

Assessment strategies for the English Department



Heavily inspired by
Prof. Raphaël Pasquini's
teachings (HEP-VD)



Read **chapters 5 & 6** freely
available:

[https://muse.jhu.edu/book/
82113](https://muse.jhu.edu/book/82113)

Assessment brings along anxieties and tensions

PROBLEMS WE FACE:

- We may have **too many students** but **too little time** to assess their work.
- We don't want to **lose time counting points** or to decide between a spectrum of gradable adjectives (*excellent vs. very good vs. good vs. satisfactory vs. very bad vs. bad ...*)
- The grading scale presented by [UNIL](#) can't solely be used to assess students.
- We fear that assessment grids are too rigid and don't let students be creative.

WE NEED:

Assessment grids that are **easy to use**, **save time** in providing targeted feedback, **avoid point-calculations**, align with **UNIL's scale**, and are **concise**, yet broad enough to give students the freedom to showcase their creativity and originality.

Need to control our subjectivity

- Subjectivity is omnipresent when assessing. Our job is to be mindful of **different biases** so that we can turn the whole process more reliable and “objective”:

TIREDFNESS

the more papers you assess in a row, the more tired and severe you become

HALO EFFECT

Language form & aesthetic influence our perception of the content

CONTAMINATION EFFECT

The evaluation of a first part influences the evaluation of the second part

CORRECTION ORDER EFFECT

The quality of one assignment influences our judgment of the next one

PYGMALION EFFECT

Our beliefs about students influence our judgment

NORMAL DISTRIBUTION EFFECT

We are afraid to under/over-assess students and we force them into an average

4 COUNTER ACTIONS:



take breaks



anonymize copies with students' ID numbers



Correct the same question across copies



Create assessment grids

Be aware of 3 assessment paradigms

1. PRAGMATIC INTUITION

- judgments based on teachers' **beliefs and subjectivity**
- assessment is **vague** and **lacks systematic evidence**

EFFECT ON STUDENTS:

**UNFAIR, BIASED &
NO CLEAR IDEA ON
HOW TO IMPROVE**

2. MEASURABLE ASSESSMENT

- assumes that **learning is quantifiable**
- need **unit of measurement** (points / grades)
- gives us the **impression of objectivity**
- creates **compensation effect**

**COMPETITION,
COMPARISON &
NEGOTIATE TO
GET ENOUGH
POINTS**

3. ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

- assumes that **learning is NOT quantifiable**
- encourages students to become **conscious** of their learning
- valorizes students' **progress and efforts**
- based on **criteria** and teachers' **professional judgments**
- **supports learning process** in order to **avoid failure**

**SUPPORTIVE
& INFORMED &
DIRECTLY KNOWS
HOW TO IMPROVE**

Assessment tools according to cognitive skills taxonomy

- When choosing what assessment tools to use, we should be mindful of which **cognitive skills** we want to assess:

High-level

Creation

Evaluation

Analysis

Application

Understanding

Remembering

ASSIGNMENT:

Essays, posters, oral presentations, creative writing, peer-feedback, portfolios, ...

ASSESSMENT TOOL:

Criteria/rubrics → grade

Low-level

ASSIGNMENT:

true/false, multiple choice, fact testing

ASSESSMENT TOOL: points → average → grade

Special case: mixing points and criteria

- Each **criterion** should ideally contain a unique/single element that we want to assess.
- Each **criterion** should be worth **a finite amount of points**.
- Be mindful of the **point weight** accorded to each **criterion**.

