

## **Design Plans: A Course on “Writing Essay Tests”**

### **BACKGROUND**

New lecturers and clinical professors not on the tenure track at LaFortune University have been having trouble transitioning to university teaching. Some of these new faculty have a background of teaching in continuing education and corporate training. Almost none have prior experience in university teaching, and many feel they are not prepared for the job. In order to contain expenses incurred with high turnover among these new non-tenured faculty, the Director of the Centre for Faculty Development has decided to develop a year-long orientation program consisting of a series of 30-minute online lessons. As a faculty development specialist with the centre, I have been commissioned with designing and developing one of these lessons, “Writing essay tests.”

### **FORMAT & MEDIUM**

#### **FORMAT: SELF-STUDY**

**Type of material:** Non-tenured faculty can expect a training program with an explanation of background concepts, demonstrations of steps in performing the task at hand, and activities and opportunities for the learner to practice the task. (Carliner, 2015). They can expect feedback based on automated responses, with little or no immediate interaction with an instructor.

**Structure:** Learners can expect the following structure:

- The course will begin with an agenda or list of objectives.

- There will be three units: one on the background concept (What is an essay test) and two others on the procedures (When should an essay test be used? and Write an effective essay test question).
- Units covering the procedures progress in a step-by-step sequential order, with the final lessons offering exercises or examples comparing essay tests with better-written, effective essay tests.
- Each unit ends with a quiz.

**Writing style:** This training program will be written in a supportive style.

**Additional expectation:** Non-tenured faculty will come from different stages of their life, and from different faculty. There will be some learner needs in common, like:

- Faculty have full course loads and are also expected to sit in on committees. So, we expect they will all have busy schedules, and won't all be available at the same time.
- Faculty will differ in technical abilities and comfort level in terms of computer use or working online, so some technical support should be considered in giving the course.

### **MEDIUM: ONLINE (ASYNCHRONOUS)**

Learners will be able to take the courses at their own pace, when and where they wish, eliminating the need to — and cost of — travel for training. An assumption is that faculty members of the university would have ready access to a computer or tablet, as well as technical support if the need arises.

#### **Advantages:**

- Online courses can make use of various media (video, audio sequences, visual).

- Material can be adjusted to address learners of various faculty (down to the examples, exercises and quizzes) and of various needs (repeat a lesson with other exercises to reaffirm learning).
- No face-to-face instructor means faculty can learn quietly on their own, without fearing judgment from instructor or fellow faculty peers.
- Courses can also hyperlink to additional resources online (example: Job Aids).

