candidate knows enough about the subject to make it at least plausible that the dissertation is his own work. Vivas are traditionally conducted by an external and an internal examiner. There is no set time limit for a viva voce, but a full day examination is often normal.

3. Oral/Aural in a language setting

    Oral in a language setting is a direct speaking test geared at assessing a student's level of speaking proficiency. Aural in a language setting is a listening test (often by devices such as tapes) geared at assessing a student's level of hearing proficiency.

Questions ask in classroom setting do not contribute as oral assessments, as not all students have the benefits of being assessed.

Structure of Oral Assessment

The structure of an oral assessment depends on the type of oral assessment, but in general, the followings are used.

1. Depend on which type of oral assessments, it is sometimes desirable to allow the student to start the oral assessment by giving an account of the analysis of the practice. The sophistication of his spontaneous account can reveal far more than simply his responses to the questions. Questions such as: How do you think you did?

2. Probing questions – to initiate and engage the student in conversation. Questions such as: How did you know that? What method did you use to arrive with that conclusion?

3. Prompting questions – to give hints that point the student to the right direction to clarify his response, this however does not mean the assessor answers the questions himself. Questions such as: Remember the experiment on xx? What do you think this relates to?

4. Challenging questions – to assess the deep understanding - the higher level of Blooms taxonomy. Questions such as: Can you justify why your method is more efficient than Prof. Einstein's?

Y	Declarative	
Y	Functioning	
	Take Time to Set	
Y	Take Time to Answer	
	Take Time to Correct	
Y	Take Time to provide Feedback	**CHARACTERISTICS**
	Suitable for Large Class	
	Can substitute with Computers	
	Passive	
Y	Active	
Y	Process Oriented Method	
Y	Product Oriented Method	

P = Possibly   Y =Yes

Advantages of Oral Assessment

- There can be no plagiarism or false reports.
- Assessors receive immediate reactions and responses.
- It complements perfectly with practical assessments.

Disadvantages of Oral Assessment

- Oral assessment is very time-consuming, it is an expensive way of assessing.
- Validity is high but reliability is not. Clear assessment criteria and grading are required for all parties so that students and assessors are fully aware of how the performance will be judged to increase reliability.
- There are rarely any clear guidelines about what is fair to judge at a viva. There have been some contentious cases that the assessor has rejected or even failed a dissertation because the assessor is unwilling to accept the results of a candidate due to difference in opinions. Although there will be examiners' reports, there is rarely any record of the process itself to ensure its fairness.
- Oral assessment may present significant difficulties for international students or students with certain impairments, who may require access to an alternative type of assessment that provides an acceptable test of learning outcomes. Students with some other impairments may be able to undertake oral assessment but may require some adjustments in order to have an equal footing.
- Immediate feedback is useful, but sometimes that is difficult due to time constraints.
- Oral assessment is usually ephemeral, and dissenting views may later be contested if notes or recordings are not documented clearly.

How to design a good Oral Assessment?

1. Ensure the students know what the objectives of the assessment are.
2. Provide students the time period, location, guidelines, requirements, assessment criteria and if there are items that are not to be included. The students should also be aware of who is going to assess them – tutor, peers and/or self? And if peers or themselves are going to assess, would the weightings be the same as the tutor's assessment?
3. Prepare a structured marking sheet for all assessors.
4. Give sufficient time for students to respond.
5. Teacher should incorporate oral assessment into the practice of teaching during class, e.g. how to think out loud.

Marking Rubrics

Below is a sample of marking rubrics and grading standards for an oral assessment after a direct observation assessment: (From Recipe for Success, accessed 05 July 2008

http://myt4l.com/index.php?v=pl&page_ac=view&type=tools&tool=rubricmaker)

