



**Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board**

# **Are Existing Assessment Modes for English Literature Still Relevant in Today's World?**

**Joshua Ang**  
**Low Ying Ping**

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# Singapore Context

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- English not Mother Tongue but considered as first language for education
- Literature a separate subject from English Language



# Assessment of Literature in Singapore

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- Assessed formally at Grades 10 and 12
- Set texts and Unseen
- Purely essay mode in timed exams
- Some scaffolding provided for Grade 10 passage-based essay questions
- Extended research essay at Grade 12 Higher 3 level

# Introduction – The Larger Picture

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- Main aim of Education
  - Equip students for life
- Changing demands
  - New skills needed

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies

Framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes



# Current Situation

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- Demand for more rigorous **standards** and more **systematic assessment** of students' learning to **measure grasp** of these 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies.

# Desired Outcome

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The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Student:

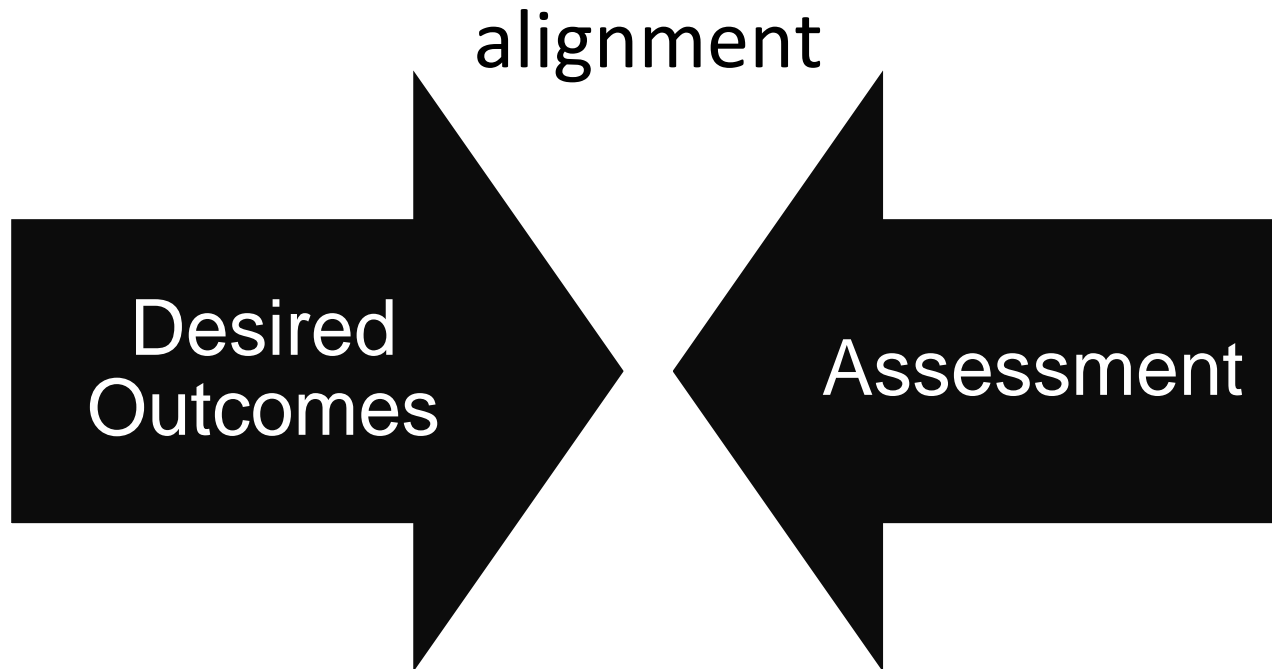
Must be able to evaluate validity and relevance of disparate pieces of information and draw conclusions from them

Darling-Hammond, et al (2013)



