

4 Self-assessment

In this section:

- make the most of the self-assessed questions and exercises
- develop a critical approach to your work
- develop a strategy for self-assessment
- compose your own assessment criteria

What is self-assessment?

Self-assessment is a process of critical analysis of your own work that will help you to:

- improve the overall quality of your work; and
- help you diagnose any difficulties you may have, early and efficiently.

You are asked to participate in self-assessment as a part of your studies by:

- undertaking the self-assessed questions and exercises provided for each module; and
- by assessing your own assignments prior to them being assessed by your tutor.

Self-assessed questions and exercises

The self-assessed questions and exercises are self-explanatory. The simplest type of question helps you to test your level of comprehension of the section you are reading. Occasionally, you are specifically asked to consider your own opinions in the light of information presented to you. The exercises help you to acquire particular skills along with the ability to apply them. In most cases, model answers are provided. Try not to consult these before seriously attempting the questions or exercises, as they will then be less useful to you.

Although the self-assessed questions and exercises do not 'count' towards your final mark for the module, they are an integral part of your study programme and can help you when you are compiling material for your assignments. It is worth spending time working through the questions and exercises, making notes to refer to later.

If you do have difficulties completing an exercise you can always return to it later. Returning to a problem after thought

and in the light of new information is sometimes all that you will need to do to reach an understanding of the particular issue. On other occasions, consult the specimen answer to follow the logic or procedures for solving the problem. If you still have problems, you may decide to consult your tutor by emailing or telephoning the responsible examiner (module tutor) directly, or sending a request by post.

The following section introduces you to other processes of self-assessment, encouraging you to build regular self-reflection into your own learning programme. Self-assessment can be summative or formative.

Summative self-assessment

This involves formal, objective assessment at the end of an assignment.

Formative self-assessment

You can adopt a critical and reflective approach throughout your work and at the start of a new assignment.

Summative assessment

Assessing your own work privately helps you to develop a personal insight into your abilities and achievements. Before assessing your own work, it is a good idea to establish criteria against which it can be assessed. This will help you critically appraise your work. It can be hard to adopt a distanced approach when you have been actively involved in preparing an assignment that is likely to have involved considerable time and effort. Setting criteria will help you do this. An obvious starting point is to assess an assignment against the criteria set in the question(s). To draft your own criteria, consider what it is that makes for a good piece of work.

The criteria may include:

- an informative and concise introduction (this is often not required for short answers);
- clearly stated objectives (this is often not required for short answers);
- a clear structure;
- handling of complex arguments;
- an informative conclusion (this is often not required for short answers);
- appropriate use of visual materials; and
- a word limit or page limit.

Of course, the criteria will vary according to the nature of the assignment you are undertaking.

Once you have drafted criteria you are happy with, it is time to gauge your work against them.

To do this you need to focus on the way the work relates to your criteria rather than on the actual piece itself.





If you are evaluating an essay, for example, you may like to adopt a different reading style, focusing more on the broad issues rather than a detailed word-by-word analysis.

Tick or score your work against the objective criteria.

From this, generate comments stating what particular points:

- deserve praise; or
- indicate problems or weaknesses.

Finally, try to summarize your performance in one short paragraph. This will help clarify your feelings and perceptions of your own work.

Formative assessment

We continually assess our output on an informal basis, gauging our feelings and sense of satisfaction.

However, this ongoing appraisal and awareness of our development can be enhanced through the use of more objective assessment.

Self-assessment can be essential at the following times:

- Before you start — when planning an activity: What do you want to achieve?
- Work in progress — how are you getting along?
- Prior to submission — any last minute checks and changes?

Before you start

Set objectives:

- How do I want this work to evolve?
- What information do I want to include?
- What is being asked of me? (i.e. what are the criteria?) and
- What do I want to learn?

Objectives should be written down so that you can have them with you throughout a piece of work.

This will help you keep focused and encourage you to evaluate your work once it is completed.



Be realistic when setting objectives

Ask what you can actually achieve rather than what you would wish to achieve.



Work in progress

Make an actual break in your work programme, then come back and review the work you have done so far. Concentrate

on broader issues. Regularly appraise your development throughout a piece of work by asking yourself:

- How am I doing for time?
- How am I meeting my objectives?
- Am I including everything I want to?
- Am I fulfilling my responsibilities to others?
- Am I having any problems
 - finding information?
 - using equipment?
 - working with others? or
 - working on my own?



Before it is seen

Before you submit an assignment, try to make sure that you have allowed yourself enough time to review the piece as a whole. This may be the time to check minor details. Compare the final outcome with your initial objectives to give you a general overview of how you have developed the piece of work. Check that you have actually answered any questions posed in an assignment. You may identify problem areas even at this stage.

Ask yourself:

- What needs changing, if anything?
- What am I unsure about?
- Is there anything I have left out?
- Have I included too much? and
- How can these issues be rectified easily and quickly?



Further information: See also the advice in Section 5 and Section 9 on preparing assignments.

Consultation

At all stages, make sure you have an opportunity to talk over any difficulties with others, such as the responsible examiner, your guarantor (if you are studying by distance learning) or your friends and colleagues. If you are encountering severe or recurrent problems, please let us know. You can contact other distance learning students through the WEDC distance learning discussion list and in some cases through module discussion forums.

Conclusion

Self-assessment can be an invaluable tool in developing an awareness of your working methods and encouraging objective self-examination.

A little time spent objectively evaluating your own work is likely to greatly improve your own sense of satisfaction and will help improve the overall quality and, therefore, the success of your studies.