Designing and developing assessment tools is part of the ‘bigger picture’ of the assessment system within vocational education and training. However, it is one of the most common areas of non-compliance, where assessment tools are found not to meet a range of requirements such as the principles of assessment, rules of evidence or training package requirements.

This Participant Workbook specifically addresses designing and developing assessment tools. As in the other workbooks, the first section describes the foundations of assessment and the standards that guide what you need to consider. The other sections follow the development process, as shown here.

If you have already undertaken TAEASS401 Plan assessment activities and processes, TAEASS402 Assess competence and TAEASS403 Participate in assessment validation before beginning this unit, then you can probably do a high-level review of the content in Section 1 and Section 2 before moving into the detailed processes in Sections 3 to 6.

**What skills will you need?**
To understand the assessment process within the current VET system, you must be able to:
- use appropriate terminology related to assessment of vocational education and training (VET) standards
- comply with the principles of assessment
- describe the rules of evidence
- describe dimensions of competency
- interpret the Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015.

**Access activity**
**Your definition of assessment**
An assessment is a tool used to see if a learner has reached the level of competency required to perform a task in the workplace. Think about a recent assessment you took and answer the following questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment details:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was it a successful assessment (were you competent)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was it a fair assessment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you feel the assessment tested what you had learned?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could the assessment have been used in a different context?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could the assessment have been completed by somebody other than you without the assessor knowing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the assessment cover up-to-date technology or processes?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Overview of relationships in the assessment process**

Assessment benchmarks determine evidence requirements, methods and tools used to gather the evidence produced.

The diagram on the following page broadly illustrates the relationship between benchmarks, evidence requirements, assessment methods and tools, and evidence produced.
Design and develop assessment tools

Determine the focus of your assessment

Before you can start to develop your assessment tools and processes, you need to answer a few questions. The answers to these questions will guide the development process and provide you with the necessary content to create your assessment tools.

› Who is the target group of learners for the assessment process?
› Do they have any additional needs?
› In what context will the assessment tools be used?
› What benchmarks for assessment are the tools designed to meet?
› Have the benchmarks been contextualised to reflect the assessment contexts?
› Have the evidence requirements of the benchmarks been identified?
› Do you need to access and review any other relevant documentation?

The target group and the context

You need to know who the target group is, so you can design and develop tools that will appropriately reflect any general or specific characteristics they may have. How much you know about the target group helps you determine the context in which the tools will be used. Do the learners have specific characteristics or needs to be considered?

The context of your own work influences what you know about the target group. If you are developing assessment tools for a specific group of learners, such as employees in your own workplace, the specificity of information you may be able to gather about this group will be much greater than if you are developing assessment tools to support the broader implementation of a training package. For the former, you can probably talk to the learners and other relevant personnel to access background information and build a detailed profile of the group. For the latter, your knowledge may be limited to a generic profile based on the qualification outcomes, entry requirements, etc.

If the tools are designed to be used by assessors in an RTO, with multiple applications for different groups of learners, you will be guided by general profiles of the learners or learners based on enrolment and other information. The assessors using your tools then need to contextualise them to reflect any specific needs and requirements of their particular group of learners, based on information gathered through training.

Reflecting the workplace or institutional context

The context of the assessment affects the design and development of your assessment tools; for example:

› if training and assessment activities occur in an off-the-job setting, skills might have to be demonstrated through simulations rather than in real workplaces (in line with the training package rules)
› if demonstrations in the workplace could affect workflow, they might have to occur outside normal operating hours
› sometimes permission needs to be sought – identify people involved in the learner’s workplace who may need to be informed of the assessment process
› where the workplace is noisy, you might need to go to a quiet or private place if assessment involves questioning
› where evidence is to be gathered over time, you need to make decisions about how this will be done (e.g. by demonstration and third-party reports)
› consider who will carry out the assessment (e.g. if you are assessing under a partnership arrangement)
› where the learner is in a workplace, their work activities should provide relevant assessment opportunities (you can show this by mapping the relationship between the assessment benchmarks and the learner’s workplace activities)
› you may need to consider how distance-based learners can demonstrate skills (e.g. by recording their performance and seeking third-party reports).

Check the context in which assessment will take place when you are confirming assessment methods.

