

# Providing effective assessment assistance



## The purpose of this guide

This guide summarises key elements of effective assessment assistance practice. It focuses on effective assistance when reading and/or writing are a barrier to a student showing what they know.

The guide is for heads of learning support, those in similar roles and other school leaders. Its purpose is to help leaders design school practices which support effective assessment of all students.

# The structure of this guide

The guide is divided into four parts:

- 1 Designing assessment for all learners
- 2 Recruiting assessment assistants
- 3 Using assessment assistants effectively in your school
- 4 Training assessment assistants.

This guide includes links to additional resources. If you are working with hard copy, please access the PDF online to activate the links:

<http://www.education.govt.nz/school/student-support/special-education/special-assessment-conditions/>

## Terminology

This guide uses the terms **assessment assistance** and **assessment assistants**.

**Assessment assistance** is necessary for some students throughout their secondary schooling. The term acknowledges the many ways a student can be supported to have their learning assessed.

For a student to access assessment assistance for internal and/or external NCEA assessments, their school follows the Special Assessment Conditions process. This process and set of entitlements is managed by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA).

An **assessment assistant** is a person who assists a student in an assessment situation. An assessment assistant might be used to support students to express their learning in a range of ways and at multiple points along an individual student's learning pathway.

The person carrying out this role in NCEA assessments may be the student's reader, writer or reader-writer.

► Find out more about [Special Assessment Conditions](#) on the NZQA website.

# 1 Designing assessment for all learners

Effective assessment benefits and involves students, supports teaching and learning goals, is planned and communicated, suited to the purpose and valid and fair.<sup>1</sup> Assessment assistance removes barriers so that every student has a fair opportunity to demonstrate what they know, think and can do.

Universal Design for Learning<sup>2</sup> (or UDL) provides a framework for creating effective assessment.

UDL is about creating accessible education for all learners, from the outset. It is based on the recognition that each person learns and expresses themselves in their own unique way. When teachers apply a UDL framework to planning, they build in multiple means of representation, expression and engagement.

We worked with teachers and got them to rethink how they were doing some of the internal assessments. After we'd redesigned the assessments, we didn't need as many reader-writers.

- Head of department

A UDL frame for assessment prompts educators to design assessment to fit the student, rather than the other way around. It ensures the means of showing understanding is not itself a barrier to success. When using this frame, teachers design a broad range of assessment approaches that take account of the varied skills, characteristics and experiences of all students.

When schools expand the range of ways their students can show their knowledge, they can also reduce the need for additional assessment assistance. This is because more students are able to participate in the assessment without the need for support.

## Questions to ask

- ❓ What process do we follow to decide how to assess student achievement?
- ❓ Are there other ways achievement could be measured outside of reading or writing?
- ❓ What do our students have to say about how they would like to show their learning?
- ❓ What assistive technologies could we employ to help students communicate what they have learned?

▶ See NZQA's website for information about [Transforming Assessment Praxis](#) (TAP). TAP supports educators to explore diverse, fair and valid ways of collecting evidence of achievement and to modify existing resources to better meet learners' needs.

▶ For more information on [Universal Design for Learning](#), read the UDL guide on the Ministry's Inclusive Education website.

<sup>1</sup> *The New Zealand Curriculum*, page 40

<sup>2</sup> See <http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/universal-design-for-learning/>

## 2 Recruiting assessment assistants

Establish a pool of suitable assessment assistants who can be matched to individual student needs, strengths and preferences.

It is useful to determine the need for assessment assistance early in the school year. Planned discussions with students, teachers and whānau will assist in identifying the requirements for assessment assistants at your school.

We ask some of our senior students to be assessment assistants for our junior levels. It introduces them to the role and then they can be assessment assistants for NCEA exams when they have moved on to university.

*- Head of learning support*

Some of the larger businesses in our town encourage their staff to take a day's leave for community service. We have started working with a bank to provide volunteers during our high-demand times for assessment assistants.

*- SENCO*

Once the school's need for assessment assistants has been defined, the next step is finding suitable people. To be effective in their role, assessment assistants need to have a positive relationship with students, good organisation and a competent skill level. The [e-learning module](#) which accompanies this guide is designed to provide basic training in these competencies. It is for assessment assistants working as reader-writers in formal assessments.

It is also important that assessment assistants can read clearly and write legibly. Different schools ascertain these qualities in different ways - some schools give potential assessment assistants a brief reading and writing task, other schools may ask for a writing sample.

Schools can find it a challenge to recruit and train enough assessment assistants to meet their requirements. Some schools address this by seeking volunteers from the community - from marae, churches, service clubs, retirees, past students, senior students and local businesses.

