

The MYOB Project
Cloud-based accounting and making sense of financial data.

Abstract

The MYOB Project is a case-based assignment that is designed for students, who aspire to be professional accountants or small business owners learning cloud-based accounting. Informed by literature of active-learning and the case method, this assignment is almost completely organized by self-directed learning. The assignment requires students to learn cloud-based accounting by using a live accounting software package MYOB Essentials™ to create a business profile and record day to day transactions. This project also involves the preparation of common financial statements and a tax return. Students are also required to write a reflective essay to evaluate the performance of the business by making sense of the financial information they have prepared. Upon completion of this assignment, students will be able to gain the confidence in learning practical skills by utilizing available learning materials and evaluating their own quality of work.

Keywords:

Cloud-based accounting, self-directed learning, small businesses.

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Submission

INTRODUCTION

Background

The MYOB Project is a case study-based assignment to be completed by the students who enrolled in a first-year accounting course at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. This course is compulsory for students who are completing a Bachelor in Commerce with Accounting as their major. The course introduces the principles of tax law, bookkeeping and the preparation of financial statements in the context of small businesses in New Zealand. The course emphasizes the practical side of bookkeeping and financial reporting at an entry level. The practical nature of the course also attracts entrepreneurially-minded students contemplating on running their own businesses. There are approximately 200 students studying this course. A significant portion of the students do not have previous knowledge of bookkeeping and accounting software packages.

The case material sets the scene where the students are required to take on the role of an owner-manager of a sole trader business. The fictitious business in the case study is based in Christchurch, New Zealand. It imports and distributes one type of reasonably high value equipment to customers and provides technical assistance. To complete the assignment students are required to set up the business in MYOB Essentials™, a cloud-based accounting software, and use the software to record all the business transactions and produce financial reports for one month. The cloud-based software suits this assignment well because it offers flexibility for students to complete it anywhere and anytime so long as the internet is available. The software can also be accessed from a range of devices. The assignment takes advantage of the 30-day free trial period. The project has obtained permission and support from MYOB New Zealand.

The business case information for the assignment, instructions and requirements were documented in a student workbook (available on request). This assignment is designed to let students experience the bookkeeping for small businesses by using a live accounting software package and to make sense of financial data for operational purposes. The key feature of this

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assignment is that it almost completely relies on self-directed learning, i.e. no teaching time is allocated for demonstrating how to use the MYOB software or any of the bookkeeping and financial reporting related tasks.

The implementation of the MYOB Project – experience in 2018 and 2019

The assignment was distributed in the last lecture before the term break. Students had four weeks to complete the assignment. Three optional drop-in sessions were timetabled for students. These drop-in sessions were held in a computer lab and were facilitated by the lecturer. Students attended these sessions to ask particular questions or utilize some dedicated time to work on the assignment with the presence of the lecture and fellow classmates. The interaction between students and the lecturer were infrequent.

The assignment was to be completed and assessed individually. The assignment held a weighting of 17% of the entire course. To complete this assignment, students were required to:

- generate six (6) documents from the accounting software based on the step-by-step guidance in the student workbook;
- learn and manually prepare a statement of cash flows.
- write up a short reflective essay (500 words) based on the financial data they processed in the assignment to identify two business problems

The case information was designed to embed a range of operational and financial problems. Students were required to make sense of the financial information and identify two business problems, either operational or financial. The identification of those business problems was required be supported with evidence (data or information) from their work in the assignment. Students were also required to discuss the implications of these problems and provide practical solutions.

The final section of the workbook laid out the marking schedules for the required documents, including the marking rubric for the reflective essay. After the assignment was collected and marked. A full set of examples and the lecturers' comments on the merits as well as the

shortfalls of the exemplars were provided to the students as feedback. Students were also encouraged to pick up their own individual marking schedules after the results were released.

The design rationale of the MYOB Project

The design rationale of the assignment has been informed by literature of using case studies in accounting education (Boyce, Williams, Kelly, & Yee, 2001; Jones, 1998) and the case-method (Cullen, Richardson & O'Brien; 2004).

First, the case-based scenario is realistic and relevant (Weil, Oyelere, Yeoh, & Firer, 2001). Although the case information is drawn on a fictitious business, the settings of the business contain ample realistic details for students to experience setting up a real-world business in accounting software. The case information embeds a range of ambiguities and uncertainties represented in real-world organizations. Students have to observe and contemplate in order to articulate the ambiguities and uncertainties in their reflective essay.

