Example A

What we did

- Formative assessment that covered the entire semester. The students wrote something almost every week. This set the expectation that students would engage consistently with the topic’s reading and practise their writing over a longer period.
- The in-class test was essentially an invigilated version of the reading journal.

Teaching and learning benefits

- Students are given diverse forms of assessment to measure different skills and knowledge.
- This assessment model explicitly values reading, and aims to measure and give credit for reading as part of the topic’s assessment.
- Students gain ongoing, formative feedback that encourages (and indeed, enables) the students to use feedback to improve their critical reading and writing.
- Essentially having two different formats for the reading journal -- prepared entries and a test -- accommodates students with different skills and abilities. For example, some students who do not perform well on the prepared entries perform better on the test. Why? Perhaps the test conditions require students to focus for one to two hours on a writing task and they do not spend this much time on the prepared entries.
- This model uses short writing tasks to encourage students to build skills for essay writing.
- Having students read and comment on the reading journal entries of other students has clear learning benefits, with many students reporting how much they learned from doing this and wishing it was something they were able to do more often (for example, in other topics).

Challenges

- The topic’s ongoing writing and marking commitment proves (initially) to be a challenging workload for students and teachers. However, with encouragement (for students) and training (for teachers), this is soon overcome and students and teacher report that the workload is manageable and appropriate.

What I would do differently

- When I ran a similar topic before this one, I asked students to comment on the reading journal entries of other students in small groups, in their own time, and it formed part of the assessment. I found that there was a large disparity between the quantity and quality of comments depending on the culture of the small group the students had been placed in. Realising this, I instead created time for students to write comments during class time. This was not assessable but, because students reported that they gained a lot from reading the work of other students, I wanted to keep this component while also reducing the workload for students.