



Student workload estimates are important in informing students of the time commitment expected in a unit. However, estimating non-timetabled tasks can be tricky. This guide will explore how this can be done.

UNIT COMPONENTS

The Commonwealth Government has a standard of 150 hours per 10 credit point unit. At Macquarie, the student's time commitment for each activity in a unit needs to be entered into the CMS. The method of estimation will vary according to the type of activity. The time estimation methods that apply to each type of activity are below.

Determining time-on-task	
Activity type	Use
Scheduled Learning Activities: both timetabled (e.g. lectures, tutorials) or by arrangement (e.g. project classes, work placements). Use the duration specified in the schedule or timetable – e.g. time-on-task for a 1 hour lecture is 1 hour, or the hours scheduled for a project work placement. The duration excludes preparation time, but it will counted under "non-scheduled activities".	The event duration.
Non-Scheduled Activities such as independent research, exam preparation, or preparation for scheduled activities such as pre-reading for a tutorial.	Academic judgement
Assessment tasks used to judge student performance. Include the sum of research, production and submission for each assessment task. Note: All assessment tasks must have associated workload time and this includes zero weighted tasks and hurdles.	Academic judgement

Further information as to which category an activity falls into is available in the 'Unit Activities' Quick Guide.

Notes:

- Do not include staff time (i.e. for task design or marking).
- MQ Assessment policy: Exam duration 2 hours max.
- The unit workload must be within 10% of the required or a written justification will be needed (CMT, 2019).
- Add the caveat "*Indicative time-on-task is an estimate of the time required for completion of the assessment task and is subject to individual variation.*"

ESTIMATING STUDENT WORKLOAD

Time on task estimates should reflect the time a novice student of average ability would take to achieve a pass. Estimating the time-on-task is difficult, even when learning analytics is available (see Kovanovic et. al. 2015). Most students are novices and have yet to develop their intuition about the body of knowledge or methods. It can be difficult for experts to estimate how long a novice will take to do the same task. Several suggestions are made:

- Carnegie Mellon Uni. (n.d.) suggests a rule of thumb: multiply the time it takes you to do the task by 3 or 4.
- Ask students to provide an estimate of the time they took.
- iLearn (Moodle) Quiz grade report shows 'time taken' for each student. Use this to improve future estimates.

Rice University (2016) provided research informed workload estimation for reading and writing (see tables) and an interactive online tool (see "Explore..." link).

Reading time-on-task – words per minute

Reading	No new concepts	Some new concepts	Many new concepts
Survey/skim	500	350	250
Understand	250	180	130
Engage/evaluate	130	90	65

Writing time-on-task – hours per 500 words

Writing	No drafting	Minimal drafting	Extensive drafting
Reflection/Narrative	1.5	2	2.5
Argument	3	4	5
Research	6	8	10

The University of New South Wales (2011) estimated time ranges from simple to complex for various tasks in Arts.

Arts time on task hours from simple to complex

Task	Hours	Per
Creative work	20 to 40	work/artefact
Examination, final	10 to 45	2 or 3 hour exam
Examination, quiz	1 to 6	5 to 30 min quiz
Examination, test	2 to 15	30 to 90 min test
LOTE, translation	1.2 to 3.4	100 words of English
LOTE, composition	1.7 to 4.3	100 words of English
Portfolio	30 to 85	portfolio
Presentation, long	10 to 20	> 20 min presentation
Presentation, short	5 to 10	5 to 20 min pres.
Research task	1 to 15	ea research task
Problem sets	17 to 34	ea problem set
Writing, extended	10 to 20	1000 words
Writing, short	2 to 3	100 words
Writing, informal	0.5 to 1	100 words

Explore this topic further ...

Curriculum Manual Team (2019) 'Workload', MQ CMS Wiki, <https://wiki.mq.edu.au/x/ugaYEg>

Rice University (2016) Workload estimator (interactive tool and research background), <https://cte.rice.edu/workload>

Quick guide: Unit Activities

REFERENCES

Carnegie Mellon University (n.d.) Assign a reasonable amount of work, <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/solveproblem/strat-lackmotivation/lackmotivation-05.html#strati>

Kovanović et. al. (2015). Penetrating the black box of time-on-task estimation. LAK15, 184–193. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2723576.2723623>

Macquarie University, Assessment Policy <https://goto.mq/assessment-policy>

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