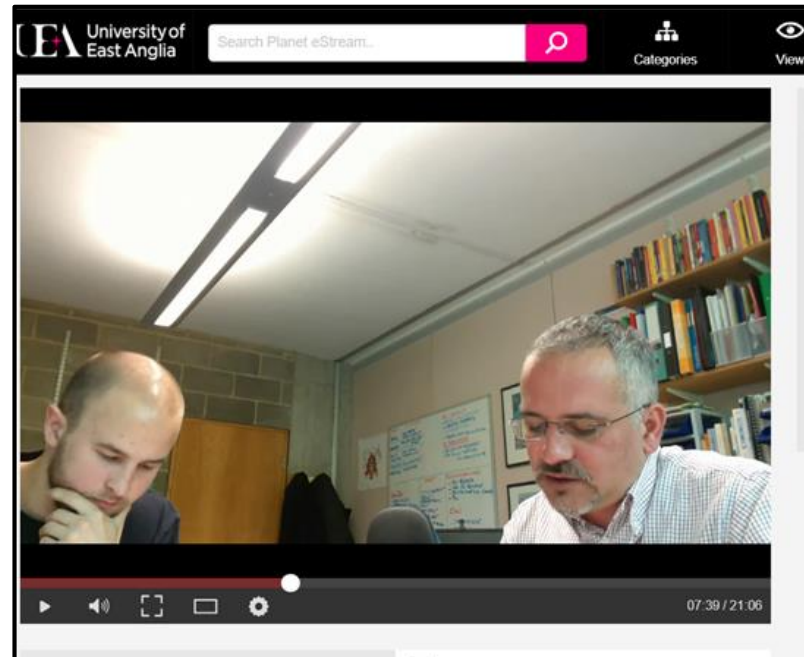# From Essay to Evaluative Conversation

Unlocking the power of viva voce assessment for undergraduates

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#TeachECON - July 2020

YOUR PRESENTER

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Research fields

- Higher Education policy and practice
- Oral Assessment
- Self-Assessment and Academic Self-Efficacy

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OUTLINE

1. **Introduction to viva voce assessment and wider context**

2. **Implementing viva voce assessment: my experience**

3. **Evaluation and Research of 2017-18 and 2018-19 data**

4. **Developments and plans post Covid-19**

# Introduction to viva voce assessment and wider context

POSITIONING

I am Italian and I trained at an Italian University

Backward:
Teaching practice in Italy was more didactic

Forward:
For the majority of disciplines, every final exam
is composed of a written + viva voce component
I believe the viva voce component is what shapes
Italian students' critical ability and discussion skills
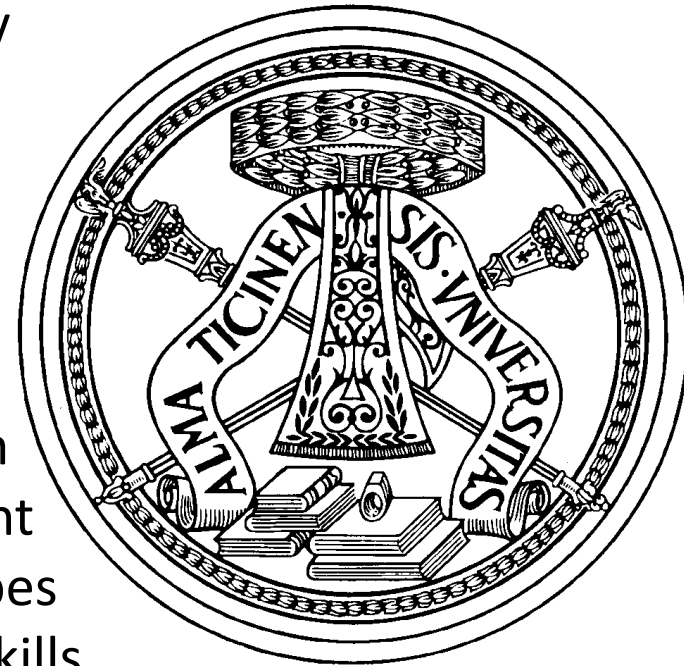
I strongly believe we should make better use of viva voce assessment.

VIVA VOCE ASSESSMENT

Uncommon   Stray (2001) – Traditional shift from oral to written exams in UK
Hounsell et al. (2007) – Why is it not used at UG level?

Few examples: Nursing (Davis & Engward, 2018), Dentistry (Ganji, 2017),
Business Studies (Pearce & Lee, 2009), Education (Carless, 2002),
Mathematics (Iannone & Simpson, 2012)

Unresearched   Dobson (2008) – not conceptualised in literature

Needed   EconomicsNetwork Surveys (2018-20)
→ communication to non-economists
→ creativity and imaginative ability

VIVA VOCE ASSESSMENT

When I interview graduates for a job at ONS, I do not look at their technical skills to begin with. I just ask myself: "Can I send this person to go and brief the Prime Minister about the most recent economic statistics in six months from now?"

Jonathan Athow
Deputy National Statistician and Director General,
Economic Statistics at Office for National Statistics
Former Advisory Board Member, Economics@UEA

VIVA VOCE ASSESSMENT

INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATION

EVALUATIVE CONVERSATION

A presentation is <u>not</u> a viva voce – power dynamics are different

Authenticity → what could be closer to a job interview?