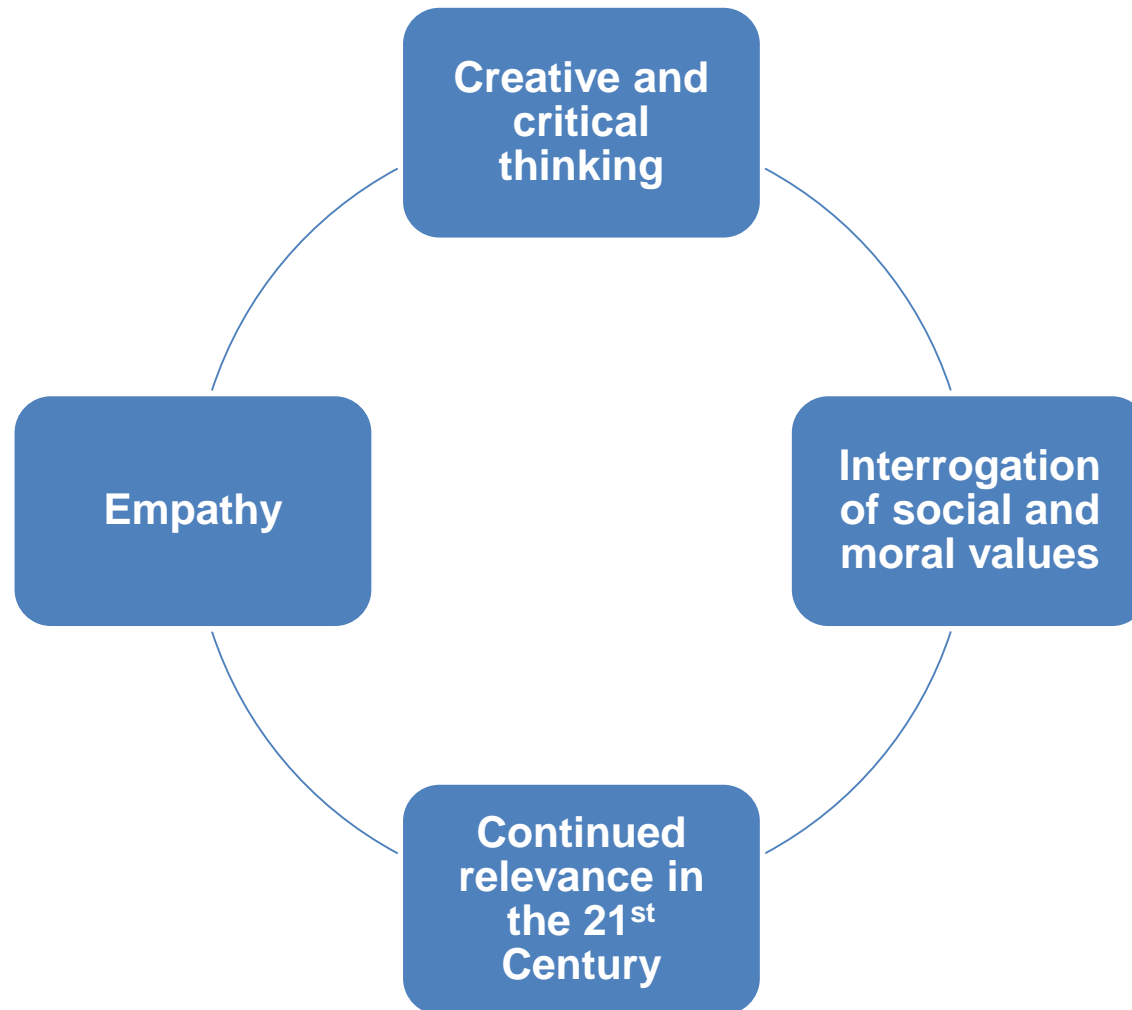
# Ideal Situation

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# Educational Value of Literature



# Literature as a Subject

- “aptly suited to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which is a time of rapid development and shifting perspectives in many areas, including the socio-cultural and the ethical-moral”

Singapore Ministry of Education *Literature in English Syllabus for Lower and Upper Secondary* (2013)



# Aims of Literature

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- “the goals of literature instruction include helping students increase their abilities to comprehend **literature in general** and their understanding of **given works in particular**”  
Hillocks Jr and Ludlow (1984)

