

Writing PAD conference

Implementing the viva voce

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My Teaching and Learning Fellowship 2005/06 originated in my commitment to enable dyslexic students to have a vehicle of assessment that accommodated their disability. A disability that focusses on the lexicon. A disability, which amongst other difficulties, centres on the production of written material. Dyslexic students can produce great dissertations and continue to choose to write, however, it is harder to produce this work than for a non-dyslexic. The notion of 'other' is the key here, the student body is diverse and the assessment is 'other' and is about offering choice. Choosing the vehicle that best expresses a student's abilities.

Financial imperatives and time restrictions govern many decisions promoting 'alternative' assessments but perhaps in exploring 'reasonable adjustments' for dyslexic students, tutors can discover greater accessibility for the whole cohort.

I have not intended in this workshop to cover particular theoretical rationales for accommodated assessment, as this has been expressed in my discussion paper for Writing Pad (2005) and in my presentation for the Centre for Learning & Teaching in Art and Design (Lisbon 2006). Rather, I want to look at how the viva can and is being implemented within Higher Education for the creative arts.

Academic Affairs at University of the Arts list a viva as a fair method of assessment for a dyslexic student and this is advertised on the web site. The acknowledgement of entitlement to this accommodation, where appropriate, will form part of the University's disability equality scheme on 4th December 2006.

Assessment requires quality assurance, parity with other modes and standards of awards. An institution wishing to ensure effective accommodated assessment needs to undertake staff development and then progress to promoting awareness of the assessment to students using advice and guidance.

1. Staff Development of Performance Assessment

Guidelines do not entail staff parameters regarding the subject specific content of a programme; this is the task of the HEFCE subject benchmarks. Guidelines aim to support staff in unpacking their own learning outcomes within a new discourse of orality.

At University of the Arts validation documents state that assessment reflects the

learning outcomes. If the learning outcomes do not clearly acknowledge the journey the student is expected to travel, there could be difficulties and minor modifications may be required. The learning outcomes, whatever their shortcomings, are owned by the team and this ownership is continued into the assessment for the viva.

It is important to note that generic learning outcomes in relation to oral communication apply to the presentation and defense of the viva and may impact on the grading criteria and transparency of the accommodated learning outcomes. Generic learning outcomes are offered to support staff in a new vehicle of assessment. The rubric below is an exemplar.

Performance Assessment

Structure Vocabulary Resources

Instructional strategies

RUBRIC

All vivas	BA Programme	Task specific
Language production	Q & A Fluidity	Content of
		Dissertation
Accuracy vocabulary	Learning outcomes	Style
NVC	Cohesion	Coherence
Fluency	Mechanics	Interaction
Language		

A -

- Rich and Varied Vocabulary
- Develops a persuasive argument that is well developed and supported
- Addresses all aspects of the prompts
- Responds Readily
- Willingness to exploit verbal opportunities - spontaneity
- An informed position expressed with clear and fluent speech
- Counters arguments offered

B –

- A broad range of vocabulary
- Persuasive but little supportive argument
- Prompts adequately addressed but less substance
- Less able to exploit opportunities
- Evidences and attempts to negotiate a position but lacks confidence.

- Addresses the issues raised from the rehearsal

C –

- A limited vocabulary hampering delivery
- Attempts to persuade with some supportive work
- Prompts not fully addressed and lacks substance
- Tentative in expressing a viewpoint
- Good attempts at addressing issues raised from rehearsal viva
- Does not always counter with evidence

D -

- Weak vocabulary
- Hesitates but has an awareness and does self correct using evidence
- Fails to persuade despite some evidence presented
- Doesn't address prompts from panel and offers little substance
- Lack of inflection and expression
- Little preparation for the discourse
- Limited response to issues raised from rehearsal viva

E –

- Weak vocabulary for subject and general verbal performance
- Hesitates often and makes errors
- Fails to persuade and offers no evidence
- Incomprehensible at times
- Little substance or evidence of preparation
- Unable to disagree with panel
- Appears unprepared for the discourse
- No response to issues raised from rehearsal viva

The rubric supports the notion that the ultimate aim for discourse competence is a *'mastery of the cohesion and coherence devices employed by someone to achieve unity in a text or piece of productive discourse.'*

What evidence is offered for mastery? How is connoisseurship formed? What coherence devices exist? How might the oral be viewed as a unified body? Staff in designing backwards needs to consider the curriculum and the opportunities, which already exist for oral assessment and any guidance given on how to engage with their discipline. Staff needs to focus on the cohort and the general ability of the peer group. What is reasonably offered as a closed text may not be as comprehensibly offered in 'real time'; this may not be seen as 'fair'. For example, a student may in a closed text make extensive reference to an authority, using quotes. The matter is closed and a tutor cannot examine by asking the student precisely what their interpretation of different

theorists might be on their chosen area of work. In an oral they can and the student has to have a firmer grasp on the subject captured in an immediate moment.