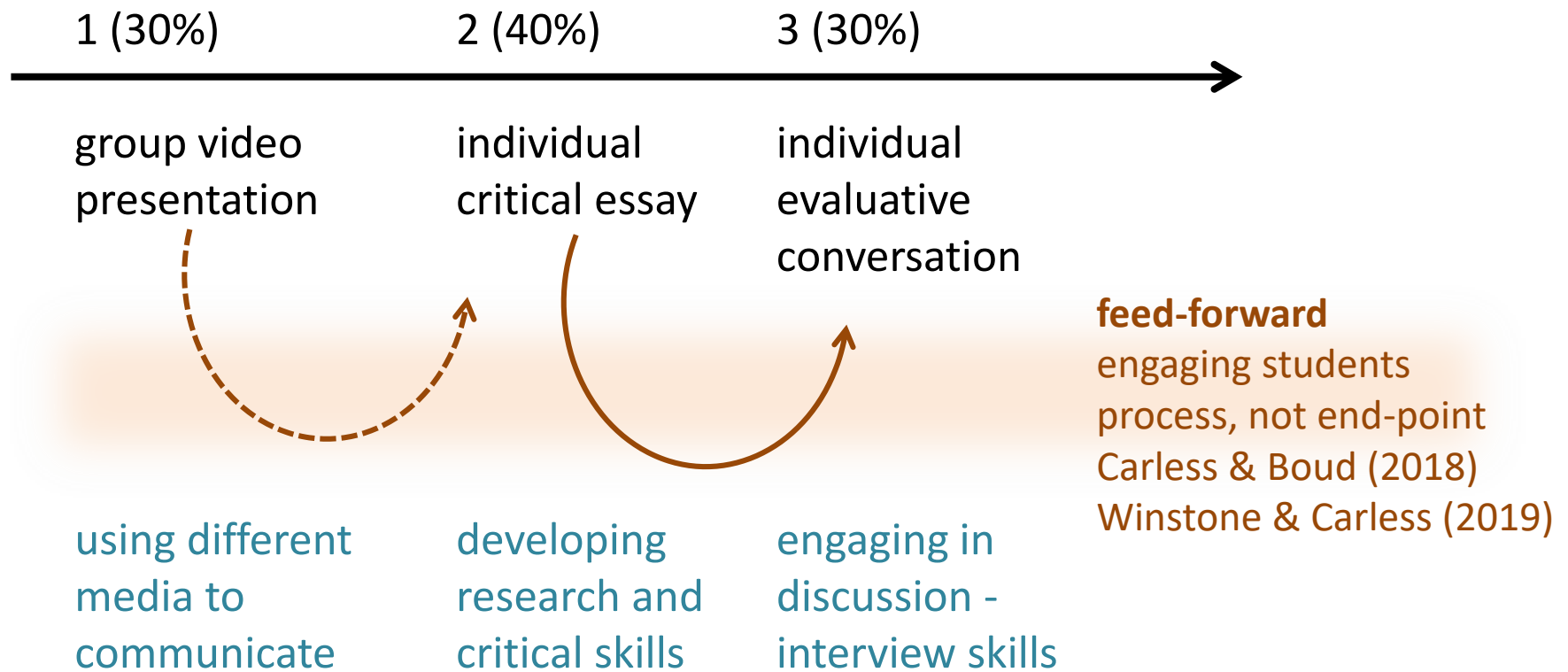Reflect on where you want to position your assessment.

Implementing viva voce assessment: my experience

HISTORY of ECONOMIC THOUGHT

Context: UG Year 2 optional module, popular with PPE students

Enrolment: 70 students in 2017-18, 50 students in 2018-19

Delivery: lectures   (reading and commenting original texts)
seminars (more readings, ideally student-led)

Content: Petty, Smith, Ricardo, Marx, Bentham, Mill & Marginalists,
Hayek & Austrians, Keynes, Friedman, McCloskey, Sudgen

Challenges: non-technical, so tests and exams are pointless
want to develop critical thinking, ability to discuss,
see the bigger picture, express through different media.

ASSESSMENT DESIGN

1 (30%) 2 (40%) 3 (30%)

group video presentation

individual critical essay

individual evaluative conversation

feed-forward
engaging students
process, not end-point
Carless & Boud (2018)
Winstone & Carless (2019)

using different media to communicate

developing research and critical skills

engaging in discussion - interview skills

HOW TO DO IT? Video-Presentation

1. Allocate students in groups and let them choose a topic

2. Set group allocation on VLE

3. Provide guidelines on free-software (e.g. OBS Studio, iMovie)

4. Students create video-presentation or screencast and upload on VLE

6. Videos are marked on VLE through rubric and feedback

7. Create a Wiki with all videos on VLE for students to share.

HOW TO DO IT? Essay

1. Students choose a topic and discuss it with me

2. Students submit their work on VLE in MSWord format

3. Scripts are annotated in MSWord + rubric + mark on VLE

4. Final comments include directions for the Evaluative Conversation
   - addressing in-text comments
   - expanding on the issues covered in the essay
   - making a link to another theory/thinker

5. Students receive their feedback and prepare for the conversation.

HOW TO DO IT? Evaluative Conversation

1. Block time-slots according to need

2. Set shared Excel with time-slots, linked to VLE

3. Students book their conversation slot, email to confirm

4. Evaluative Conversation: 15-20mins + 10 minutes to write feedback
   - recording on laptop camera and microphone
   - 1st part discussing essay feed-forward, 2nd part on entire syllabus
   - taking notes + marking crib + marking rubric agreed with students