# Modes of Assessment of Literature

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- MCQ
- Oral commentaries and presentations
- Essay Questions



# Evaluation of High-Quality Assessment

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## Criteria for Evaluation:

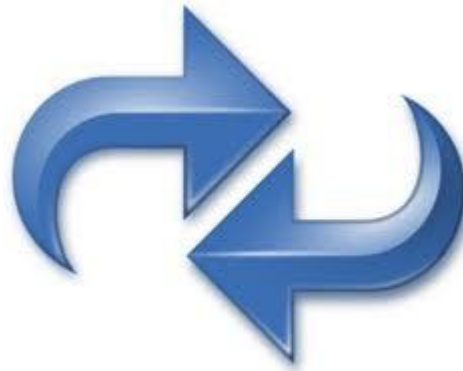
1. Assessment of higher-order cognitive skills
2. High-fidelity assessment of critical abilities
3. Standards that are internationally benchmarked
4. Use of items that are instructionally sensitive and educationally valuable
5. Assessments that are valid, fair and reliable

# 1. Assessment of higher-order cognitive skills

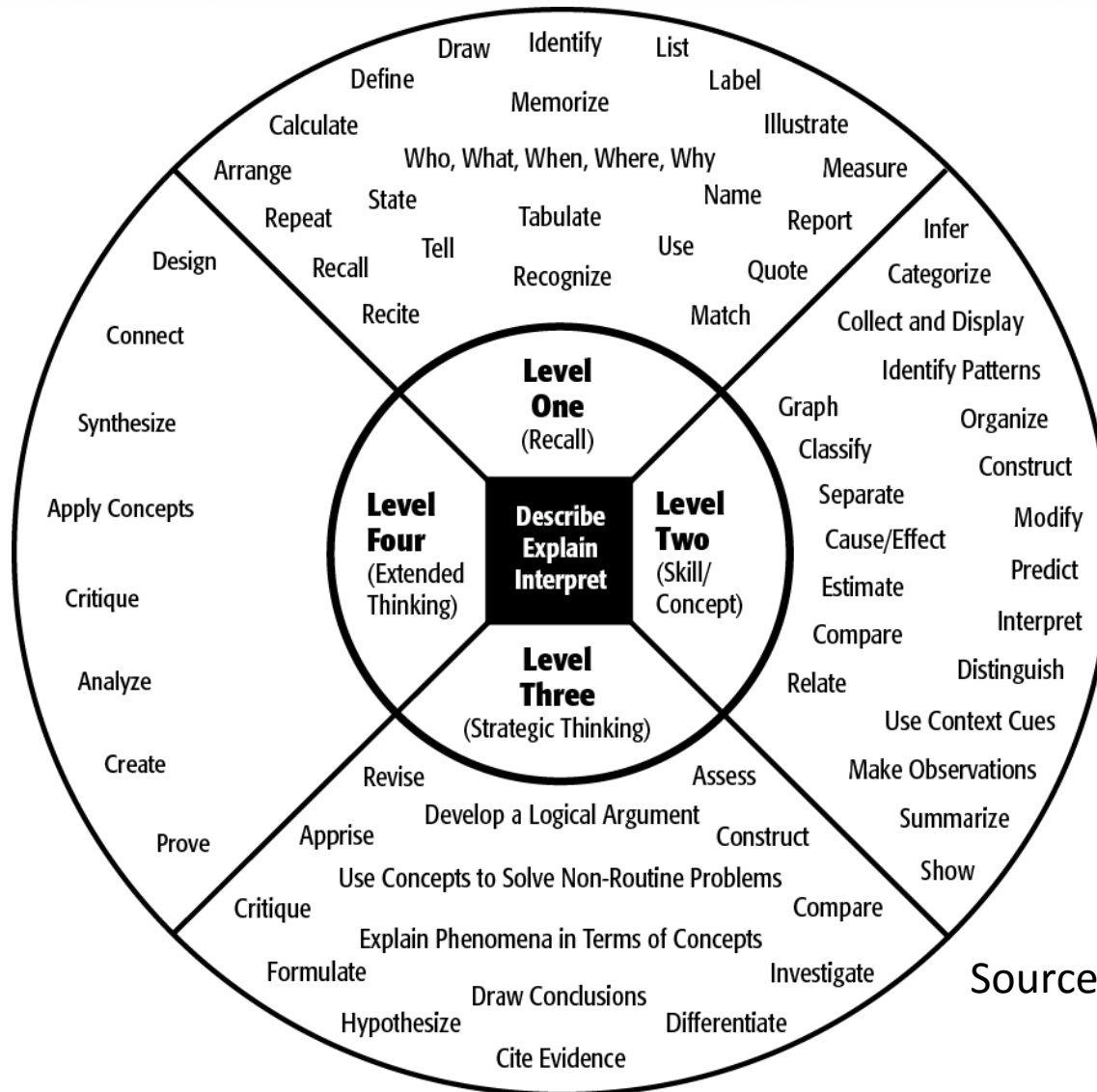
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- High quality assessment should evaluate students' ability to “transfer their learning to novel contexts”

