CRITICAL / PRACTICE NOTES

Present, Defend, Reconsider

Making critical judgement visible in a 30-minute group assessment

NO. 03 / NOVEMBER 2026 ROY HANNEY READING TIME 7 MIN

The provocation

Replacing essays with presentations is often proposed as a response to generative AI. Yet a credible presentation can now be assembled from AI-generated research summaries, slides, scripts and speaker notes. Delivering the material fluently does not, by itself, establish that students understand or can defend what they say. Nikolic et al. (2024, pp. 135–136) distinguish presentation competency from knowledge attainment and highlight the vulnerability of rehearsed scripts. But if we move all the marks onto questions, do we risk replacing a prepared performance with a test of verbal agility? Could a brief opportunity for critical reconsideration make a different kind of judgement visible?

The critical question

How might a group presentation remain a portable, self-contained assessment while offering opportunities to observe students' understanding, evaluative judgement and reasoned responses to criticism—within a single 30-minute event?

What the research suggests

Three open-access papers offer distinct foundations. Nikolic et al. (2024, pp. 135–136) show that AI can prepare presentation scripts, slide outlines and speaker notes; they distinguish communication performance from evidence of understanding and suggest interactive questioning. Amri (2026, pp. 5–9, 14–17) analyses how audience members ask for explanations and justifications after presentations, and how presenters defend their choices; her study is situated in secondary EFL education, not university assessment. Bearman et al. (2024, pp. 895–896, 899–900) conceptualise evaluative judgement as recognising quality in context and describe deliberate opportunities to develop it through peer assessment, rubrics, feedback and comparison. Together these sources justify investigating a more dialogic format.

An approach to try

Try one 30-minute assessment event for a group of four: 10 minutes presenting, 12 minutes questioning and 8 minutes deliberating and responding. The audience works from the existing assessment criteria; the tutor assesses the presentation and ensuing reasoning as one event. Timings and weighting are suggestions, not a fixed assessment specification. No additional coursework, portfolio or later re-presentation is required.

01 PRESENT — 10 minutes. The group presents a defensible proposition, interpretation or solution, making clear its main claim and grounds. AI-assisted preparation may be permitted in accordance with local policy; polished slides and delivery are not assumed to demonstrate independent understanding. Suggested output: the live argument, considered against the module rubric.

02 QUESTION — 12 minutes. While listening, every audience member uses a short, rubric-aligned critical listening worksheet. Four prompts offer accessible ways into judgement: CLARIFY — What is not yet clear? JUSTIFY — What evidence supports the claim? CHALLENGE — Which assumption or

alternative needs examination? QUALIFY — Under what conditions might this conclusion not hold? Students record an observation and one question linked to a criterion. The tutor selects questioners without announcing in advance who will be called upon, so everyone has reason to prepare. Peers need not invent fully developed counterarguments; the tutor facilitates and, where necessary, supplies a prepared question. Suggested output: live questions and responses, not a separately marked worksheet.

03 RECONSIDER — 8 minutes. The tutor closes the discussion with a clear transition: 'You have heard the questions and challenges. You now have an opportunity to defend, qualify or change your argument. Explain why.' Allow approximately three minutes for the four presenters to confer, followed by five minutes for a considered response. ROUTE A: respond to the most consequential challenge(s) actually raised. ROUTE B: if discussion has not produced a substantive challenge, introduce a pre-prepared 'unstable problem'—a changed condition affecting evidence, resources, stakeholders or underlying assumptions. Variations must be comparable in intellectual demand and sufficiently specific to avoid a predictable answer being shared between groups. A justified defence is as valuable as a justified revision. Suggested output: a brief oral re-statement of the group's considered position.

ASSESS AND CLOSE. The tutor records evidence against criteria such as the clarity and justification of the argument, engagement with scrutiny, and the quality of the considered response. Evidence from the group does not necessarily establish each individual's understanding; opportunities for all four to contribute and appropriate moderation are important. The listening sheet is a scaffold for audience participation, not additional assessed coursework. The full activity, including the final response, ends within 30 minutes; grading and moderation follow normal procedures.

Where AI fits — and where it does not

AI may assist with researching, drafting, designing slides or rehearsing likely questions, subject to institutional rules and disclosure requirements. The aim is not to guarantee an AI-proof assessment: preparation and even anticipated challenges can be AI-assisted. Instead, the live interaction gives tutors additional, imperfect evidence of how students explain, weigh and justify claims. Students should know the assessment process and question types in advance, and accessibility adjustments should be planned. Where live use of AI is disallowed, that boundary must be made explicit.

Questions for adaptation

- Are the intended outcomes communication, disciplinary understanding or evaluative judgement? What evidence is appropriate for each, and how should the rubric reflect that distinction?
- Will the listening prompts generate questions that meaningfully relate to the rubric? How can random selection be fair to students with anxiety, disabilities or differing levels of spoken-language confidence?
- Should reconsideration respond to the discussion or to a prepared unstable problem? How will challenge difficulty, individual contribution and rapid group deliberation be judged fairly?

Three sources to explore

Amri, M. (2026). Holding presenters accountable for their posters during post-presentation discussions in a project-based EFL classroom. System, 141, Article 104098. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2026.104098

Bearman, M., Tai, J., Dawson, P., Boud, D., & Ajjawi, R. (2024). Developing evaluative judgement for a time of generative artificial intelligence. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 49(6), 893–905. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2024.2335321

Nikolic, S., Sandison, C., Haque, R., Daniel, S., Grundy, S., Belkina, M., Lyden, S., Hassan, G. M., & Neal, P. (2024). ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, SciSpace and Wolfram versus higher education assessments: An

updated multi-institutional study of the academic integrity impacts of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) on assessment, teaching and learning in engineering. Australasian Journal of Engineering Education, 29(2), 126–153. https://doi.org/10.1080/22054952.2024.2372154

Method & provenance

This draft was developed through AI-assisted critical enquiry, comparative reading of six available open-access articles, examination of the selected three full texts, page-referenced extraction and iterative discussion and drafting. The three principal sources are Nikolic et al. (2024), Amri (2026) and Bearman et al. (2024); the other papers informed selection but are not cited as the core theoretical basis. The Present–Question–Reconsider sequence, rubric-guided listening prompts, unannounced selection of questioners and optional unstable problem are the author's interpretive pedagogical synthesis, not interventions established or empirically tested by these sources. Page references refer to the supplied journal PDFs. Initial provocation: Simon Paul Atkinson, Practice Note 27, ‘Assessment: Presentations – in the age of GenAI’ (20 November 2026). This document is a draft for checking and validation.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

Short, evidence-informed provocations that move from critical enquiry to adaptable teaching practice. Each note draws on a small, accessible reading list and makes the role of AI-assisted scholarship transparent.