

Key assumptions and challenges to those assumptions

Assumptions	Challenges
Oral approaches enable learners to foster a deep approach to learning	A deep approach to learning arises from a need-to-know which enables a student to engage with a task appropriately and meaningfully. The implication for assessment is that the overall structure is more important than independent facts. Biggs (1999) 3P model depicts an interactive system in which student characteristics and the teaching context mutually determine deep or surface learning. An oral approach can offer the student more feedback to help them formalise ideas, develop thinking and strengthen analysis. If the approach is seen to be useful and positively valued then it is likely to foster a deep approach.
Importance of the role of feedback	Improving the quality of the information that students receive is advocated by Biggs (1999) in constructive alignment. Also see Gibbs 2006
Provides the opportunity to identify degrees of participation of individuals within a group	Oral approaches can be used with individual students and within the context of group work. Group work invariably challenges the assessor in identifying a number of concerns over the ownership and contribution of individual's work. This is not a unique concern about the assessment of oral group presentations but of all group or collaborative approaches. The assessment of group skills (reliability, cooperation compromise etc) is not well recorded. The Assessing Group Practice project found an almost universal emphasis on task-focus suggesting that group work was the context for learning rather than a specific learning objective. http://www.lancs.ac.uk/palatine/AGP/index.htm provides five principles that should underpin the assessment of group work. Within the creative and performing arts a frequently occurring problem relates to the difficulty of identifying and assessing individual contributions to group practice. These problems were exacerbated in the context of group devised or student directed work where the tutor is not present. (Assessing Group Practice Project) This is addressed in many cases by the awarding of a group mark for performance which is moderated by some form of peer or self assessment often in conjunction with oral critical reflection. The individual viva has been found to be an effective tool especially when much of the process has been independent.
Assumed to embed employability skills	Communication skills include a mix of verbal, interpersonal and physical strategies needed to interact confidently and effectively with a range of audiences. Australian research shows why effective oral communication skills are valued by employers (see http://www.griffith.edu.au/centre/gihe/griffith_graduate/toolkit/oral/why.htm). For the development of such skills to be transferable they need to be made explicit to students
A variety of assessment approaches improves	Changes to assessment have a greater influence on student learning than other changes to the curriculum (Gibbs 2006) and that introducing variety has been

<p>student learning</p>	<p>shown to confuse and disengage students as they struggle to understand the requirements of different approaches</p> <p>A sensible mix can enable greater alignment of assessment with outcomes. Case study in environmental health http://www.ulster.ac.uk/staffdev/DatabaseGoodPractice/harveymodule.htm and in the earth sciences http://goodpractice.gees.ac.uk/cgi-bin/searchspec.pl?terms=206</p>
<p>Less work and preparation for staff and students</p>	<p>It is a misplaced as the assumption that students are able to communicate effectively in the context of oral assessment. The skills for presenting orally, individually or collaboratively need to be honed and developed. There is plenty of research around to suggest that the most effective forms of assessment, including group assessment, involves students in designing and negotiating criteria with Tutors (ASKe project, Rust 2006). This can be time consuming but is reported as having significant learning benefits. (ASKe, Assessing Group Practice Projects, connect). This suggests that preparatory work with students to develop and clarify criteria will result in more effective assessment.</p>
<p>Good for formative approaches but not valid for summative approach as difficult to provide quantitative representation of performance</p>	<p>One of the most taxing paradoxes is the necessity to translate quality into numerical data which represents performance or contribution. The Assessing Group Practice found numerous examples of good practice and that the defining characteristics of the practice were where the mode of assessment was aligned to the learning outcomes, and where the main aim was to provide learners with feedback on both the product and the process. The project recognised the limited work that had been done in addressing the challenges of generating grades and marks from assessed performance</p>
<p>Provides an environment where students who struggle with writing can excel and demonstrate what they know</p>	<p>Some students find oral assessment to be an easier way of demonstrating learning outcomes but it can provide significant difficulties for students with certain impairments. Even those who are able to undertake this approach may require some adjustments. See: OU Oral assessment website for details of adjustments; and case study by Herrington, M. and D. Simpson, Eds (2002). See <i>How inclusive can oral assessment approaches really be?</i></p>