




Assessment

Avoiding the pitfalls



Dr Russell Docking



1



What's this session about?

We will look closely at **four** of the thirty deadly assessment sins listed in the handout:



- Simulated Skills (Sin 7)
- Sufficient Evidence (Sin 9)
- Clustering (Sin 23)
- Customisation (Sin 11)



Unreal simulations

The definitions of Assessment, Competency and Unit of Competency in the Glossary of the *Standards for RTOs* make explicit reference to the standard of performance required in the **workplace**.

Elsewhere, the standards make 46 references to “**industry**”, most of which relate to understanding and reflecting the needs of industry in training and assessment.



Unreal simulations

Most units of competency indicate that assessment must take place in a real workplace or a **simulation** of a real workplace.

Often we find that the simulated workplace is so carefully contrived and managed that it bears little resemblance of a real workplace. This is OK in education, but not in VET.

What do you need to do to get real?



Unreal simulations

A valid simulation must meet all four dimensions of competency:

- Task skills (with real equipment and materials);
- Task management skills (coordination and prioritisation);
- Contingency management skills (problems and faults); and
- Workplace environment skills (complexity and chaos).



To do this, you need to draw upon your industry expertise.



Unreal simulations

Your industry expertise is reflected in your **vocational competence** and your **current industry skills**:



- You need to have either the competency you are delivering, or can establish that you have equivalent competency; and
- You need to maintain constant direct links with industry so that you know how, when and where the competency is used in real workplaces.



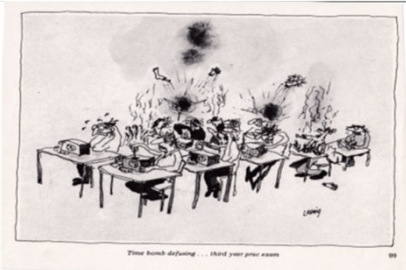
Unreal simulations

So when you are using simulations to assess units of competency you need to:



- reflect upon your current industry knowledge and skills to identify tasks that would provide the learner with an opportunity to demonstrate some or all of the unit's skill requirements; and
- construct a simulation that meets all four dimensions of competency.



Simulated Practical Assessments



Time bomb defusing ... third year practical exam

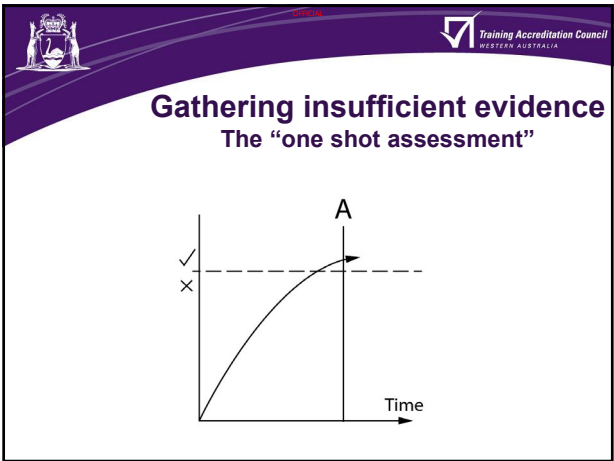


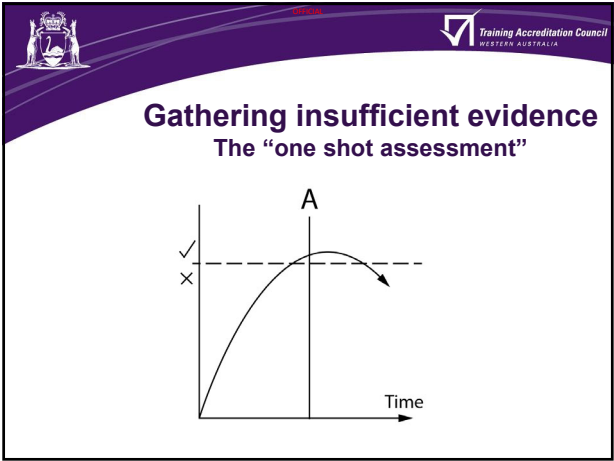
Gathering insufficient evidence

To convict someone of being competent, you need to have **sufficient evidence** to be sure beyond reasonable doubt that they are guilty of being truly competent.

Sufficiency relates to gathering evidence that reflects all the requirements of the unit, and when it comes to elements of competency we need enough **corroborated evidence** to be sure of competence.

Some units of competency declare that performance must be observed "at least once" ... but is once enough ... ? No ... not in the VET sector ...





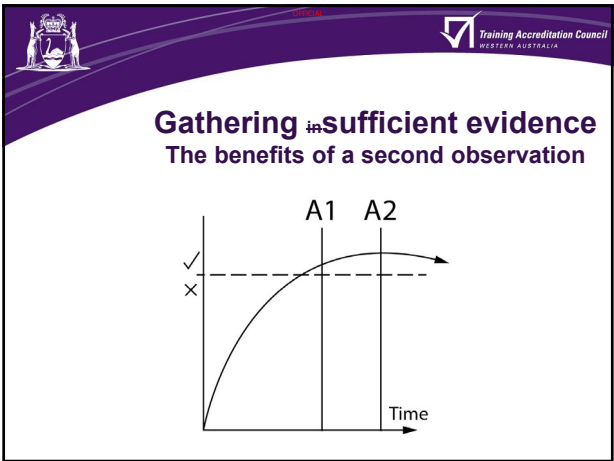
Gathering insufficient evidence

The definition of competency in the Glossary of the *Standards for RTOs* includes the requirements of **consistent** performance and **transfer**.