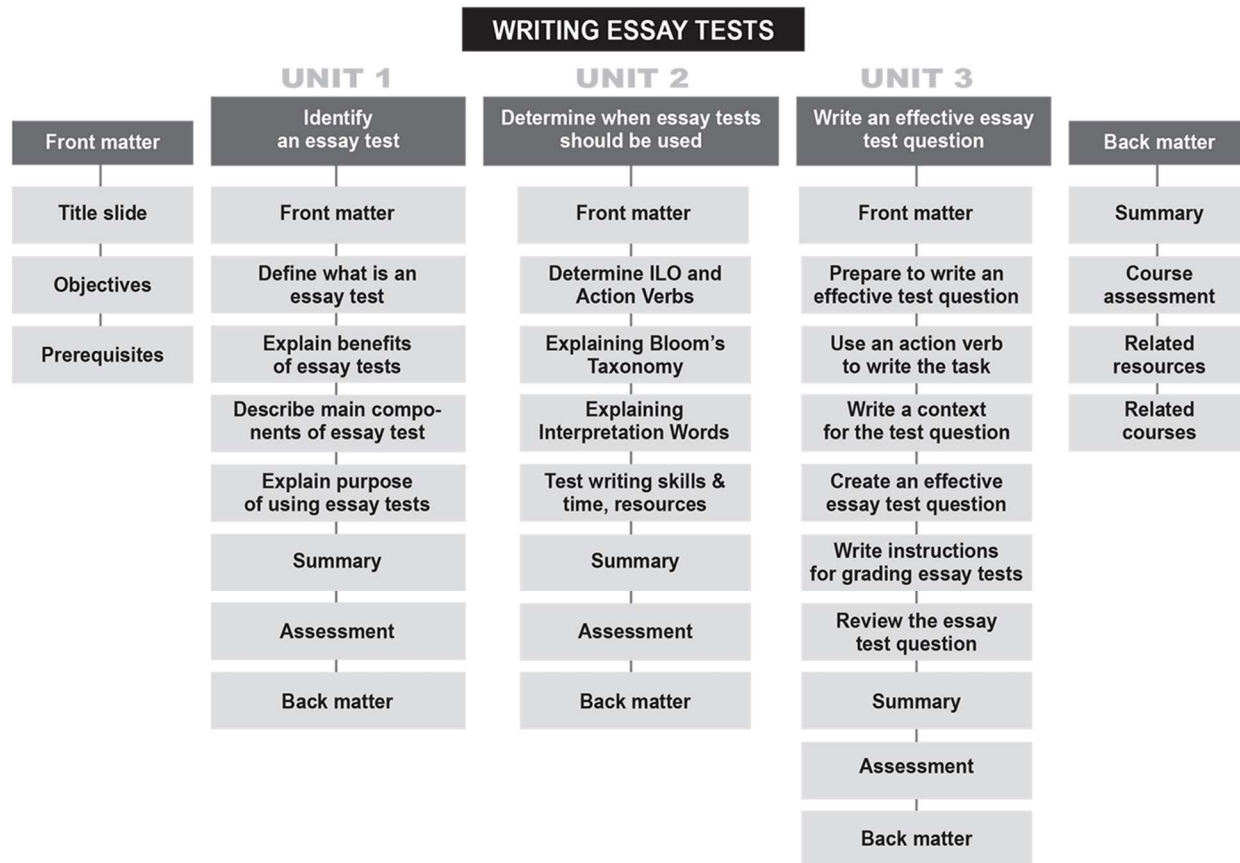
**Disadvantages:**

- Development for a basic (Level 1 eLearning) online asynchronous course costs at least twice as much as face-to-face instruction in a classroom on average (Chapman, 2010). This cost increases if the instructional designer or developer needs training to use specific authoring tools.
- Updates to online courses could prove troublesome if video or audio need to be re-edited with new content.
- Even though faculty would probably have access to computers and devices, technical issues could still crop up when the learners take the online course.
- There is no immediate and direct access to an instructor.

(Carliner, 2015)

## STRUCTURE OF THE OVER-ALL COURSE

**Note:** There have been some modifications made to the tasks and objectives in the Needs Assessment, at the suggestion of the Subject Matter Expert. Lessons within the course units now reflect these changes.



## OVERALL INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

### INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

**Mastery learning** is the best overall strategy for this online course on “Writing essay tests.” It’s based on Gagne’s Nine Events of Instruction. A training program with such an instructional strategy begins by gaining the learner’s attention, and then describing and demonstrating the skill learners must master. Learners then practice the given task until they have mastered the skill. Mastery Learning is often used to teach novices skills that have to be

performed in a prescribed manner. (Carliner, 2015). Our learners are university faculty hired for their expertise in respective fields of study, but they are novices at university teaching. Because this training program is online, learners will be able to practice multiple times in order to master the new skill. For these reasons, it’s best to use mastery learning as the overall strategy for this course.

## UNIT 1

### **PURPOSE**

This unit defines the concept of what is an essay test.

### **MAIN OBJECTIVE**

Define what is an essay test.

### **SUPPORTING OBJECTIVES**

- Distinguish between essay tests and other tests
- Describe types of essay tests

### **INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY**

**Classical Approach:** This portion of the course is straight-forward instruction and can be delivered in the following manner: Presenting an overview of the content, the learning materiel, practice problems, a summary, and then an evaluation. (Carliner, 2015).

UNIT 1: IDENTIFY AN ESSAY TEST					
	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	
Front matter	Define what is an essay test	Explain benefits of essay tests	Describe main components of essay test	Explain purpose of using essay tests	Back matter
Title slide	Front matter	Front matter	Front matter	Front matter	Summary
Unit Objectives	Distinguish between essay & other tests	Assesses critical thinking	Requires composition of response	Demonstrate systematic thinking	Assessment & Feedback
	Describe types of essay tests	Assesses writing ability	Requires more than one sentence response	Demonstrate critical thinking	Review unit or examples
	Summary	Summary	Summary	Summary	Move on to next unit
	Assessment & Feedback	Assessment & Feedback	Assessment & Feedback	Assessment & Feedback	
	Review lesson or move on	Review lesson or move on	Review lesson or move on	Review lesson or move on	

**OUTLINE FOR THE UNIT**

The structure of Unit 1 is shown above. **Narration over text-on-slides** could efficiently handle this instruction. **Formative and summary assessments** will be in the form of quizzes. Learners have to answer more than half the quiz in order to complete each unit and course, in order to obtain a certificate of completion.

## UNIT 2

### PURPOSE

This unit defines the first procedure: Determining when an essay test should be used.