Some schools are very effective at maintaining a pool of volunteers by providing them with training and letting them know how much their help is appreciated.

Teachers can't assist their own students in exams and our school is quite rural – so there aren't loads of people to call on to help. We swapped one of our teachers with a teacher at another school for the duration of exam week.

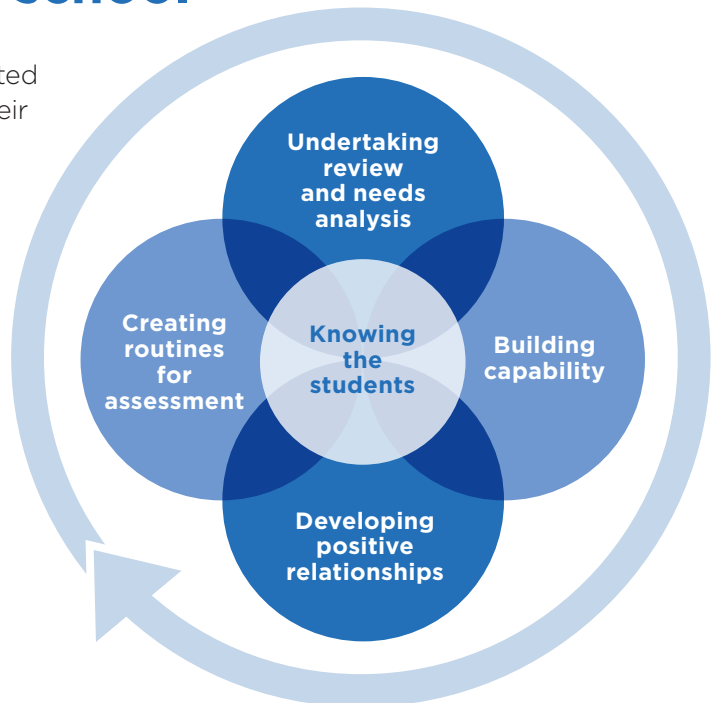
*– Head of learning support*

### Questions to ask:

- ❓ What kind of administrative support might we need to assist with the vetting and recruitment process?
- ❓ Could we create a part-time assessment assistant coordinator role?
- ❓ What are the tangible ways in which we value our assessment assistants as part of the school community?

### 3 Using assessment assistants effectively in your school

The diagram opposite outlines five interrelated features of schools which are effective in their use of assessment assistants. It suggests an ongoing process of inquiry and self-review that sits within such processes already in place in the wider school.



#### Knowing the students

An effective assessment system requires knowledge of students' strengths, needs, goals, aspirations and personal circumstances.

To develop an understanding of students, it is necessary to listen to all perspectives, including students, whānau, teachers and specialists. These conversations can contribute to learner profiles which capture information for a variety of purposes – and could include the design of assessment and any requirements for assessment assistance.

Effective assessment is different for different people. By tailoring assessment approaches to students' strengths and preferences, schools may find that there are other ways to utilise their assessment assistants, outside of reading and writing. For example, an assessment assistant could be used to interview a student on their knowledge and record their response on a device for their teacher to then assess.

► See the Ministry of Education information sheet on [developing learner profiles](#).

#### Questions to ask:

- ? What opportunities do we have to talk with students, teachers and whānau about the students' assessment plans?
- ? How could we involve students in developing learner profiles to help us know and understand them better?
- ? How do we draw on students' views and perspectives when designing assessment?

## Building capability

Everybody involved in the provision of assessment assistance needs support to develop the knowledge, skills and understandings required to make the best use of this resource.

Schools that provide effective assessment assistance build capability in their students, teachers, assessment assistants and whānau. Capability is about skills and knowledge but it's also about attitudes – a shared belief in the value of assessment assistance so that all students have the same opportunity to demonstrate their success.

Formal assessment can be a stressful experience for anyone. Students who require an assessment assistant have the additional stress of having to mediate their interaction with the assessment task through another person. By providing opportunities for students to engage with assessment assistants in a number of ways and settings, you can help students feel comfortable with managing this situation.

It is important for teachers to understand the vital part they play in providing effective assessment assistance for students. It works best when teachers are planning relevant assessment opportunities for their students well in advance. Teachers also need to know the process to follow for arranging assessment assistance.

We look for opportunities to embed our conversations about assessment assistance within wider staff discussions about exams and assessment. We don't want it to be seen as an 'add-on' – it's about creating an assessment system that works for everyone.