Darling-Hammond, et al (2013)



# Depth of Knowledge Levels



Source: N. Webb (2002)

# MCQ

- “level of cognitive demand was severely constrained”
- “rarely able to assess [...] higher-order skills”
- Not sufficient to demonstrate student’s ability to “conduct research by finding, evaluating and using appropriate evidence to build an argument or evaluate a situation”



Darling-Hammond, et al (2013)



# Essay

- Requires students to formulate arguments, with evidence formed by analysis and evaluation of literary qualities of text

Relation to [Webb's DOK](#)



# Why the high degree of fulfillment?

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- Disciplinarity of the subject
  - Learning outcomes
    - ≠ content
    - = higher-order skills: analysis, evaluation, informed personal opinion

# Value of the Unseen

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- **Assesses**
  - ability to critically analyse new material
  - application of literary analysis skills
- **A core and compulsory component of Singapore's Literature examinations**

# Case Study

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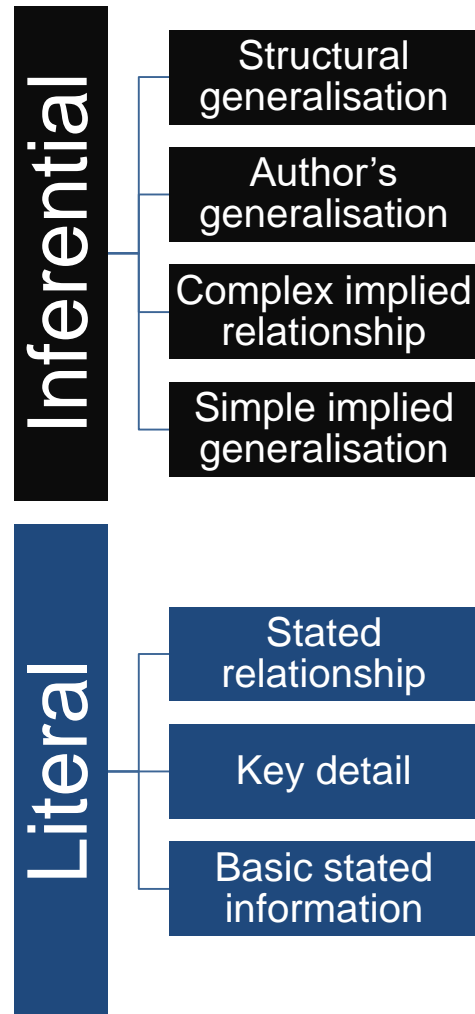
Ambivalent attitudes of some teachers to unseen