5. Upload recording and marking crib/rubric on
   VLE add short feedback sentence and final mark.

HOW TO DO IT? Evaluative Conversation

Making Rubric co-created with students and reviewed periodically
(simplified senate scale)

Response to Feedback	discussing the essay
Critical Ability	depth of knowledge
	links across theories
Flexibility and Responsiveness	breadth of knowledge
Exposition Clarity and Quality	using appropriate jargon
Confidence	attitude during conversation

HOW TO DO IT? Evaluative Conversation

ECO-5009B - History of Economic Thought
Evaluative Conversation – Marking Crib

Question	Student Response			Needed Prompting?		
	Good	Fair	Poor	A lot	Some	No

HOW TO DO IT? Evaluative Conversation

HET – Evaluative Conversation – Marking Rubric

	High 1st (80-100)	1st (70-79)	2:1 (60-69)	2:2 (50-59)	3rd (40-49)	Mg Fail (30-39)	Fail (below 30)
Response to Feedback from Critical Essay	Feedback received was fully and satisfactorily acted upon.\n\nThere is presence of additional research related to the specific issues raised in the feedback. This is supplemented by additional original and critical contributions.	Feedback received was fully and satisfactorily acted upon.\n\nThere is presence of additional research related to the specific issues raised in the feedback.	Feedback received was acted upon.\n\nThere might be minor gaps in knowledge.\n\nThere might be reference to additional material, but this does not address the feedback fully	Feedback received was acted upon, but only core aspects were addressed.\n\nThere might be gaps in knowledge and unresolved issues.\n\nReference to additional material does not address the feedback fully, or it is not topical and relevant.	Feedback received was only partially acted upon.\n\nThere are substantive gaps in knowledge and unresolved issues.\n\nThere is no reference to additional material, or references provided are not pertinent.	Feedback received was marginally acted upon and addressed.\n\nThere are unanswered questions.\n\nInformation provided is superficial, confused, and/or irrelevant.	Feedback received was not acted upon in its entirety.\n\nThere was no response, and no evidence of engagement with the feedback.
Flexibility and Critical Ability	The conversation moved across different topics and theories seamlessly. There were elements of originality.\n\nAll responses were competent and exhaustive. They displayed excellent critical ability.	The conversation moved across different topics and theories reasonably well.\n\nResponses were competent and exhaustive. They displayed good critical ability, with very minor hesitations.	The conversation moved across different topics and theories but needed a few prompts.\n\nResponses were reasonably generally accurate. There was some evidence of critical considerations, but with hesitations.	The conversation moved across different topics and theories but needed several prompts.\n\nResponses were mostly accurate, with some imprecisions. There was limited evidence of critical ability.	The conversation had to be entirely led by the module convenor.\n\nOnly few responses could be deemed as accurate. The student could correct themselves through prompt, but with hesitation. There was very limited evidence of critical ability.	The conversation was affected by several difficulties and the student could not easily move across topics and theories.\n\nMany responses were imprecise and not accurate. The student was very hesitant. There was no display of critical ability.	The conversation was flawed by major gaps in preparation. Several questions remained unanswered.\n\nThe majority of responses were incorrect. The student was very hesitant. There was no display of critical ability.
Exposition Quality and Clarity	The student used appropriate terminology. They were able to contextualise and logically organise information. Their exposition was professional and focused.	The student mostly used appropriate terminology. They were often able to contextualise and logically organise information. Their exposition was almost always professional, clear, and focused.	The student mostly used appropriate terminology, with a few slips. They were not always able to contextualise and logically organise information. Their exposition was mostly professional and clear, with a few shortcomings.	The student was only partially able to use appropriate terminology. Their ability to contextualise and logically organise information was limited. Their exposition was at times unclear and/or affected by shortcomings.	The student was mostly unable to use appropriate terminology. They mostly lacked ability to contextualise and logically organise information. Their exposition might have lacked clarity and was affected by shortcoming.	The student was unable to use appropriate terminology. They lacked ability to contextualise and logically organise information. Their exposition was unclear affected by significant shortcomings.	The student was unable to use appropriate terminology. They lacked ability to contextualise and logically organise information. Their exposition was unclear and problematic.
Confidence	The student was completely comfortable and pro-active during the conversation. They established good eye contact and synergy with the lecturer.	The student was comfortable during the conversation. They established good eye contact and synergy with the lecturer, with very minor hesitations.	The student was reasonably comfortable during the conversation, even though not always in control. They might have displayed some doubt and hesitation.	The student managed to hold some control over the conversation, but there were doubts and hesitation. They might have displayed a rushed or evasive attitude.	The student was not in control of the whole conversation and had to be guided. They might have displayed a rushed, evasive, and indecisive attitude.	The student was silent unless prompted across the whole conversation. They might have displayed clear signs of indecisiveness.	The student was mostly irresponsive for the whole duration of the conversation. They might have displayed indecisiveness and inability to interact.

RE-FRAMING THE ASSESSMENT SPACE

School of Economics

my office

RE-FRAMING THE ASSESSMENT SPACE

School of Economics

my office

RE-FRAMING THE ASSESSMENT SPACE

In a **socially-distanced world** transferring Evaluative Conversations online was very simple

2019-20 meetings booked on Zoom and recordings uploaded on the VLE

I found that students felt more at ease not being physically present in the room with me

Discussing the essay feedback could be done sharing the essay document on screen

Evaluative Conversations are hardly subject to risk of plagiarism.