– Learning Support Coordinator

Assessment assistants need to know how to be effective in their role. This guide has a companion [e-learning module](#) that introduces assessment assistants to the key skills, roles and responsibilities of being a reader-writer in a formal assessment. It can be used remotely by assessment assistants at their own time, pace and place. Alternatively, use the instructions at the end of this guide to help plan a group training session using the e-learning module.

Effective practice will include whānau as informed partners. Take advantage of the school's current processes for home-school partnerships to continue to build whānau understanding of their children's assessment plans.

### Questions to ask

- ? How does learning support communicate with staff about assessment assistance? Are the policies, processes and expectations displayed clearly for continued reference?
- ? What other practices can be employed to foster effective assessment assistance? For example, could subject teachers provide subject-specific vocabulary lists for assessment assistants to study prior to an assessment?



## Establishing positive relationships

Regular, respectful communication is the foundation of effective working relationships.

Relationships of trust and respect develop when there is effective communication that includes opportunities for people to ask questions and share their perspective. This can give students confidence in the assessment assistance that they will receive.

Much of the responsibility for a student's assessment lies with the teacher. Teachers play an important role in helping students to take ownership of their own assessment plan by talking regularly with them about what will work best.

Ideally, students will form relationships with multiple reader-writers so there is a pool from which to draw. In exceptional circumstances, such as when a student has a strong preference for working with one person, the priority is to do what works for the student.

### Questions to ask

- ? In what ways do we currently engage with students, teachers and whānau about an individual student's assessment plan?
- ? What opportunities do we provide for students and assessment assistants to get to know each other before an assessment?

I didn't have a chance to work with my reader-writer before my English exam, so they arranged for us to meet ten minutes early just to chat.

- Student

## Creating routines for assessment

Detailed planning supports all partners in the assessment process to ensure a smooth assessment experience.

Effective schools design training and communication systems to ensure that the protocols and routines for assessment assistance are clearly articulated and understood by all.

At assessment time, it can help to have a checklist to follow so that a student's assessment experience is as smooth as possible. If possible, try to locate the assessment near where the student's peers are being examined. This way the student can share the camaraderie before and after the exam. Allow plenty of time for setting rooms and make sure someone from learning support is on call to provide help if it is necessary during the assessment.

### Questions to ask

- ? Do we have clear practices around assessment time?
- ? How do we communicate with teachers, students, assessment assistants and whānau to make sure everyone has the same understanding?
- ? Is there a central place for everyone to gather before and after the examination where the papers and any other materials can be found?

## Undertaking review and needs analysis

Ongoing review and reflection means that the provision of assessment assistance can continually improve.

Talk to the student, the teacher and the assessment assistant as soon as possible after an assessment. You may want to provide an evaluation form instead, to capture what they thought of the assessment experience. Use what is learned from review to reflect on whether individual students are getting the right sort of assistance and to improve the system for everyone. Schools which have effective communication and training systems, find that feedback and feed forward become a natural part of people's conversations.

NZQA requires schools to undertake an annual needs analysis. Integrate your reflection and needs analysis into what happens at the school-wide level around the assessment experience for all students.

### Questions to ask

- ❓ What opportunities do we provide students to talk with each other about their experiences of assessment assistance?
- ❓ How do we embed our review of assessment assistance within our school's overall processes for review?

Find out more about the [annual needs analysis](#) on NZQA's website.

## 4 Training assessment assistants

Alongside this guide, the Ministry has launched an e-learning module, [How to be an effective assessment assistant](#).

This 30-minute e-learning module provides guided learning activities to develop the knowledge and skills of people who will carry out the role of a reader-writer in a formal assessment. By the end of the module, assessment assistants will be able to:

- ✓ identify the key skills required to be an effective assessment assistant
- ✓ classify the different roles that students, assessment assistants, and learning support have when approaching an assessment
- ✓ describe the specific responsibilities that are associated with being an assessment assistant in an assessment situation.

The e-learning module can be used independently, or in group sessions. Please see the appendix for notes on how to use the module in a group setting.

## Appendix

# How to be an effective assessment assistant: Using the e-learning module for group training

## Introduction

The e-learning module [How to be an effective assessment assistant](#) introduces assessment assistants to the key skills, roles and responsibilities they need to have as a reader-writer in formal assessment situations.

The module developed out of sector demand for training resources. It has been designed primarily so that it can be used remotely by assessment assistants at their own time, pace and place.

This guide outlines the benefits of using the e-learning module to help run a group training session. It provides a suggested structure for activities to use alongside the e-learning module.