### MAIN OBJECTIVE

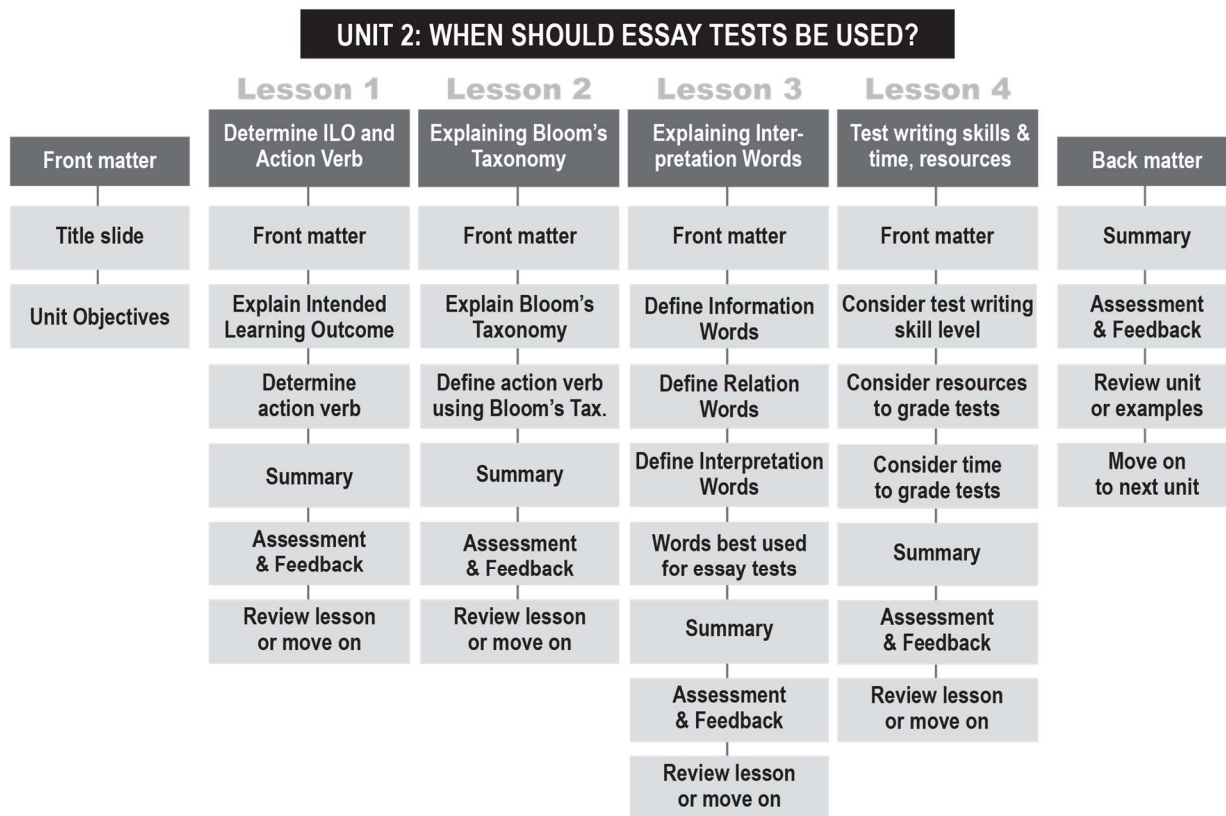
Determining when an essay test should be used.

### SUPPORTING OBJECTIVES

- Explanation of an Intended Learning Outcome
- Explanation of Bloom’s Taxonomy
- Interpretation Words and their use in an Essay Test
- Weighing test-writing skills and the professor’s time and resources

### INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

**Mastery Learning:** The first step in the overall procedure is conceptual and complex. Explanations will be accompanied with examples and exercises to help learners link newly learned concepts with the overall procedure. In this sense, mastering the overall skill in writing an essay test is contingent on the mastery of these learning and teaching concepts. (Carliner, 2015). It will be necessary to supply additional exercises to address learners’ needs (faculty-specific, comfort level with material, etc.).



**OUTLINE FOR THE UNIT**

Above is the structure of Unit 2. **Narration over text-on-slides** will still be the main form of instruction, but now, it will be important to supply multiple batches of exercises to demonstrate the material to the learners. **Formative and summative assessment** is still be in the form of a quiz at the end of the unit to assess learning one concept after another (from the introduction of intended learning outcome, to an explanation of Bloom’s Taxonomy, and then, to the Interpretation Words best suited for Essay Tests). Learners have to answer more than half the quiz in order to complete each unit and course, in order to obtain a certificate of completion.

## UNIT 3

### PURPOSE

This unit defines the second, and last procedure: Write an effective essay test question.