[+] Welcomed autonomy of choosing texts

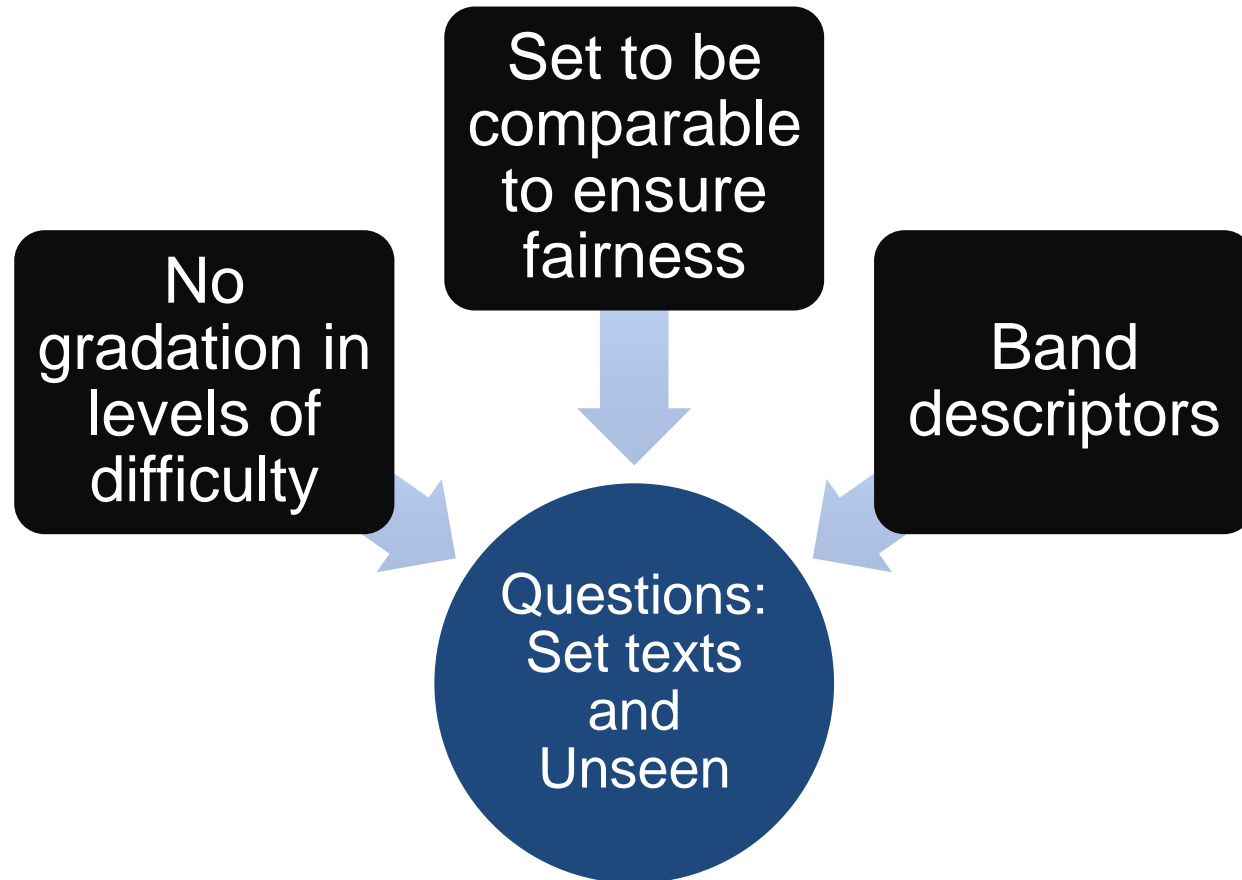
[-] No 'accountability' from students - tests on general ability