QA and FAIRNESS – provocations

- According to the evidence by Stray (2001) we might be biased against viva voce assessment → we are not used to conceptualise it

- If we are concerned about bias in viva voce assessment, what about presentations? Shall we remove these too?

- If we are concerned about bias in any dialogue with our students, should we remove office hours? Should we conduct them anonymously?

- Are essays or (worse) hand-written exams bias-proof?

- Is the decolonising the curriculum agenda bias-proof?
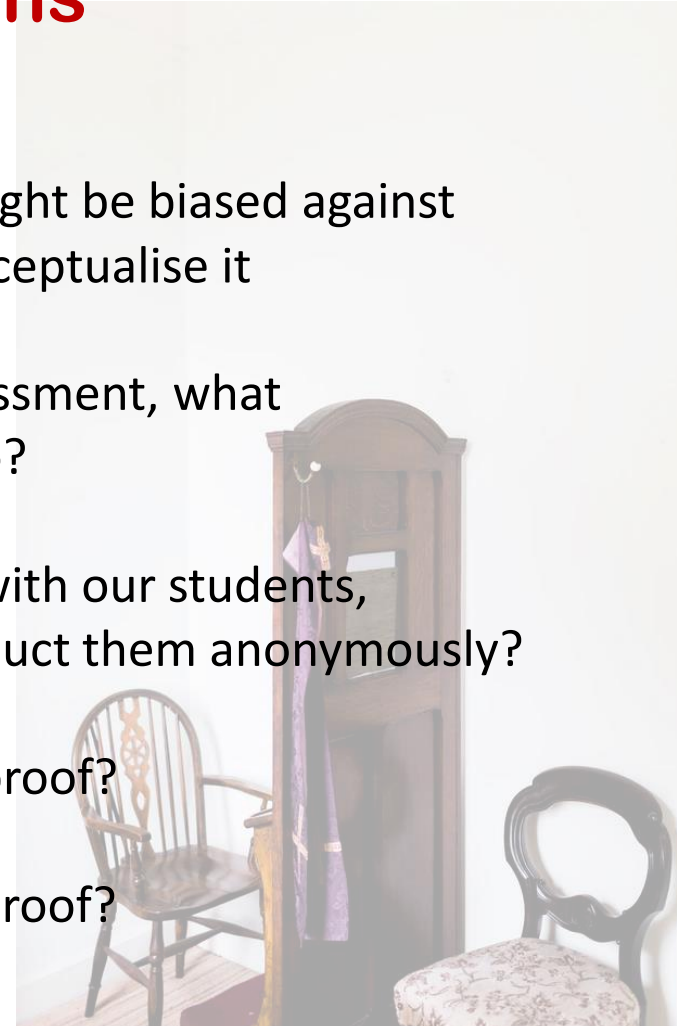
QA and FAIRNESS – risk management

- Viva voce assessment are recorded and uploaded on VLE. They are accessible by students, marker, moderator, external examiners

- Marking-Crib and Marking-Rubric keep the process consistent

- There are risks to students, but also benefits to skill-development
  $\rightarrow$ strive to achieve balance

- Viva voce assessments are much harder to plagiarise.
  From this perspective, we are preventing bias!

- There is unconscious bias, but there is also goodwill and partnership
  $\rightarrow$ we need to be brave, we need to teach students to be brave.

SCALABILITY

How to adjust this process for large classes?

- Consider shortening the time of each viva. We can extract a lot of information within 3-5 minutes.

- Consider focusing on commenting diagrams and data.

- Consider online/offline conversations

How to obtain consistency across different markers?
- calibration is much better than moderation (AdvanceHE)

- assess first 5 conversations as a team

- use marking tools such cribs and rubrics with explicit criteria

- cross-evaluate (e.g. 5mins with each markers rather than 10mins with one)

Evaluation and Research: 2017-18 and 2018-19 data

PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS

- Evaluative conversations allow for a **personal experience**. I dedicated time to each one of my students. I adapted to them, rather than they adapting to me.

- Managing and assessing Evaluative Conversation It might seem a daunting task, but it **does not take any longer than marking an essay**. It is a stimulating and interesting experience too.

- Evaluative Conversations can be implemented observing **Quality Assurance** protocols and facilitating standard moderation and external examining.

- Evaluative Conversations are not anonymous, but Presentations are not either. **Anonymity and unbiasedness are two separate concepts**.
Unconscious bias can be addressed by adhering to detailed rubrics.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**What are students' perceptions of the viva voce assessment?
How can we improve its effectiveness?**

**How are students acting on feedback received in
preparation for the viva? What factors affect this agency?**

→ with Naomi Winstone (University of Surrey)

**What are the barriers and the enablers for a successful
implementation of viva voce assessment?
How can we support the students preparing for vivas?**

→ with Paola Iannone (Loughborough University)

DATA COLLECTION & METHODOLOGY

2017-18   simple evaluation – bespoke end-module questionnaire

2018-19   mixed-methods research approach –
matched student data: student evaluations,
orientation to feedback scale (Linderbaum & Levy, 2010),
conversation transcripts, demographics, rubrics, marks

2019-20   Covid-19 disruption - transition to blended-learning
assessment moved online – no research
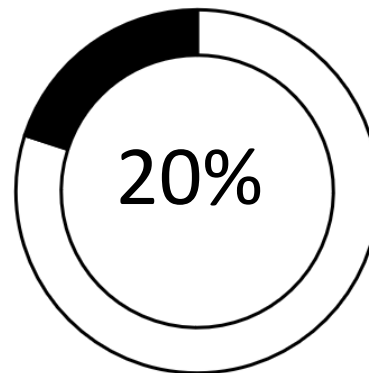
2020-21   improved design – future research planned.