Reflecting industry

You should also consult industry when assessing learners. This is done at the Training and Assessment Strategy level; however, it should also be also done at the individual assessment level. This ensures the currency of the assessment and that the learner is ‘job ready’ once they have passed assessment.
When choosing assessment methods, consider individuals’ needs – it might not be appropriate to treat each learner with particular needs in exactly the same way. If in doubt, ask the learner to give you some guidance.

Methods for integrated assessment

If your initial choice of units showed that the same evidence could be used by the learner to support some or all of the evidence requirements of the units collectively (i.e. a clustered approach), then choose assessment methods that enable integrated assessment.

Clustering units of competency for gathering evidence is covered in more detail in the Participant Workbook for the unit of competency TAEASS401 Plan assessment activities and processes.

Choosing methods for RPL assessment

Recognition of prior learning

RPL is an assessment process that assesses an individual’s formal and informal learning to determine the extent to which that individual has achieved the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, a qualification.

If a learner is making a claim for RPL, you may need to consider appropriate assessment methods. Depending on the needs of the learner, a range of methods suit RPL. You could use a combination of these methods. They include:

- Self-assessment
- Portfolio
- Questioning

You can select a combination of methods to suit the learner’s needs and the evidence requirements. For example, for a person being assessed for a diploma qualification, where access to workplace documentation is readily available, self-assessment and a verified portfolio could be adequate. However, for a person being assessed for a Certificate II qualification, you might need to combine self-assessment with an informal interview, possibly with a support person present, to elicit the required evidence.

You might also wish to set a project or ask for a demonstration of skills to observe current performance levels.

Analysing methods

Your analysis of the units you are assessing, including the evidence requirements, combined with the information you have gathered on the learners’ backgrounds and the context of assessment, forms the basis for selecting the most appropriate methods, tools and individual instruments for assessment.

The assessment methods you choose will establish how the necessary evidence will be best gathered. For most methods there are a range of tools that can be used to gather the necessary evidence. The assessment tool provides the specific instruments for the assessor or third party to collect evidence from the learners.

Choosing methods for RPL assessment

Some of the most commonly used assessment methods include:

- self-assessment
- direct observation
- observation through simulation
- verbal questioning
- written questioning
- third-party report
- projects
- portfolios
- journals and case studies

Each of these assessment methods are examined in greater detail below.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

The self-assessment method involves learners making decisions about their own progress towards competence. This could be a response to questions in a checklist, or it could involve gathering evidence to demonstrate competence against performance criteria. Self-assessment is a logical starting point for an RPL assessment process, as it provides learners with a threshold understanding of whether they are likely to meet the evidence requirements of the benchmark. They can then decide whether to proceed with the rest of the RPL process.

Appendices 1 and 2 in this Participant Workbook provide templates for self-assessment instruments that you can modify to suit your requirements.
Preparing responses for assessors

In preparing responses to the questions you have developed, ensure that you:

› make a list of acceptable responses to ensure the assessor can judge whether benchmarks have been met in a consistent way
› give guidance about how much information is needed in response to each question
› provide space for the assessor to document notes from the conversation to evidence authenticity and competency.

Your prepared responses need to reflect the actual evidence requirements of the unit; that is, you need to use the material in the benchmark to frame both the questions and the responses. It is preferable to develop a checklist of all the points that need to be addressed to meet the benchmark, rather than detailed, prepared responses written in full sentences (like a script of what you expect the learner to say).

Recording the evidence

The assessment tool should provide a way to document the learner’s responses in a suitable format to:

› provide a record of the learner’s evidence
› give feedback to the learner
› provide a record, if one is needed for any appeal against an assessment decision
› ensure recordkeeping in line with RTO/organisational policies and procedures and other responsibilities.

Assessment recording tools can include evidence captured in writing (written by the assessor), as well as in audio or video formats. The recording tool should include:

› information about the learner, assessor and context
› the list of questions, if appropriate
› a place to indicate whether the learner’s response to each question was satisfactory or not
› a place to indicate whether the learner’s overall performance was satisfactory or not and any necessary feedback.

Instructions for learners

Instructions for the learner could be in a separate document, or included on the question sheet. Instructions should include a form that the assessor can complete and give to the learners, explaining:

› when and where the questions will be asked
› who will ask the questions
› the benchmark/s for which the questions will be asked
› the length of time learners will have to respond to the questions
› the method of recording responses that will be used.

