

Short Tests

PURPOSE

Short tests are most commonly used in two contexts, and these guidelines have been produced assuming one (or both) of these will be the case:

- 1) In the study of biblical languages, the purpose of tests is to encourage you to review regularly all the learning you have achieved in a module, so that you can build on that retained knowledge and understanding for the next stage of your learning. Language tests assess acquisition of knowledge, memory and ability to integrate these with your knowledge of biblical studies for the purpose of nuanced translation. They are a learning tool and should be approached as such.
 - 2) In online learning, the purpose of tests is to ensure you have achieved the intended learning from the work you have been doing. They may assess factual knowledge or the ability to apply this. Again they are designed to support your learning and should be approached as such.
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CONTENT

Typically you will be given several tests spaced through the module (in an online course they may even be part of the work for each week or other unit of the module). Tests may be multiple choice or require short answers to questions in some other format. They are designed to give you an opportunity to demonstrate what you have learned and retained: they are not designed to “catch you out”. They help you to be disciplined about engaging with the material on the course to develop your knowledge and understanding.

In the case of language learning in particular, this may mean committing to memory what you have learned so that you gain and retain increasing fluency in the language. Short tests assess learning of grammar, vocabulary and translation skills, depending on which stage of language learning is being tested. They normally draw on all the material covered in the module up to that point. They may well be time-limited and take place under ‘examination conditions’.

In the case of online learning, a short test will normally focus primarily on the learning you have been doing in that element of the module (e.g. the module may be divided into weeks or other units), but may expect you to draw on material covered previously too. While you may be asked to complete them in a fixed time or under other conditions, typically they will be more flexible.

WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR

We are looking to ensure that you are developing your learning at the pace that is set out in the module. In particular your performance in the test will:

1. demonstrate that you have studied, understood and (especially in the case of language learning) committed to memory the relevant material in your module.

2. demonstrate that you are able to apply your knowledge, for example in the translation of texts.

TECHNICAL MATTERS

For the tutor:

- Tests should be given at spaced intervals (at least twice; quite possibly much more frequently for an online course) during the module. The timings of the tests, the weighting of the marks and an indication of what is to be covered in each test should be given to students at the beginning of the module.
- Ensure that tests at least focus on what is significant for student learning – if you primarily test less important details students may give disproportionate attention to trying to remember these and so give less time to engaging with what matters most.
- Particularly in the case of online learning, think about how your test can assess understanding not just knowledge.
- Tests should only be used where they can provide a means for the student to demonstrate their learning in relation to the module learning outcomes. Short form or multiple choice tests are normally best suited to assessing factual knowledge and understanding and specific applications of such knowledge and understanding, rather than (for example) student's engagement with complex theological or historical debates. There are many learning outcomes for all or part of which the short form of test responses is unlikely to allow students to demonstrate what they have learnt. As always, you need to ensure that across the assessment for the module all learning outcomes are fully assessed, and that if the assessment task only assesses a small part of the module learning outcomes the weight allocated to it is not disproportionate.
- In the case of online tests you will need to assess their equivalence in length to a timed test in the classroom. This will depend in part on the complexity of the test. For example, if you are using small regular multiple-choice tests to check student engagement with material and the answer to most of the questions is straightforward, you may well judge that 5 or 10 questions is the equivalent of a 5 minute test. You can refer to the guidance on assessment lengths and weightings to help you reach a judgement. Clear guidance should be given to students about how long they should spend on an online test, including whether you expect them to work within a time limit.
- It is advisable to ask a colleague to proof read tests.
- Students will learn most from the test when they receive feedback on their performance as soon as possible after taking the test.
- If any test is worth a significant proportion of the marks for the module, it is good practice to prepare students for this through regular quizzes or practice tests.
- The translation of set texts from the target language into English is of limited value, since it invites students simply to learn the English text. It is generally more advisable to invite comment on points of grammar, the consequences for interpretation of a linguistic feature, or the comparison of different translations.
- You will need to work out how to assign a final grade for the test in light of the Additional Guidance for Marking on Common Awards (<https://www.dur.ac.uk/common.awards/policies/assessment.policies/guidance/>), and explain to the students how you arrived at this.

For the student:

- Language modules require regular practice of the material that is learned in each session: this is the best way to prepare for tests. It is not advisable to leave revision until just before the test! Language learning is also cumulative, so make sure you revisit learning from earlier sessions or modules, where appropriate – and again this is best done on a regular basis, not just as preparation for a test.
- In the case of other forms of test, online or in person, the best preparation for a test is normally to have engaged thoroughly with the set material and to spend time consolidating this in preparation for the test.
- The grade towards your award that you are given for the test may not be simply the score you get – you might score nine out of ten on the test, but be given a grade of 70, for example. This is because the grade needs to be in line with the overall university assessment criteria which are reflected in the other grades you will get on your course, and these say that 70 is used for excellent work but 90 only for extraordinary work. Your tutor may have judged that getting nine out of ten questions correct shows you have learned very well but is not the sign of extraordinarily good work. Your tutor should be able to explain to you how they arrived at the grade. You will find more explanation of this in the Additional Guidance for Marking on Common Awards (<https://www.dur.ac.uk/common.awards/policies/assessment.policies/guidance/>).

MARKING CRITERIA

The questions that your marker will be considering when assessing your work are as follows:

1. Are your answers accurate and correct?
2. Do they show you have acquired the knowledge, understanding and skills expected in the module?

There are no specific assessment criteria for short tests. However, as noted above, the grade awarded will be calculated in light of the overall university assessment criteria and the Additional Guidance for Marking on Common Awards.