DEMOGRAPHICS 2018-19 data
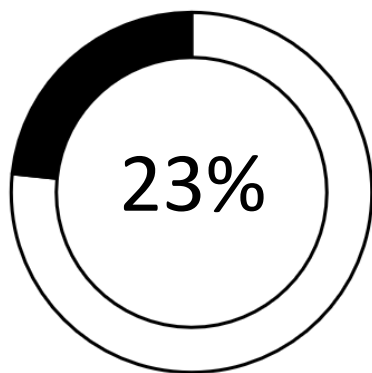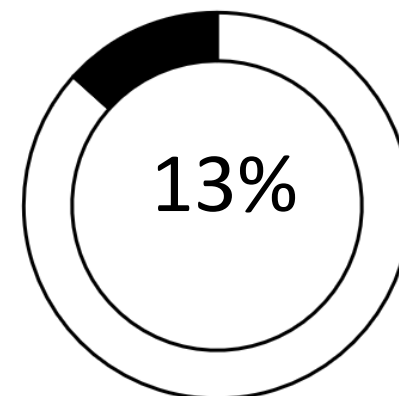
23% female students
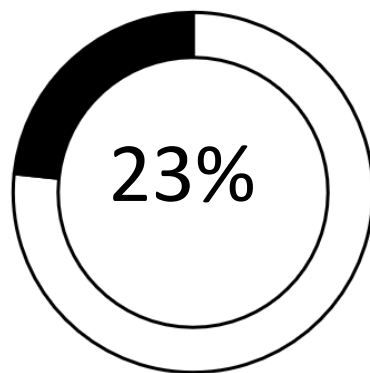
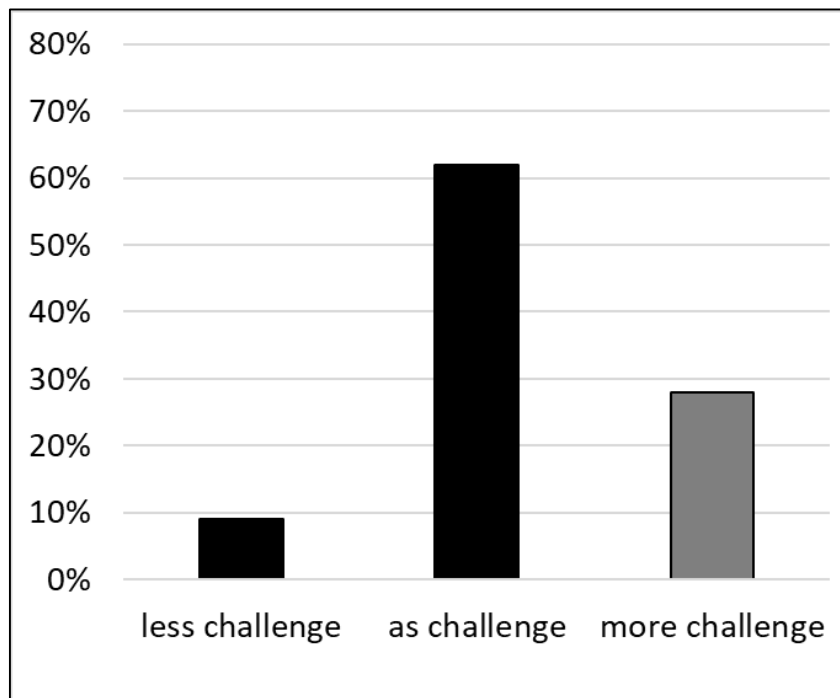23% overseas/EU students

