

FAQ: What can we actually assess?

Race P (1999) outlines the key principles of assessing presentations in his text 2000 Tips for Lecturers.

There is some thinking that oral assessment can only assess low level skills and understanding. However the ability to present arguments orally is a vital component of any Higher Education programme of study, as is the ability to present a case. This requires the demonstration of skills knowledge and understanding at a range of levels. Effective oral communication can be demonstrated at higher levels. Criteria from the SCIPS website illustrate this: Criteria include: ability to marshal complex interlocking arguments to support an over-arching thesis; proficiency in the design and delivery of presentations as suited to the occasion; competency in chairing discussions and encouraging, interpreting and channeling questions.

Joughin and Collom (2003) provide a breakdown of what they consider oral assessment can assess at

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources.asp?process=full_record§ion=generic&id=433

http://www.griffith.edu.au/centre/qihe/griffith_graduate/toolkit/oral/assess03.htm has a criteria sheet that shows the incremental progression of what can be assessed. See also <http://www.city.londonmet.ac.uk/deliberations/seda-pubs/Donaldson.html>

In brief it is generally accepted that:

Orals and Viva-voce	Tests communication, understanding, capacity to think quickly under pressure and knowledge of procedures. Feedback potential. Marking for grading can be fast but some standardisation of interview procedure is needed to ensure reliability and validity.
Poster sessions	Tests capacity to present findings and interpretations succinctly and attractively. Danger of focusing unduly on presentation methods can be avoided by the use of simple criteria. Feedback potential: from tutor, self and peers. Marking for grading is fast. Use of criteria reduces variability.
Presentations	Tests preparation, understanding, knowledge, capacity to structure, information and oral communication skills. Feedback potential: from tutor, self and peers. Marking for grading based on simple criteria is fast and potentially reliable. Measures of ability to respond to questions and manage discussion could be included.
Simulated interviews	Useful for assessing oral communication skills and for developing ways of giving and receiving feedback on performance. Video-recorded sessions take more time but are more useful for feedback and assessment. Peer and self assessment can be used. Sensitive oral feedback on performance is advisable. Assessment by simple rating schedule or checklist is potentially reliable if assessors, including students, are trained.