

Assessed Conversations

PURPOSE

Assessed conversations enable you to evidence your knowledge, understanding and skills through responding orally to questions from a tutor. To prepare for this you will clearly need to do a significant amount of learning about the topic(s) the conversation will cover. Being able to respond well to questions is a skill that you are likely to use in a variety of professional, ministerial or vocational settings.

CONTENT

In an **assessed conversation** you will respond orally to questions asked 'live' by a tutor (or on occasion more than one tutor). This may mean meeting physically or can be done by online video conferencing.

You may be asked to prepare in advance an answer to an initial question as a way of beginning the conversation. However the majority of the time will be spent with you answering other questions.

You will always know the area(s) about which you may be questioned. Depending on the module, appropriate areas would include:

- A very specific topic you have been asked to investigate (for example, in a church history module you might have an assessed conversation on how and why Constantine changed the position of the Christian church in Roman society)
- A broader range of topics within the module (for example, in a New Testament module you might have an assessed conversation on Paul, covering a range of aspects of his life and writings)
- A specific project you have carried out (for example, planning and leading an act of worship)
- A placement you have undertaken
- A case study

The tutor will use their questioning to discover the extent of your knowledge, understanding and skills. This means they will give you opportunities to clarify and expand what you said where they think this would be helpful to you, but they may also challenge you to offer further defence of your views.

WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR

First and foremost, we are looking to see how your answers to the questions demonstrate that you have met the relevant learning outcomes of the Module Outline. In particular, we will be looking to answer the following questions:

- 1. Do you have the relevant knowledge, understanding and skills?**
 - 2. Can you explain and defend your views?** Can you demonstrate further or deeper understanding when asked to do so?
 - 3. Are you able to respond flexibly to questions?** It is perfectly acceptable to take a few seconds to consider how you wish to answer a question. However in an assessed conversation (as in the practice of ministry) you are likely to be asked questions you had not anticipated, and have to give a response.
 - 4. Can you speak clearly and comprehensibly?** Can the tutor hear and make out what you are saying? Do you use language in a way that communicates effectively and is easy to understand?
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TECHNICAL MATTERS

For the tutor:

It is important to give students clear information about what will happen, including:

- What may be covered in the conversation
- When and where it will take place (and if electronically, how this will work)
- The format of the conversation, including its length

You may wish to ask students to prepare an answer to an initial question. They should always know well in advance that this is required, though notice of the particular question can be anything from well in advance to a few minutes in advance; clearly you need to ensure that what happens is the same for all candidates. (Similarly, if you are asking students to respond to a case study they may have details of the particular case anything from well in advance to a few minutes in advance.) The aim of a prepared introductory answer is to help start the conversation well: students should not be expected to make a polished or lengthy presentation, since this would be more appropriately regarded as an 'oral presentation' assessment.

You will need to decide to what extent you want to ask standard questions of all students, and to what extent you want to ask different questions of different students. Even when you have shaped a standard question you will need to be willing to rephrase or explain this, if necessary, and to ask follow-up questions to help the student give further evidence of their learning. You will need in this to be careful that all students are treated fairly and equally. That does not mean they all need to be asked exactly the same questions – part of the point of the conversation format is that what the tutor says and asks can be shaped by what is said by the particular student (which if done well works to the advantage of all students). However all should have undergone the same process. A particular danger is that your technique evolves as you carry out the conversations with multiple students, with the result that the assessment is significantly different (which might mean it is easier or harder) for later students.

You will need to think about good questioning technique. For example you should probably seek to avoid leading questions (which indicate to students the answer you want), complex questions with several parts, and hypothetical questions (better are questions founded on particular situations or their actual experience). You might like to think about how you might use the following – which as you will notice are strictly not all questions:

- Open-ended questions – for example, ‘tell me about X’ or ‘how do you think you did?’. These may what the student can say unprompted, and can often provide a good way to start a conversation or discussion of a new topic.
- Probing questions – for example, ‘why do you think that?’, ‘what were your reasons for doing that?’. These seek to develop the conversation in an area.
- Prompting questions – for example, ‘could you say more about X?’, ‘you haven’t mentioned the Bible yet’, ‘is there another reason for that?’. These suggest there might be more that the student might helpfully say in an area
- Challenging questions – for example, ‘is that compatible with the creeds?’, ‘doesn’t X argue the opposite?’. These give the student the opportunity to indicate deeper thinking.

Consider what level of explicit engagement with primary and/or secondary sources you might expect in the conversation, and how you will ensure that students are prompted to do this. Students may be expected to be aware of how what they are saying relates to key thinking in the subject, but not to remember all their sources in detail. (You may find it helpful to start by thinking about what you would expect in a ‘closed book’ written examination, rather than a written assignment.) Asking the student to give you a bibliography before the conversation is one approach to enabling you to question them appropriately.

Best practice is for the conversation to be recorded in such a way that it can be straightforwardly accessible to the moderator and external examiner. If this is not possible, there will need to be consideration of how to ensure appropriate moderation and external scrutiny can take place. This is likely to include having two markers present, and keeping detailed notes of what was asked and the student’s responses.

It is certainly acceptable for the conversation to take place via online video conferencing. It is generally less desirable for the conversation to take place by telephone or similar, since seeing the other person aids in communication, but it is acceptable when there is a good reason for it, for example the student not being able to access video conferencing at the appropriate time.

For the student:

Ensure you prepare thoroughly by engaging with the topic(s) that the conversation will cover. As part of this you should think about what questions you might be asked, and how you might answer them – but don’t expect to have identified everything you will be asked.

You are not expected to reference things you say in the same way you would need to in a written assignment, or to remember every detail from your reading or other learning materials. However, you may wish to refer to key sources and may be asked questions about your sources as part of demonstrating your knowledge and understanding of the topic. So ensure that as you prepare you note your sources, as you would in preparing for other assignments.

You might like to practise for the conversation with other students.

Don't be afraid to ask the tutor to repeat or clarify a question during the conversation.

You may well have to try to answer a question where you are not completely confident in what you are saying. However if you really don't know something it may be better to admit this so the conversation can move on to an area where you can evidence what you have learned, rather than taking up time saying things which only serve to show that you don't have the necessary knowledge.

Be aware that you may be asked a further question when you have given a good answer, because the tutor wants to see if in response you can say even more or give an even better answer.

MARKING CRITERIA

The questions that your marker will be considering when assessing your work are as follows:

1. How did what you say in the conversation demonstrate that you have acquired the knowledge, understanding and skills of the relevant learning outcomes of the module?
2. To what standard have you fulfilled these? These standards – by which your work will be graded – are described in the **Assessment Criteria for Assessed Conversations** for the level of your module. The criteria against which your work will be marked fall into four categories:

Knowledge and understanding: Have you demonstrated a thorough and accurate understanding of the relevant subject matter?

Engagement with practice (if appropriate to the module): Did you evidence a good level of skill in your practice

Could you reflect well on your practice?

Argument and critical thinking Were you able to explain and defend your views, providing evidence for them as appropriate?

Did you respond well to each question you were asked?

Comprehensibility and clarity of expression Did you effectively convey what you wanted to say through the clarity of your speaking and your use of language?