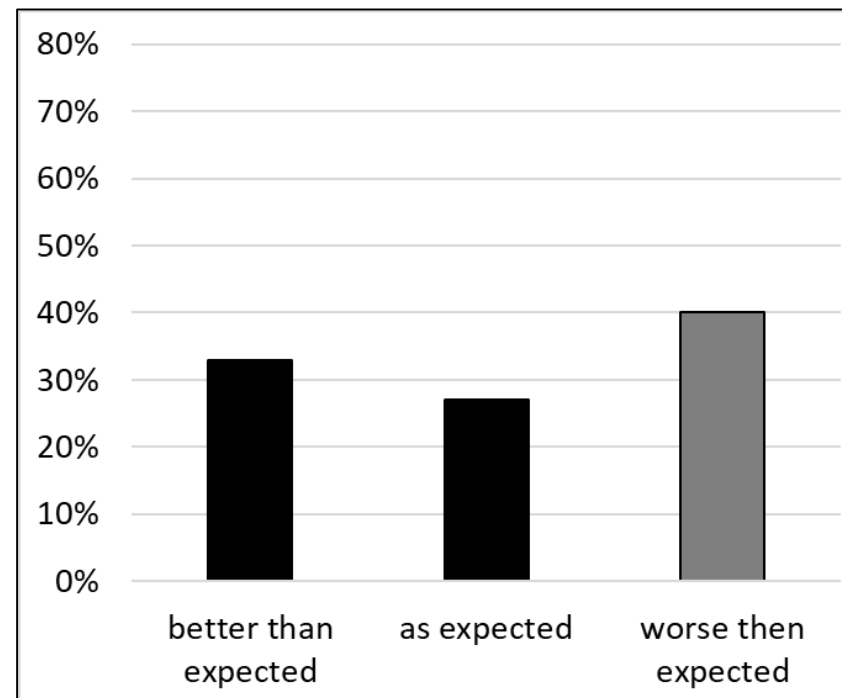20% non-native speakers

13% non-Economics students

N=30   Response Rate = 60%
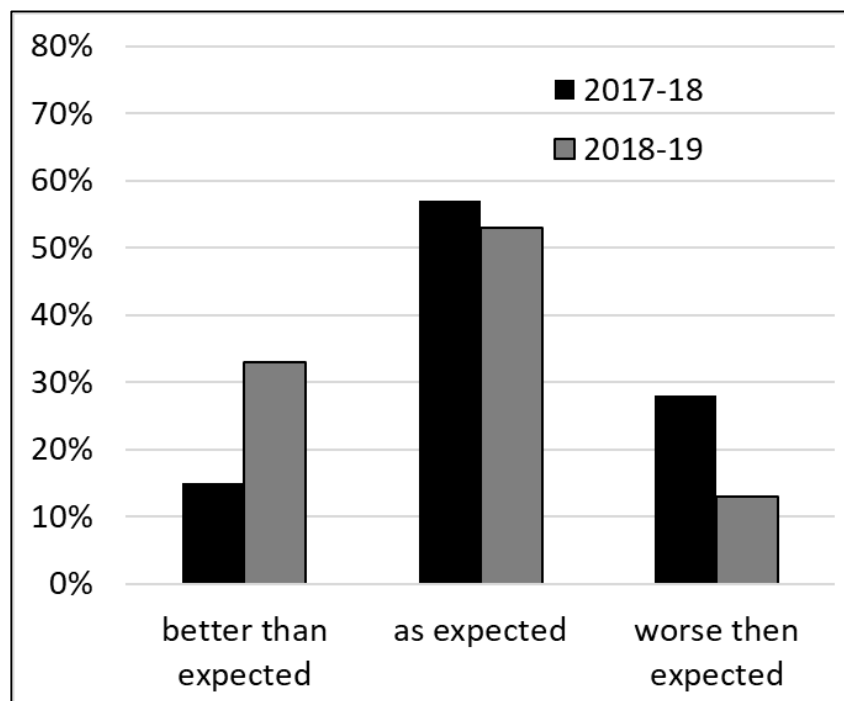
SUMMARY STATISTICS conversation

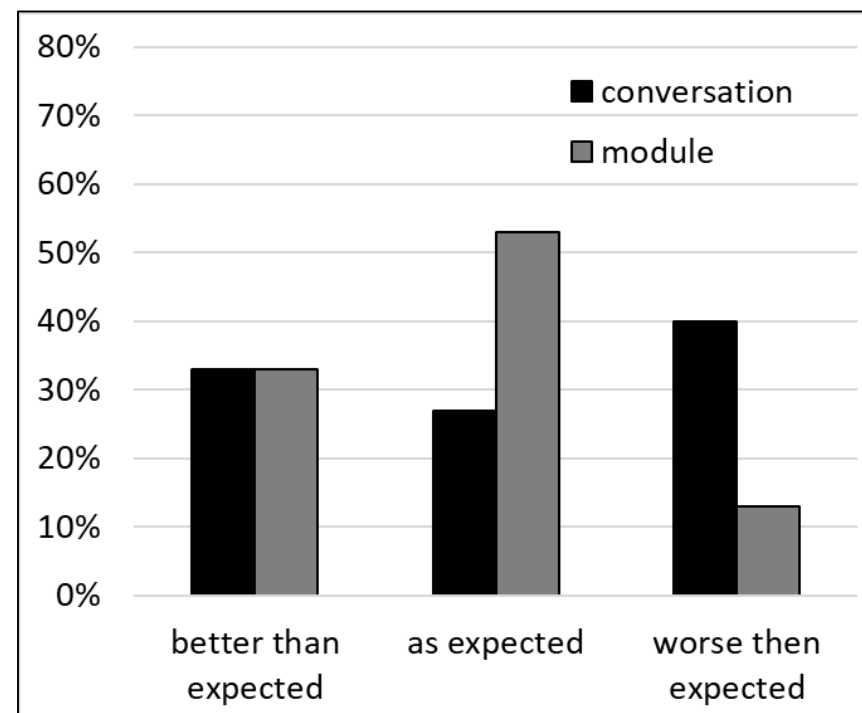Evaluative Conversation 2017-18
positive response = 71%

Evaluative Conversation 2018-19
positive response = 60%

SUMMARY STATISTICS module

Overall module evaluation
improvement: 72% → 86%

Module evaluation vs Conversation
2018-19:   60%   vs   72%

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Students elaborated on the self-evaluation of their viva voce assessment

Themes emerging:

anxiety/confidence at performing the task $\rightarrow$ feeling confident/nervous

student's preparation for the task $\rightarrow$ studying the syllabus selectively

challenge generated by the task $\rightarrow$ timing, accuracy, uncertainty understanding questions

support received to face the task $\rightarrow$ exemplars, feed-forward, emotional intelligence

COMBINING THE DATA

Self-evaluation	anxiety or confidence	preparation	supportive environment	challenge of the task
worse than expected	2	6	0	2
as expected	3	5	0	4
better than expected	7	3	6	1
sum	12	14	6	7

…If went well, thanks to you – if didn't go well , it was my fault…

ORIENTATION TO FEEDBACK

- Scales are reliable

- Scales are not correlated
  - → to conversation marks
  - → to rubric of feedback transfer

What is happening?
- Is feedback literacy sufficient to understand the questionnaire?
- Cognitive dissonance effect?
- Could I improve my teaching?