Possible cause: teachers unaware of broader aims of literature

# Hillocks's Taxonomy of Skills



# Application in Summative Examinations



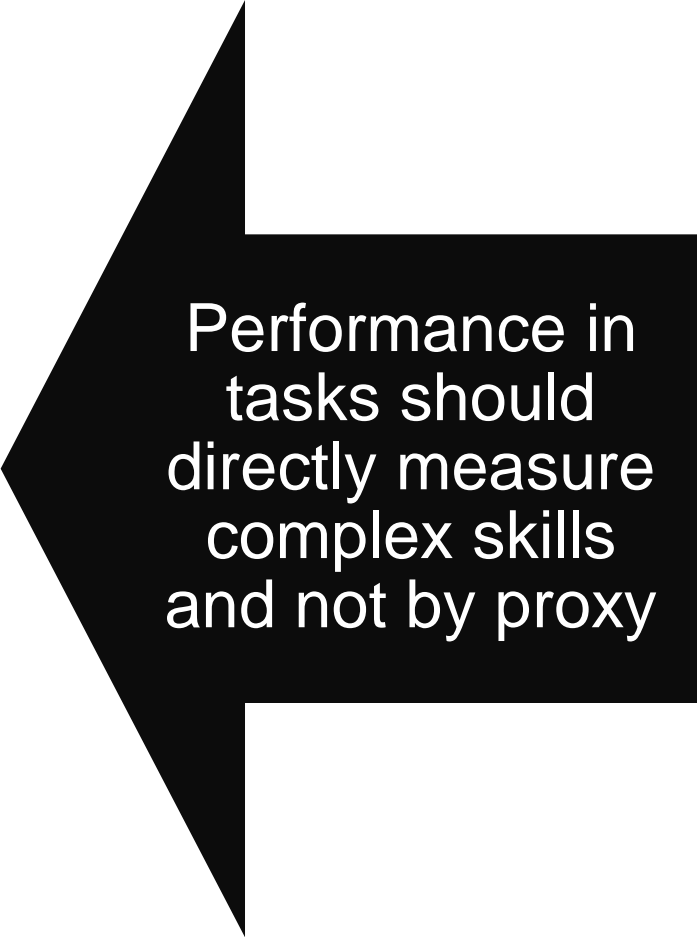
# Appropriacy

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Synoptic Questioning appropriate at summative level because students have read the set texts and have had time to think and reflect, to make connections

## 2. High-fidelity assessment of critical abilities

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Performance in  
tasks should  
directly measure  
complex skills  
and not by proxy



MCQ: poor  
approximation of  
intended  
assessment  
objective



# Assessment Objectives

- Candidates will be assessed on their ability to:
- communicate a sensitive and informed personal response to what is read
  - express responses clearly and coherently, using textual evidence when appropriate

## LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

GCE Ordinary Level

(Syllabus 2065)

November Only

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# Evaluation

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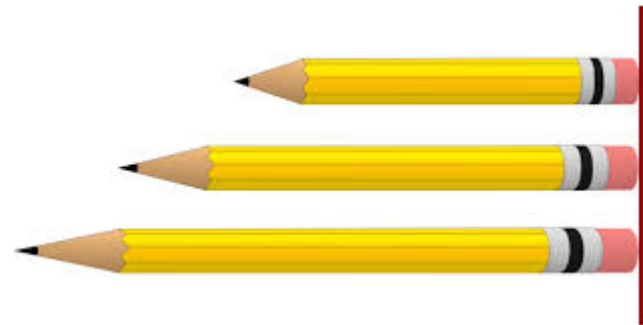
Essay as integral part of  
assessment of subject

High fidelity to  
testing of critical  
skills required of  
discipline

Analysis,  
synthesis,  
evaluation,  
communication

### 3. Standards Are Internationally Benchmarked

- Needs to be internationally competitive
- Comparisons with other countries with high-stakes examinations like the UK; IB
- Evaluation of MCQ against constructed response questions



## 4. Instructionally Sensitive and Educationally Valuable

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“represent the curriculum content in ways that respond to instruction”

Assessment should be “constructed so that an appropriate response requires students to employ key, enabling knowledge and skills.”

