
Assessments 101: Tools and Techniques for Faculty Enhancing Legal Education with Effective Assessment Methods

Welcome to 'Assessment 101 for Paralegal Teachers'! In this session, we will review a semester-long research and writing project while introducing different assessment measures for effectively teaching paralegal students.



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- Jackie Van Dyke is a Certified Paralegal (CP) and university professor teaching Legal Research and Writing at the University of San Diego School of Law Paralegal Certificate Program (USD) and The George Washington University College of Professional Studies (GWU).
- Jackie is also the solopreneur of The Paralegal Writer™ and host of Legal Writing Essentials, a membership for all paralegals and students interested in writing and leadership. She is also the author of the online signature course Pen A Memo™, which teaches experienced paralegals how to draft a concise, clear, and powerful memorandum as they prepare for certification.
- Sheila Grela is a seasoned litigation paralegal with an Advanced Certified Paralegal (ACP) designation in eDiscovery. She earned her paralegal certificate with honors from the ABA-approved USD Paralegal Program.
- A passionate advocate for professional growth, Sheila champions training, education, mentorship, and development within the legal community. She hosts the innovative "Virtual Lunch with Leaders" series—a collaborative weekly program with SDPA, EDRM, and Practice Aligned Resources—designed to foster meaningful conversations with trailblazing industry leaders.

Key Benefits of Assessment

- ✓ **Beyond Just Grading** – Measures understanding, application, and skill development, not just scores.
 - ✓ **Enhancing Legal Education** – Helps students retain legal concepts and apply them in real-world scenarios.
 - ✓ **Continuous Improvement** – Provides feedback to both students and educators for better learning outcomes.
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Why Assessments Matter in Paralegal Education

Ensuring Knowledge Retention and Skill Application

- ✓ **Knowledge Retention** – Well-structured assessments reinforce legal concepts and principles.
 - ✓ **Real-World Readiness** – Prepares students for legal tasks such as drafting, research, and client interactions.
 - ✓ **Skill Development** – Enhances critical thinking, problem-solving, and legal analysis skills.
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Types of Assessments

Balancing Traditional and Active Learning

- **Formative vs. Summative Assessments**
 - *Formative:* Ongoing, low-stakes (quizzes, reflections).
 - *Summative:* Final, high-stakes (exams, case briefs).
 - **Traditional vs. Active Learning Assessments**
 - *Traditional:* Essays, multiple-choice tests.
 - *Active:* Role plays, case studies, mock trials.
 - **Legal-Specific Assessments**
 - Custom tools like legal research challenges and oral arguments develop professional skills.
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Evidence-Based Methods

*Applying 'Make It Stick' Learning Strategies**

- **Retrieval Practice** – Low-stakes quizzes help strengthen memory recall of legal concepts.
- **Spaced Repetition** – Revisiting past topics over time improves retention and understanding.
- **Interleaving** – Mixing different legal subjects in assignments enhances problem-solving skills.
- **Generation** – Encourages students to attempt problem-solving before receiving guidance.
- **Elaboration** – Explaining legal concepts in their own words deepens comprehension.

*Taken from The Science of Successful Learning by Peter C. Brown

Effective & Engaging Assessment Techniques

Enhancing Legal Education Through Active Learning

- **Quick Recall Quizzes** – Mini-quizzes using flashcards, Kahoot, or verbal recall for memory retention.
 - **Legal Memo Writing and Analysis:** Students analyze real or hypothetical cases, assessing clarity, accuracy, legal reasoning, and critical thinking skills.
 - **Legal Research Challenges** – Students find and analyze treatises, law reviews, practice guides, case law, or statutes, developing research skills while learning how to navigate various legal platforms.
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Interactive Assessments

Engaging Students Through Applied Learning

- **Role-Playing & Mock Trials** – Students conduct client interviews, courtroom objections, and deposition exercises.
- **Self-Assessment Reflections** – Encourages students to analyze their performance and identify areas for improvement.

Interactive assessments engage students in real-world legal scenarios. Mock trials and role-playing allow them to develop advocacy and argumentation skills in a controlled setting. Self-assessment reflections help students take ownership of their learning, fostering self-awareness and critical thinking. These methods enhance participation while reinforcing legal concepts in practical ways.

Designing Effective Grading Rubrics

Ensuring Fair and Transparent Assessment

- **Content Accuracy** – Assess the correct application of legal principles and reasoning.
 - **Organization & Clarity** – Evaluate logical structure and coherence in legal writing.
 - **Citation & Legal Support** – Ensure proper citation of cases, statutes, and legal sources.
 - **Critical Thinking & Analysis** – Measure the depth of analysis and argument strength.
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Key Takeaways

- **Engaging & Evidence-Based** – Assessments should be interactive and grounded in learning science.
 - **Mix Formative & Summative Assessments** – Balance quizzes, discussions, and final evaluation feedback for deeper learning.
 - **Focus on Real-World Applications** – Assess critical thinking and legal research skills beyond memorization.
 - **Use Clear Rubrics** – Ensure fairness, transparency, and actionable feedback.
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Next Steps

Implementing Effective Assessment Strategies

- **Try a New Technique** – Incorporate a retrieval quiz, role-play, or research challenge in your next class.
 - **Use a Grading Rubric** – Apply a structured rubric to improve assessment consistency and fairness.
 - **Collaborate with Colleagues** – Share successful assessment strategies and learn from peers.
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Frequent, low-stakes quizzes are effective.

Activities that require active, effortful recall help students retain what they learn. Ask them to summarize in their own words the main idea from a reading.

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Switch up topics and activities.

Spacing and varying topics and practice is significantly more effective than a 75-minute lecture on one subject. It engages long-term memory and consolidates knowledge.

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Encourage students to figure it out.

Showing students the correct solution to a problem rather than letting them make mistakes means they avoid the sorts of difficulties that promote learning.

QUESTION & ANSWER TIME

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■ Thank you.