Consistent performance implies repetition and retention ...

Transfer implies performance in new situations, with different conditions ...

You can't see these qualities in a one-shot assessment ...



Gathering insufficient evidence



The second assessment, using different context, conditions, resources, and/or different personnel encourages:

- ☒ Acquisition of real competence rather than mere imitation (meaningful rather than rote learning);
- ☒ Retention in long term memory; and
- ☒ Transfer to new situations and tasks.

Gathering insufficient evidence

So, when you are designing your assessment strategies you need to consider how many times you will need to observe a unit's skills to be sure that:



- you can observe consistent performance;
- you can observe transfer across applications;
- you can eliminate chance performance;
- you can check on authenticity; and
- you can verify reliability and sufficiency.



Cluttered clustering

One of the characteristics of a unit of competency is that each is a relatively small step on the stair up to a qualification. This is helpful as small steps provide:

- achievable goals;
- regular reinforcement;
- a less risky long-term investment of time;
- sharper focus for learning and assessment;
- greater flexibility in training; and
- greater flexibility of workplace application.





Clustering

But on the other side, small units of competency can be a problem if they:

- compartmentalise learning;
- are fragmented and disjointed;
- are inefficient and repetitive; and
- are dissociated from tasks or jobs.



So, we often combine two or more units of competency together to form clusters.



Clustering

The four reasons we might cluster are because the units in the cluster:

- go together in the real workplace in the performance of a task or job;
- provide support for each other as they share delivery modes;
- share skills and/or knowledge; and
- reduce the amount of training.





Cluttered clustering

But the cluster increases the size and complexity of the learning step, so there might be:

- less achievable goals;
- less frequent reinforcement;
- more risky long-term investment of time;
- less flexibility in training;
- less flexibility of workplace application, and
- a loss of focus for learning and assessment.



So we need to balance the benefits and the risks.



Cluttered clustering

When we assess units as a cluster, we need to be sure that:



- the cluster is not too large;
- the units are of similar complexity;
- the units don't become "locked in" to the assessment task; and
- we can separate the evidence related to each unit so we can make independent decisions about the achievement of each unit.



Decluttered clustering

So when we to decide to cluster, we need to remember that:


- Clustering is good for training delivery and evidence gathering, but we must not make clustered assessment decisions.
- The judgement of C or NYC for a unit must be based only on the evidence relevant to that unit and must not be impacted by evidence related to other units in the cluster.



Customisation

We are told that we must be responsive to learner needs, relevant to industry and enterprise needs and to be flexible and fair.


- Perhaps this unit requirement is beyond this learner ... can I leave it out?
- Perhaps this requirement is different in WA ... can we change it?
- Perhaps industry has moved on from the unit ... can we add the latest techniques?



Customisation

The competency-based VET system depends upon the compliance of delivery and assessment to the **national standards** as expressed in the *Standards for RTOs* and the units of competency.

Any deviation from the requirements of a unit ... deletion, alteration or addition ... will undermine the meaningfulness of the VET system and certification, and could lead to significant harm to the graduate, employer, client ... and to the RTO and the assessor.





~~Customisation~~ Contextualisation

Customised assessments will not meet the rule of evidence of validity nor the principle of assessment of validity.

So what can we do to be flexible and fair?

We can contextualise our assessments.



Contextualisation

Contextualisation does not involve any deletions, additions or alterations ...

... all it involves is the re-expression of some or all of the unit requirements, without changing their meaning, so that the reader can understand what they mean.



It does not allow for the unit to be translated into another language.



Contextualisation

So we can't customise but we can contextualise, remembering that:

- We may see contextualisation in the description of unit requirements, in the learning materials and in the assessment tools.
- We may be contextualising to reflect our learners, our observers, our enterprises, our local industry.
- To do this we need to understand our learners, our observers, our enterprise and our local industry.



Contextualisation

The last word ...



We may also make adjustments to our assessments to reflect the needs of learners with a disability. ... these are known as Reasonable Adjustments.

We need to be sure that to be reasonable these adjustments do not change the content or meaning of the unit requirements so that the validity of the evidence, the validity of the assessment judgement and the credibility of the certificate are preserved.





Questions



References and Resources

- Handout - Thirty assessment errors: Overcoming the legacy of our own assessment experiences.
- The Standards for RTOs 2015 Compilation No. 3 2019
- The TAC Users' Guide for the Standards (Version 2)
- TAC Assessment Fact Sheet
- TAC Assessment Validation Fact Sheet
- TAC Vocational Competence and Industry Skills Fact Sheet
- TAC Identifying and meeting learner needs Fact Sheet
- TAC Reasonable Adjustment and inclusive practice Fact Sheet
- TAC Education Workshops (On-line, TAC website)



Contact us

Training Accreditation Council
Locked Bag 16
OSBORNE PARK DC WA 6916
Telephone: (08) 9224 6510
Email: tac@dtwd.wa.gov.au
Web: www.tac.wa.gov.au



Acknowledgement: Some icons designed by Freepik
