



# The Oral Defence in EAP assessment

Using speech as a medium for defending written assignments

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# Overview

- Extended essay as assessed task
- Impact of AI on assessment of written assignments
- Approaches to mitigate impact of AI: weighting and spoken component
- Use of Oral Defense in UCD partner colleges in China
- Oral defense: key features
- Possible drawbacks

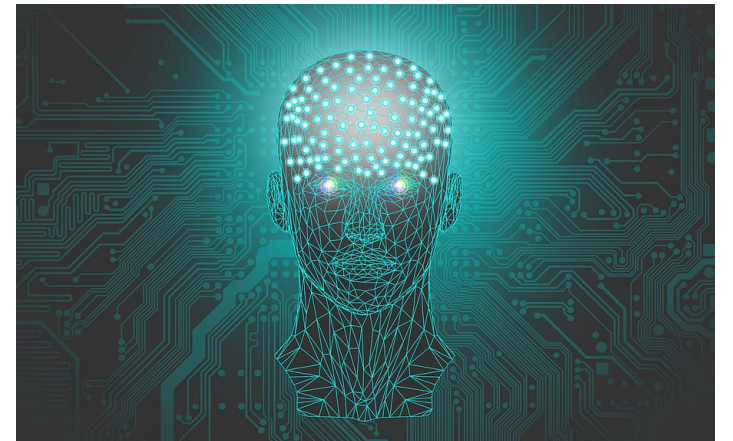
# The extended essay

- Traditional form of writing assessment in university modules and both pre-sessional and in-sessional EAP courses
- Tests students' ability to produce an extended written assignment using key academic skills, such as **research**, **integration of sources** and **critical thinking**



# The impact of AI

- The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) now makes it difficult for examiners to be certain that work submitted is the student's own
- AI can be used by examiners to create and administer examinations (Swiecki et al.)



# Responses to AI

- Weighting in assessment in favour of timed writing or oral tasks
- AI Statement or AI Reference List
- AI detection software (e.g. GPTZero)
- Oral component in assessment



# Oral Defense: what is it?

Formal interview that tests:

- knowledge and understanding of essay content
- key terms or concepts
- how sources are used
- ability to defend the position taken in the essay  
(viz. thesis and supporting arguments)
- Critical Thinking (Yin et al.)



# Qualitative data: teacher interviews

- Five teachers from the UCD partner colleges in BDIC (Beijing), CDIC (Xi'an) and GDIC (Guangzhou) were interviewed about their experience using the Oral Defense in the academic year 2024/5.
- The respondents gave mostly positive feedback on the new element in assessment.
- The Oral Defense succeeded in testing student's ability to discuss and explain their written work.
- The test was tiring to administer and required a certain amount of experience and training on the part of the teachers.





Respondent	Advantages	Drawbacks
<b>Teacher 1 (BDIC)</b>	Provides an opportunity to check students' comprehension of language	Some students might still use AI Not executed with complete consistency (further standardization, moderation and teacher training could help with this – e.g. video sample)
<b>Teacher 2 (BDIC)</b>	Tests critical thinking (students have to think comprehensively) Exposes possible use of AI Provides an accurate picture students' ability	Some students memorized paper (solution: ask questions related to their source, as well as essay) Adds to workload of teachers
<b>Teacher 3 (CDIC)</b>	Places more emphasis on speaking and keeps oral skills centre-stage throughout module Tests whether students did their own work and make progress	Teachers need clear guidelines and instructions / training (e.g. ask students questions just outside scope of research)
<b>Teacher 4 (CDIC)</b>	Checks consistency in performance (performance should reflect level demonstrated in assignment) Tests students' ability to express arguments	Does not necessarily establish authenticity of assignment Tiring for teachers (concentration and stamina needed) Difficult to standardize and moderate because each assignment is different (by definition)
<b>Teacher 5 (GDIC)</b>	Tests whether students did their own work Gives students opportunity to clarify arguments and discourse in the assignment	Difficult for teachers to come up with suitable questions – training needed Teachers need to be experienced and competent to execute exam effectively

# Oral defense: key features

- Tests authenticity of authorship
- Checks consistency in proficiency level
- Promotes critical thinking
- Highlights speaking in academic discourse



# Possible drawbacks

- Examiner training
- Consistency of examination experience
- Time & effort
- Not entirely AI-proof





# Conclusions

- The Oral Defense is a useful element in assessing academic writing, particularly against a background of easy access to AI software on the part of third-level students
- The Oral Defense helps promote speaking as an important aspect of academic discourse.
- The successful execution of the exam depends upon a reasonable level of expertise and training on the part of examiners.
- More work needs to be done to ensure that Oral Defense exams are conducted fairly, so that the students' experience is consistent.



# References

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Yin, S., Fan, J., Jin, Y. and Stapleton, P. 'Towards a framework of critical thinking for assessing EAP speaking'. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, Vol. 71, September 2024.