## Why run a group training session?

There are a number of benefits to running a group training session with the e-learning module:

- The module brings structure to group training as the key messages and content are already developed.
- The module provides an interactive resource to support your expertise.
- Discussion around the material can be customised to meet the needs of your specific audience and your school's specific context.
- Questions about the module can be answered by you, the expert, on the spot.

## Group training notes

The group training notes outline one way you can use the e-learning module as a basis for training assessment assistants. As an educator yourself, you may have other ideas for




delivery of this material that are just as successful.

It has been designed to take approximately 90 minutes.

### **Resources required**

- This guide
- E-learning module, laptop and data projector
- Whakatauki – provided, print to A3
- Station cards – provided, print to A3 and cut up
- Green and red paddles – provided, print one of each for each participant
- NZQA Reader/Writer Guide – download from the [NZQA website](#) and print one copy for each participant
- Whiteboard and pens
- Pens and paper

### **Practical tips**

- Take some time before you run a group training session to go through these group training notes alongside the e-learning module.
  - Check that the e-learning module works as expected on your computer before the session. Make sure the audio can be heard.
  - Make sure that you are familiar with how the interactions work, so you can control the pace and direction of the session.
  - Print out the attached resource sheets.
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Time & topic	Suggested activity	Resources
<p><b>Welcome &amp; introductions</b></p> <p>(5 minutes)</p>	<p>Welcome to the training session.</p> <p>Whakatauki can help to frame the kaupapa of the training – there is a printout at back of this guide that you may choose to use.</p> <p>Ask people to introduce themselves to the group.</p>	<p>e-learning module – Title page</p> <p>Whakatauki printout – provided</p>
<p><b>Warm-up</b></p> <p>(5 minutes)</p>	<p>Click to hear three students describe why they require assessment assistance.</p> <p>Listen to Heidi, Mhirangi and Jon.</p> <p>Ask participants to talk to the person beside them about who they think is eligible for assessment assistance and why.</p> <p>Ask for participants to feed their thoughts back to the group. Once discussion has completed, click on the screen to read the summary as a group.</p>	<p>e-learning module # 1</p> <p>e-learning module # 2</p>
<p><b>Objectives</b></p> <p>(2 minutes)</p>	<p>Read through the objectives as a group.</p> <p>Emphasise that the role is separate and distinct from other types of learning support. Even if some of your group are experienced in supporting students, it is important that they are aware of that there are specific roles and responsibilities as an assessment assistant.</p>	<p>e-learning module # 3</p>
<p><b>Formative assessment</b></p> <p>(2 minutes)</p>	<p>The learner rates their own knowledge and confidence levels prior to beginning this e-learning module by giving themselves a number of 1 – 5 in relation to the continuum statements</p> <p>Ask participants to jot down the answers on paper, fold their paper in half and put to the side for later on in the session.</p>	<p>e-learning module # 4</p>

Time & topic	Suggested activity	Resources
<p><b>Topic 1: The key skills required</b></p> <p><b>Key skills of an effective assessment assistant</b></p>	<p>This introduces the group to this topic.</p>	<p>e-learning module # 5</p>
<p><b>Learn from listening to students</b></p> <p>(2 minutes)</p> <p><i>Provide guidance for learning</i></p>	<p>The first part of the training today will be focusing on the key skills needed to be an effective assessment assistant.</p> <p>Before you click through on the first skill 'Organisation', ask learners to turn to the person beside them and discuss:</p> <p><i>What does being organised look like?</i></p> <p>Then view the summary statement and listen to the soundbite together.</p> <p>Ask of the group:</p> <p><i>Does this add anything to what you've already discussed as a pair?</i></p> <p>Do this process with the other two tabs, 'Positive Relationships' and 'Competence.'</p>	<p>e-learning module # 6</p>

Time & topic	Suggested activity	Resources
<p><b>Be Organised</b></p> <p>(1 minute video)</p> <p><i>Reflect on practice</i></p> <p><i>Increase knowledge</i></p>	<p>The learners watch the video and then discuss the features of effective practice.</p> <p>Watch the clip, and ask learners to discuss with the person next to them what they saw happening and why that would be effective.</p> <p>Every school structures their assessment assistance differently. The way that you implement the skills shown in the video at your school may be different from the example.</p> <p>Discuss how what you saw might work in your own schools' context.</p> <p>Move on to the slide with the True/False statements. Ask learners to jot down their own answers to the statements, before checking answers as a group against the module.</p>	<p>e-learning module # 7</p> <p>e-learning module # 8</p>
<p><b>Establishing positive relationships</b></p> <p>(1 minute video)</p> <p><i>Knowledge check</i></p>	<p>Repeat the activities from the previous two slides for the 'Establishing positive relationships' video and T/F statements.</p>	<p>e-learning module # 9</p> <p>e-learning module # 10</p>
<p><b>Have the skills</b></p> <p>(1 minute video)</p> <p><i>Knowledge check</i></p>	<p>Repeat the activities from the previous two slides for the 'Have the skills' video and T/F statements.</p>	<p>e-learning module # 11</p> <p>e-learning module # 12</p>



