



A guide to accessible assessment for your classroom

Accessible assessment helps every student show what they know and can do. It's not about lowering standards – it's about removing unnecessary barriers so students can focus on the knowledge and skills you're trying to assess.

1. It protects the construct

A question's construct is the knowledge or skill it is meant to assess. When other features get in the way, it becomes harder for students to see what they're being asked to do. Clarifying a question doesn't change what is being assessed – it simply makes the focus clearer.

2. Accessibility removes unfair barriers

Ofqual's guidance is clear: assessments should allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills without unfair barriers. These barriers often appear when a question requires knowledge that isn't part of the construct, such as reading complexity, unfamiliar contexts or unclear visuals.

Removing these barriers helps students focus on what the question is really asking and what an awarding organisation wants to assess.

3. Accessibility supports all students

Clearer wording, familiar contexts and unambiguous questions help all students. What supports SEND students often makes assessment clearer and more manageable for the whole class.

4. How it links to your everyday teaching

You can make assessment more accessible and straightforward in classroom activities and mock assessments by using the table on the next page.

Examples (for both general and vocational qualifications)

Showing students how to break down question wording	Model how to recognise the command word (for example, describe, explain, compare) and circle what the question is asking them to focus on before they start writing. Walk through an assignment brief together and highlight where students need to describe a process, demonstrate a skill or evaluate their own practice.
Choosing familiar, relevant contexts Use context only where it is needed to answer the question or is required by the construct.	● avoid adding context simply to “set the scene” as it can increase cognitive load and distract candidates. ● use contexts that learners at the level are likely to be familiar with. ● avoid irrelevant, unnecessary, contentious or upsetting contexts. ● use culturally diverse contexts and be mindful of beliefs, practices and cultures to avoid unintended offence or distress. ● use neutral titles where possible, such as the student, Engineer A or the teacher. ● use people’s names only when necessary to support understanding. ● prioritise gender-neutral names (e.g. Alex) and use gender-neutral pronouns (their rather than his or her). ● balance of gender names across the assessment. ● for fictitious businesses, organisations or products, use names that are short, simple, easy to pronounce, easy to spell and unambiguous (e.g. “Jay Media Ltd”)
Avoiding unnecessary complexity in questions	● keep sentences short, avoid double negatives and remove information that isn’t needed to answer that question. ● break longer tasks into clearly labelled sections so students can see exactly what evidence is needed for each part.
Explaining clearly what is being assessed	● tell students which knowledge, skill or understanding the question is targeting, not just how many marks it’s worth. ● link tasks directly to the assessment criteria, using plain language to explain what meeting the standard looks like in practice

Small changes like these can make assessment clearer, fairer and easier for students to engage with.

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