Example from our Linguistics assessment form:

Style, grammar and vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5	6
<input type="checkbox"/> TENSE USE						
<input type="checkbox"/> COMPLEX STRUCTURES (CLAUSE COMBINING)						
<input type="checkbox"/> OVERALL GRAMMATICALITY						
<input type="checkbox"/> ACADEMIC FORMAL REGISTER						
<input type="checkbox"/> CONCISENESS						
<input type="checkbox"/> WORD FORM & SPELLING (INCLUDING CONSISTENT USE OF ADOPTED VARIETY OF ENGLISH)						
<input type="checkbox"/> PUNCTUATION						
<input type="checkbox"/> VARIATION / AVOID REPETITION OF WORDS AND PHRASES [NB: SEE MANCHESTER ACADEMIC PHRASEBANK FOR HELP - HTTP://WWW.PHRASEBANK.MANCHESTER.AC.UK/]						
<input type="checkbox"/> APPROPRIATENESS OF TERMINOLOGY AND STYLE						

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

1 criterion = X pts | Total: / Y pts

Completely avoid points, but determine **fundamental vs. enhancement criteria**

PROBLEM: 6 points for 9 criteria → how can we attribute points?

Example of assessment grid for Linguistics oral exam

	QUESTION 1 The student is able to:	QUESTION 2 The student is able to:	COMMUNICATION	INNACURACIES + FEEDBACK
FUNDAMENTAL CRITERIA (FC) to get 4	<input type="checkbox"/> address the question by elucidating its complexity. <input type="checkbox"/> define and explain the relevant theoretical notions/methods. <input type="checkbox"/> refer to their reading list to back up their arguments and explanations (explicitly refer to the author, year of publication). <input type="checkbox"/> provide examples from their reading list to back up their arguments and explanations.	<input type="checkbox"/> address the question by elucidating its complexity. <input type="checkbox"/> define and explain the relevant theoretical notions/methods. <input type="checkbox"/> refer to their reading list to back up their arguments and explanations (explicitly refer to the author, year of publication). <input type="checkbox"/> provide examples from their reading list to back up their arguments and explanations.		
ENHANCEMENT CRITERIA (EC) to get more than 4	<input type="checkbox"/> connect the question to other topics (establish comparisons to highlight differences or similarities, refer to other theories covered in class, etc.). <input type="checkbox"/> critically examine the question and fully engage in a discussion that goes beyond the readings (establish links to their own observations/class discussions/speculations, highlight bias induced by methodology, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/> connect the question to other topics (establish comparisons to highlight differences or similarities, refer to other theories covered in class, etc.). <input type="checkbox"/> critically examine the question and fully engage in a discussion that goes beyond the readings (establish links to their own observations/class discussions/speculations, highlight bias induced by methodology, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/> express themselves clearly (no difficulty in understanding them). <input type="checkbox"/> use Academic English.	

- Our job during the exam is to **ask questions** that allow students to **check the fundamental criteria**.
- Students who **don't check all fundamental criteria**, fail the assignment. Re-writes focus on the failed criteria only.

ADVANTAGES:

- The **grade** reflects students' **acquired skills**.
- Avoids **compensation effects**.
- It's **easy to use**.

DISADVANTAGES:

- **Takes time** to build it at first, but you get faster with time.
- **Danger** of formulating **unspecific criteria**.

GRADING SCALE

1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5	5.5	6
1 FC	2 FC	3 FC	4 FC	5 FC	6-7 FC	8 FC	8 FC + 1 EC	8 FC + 2 EC	8 FC + 3-4 EC	8 FC + 5-6 EC

Step-by-step approach to create a descriptive grade

Step-by-step approach to create a descriptive grade

1. Formulate **at least 2 fundamental criteria (FC)** that students need to meet in order to produce the **expected output** and thus to **pass with the grade 4**.
2. Formulate **4 or more enhancement criteria (EC)** that allow students to go **beyond the grade 4**, once all the fundamental criteria are checked.
3. **Group criteria** into categories relevant to the assignment (content, form, communication).



The criteria have to be **aligned** with the **learning objectives** and the **content** covered in class.