These areas were well explored by the supervisor and internal verifier/second marker for a BA Sound Arts Design student, June 2006. After the rehearsal viva, they made invaluable comments concerning the advantages and disadvantages of the process of the viva. Plagiarism was reduced to nil under the pressure of an oral defense but nerves and the nature of immediate examination caused concern of ensuring equality of assessment with other students. Were they being harder on him?

The tutors also raised an oral issue of pronunciation confusion. Dyslexics often find it difficult to abandon the first understanding of a name and how they wish to represent it. If they read or hear Jerringham Road and not Jerningham road, it can be hard to retrieve the correct pronunciation under stress. Whilst a serious level of dysfluency in a student would make the viva an unsuitable vehicle of assessment, the odd mispronunciation should not prejudice assessors. The assessment is a courageous effort on behalf of the student but also on the part of assessors who become acutely aware of the impact of criteria and outcomes in a direct relationship with the student.

In following the backward design model (Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. 1998) and in creating discipline specific criteria staff are undertaking social action research. The recording and documentation of staff meetings, is no less vital data than the viva voce itself. Ownership should increase with the number of vivas undertaken. The tutors as the number of candidates increases will establish best practice. How are ideas articulated and information comprehensibly produced in written form? (HEFCE subject benchmarks 2005 – 4.4.4)

Supporting portfolio-Signposting, references and citations

Students are required to provide a walk through or signposting of supportive material. This asks for a guide of how the ideas and tutorials and readings or listening time built up to the final performance. A toolbox with references and citations. CD s to URLs to texts and exhibitions all provide the evidence of the journey through a dissertation. The criterion for this again lies with the subject tutors. What evidence do they want to see prior to the oral performance or in conjunction with the viva? These must be agreed in advance of the viva process, it is not reasonable to find the nature of the supportive material wanting because of lack of direction, only an absence of quality within the set parameters.

Following guidelines should enable the assessment to be explicit, valid and reliable. Assuming the above then, as suggested in the current subject benchmarks for art and design, tutors have made a positive contribution to student learning. Fit for purpose is to focus on what the student can, rather than cannot do.

Staff are offered the handbook or pod cast of the guidance on the viva, together with the CD of the successful student performance for the BA award in Sound Arts Design. The

content of the staff viva guide are listed below:

- What is a viva?
- Why are dyslexic students allowed to undertake a viva?
- Counselling a student to undertake a viva – assessing suitability
- Ensuring consent and disclosure
- Administration and Planning requirements
- Designing accompanying references and portfolio. How do you wish them to structure their work?
- Connoisseurship – teams developing assessment for the viva
- Monitoring student progress
- Enabling the student as a supervisor - Narration versus analysis
- Expectations of real time performances
- Understanding stress, sequencing difficulties and word retrieval
- Judging presentation signals and mapping
- Actively listening
- Grading a viva voce
- Mark Schemes
- Examiners and Exam Boards
- Capturing data and filing the viva in library learning resources
- References

The phases of staff development are continuous as dyslexia specialist staff need to be trained to support students in this new venture and to a lesser degree so do support staff.

In recording the student vivas and capturing data of the process researchers will evaluate it's success as a vehicle to assess the learning outcomes

2. Conduct of the student

In a new mode of assessment, it is vital that the student is fully aware of the conduct required. The student is responsible for accepting the process of the viva and giving formal consent.

Consent Form Exemplar

Name

Course

Year

Course Director

Supervisory tutor

Internal verifier (second marker)

External examiner

Dyslexia support Tutor

DSA

LEA:

I have chosen to undertake a recorded viva in lieu of a written dissertation. I have received advice in relation to undertaking an oral examination of this kind. I have read/listened to the student handbook 'VIVA voce guidance notes' and am aware of the process for a viva and the product that will be required for the examiners.

I hereby consent to the use of the viva recordings for purposes of illustration and publication.

Print Name:

The guidelines and CD or pod cast are offered with a copy of the BA performance and are integral to the process of decision-making. The handbook contents are listed below:

Contents of the Viva Guide

- what is a viva?
 - who will be present at the viva?
 - why are dyslexic students allowed to undertake a viva?
 - should I undertake a viva? Suitability of a Viva and consent
 - I have decided to undertake a viva what now? Administration and Planning
-
- Time management, equipment and planning
 - References and portfolio How to structure the work
 - evaluating your own work
 - Narration versus analysis
 - Building the lexis-glossaries/texts and language of the discipline
 - Presentation signals and mapping
 - NVC to BBC- guides to delivery
 - Generic Questions
 - Mark Schemes
 - Examiners and Exam Boards
 - References

Tutorials and technical assistance to train and enable the student for a viva is expected to be met by the Local authority as part of Disabled Student Allowance. The first student to undertake a viva in programme area should seek to claim 18-20 hours of support from the end of the second year of the degree. This is likely to be in addition to any other allocated claims. The following student may only wish to seek 10 hours as the precedent and examples that the student can draw upon grow. The stronger the uniform design for instruction of a group i.e. the greater the influence of oral culture and assessment within the standard curriculum the less accommodation needs to be made.