### MAIN OBJECTIVE

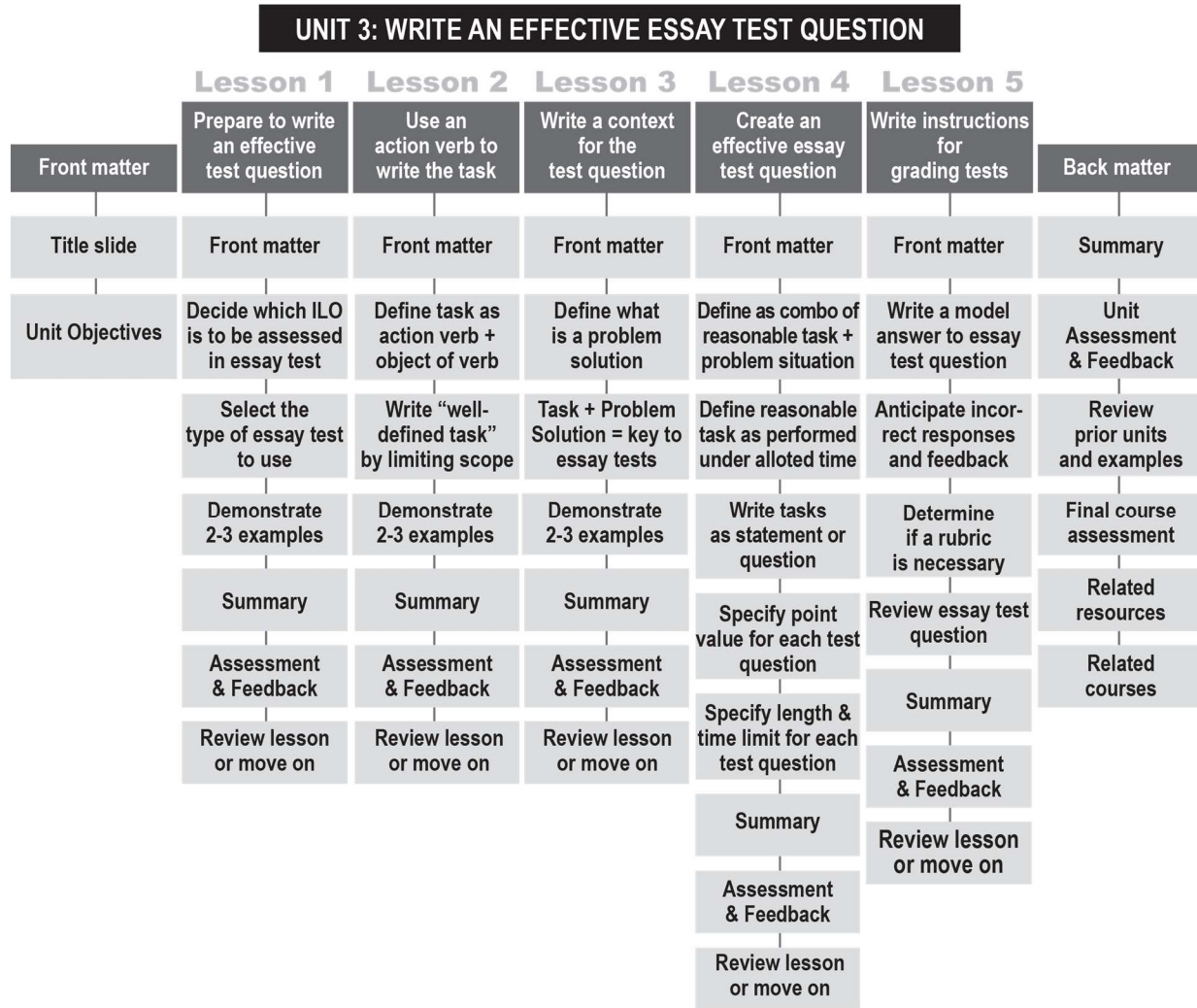
Write an effective essay test question.

### SUPPORTING OBJECTIVES

- Prepare to write an effective test question
- Use an action verb to write the task
- Write a context for the test question
- Create an effective essay test question
- Write instructions for grading tests

### INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

**Mastery Learning:** The final step in the overall course sounds straight-forward, but it will take practice. Explanations will be accompanied with examples and exercises to help understand just what makes an essay test question effective. It will be necessary to supply additional exercises to address learners’ needs (faculty-specific, comfort level with material, etc.), in order to give them ample opportunity to practice the skills. (Carliner, 2015)



**OUTLINE FOR THE UNIT**

Above is the structure of Unit 3. **Narration over text-on-slides** will still be the main form of instruction, but now, it will be important to supply multiple batches of exercises to demonstrate the material to the learners. **Formative assessment** is still in the form of quizzes, interspersed through the unit/lesson to reinforce learning of what makes an effective essay test question. **Final assessment** will give learners a final chance to review exercises. Learners have to answer more than half the quiz in order to complete each unit and course, in order to obtain a certificate of completion.

References

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