Careful with the **formulation** of the criteria that focuses on **demonstrable behaviors**. Write:

➤ *Student is able to* + **ACTION VERB** (see next slide) + ACADEMIC CONTENT

Step-by-step approach to create a descriptive grade

4. Attribute the number of criteria to the grading scale:

If you have 6 fundamental criteria (FC) and 4 enhancement criteria (EC):

1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5	5.5	6
0 FC	1 FC	2 FC	3 FC	4 FC	5 FC	6 FC	6 FC+ 1 EC	6 FC+ 2 EC	6 FC+ 3 EC	6 FC+ 4 EC

If you have 9 FC and 5 EC:

1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5	5.5	6
0 FC	1 FC	2-3 FC	4-5 FC	6-7 FC	8 FC	9 FC	9 FC+ 1 EC	9 FC+ 2 EC	9 FC+ 3-4 EC	9 FC+ 5 EC

If you have 4 FC and 4 EC:

2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5	5.5	6
0 FC	1 FC	2 FC	3 FC	4 FC	4 FC+ 1 EC	4 FC+ 2 EC	4 FC+ 3 EC	4 FC+ 4 EC

You are not obliged to go down to grade 1. Arguably, there is no scale of failure... You can define the lowest grade wherever below 4, because the student will have failed anyway...


Step-by-step approach to create a descriptive grade

If you have **up to 8 ECs**, you can also work with **0.25 grade intervals** that go from 4 to 6. This allows you to have **8 slots for ECs**!

1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.25	4.5	4.75	5	5.25	5.5	5.75	6
0 FC	1 FC	2 FC	3 FC	4 FC	5 FC	6 FC	6 FC + 1 EC	6 FC + 2 EC	6 FC + 3 EC	6 FC + 4 EC	6 FC + 5 EC	6 FC + 6 EC	6 FC + 7 EC	6 FC + 8 EC

 Personally, I would **avoid that** because it complexifies the assessment process.

 It's **better** to have **less criteria** to focus on!

 As a personal (arbitrary) rule of thumb, go for a range of **2-7 FC + 4-6 EC** to simplify the assessment, but it all depends on the number of **learning objectives** of the seminar that you are assessing.

Why should we use assessment grids?

FOR STUDENTS:

- We are **fair towards students** by giving them the **same opportunities to succeed** when distributing the assessment grid at the beginning of, or during, the semester.
- The grid **reduces** students' **anxieties**, and **encourages excellency** by targeting FC and EC.

FOR US:

- Even if the art of assessment lies in the eye of the beholder, the grid allows us to **narrow down** our **biases** and **subjectivity**.
- It's **easier** for us to **target students' inaccuracies** in relation to specific criteria and **give precise feedforward** on how they can **reach** the missed criteria.
- When students appeal a grade (*recours*), we **protect ourselves** from accusations of lack of transparency.

Responding to your assessment needs

Assessing portfolios

HOW?

Every (2nd/3rd) week, ask students to write a 300-500 word close-reading or critical reflection of a text covered in class. At the end, student should have written the amount of words you ask them to write for an essay.

POSSIBLE CRITERIA

- ... respect the **formal requirements** (font size, references, number of reflections, etc.)
- ... **critically engage** with the readings beyond mere description (by asking explorative questions, comparing elements, connecting different concepts, quoting sources, applying concepts, etc.).
- ... **identify** the skills they have learned by writing the assignments and **explain** how they can be used in their future careers.
- ... **explain** what new knowledge they have learned with the assignment.
- ... **express** and justify how they felt when reading the passage.

[these 3 last meta-cognitive criteria make sense if you ask students to write a paragraph about what they have learned with the assignment]

Assessing oral presentations

HOW?


Teach students on how to do a professional and engaging oral presentation, where they stand in front of an audience, and have control over the body language and paralinguistic features.

POSSIBLE CRITERIA

- ... create a **PowerPoint** with max. 30 numbered slides
- ... present a PowerPoint that is **mindful of the audience** and **avoids cognitive overload** (text is synchronized with speech, important textual bits are highlighted in bold & color)
- ... shift between **academic and vulgarizing registers**
- ... use **academic English** in a clear way without major errors
- ... present in an **engaging way** by paying attention to **body language**
- ... speak at a **volume** that the audience can clearly hear
- ... speak at a **speed** that the audience can follow

Assessing peer-feedback sessions

HOW?