Next step:
- Look at correlation with self-evaluation.

Marks vs Scales

● Utility   ● Accountability   ● SocialAwareness   ● SelfEfficacy
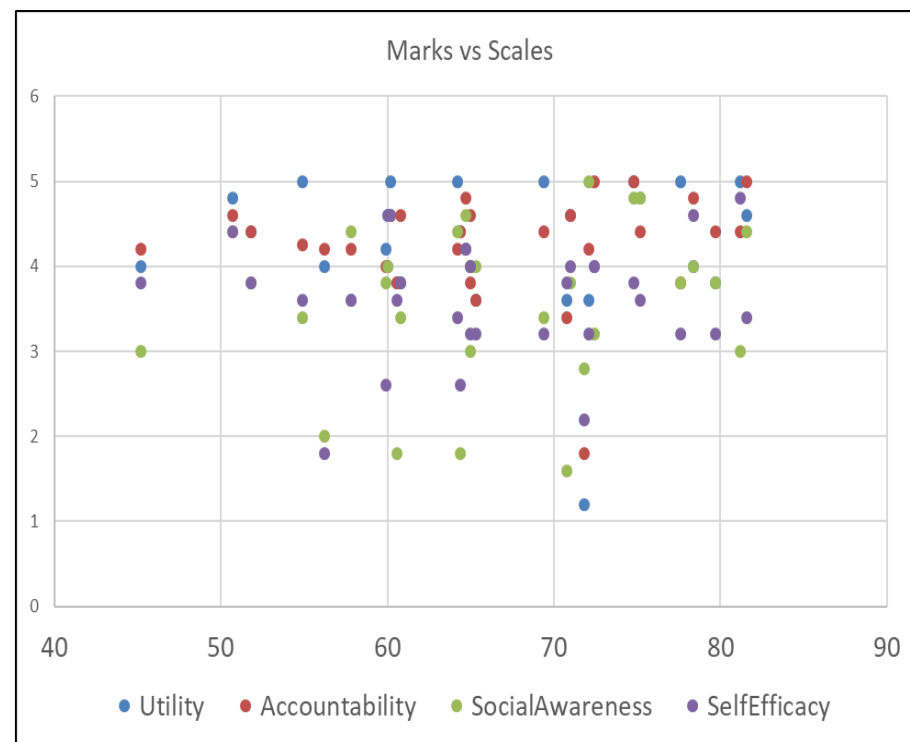
QUOTES FROM STUDENTS

The conversation approach helped to trigger memories which I wasn't confident that I had.

I had left my preparation until later than recommended. [?] I was not confident in my ability to perform . Also, I was stressed before beginning but Fabio's relaxed behaviour and casual talk calmed me down.

I enjoyed the essay writing process as I chose a topic that I found interesting. I also liked the evaluative conversation, as it has improved my ability to take criticism and respond to it.

I really enjoyed having a follow-up assessment on the critical essay. It gave more meaning to both the essay the EC, as opposed to the usual dumping of concern/knowledge following a submission.

What I prepared most was not what I was asked about.

It was harder than I expected because you asked a lot of stuff outside the essay feedback.

QUOTES FROM STUDENTS

Suggestions to future students

- Do your readings

- Ensure you are truly interested in it

- Communicate with Fabio

This was the scariest assessment I ever had.

It didn't go well, but now I know how to do it.

…We need more assessments like this.

Oh, are we already done?

Developments and Plans post Covid-19

HOW TO TRAIN STUDENTS TO VIVAS?

