

The “Rule of Ten” Approach to Assessment

Art Lightstone

The “Rule of Ten” is an approach to assessment wherein the mark for a course is based on exactly ten pieces of assessment. No more, no less. The Rule of Ten promotes assessment that is timely, encouraging, and necessary.

While students will invariably complete more than just ten assessments over the duration of the course, these other assessments will not count towards the student’s grade. These “other” assessments will be designed to be formative in nature, occurring within a unit in order to provide feedback to the student and the teacher. Marked assessment will be summative in nature. Essentially, formative assessment will provide feedback on how a student *is learning*, while summative assessment will provide feedback on how a student *has learned*.

The rationale for the Rule of Ten approach can be broken down into the following elements:

- i) Timely:** Assessment should be designed to be appropriate and judicious. A limit of ten marked assessments will tend to reduce the overall amount of student stress (especially as more instructors adopt a similar policy), while providing the student with more time to devote towards completing, or preparing for, each given piece of assessment. Less assessments vying for a given student’s time will invariably lead to fewer due date conflicts and therefore fewer assessments coming due at inopportune times.
- ii) Encouraging:** The value or weighting of an assessment should be significant enough to encourage the student to provide the assessment his best effort. After all, marks are collected and recorded under the assumption that they reflect the student’s true (or best) ability. However, large numbers of assessments can cause students to diminish the importance of each given assessment, as the student comes to realize that each individual piece of assessment will have a relatively low impact on the student’s overall grade. Naturally, the aggregate effect of these assessments will nonetheless have a profound impact on the student’s grade, yet the cumulative marks will not necessarily reflect the student’s best effort.
- iii) Necessary:** A limit of ten assessments forces the course instructor to be efficient when determining what material will be assessed as part of the student’s final grade. This reinforces the message that any summative (marked) piece of assessment requires the student’s full attention and best effort.