3. The viva performance

Who will be present at the viva?

3 tutors

Dyslexia tutor, largely performing the role of observer - to oversee the rules of the viva and as an independent arbiter (not from the School)

The second tutor will be the supervisory tutor and the third party, the internal verifier or second marker who would normally verify the work of a student in that subject/discipline

area

Duration:

The viva will be of **1 hour's** duration, during which time student's will: -

- present their findings for a maximum of **30 minutes**
- prepare for an examination of their presentation with evidence. This is an oral defense of their findings, their methods of investigation and their theoretical position or standpoint. This is likely to be **30 minutes** unless the defence includes complex multimedia.

The student guide is designed for greater accessibility than the version for staff. An example is offered below:



What is a Viva?

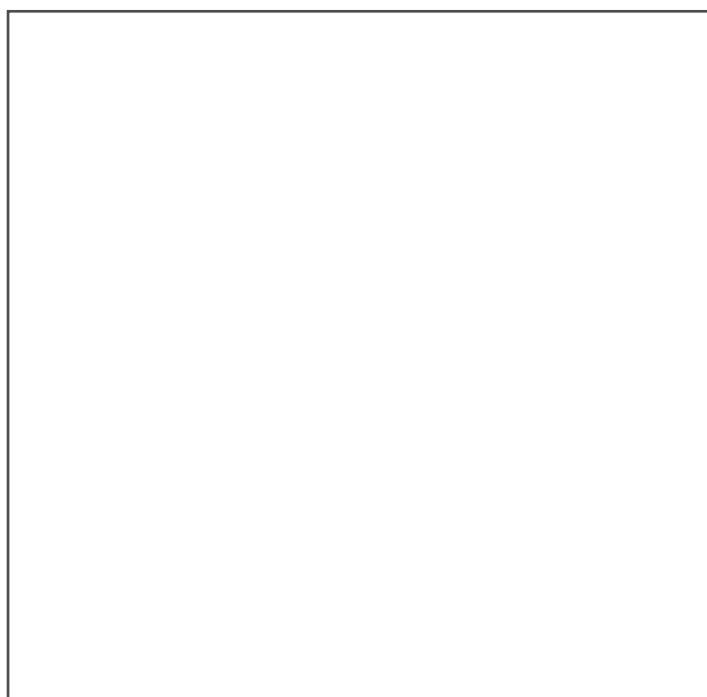
A viva is an oral examination i.e. the examination is conducted by word of mouth.

The viva will consist of an oral presentation for 30 minutes delivered to a small panel of tutors. This is then followed by a 30-minute examination of the content you have just

delivered. The standard of work will be graded for your final award in the same manner as your fellow students, using the learning outcomes of the degree programme.

A viva is offered as a 'reasonable adjustment' to standard assessment. The offer of 'reasonable adjustment' translates into accepting the viva as a comparable presentation of the learning outcomes of a dissertation for a final award. The University welcomes students who wish to demonstrate their engagements with the discourse of their subject in oral and written form.

University of the Arts London validates the viva voce (oral examination) as the expression of the dissertation learning outcomes for a Higher Education award (Academic Affairs).



Who will be present at the viva?

3 tutors:

One tutor: your dyslexia tutor largely performing the role of observer - to oversee the rules of the viva and as an independent arbiter (not from the School)

Second tutor: your supervisory tutor

Third tutor: internal verifier or second marker who would normally verify the work of a student in that subject/discipline area

Duration:

The viva will be of **1 hour's** duration, during which time you will: -

- present your findings for a maximum of **30 minutes**
- prepare for an examination of your presentation with evidence. This is an oral defence of your findings, your methods of investigation and your theoretical position or standpoint. This is likely to be **30 minutes** unless your defence includes complex multimedia.

Research:- The Learning Outcomes of the dissertation these can be found in your handbook and further explained by your course tutor.

Guidelines for assessment or marking your work will be a framework designed to incorporate measurement of oral content. Where the learning outcomes stipulate clear and effective written communication these will be transformed into a measurement of oral skills which reflect

Third year undergraduate capabilities.

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It was not my intention to enable a student to undertake a viva in 2005/06 but circumstances arose where a student was keen to challenge orthodoxy and once he realised that a viva was possible encouraged me to give him assistance. Costas Kontas BA Sound Arts Design graduated with a 2:1 degree following a successful viva on Keijo Hani a Japanese rock guitarist. If this unravelling has made an impact on it's audience it will signify the start of many productive discourses and vivas as accommodated assessment for dyslexic students.