Instructions for assessors

The instructions for assessors should include clear and specific directions for delivering and using the tool. They could be in a separate document, or included on the question sheet. Instructions should include:

› when and where to ask the questions
› guidance on reasonable adjustments that can be made to the questions and responses
› time allocation
› the method for recording responses (this is a common non-compliance area)
› the method for recording and providing feedback.

The instructions to assessors may also suggest the need for follow-up questions. Follow-up questions should be used if the learner needs further clarification about the meaning of the question or if their responses are insufficient or unclear, but the assessor thinks they are capable of providing the necessary answers to meet the evidence requirements.

If the questioning tool is to be used in conjunction with another tool, such as an observation tool, the instructions should explicitly link these instruments and the trigger points for the assessor to ask particular questions.

Learning activity

Develop a verbal questioning tool

In the learning activity relating to ‘Direct Observations’, you were asked to identify an element or performance criteria from a unit of competency in your vocational area (industry) and create an observation tool for that criteria.

Now create a verbal assessment tool for use during this observation. Develop one or two questions that will support the learner to show their underlying knowledge of the skill.

With your questions, include:

› expected responses to these questions
› instructions for the learner and assessor
› a section for the assessor to record the outcomes relating to presentation of verbal evidence.
The review and trial process

As an assessor, you must ensure that any reviews and trials of assessment tools are well planned and organised to maximise positive outcomes.

Setting up
Planning trials of assessment tools involves setting up the process, including deciding:

- how data will be collected
- who will be responsible for the process
- how information about the review, trial and results will be disseminated
- how issues that emerge from the review and trial will be documented
- who will make the decisions about modifying the tools.

If you are a sole assessor, all of these responsibilities will probably fall to you. If this is the case, it is a good idea to work collaboratively with assessors in other organisations, as well as with industry representatives.

Conducting the review
You can conduct the review in a number of ways. Make sure you always include a checklist of criteria; for example, see the checklist provided in Appendix 10.

Here are some example methods to incorporate in your review:

- Provide relevant personnel with the tools, including a checklist of criteria. This could be a hard copy or presented electronically.
- Field test the tools with other assessors and content experts.
- Workshop the tools with assessors, industry representatives and other stakeholders.

Conducting the trial

The people involved in an assessment tool trial must be clear about the purpose of the trial, and whether the tool is being used for an actual assessment process.

If possible, a representative group of learners should be used as the trial group to see how the tools work under ordinary conditions. This helps you to ensure that the tools reflect and are appropriate to the target group. The trial should also take place in a context appropriate to the intended use.

Make sure you brief the people involved in the trial and provide opportunities for all learners to give feedback. After the trial assessment process is completed and the learners’ evidence has been gathered using the assessment tools, ask learners and assessors to provide feedback by:

- Completing a checklist
- Being part of a focus group
- Being interviewed

You could use your checklist as the basis for questioning if you are conducting a focus group or interview. Make sure that you have a method for the trial learners to record their feedback about your tools so that you can compile, compare and analyse it.

Learning activity
Develop an assessment review and trial process

Develop your own process for trialling and validating assessment tools and procedures to be used for your tools. You may build on a process that is already in place in your practice environment.

Make a list of relevant people to use in the review and trial of assessment tools. These may be people in your practice environment, or external to that environment. Industry representatives should be included in the process.

How can these people assist with the review, trial and validation of the tools?

What format and filing procedures are used for the assessment tools in your practice environment?
Access activity

Create a skill-specific assessment tool template

This workbook includes many examples of assessment tools and other instruments you may use.

For this assessment, consider your industry and create a blank assessment tool template that reflects:
- the look of your industry
- the skills of your industry
- the knowledge of your industry.

This template should be useful to supervisors or assessors in your industry and lend itself to several types of assessment method and units of competency.

Once you have completed the template, store it in your portfolio for use in your professional work.

Section summary

You should now understand how to review and trial assessment tools. Before you proceed, make sure that you are able to:

- check draft assessment tools against evaluation criteria and amend as required
- trial assessment tools to validate content and applicability
- collect and document feedback from relevant people involved in trialling
- make amendments to the final tool based on the analysis of feedback
- appropriately format and file the finalised assessment tool according to assessment system policies and procedures.