Ask students to use your assessment grid and to assess a classmate's essay (before or after submission) in an anonymous way. Then, assess their feedback. This can be done on Moodle with “*Atelier*”  and can be part of the 30-40% assignment.

POSSIBLE CRITERIA

- ... begin the feedback with **congratulating words** and **a general impression** of the text that highlights the efforts of the classmate.
- ... identify X number of **weak aspects** of the text and **justify** why they are problematic.
- ... suggest how the classmate can **improve** the negative aspects.
- ... identify **strong aspects** of the text and **justify** why they are positive.
- ... **refer** to specific parts of the classmate's text to root the feedback in **evidence**.
- ... conclude the feedback with **encouraging words**.

 Students don't give a grade to their peer, just the written feedback to improve the essay

Assessing creative writing

POSSIBLE CRITERIA FOR PROSE

- ... write an **original** text that mobilizes new and unique ideas.
- ... develop the **characters** in a realistic way (their motivations/actions are clear, and they evolve over the course of the story).
- ... write an engaging, well-structured and (non-)linear **plot** (logical sense, climax and resolution).
- ... describe the **setting** in a vivid way that enhances the mood and tone of the story.
- ... write **dialogues** that are realistic, engaging and advances the plot.
- ... effectively apply **literary devices & figures of speech** (symbolism, metaphor, simile, foreshadowing, etc.)
- ... use **language** in a clear and engaging way that contributes to their unique **voice**.
- ... follow the basic rules of **grammar**, punctuation and spelling.
- ... show evidence of **revising and improving** their work based on peer-feedback.
- ... **present** the text in a formatted and professional way.

⚠ For the sake of fairness towards students, you should only assess the elements that you covered in class. If you are uncomfortable in assessing creative writing, you could ask them to write a **reflexive text** where they explain their ideas.