Time & topic	Suggested activity	Resources
<p><b>Topic 2: Roles</b></p> <p><b>Your role as an assessment assistant</b></p>	<p>This introduces the group to this topic.</p>	<p>e-learning module # 13</p>
<p><b>Understanding your role within the school</b></p> <p>(7 minutes)</p> <p><i>Understand the different roles and how they intersect</i></p>	<p>The second part of the training today will be focusing on the role that you play as an assessment assistant.</p> <p>Learners sort statements that appear in the bottom left corner into one of three columns: STUDENTS, ASSESSMENT ASSISTANTS, LEARNING SUPPORT.</p> <p>Get the group to stand and move to one of three stations set up around the room – students, assessment assistants, learning support – in reaction to the statements that appear on the screen.</p> <p>Move the statement on the screen into the column according to where the majority of the learners are choosing to stand.</p>	<p>Station cards – provided</p> <p>e-learning module # 14</p>

Time & topic	Suggested activity	Resources
<p><b>Topic 3: Responsibilities within an assessment</b></p> <p>(15 minutes)</p> <p><i>Present material</i></p> <p><i>Provide guidance for learning</i></p>	<p>The third part of the training today will be focusing on the responsibilities that you have as an assessment assistant.</p> <p>Assessment assistants have specific responsibilities. This is so that the assessment is fair, and that every student gets the same level of support.</p> <p>Hand out copies of the NZQA guides for assessment assistants to take away.</p>	<p>e-learning module # 15</p> <p><a href="#">NZQA Guides</a></p>
<p><b>What are my responsibilities</b></p> <p>(2 minutes)</p> <p><i>Knowledge check</i></p>	<p>Ask participants to form four groups. Assign one role category to each group (All assessment assistants, Reader-writer, Writer, Reader).</p> <p>Have everyone stand up and as each responsibility appears on the screen ask the group that the responsibility applies to to sit down.</p> <p>Move the statement on the screen into the column according to which group sits down.</p>	<p>e-learning module # 16</p>
<p><b>Supporting candidates in the assessment</b></p> <p>(6 minutes)</p> <p><i>Present material</i></p> <p><i>Provide guidance for learning</i></p>	<p>Click the play buttons to hear a student and an assessment assistant talk to each other. Learners listen and then they decide if the assessment assistant is correctly following the NZQA rules.</p> <p>After listening to each file, decide whether you think the assessment assistant has followed the rules set out for her in the NZQA guide. Hold a green or a red paddle up to represent your opinion. Discuss the consensus and then click on the screen answer.</p> <p>Do this with all three audio files.</p>	<p>e-learning module # 17</p> <p>e-learning module # 18</p> <p>e-learning module # 19</p> <p><a href="#">NZQA Guides</a></p> <p>Red and Green paddles</p>

Time & topic	Suggested activity	Resources
<p><b>Logistics and Q &amp; A</b></p> <p>(15 minutes)</p>	<p>This time is set aside to run through the logistics of assessment assistance at your school.</p> <p>You may have prepared your own school's resources, which you could refer to at this stage. Try to make sure that everyone is aware of what they need to do and how to get additional help should they need it.</p> <p>This time can also be used to answer any questions that the learners have.</p>	<p>School specific resources</p>
<p><b>Topic 4: Summary</b></p> <p><b>Self-assessment</b></p> <p>(5 minutes)</p> <p><i>Assess performance</i></p> <p><i>Summative assessment</i></p>	<p>The learner rates their own knowledge and confidence levels at the end of this e-learning module by giving themselves a number of 1 - 5 in relation to the continuum statements.</p> <p>Ask participants to jot down the answers on paper, then unfold their paper from the beginning of the session and see if their confidence has grown.</p> <p>Use this activity to identify any areas that might require further clarification as a group.</p>	<p>e-learning module # 20</p>
<p><b>Thank you for being an assessment assistant</b></p>	<p>The end of the e-learning module.</p>	<p>e-learning module # 21</p>

**Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi,  
engari he toa takitini.**

**‘My strength is not the work  
of one but that of many.’**



**Students**

**Assessment  
assistants**

**Learning  
support**