MARKING RUBRICS	Excellent	Proficient	Average	Poor
Content: Relates to topic, detailed, and accurate	All content directly related to the topic. Opinions were always supported by fact if possible.	Content directly related to the topic. Almost all opinions were supported by facts.	Demonstrated Basic understanding of the topic. Many opinions were not supported by facts.	Few facts related to the topic. Most Information was opinion.
Knowledge: Demonstrate knowledge of subject	Showed a thorough knowledge of the topic. Able to use assessor questions to further demonstrate understanding of the topic. Appeared to be an expert on the subject being presented	Showed a working knowledge of the topic. Able to satisfactorily answer assessor questions and provided additional information upon request.	Showed basic knowledge of the topic. Able to address assessor questions by repeating parts of the presentation - did not provide any additional information.	Showed little or no knowledge of the topic. Unable to answer assessor questions or comment further on any part of the presentation.
Posture/Eye Contact: Appropriate posture and effective eye contact	Stood upright and appeared confident throughout. Avoided rocking, shifting, and other nervous behavior. Made eye contact throughout the assessors.	Posture was good for most of the presentation. Made eye contact numerous times during presentation. Did not rely too heavily on notes or visual aids.	Sometimes rocked, shifted, or appeared uncomfortable. Made occasional eye contact with one or two audience members. Did not rely too heavily on notes or visual aids	Posture was poor. Slouched, shifted from foot to foot, and appeared very uncomfortable. Made almost no eye contact with the audience. Looked down at notes or visual aids.
Enthusiasm: Energetic, confident, not frenetic	Appeared enthusiastic and confident at all times. Moderated level of excitement to hold audience's attention.	Appeared enthusiastic and confident at all times. May have appeared overly enthusiastic at times. Held audience interest	Showed some confident and little excitement about the topic. Attempted to modify behavior to engage audience on	Showed little or no enthusiasm about the topic. Nervous. Did not moderate level of excitement in response to audience

		for most of the time.	one or more occasions. Lost attention of some audience members.	reaction. Lost audience interest.
Audience: Engage and interact with audience	Moderated speaking style based on audience feedback. Calmly and eloquently addressed audience questions and comments. Engaged audience for the duration of the presentation.	Adjusted volume, pace, and enthusiasm several times. Answered audience questions and addressed comments. Presenter adjusted enthusiasm or pace to hold audience attention.	Spoke more loudly when requested by audience members. Presenter was clearly uncomfortable. Presenter attempted to adjust enthusiasm or pace to hold audience attention.	Did not adjust speaking style based on audience reaction. Could not answer audience questions. Presenter made no visible effort to hold audience interest.
Pace: Speaks at an appropriate pace	Speaker adjusted pace to stay within allotted time. Speaker answered audience questions without overdo it or covered additional material if there were no questions	Speaker's pace was appropriate throughout	Tended to speak too quickly or too slowly.	Consistently spoke too fast or too slow.

Below is another sample of marking rubrics and grading standards for an oral assessment after a direct observation assessment: (Swarthmore College, Friends Select School, Rubrics, accessed 07 July 2008

http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/Education/Portfolios/efeltma1/dialoguerubric.htm)

MARKING RUBRICS	Excellent	Proficient	Average	Poor
Content:	Speaker consistently uses the appropriate functions and vocabulary necessary to communicate	Speaker generally uses the appropriate functions and vocabulary necessary to communicate.	Speaker sometimes uses the appropriate functions and vocabulary necessary to communicate.	Speaker uses few of the appropriate functions and vocabulary necessary to communicate.
Accuracy:	Speaker uses language correctly, including grammar, spelling, word order, and punctuation.	Speaker usually uses language correctly, including grammar, spelling, word order, and punctuation.	Speaker has some problems with language usage.	Speaker makes many errors in language usage.
Fluency:	Speaker speaks clearly without hesitation. Pronunciation and intonation sound natural.	Speaker has few problems with hesitation, pronunciation, and/or intonation.	Speaker has some problems with hesitation, pronunciation, and/or intonation.	Speaker hesitates frequently and struggles with pronunciation and intonation.
Comprehensibility:	Listener understands all of what the speakers are trying to communicate.	Listener understands most of what the speakers are trying to communicate.	Listener understands less than half of what the speakers are trying to communicate.	Listener understands little of what the speakers are trying to communicate.

Web Reference and Resources

Oral Assessment

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- Steps in creating authentic and performance-based assessment tasks, Public Schools of North Carolina, Dept of Public Instruction, Standard Course of Study, Accessed: 07 July 2008
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Tips for Students

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