What I have done so far…

- fostered debate during lectures and seminars

- asked students to share opinions about material studied

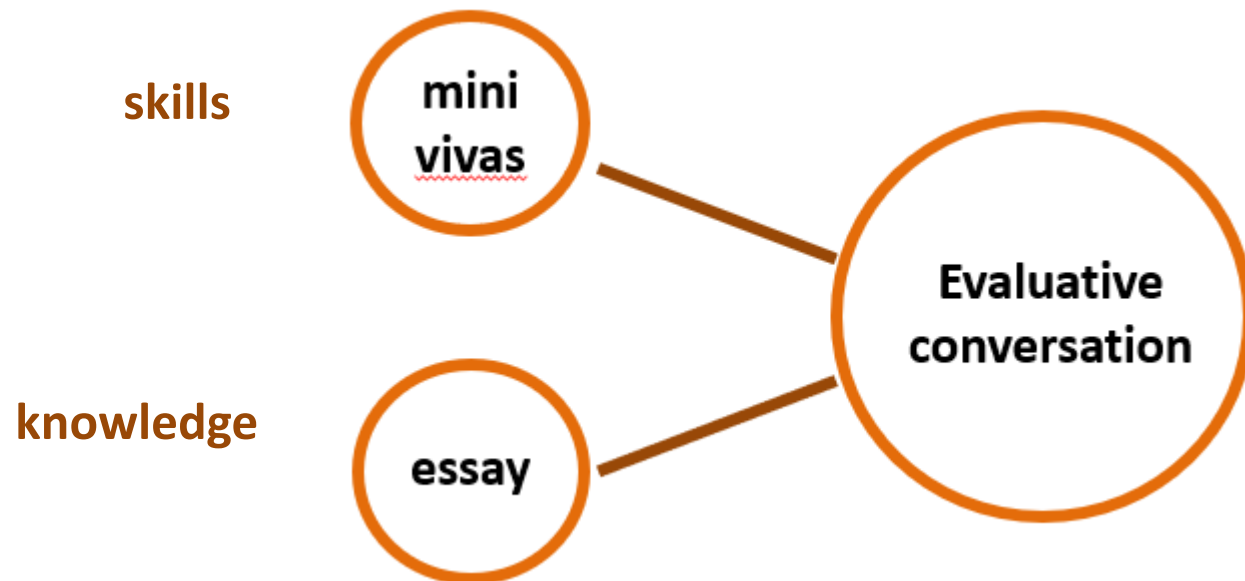- pre-assigning questions in seminars and questioning students.

… I have not been entirely satisfied with this

- students are shy and scared, despite seeing value in what we try to do

- a lot of contact-time is spent giving students the time to adjust.
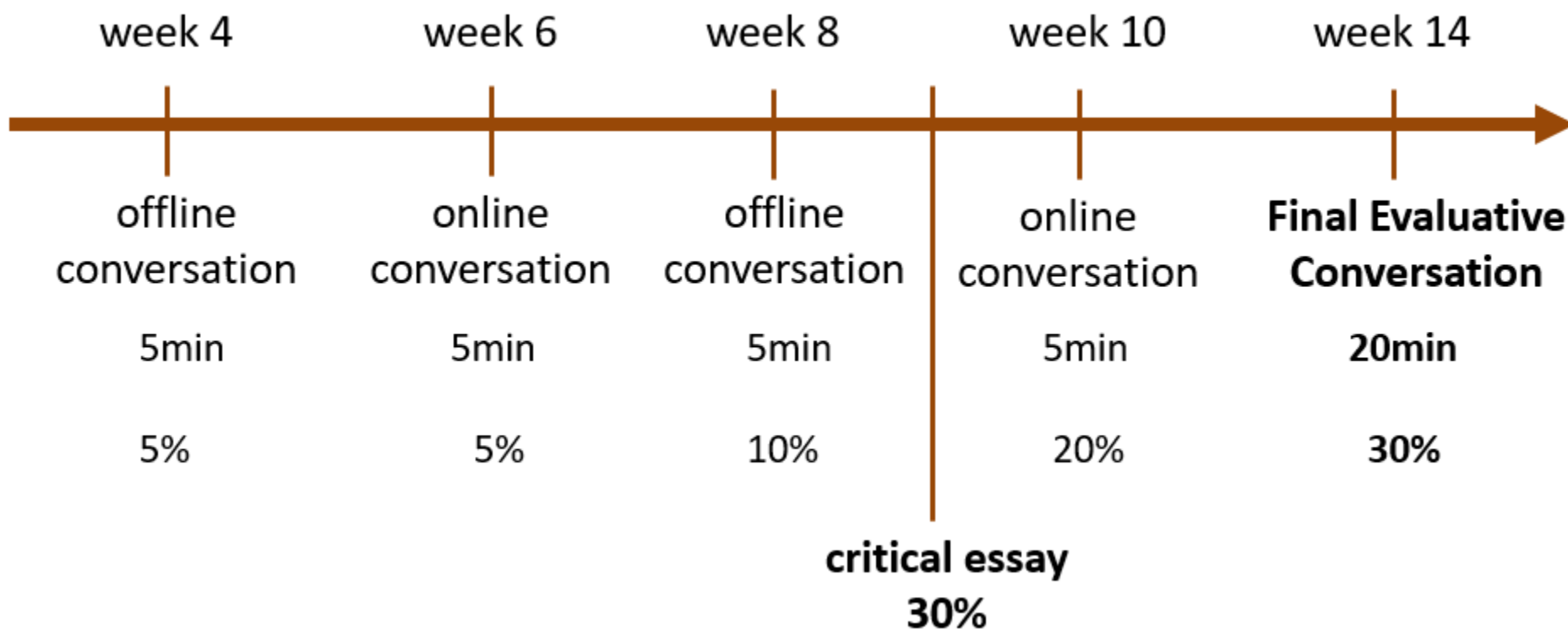
HOW TO TRAIN STUDENTS TO VIVAS?

Eureka moment: assessment is the driver of learning ——→ embed training in scaffolded assessment

H$_2$O model

skills

knowledge

mini vivas

essay

Evaluative conversation

HOW TO TRAIN STUDENTS TO VIVAS?

week 4 — offline conversation — 5min — 5%

week 6 — online conversation — 5min — 5%

week 8 — offline conversation — 5min — 10%

critical essay — 30%

week 10 — online conversation — 5min — 20%

week 14 — **Final Evaluative Conversation** — **20min** — **30%**

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