Assessing creative writing

POSSIBLE CRITERIA FOR POETRY

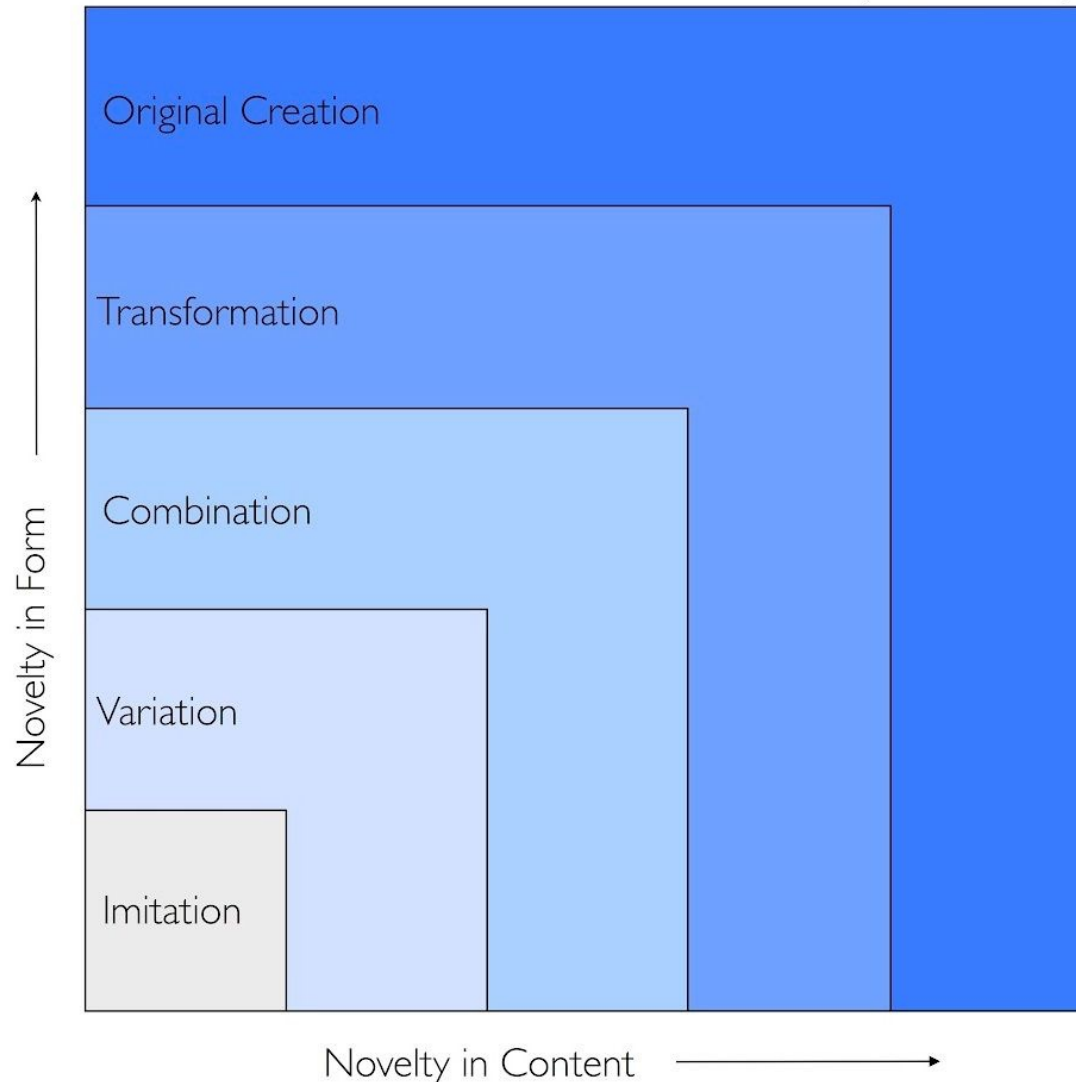
- ... **structure** the poem in clear **lines and stanzas** that logically follow each other.
- ... write a complete **dramatic event** (beginning, middle, and end).
- ... explore **connections** among otherwise apparently **unrelated phenomena**.
- ... use a limited amount of **adjectives**.
- ... favors the use of **descriptive verbs**.
- ... use language to turn it into a singular and vivid **diction**.
- ... convey **visual imagery** through words.
- ... **avoid abstractions** and generalities.
- ... use **figures of speech** (metaphors, similes, personification, etc.)
- ... pays attention to the **sonority of words** (alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, synesthesia)
- ... **rhyme** internally or at the end of the line.
- ... pays attention to **meter** to create deliberate rhythmic effects.
- ... **visually shapes** the textuality of the poem

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Assessing creative writing

Taxonomy of Creative Design

(Peter Nilsson, 2011)



Imitation

The replication of a previous work

Variation

The modification of an existing work

Combination

The mixture of two or more works

Transformation

The translation of a work into another medium or mode

Original Creation

The creation of something previously unrecognizable

Check out these sources for assessing creative writing:

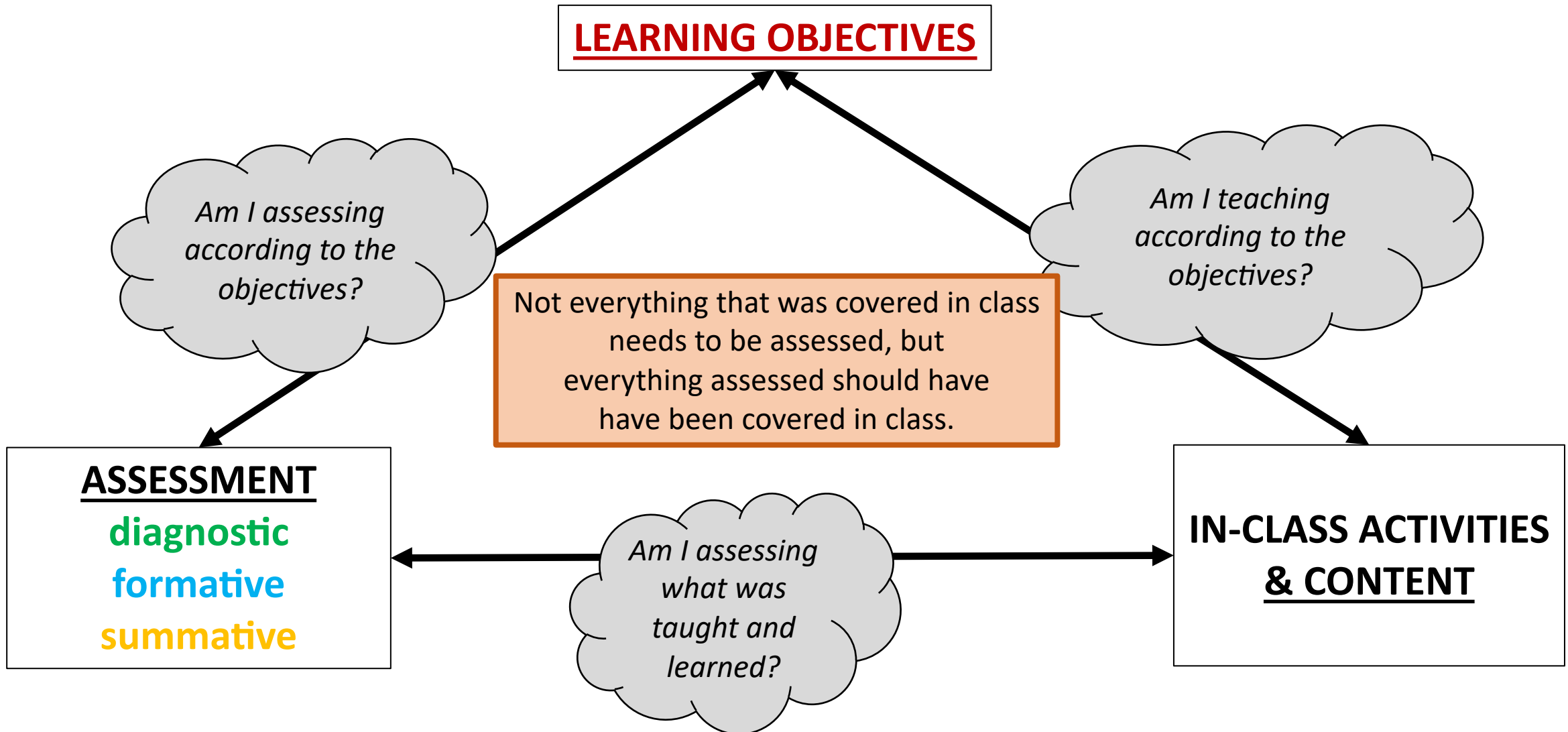
<http://www.senseandsensation.com/2012/03/assessing-creativity.html>

<https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/assessing-creativity>

Last reminder!



Ideally, each assessment grid should be **contextualized** according to the seminar:



Fair assessment practices

BEFORE SEMESTER

- Retro-planning of seminar:
 1. Learning objectives
 2. In-class activities
 3. Assessment grids based on previous points (1 & 2)

BEGINNING OF SEMESTER

- Present your calculations of ECTS to students (1 ECTS = 25-30h of work)
- Present the assessment grids you're going to use

DURING SEMESTER

- **Remind students** of the assessment grid and spend at least **1 session** on giving them the tools to do the assessment (presentation skills, readings assessment grids, etc.)

DURING ASSESSMENT

- Be mindful of different biases and implement anti-bias actions ([slide 3](#))

If you want to discuss your
assessment strategies around
a coffee, get in touch! 😊
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**DIAGNOSTIC
ASSESSMENT**

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

- Formal vs. informal
- Feedback strategies
- Self-assessment
- Co-assessment
- Peer assessment

**SUMMATIVE
ASSESSMENT**

