

Create your own festival!
A creative-analytical
form of assessment
in a Modern Languages
film module

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Context: 'French World War Films' module (FR27820/37820)

- Explores French films about the two world wars
- Four 'main' films explored in depth in class; many others mentioned
- Taught in English, open to students of other departments
- Assessments:
 - Essay
 - Individual presentation on a film not extensively discussed in class
 - **Second essay or creative assessment (writing both is possible)**
 - Choice of assessments available from start of the module – possible to space them (can be all concluded by November, or nothing done prior to January)

Rationale

- Diversification of forms of assessment beyond traditional essay/exam
- Less 'spoon-fed' and clearer in focus than typical 'teaching (through) film' programmes/modules
- 'Creative Assessments in Modern Languages' project (Alex Mangold)
- Assessment as a form of self-expression
- Combine factual/conceptual dimension with 'creative' freedom
- Employability / 'real-life' skills embedded
- Not created with a clear focus on co-creation but became one

Core ‘factual’ and conceptual learning

- Basic understanding of the world war experience for France
- The importance of ‘curated’ memories of the war
- Official and ‘counter’-narratives
- Interaction between politics, historiography and cinema (e.g. debates around *La Nuit et le brouillard* and *Le Chagrin et la Pitié*)
- The ‘double moment’: period represented, and time of creation
- The ‘third moment’: time of viewing (e.g. ulterior censorship of *La Grande illusion*)
- Parallels with other cultures (‘poppy debate’, German post-war memory debates etc.)
- All assessments should showcase understanding of these

The task: Create your own festival!

- Imagine a film festival to take place in the Arts Centre
- To include several films *not* extensively discussed in the module
- To feature auxiliary elements (exhibitions, talks with specified speakers, public engagement etc.)
- Commentary: rationale of the choice of films and of auxiliary events
- Set up a fully functional website
- Create a press release
- Create a flyer

Assessment criteria

- Commentary/programme: logic of the choice of films, relevance of additional features
- Website: functionality and user-friendliness, logical construction; relevance of features
- Press release: task-specific composition
- Flyer: design, task-specific composition

Language learning component

- Language learning components both passive and active
- Passive: understanding the films and related secondary literature
- Active: drafting commentary and flyer in target language (Final Year)
- Linked to Final Year Grammar/Writing class: form-specific expression
- Some students chose to do the whole website in French

‘Make your own’ assessment - parallels

- ‘Exam by you’: pandemic-era experiment of students writing and answering their own exam questions (Saucier-Schiffer-Jines, 2022)
- Project-based learning:
 - In language teaching (Beckett and Slater, 2020)
 - Extension into content teaching (Beckett and Pae, 2026)
 - Ruth mentioned this morning co-created project
 - *Collective projects – here individual project based on collective learning*
- Peer examples: ‘French artistic movements’ module with basic website presenting artwork and related scholarship (Manchester Met)
- ‘Curatorial’ tasks in assessment in film programmes
- Durham Modern Languages and Cultures module on museums and curating – no specific theme, assessment ‘mock funding application’

Opportunity for self-expression

- Projects can be general, or feature a specific angle
- Specific projects easier better results – theme provides a clear focus
 - *Feedback by J (2024): “I think what lost me some marks was that I had been too broad with my festival theme and had chosen things that did not quite fit the initial title, even if I had judged them thematically appropriate at the time.”*
- Specific theme inspired by module; other experiences or personal interest
- A (2023) on ‘Lived Experiences’, with – theme inspired by module, ‘5D bombing experience’ inspired by Imperial War Museum?
- E (2024) on ‘War and Colonisation’ – student with family connection to war in France but not specifically to this topic; independent research in great depth on insufficiently discussed topic – inspired change in teaching
- A-J (2023) – ‘Hidden Voices’ – queer and other ‘less heard’ voices in war films – connected to personal identity, inspired change in teaching
- Experience of website-building a form of expression itself

Employability

- L (2024):
 - “... furthermore, I was able develop new skills such as website creation. I feel this increased my employability, giving me another aspect of my degree to talk about in job interviews.”
 - Building research skills: what to include, how to provide evidence and justification
- L (2026): “Creating a fully working website was never on my bingo card when it came to what I was going to accomplish whilst at university. I like how it is something that I can (and have!) put on my CV and LinkedIn profile as a skill and something that I have learnt during my time at university, and be able to show that I did not just complete exams, essays, and presentations. I can now officially say that I have created my own website and explored new technology/apps (Base44), even if it is not available to the public. ”

Is it 'AI-proof'?

- Assessment conceived right before AI boom
- Can AI do it?
- Can assist with constitutive elements (website building; forms of writing)
- Can it create and maintain coherence throughout?
- Likely to lack the passion and cohesion that underpins strongest pieces

Feedback – collected over last weeks

- A-J (2023) – being able to focus on self-chosen topic suits students with ADHD. “it was the first time that I could combine my passions with a creative freedom that allowed me to thrive. It feels like the one piece of work that I submitted during my time at Aberystwyth which accurately shows both my passions and my skills to the very best of my ability”
- L (2024): “It allowed me to explore my own creativity and interests” (*plus skills*)
- T (2024): “ It was a good opportunity to turn our consumption of materials into something we could produce.”
- J (2024): “liberating and quite daunting idea of having so much creative freedom and expression, without following the usual structure and conventions (...) However, once I got into it, the lack of linear approach or 'right way' of completing the assessment was what made it so creative and my ideas evolved along the way. Overall, I really enjoyed the different approach of assessment and the new skills that I acquired. I would definitely like to see more modules offering an individual and original form of assessment.”
- J (2025) attracted by the openness and the possibility to study things otherwise would not have; danger of wanting to include too much and missing focus
- L (2026): “Instead of having to answer a set question on films the lecturer had selected, I was able to explore other aspects of French war and tailor it to the areas I am most interested in. It allowed me to make a lot of the decisions myself (...) it was nice to get to do something which seemed a little less formal and a bit more complicated. This was one of those assignments which really got my brain thinking as to whether or not I had included all of the necessary things.

Conclusion

- *Optional* form of assessment, next to other assessments
- Massive choice of materials flagged, others can be uncovered
- Can be even part of a '2 best of 3' assessment regime ('space for failure')
- Creative and analytical
- Alternative form ('self-defined') of assessment hugely appreciated
- Diversity and inclusivity dimension (preferred by some students with learning differences)
- Reconsiders power relationships (to some extent)
- Source of satisfaction and personal development
- Individual not collective – suits better some student profiles
- Employability skills
- Subject- and topic-specific learning successful (*historian external examiner*)
- Their research informed my teaching (new directions/films)
- To consider whether it remains (somewhat) AI-proof

Bibliography

- Beckett, Guilbahar – Tammy Slater eds., *Global Perspectives on Project-Based Language Learning, Teaching, and Assessment*, Routledge, 2020.
- Beckett, Guilbahar – Hye K. Pae eds., *Project-Based Learning in Language and Content Teacher Education*, Routledge, 2026.
- Saucier, Donald A. – Ashley A. Schiffer – Tucker L. Jones, [“Exams by You”: Having Students Write and Complete Their Own Exams During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), *Teach Psychol.*, May 2022.