Darling-Hammond et al (2013)

# Unseen

Students cannot avoid having to apply knowledge and skills in a novel context



# Marking of Essays

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## Band descriptors:

- describes achievement at different levels
- clearly articulate performance standards required

# Assessment for Learning

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- Educationally valuable
- Identification of specific areas for improvement in teaching and learning

## 5. Valid, Fair and Reliable

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Construct Validity:

good representation of knowledge and skills the test intends to measure

Essays – choice given to broaden domain coverage and minimise disadvantaging students



# Valid, Fair and Reliable

## Predictive Validity

- Relation of performance in assessment to real-world success
- Good writing skills of Literature students – cope better with University requirements in general



# Valid, Fair and Reliable

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## Consequential Validity

- Consequential validity: consequences of assessment on learners and instruction
- Positive influence on instruction

# Valid, Fair and Reliable

## Reliability

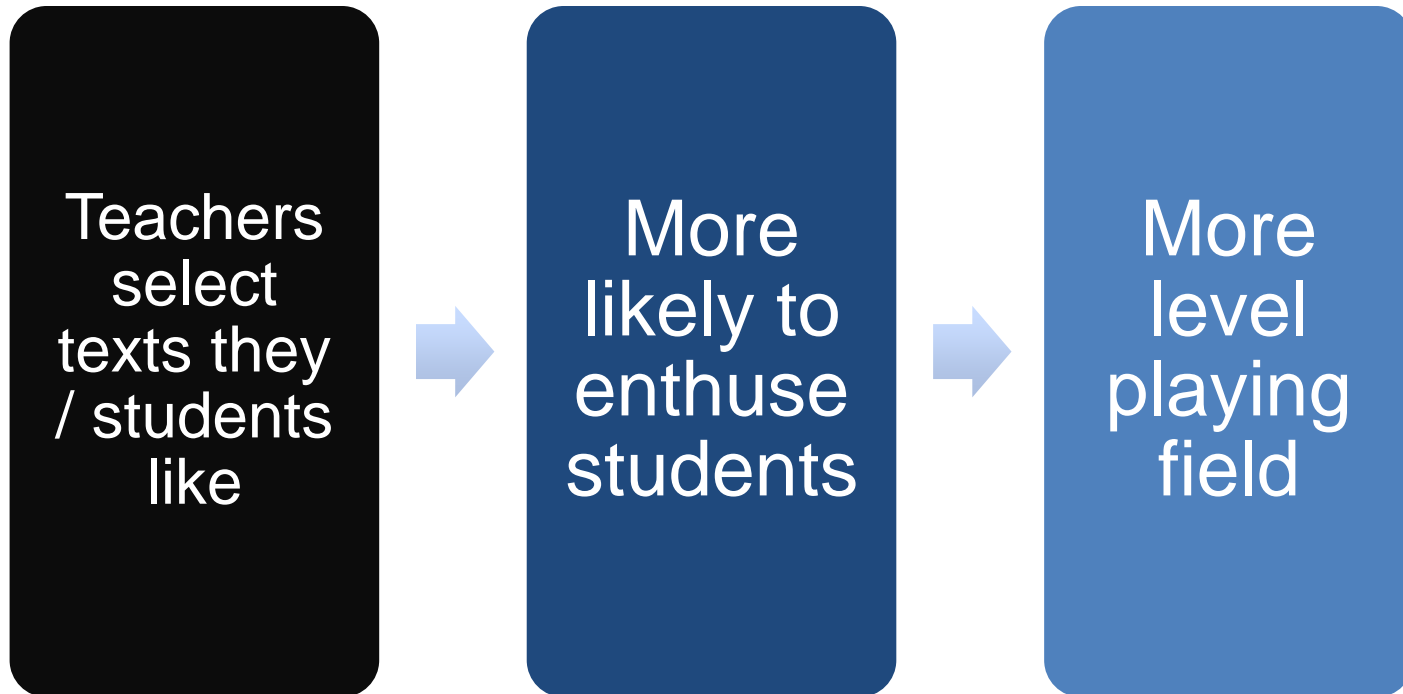
Implications of offering choice:



Criterion-referenced mark scheme helps ensure  
standardisation

# Fairness

## Choice of set texts



# Conclusion

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Essay mode fulfils all 5 criteria for high quality assessment



# Other Factors to Consider

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- Quality of Questions
- Mark Schemes
- Exam format



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A trusted authority in examinations and assessment,  
recognised locally and internationally