Second, the design and implementation of the MYOB Project is underpinned by the student-centered active learning approach (Lawson et al. 2014; Stephenson 2017). The project is a journey for students to learn bookkeeping and financial reporting via the functions of MYOB Essentials™ *by themselves*. The style of the workbook progresses from step-by-step screen cut-based illustrations to more abstract and text-based instructions. The workbook sections contain 'checkpoint' and 'assessment' sections in bold and colored font. 'Checkpoints' highlight interim outcomes of assignment tasks, which are critical for the next step. Ideally, students' mistakes should be identified at a 'checkpoint', otherwise uncorrected mistakes are likely to escalate and eventually affect students' assignment results. Therefore the 'check point' prompts students to evaluate their own quality of work. The highlighted 'assessment' sections outline the tasks that generate the documents required for submission. Students need to utilize their knowledge of manual bookkeeping that they have learnt in class to make sense and evaluate the quality of the documents that they have generated using MYOB.

Third, after the implementation of the assignment, the role of the lecturer is a 'partner' (Healy & McCutcheon, 2010) in the case method. The lecturer is available to assist students throughout

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their entire journey, but only upon request. Having access to the students' MYOB online accounts as an 'advisor', the lecturer monitors the progress of students' work in the background without intervention. In rare cases, students who cannot correct their mistakes contact the lecturer for assistance. The lecturer is mindful to make these requests and queries as opportunities for students to learn by discussing what the issue might be, why the error must be corrected and options available to correct/overcome them.

Last but not least, the "self-directed" learning characteristic of the MYOB Project was aimed at improving students' soft skills, including critical thinking, problem solving, leadership and communication skills (Jackling & de Lange, 2009; Bui & Porter, 2010; Chen, 2013; Elder, 2015). Except for the difficulties in designed tasks and assessments, students often came across barriers and difficulties in using a live accounting software. For instance, repeatedly losing their password or working at midnight while the system was upgrading. These issues were also realistic and relevant. Students learned to anticipate and overcome these barriers via effective communication and reflective learning.

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INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES

Resources required: presentation facility and wi-fi. Room setting is suitable for group discussion.

<i>Learning activities:</i>	<i>Time allocated</i>
1. Demonstration and learning by doing: the presenter will lead this section to (1) present the background of the exercise and (2) demonstrate how to log in a trial account created via MYOB Essentials™ s. The attendees will utilize their mobile phone, tablets or laptop computer to try this themselves.	5 minutes
2. Demonstration and learning by doing: the presenter will facilitate this section. The attendees will be divided into groups of three or four. Each group member will be provided with a page of instructions to use MYOB Essentials™ to generate a range of documents. Each member will perform different tasks and collaborate to share the documents they have prepared.	10 minutes
3. Group discussion: The attendees will discuss in their group and identify at least two business problems by making sense of the financial data. See the key discussion questions below.	10 minutes
4. Collaboration and wrap up.	5 minutes

Key Discussion Questions

Attendees (i.e. students) are required to identify two (2) issues and/or concerns, operational or financial. For each issue/concern identified, attendees are required to:

- Describe the concern or the business problem. The business problem is an issue or concern about the operational performance or financial circumstances of the business. [**Learning outcome:** to make sense, thinking critically and communicate financial data for business operation]

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- Present evidence (i.e. relevant information from this MYOB project) [**Learning outcome:** to communicate effectively with evidence-based reasoning, and to extract targeted financial data from the cloud-based accounting software]
- Propose a course of action(s) that may be able to resolve the situation or rectify the business problem [**Learning outcome:** to solve realistic business problems and communicate effectively in writing]

Lessons Learned and Teaching Tips

- The essence of this assignment is student-centered learning. The key is to design: ‘what students will do’.
- The learning activities should reflect a journey of ‘discovery’ and/or problem solving, i.e. they have clear directions towards the learning outcomes.
- Regular feedbacks are necessary for students to visualize the achievement of learning outcomes. Transparent assessment feedbacks can motivate participation and allow self-assessment and peer review.
- The lecturer’s role is in supporting the students rather than leading the students. Flexibility is allowed to suit students’ different learning styles and backgrounds.

Conclusion:

The technical contents of this assignment can be used for any entry-level accounting course that has a focus on the practical side of bookkeeping and financial reporting rather than the conceptual framework of financial accounting. It is suitable for students with minimal prior learning in accounting and for those who aspire to own and operate their own businesses or other types of organizations. The assignment can be used as an assignment for a course, or a standalone competence-based assessment.

The design rationale of the assignment emphasizes students’ self-directed active learning. Its flexibility, transparency and the practical nature is able to motivate and engage students. It was found that the MYOB Project had a higher number of submissions and pass rates than those of

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the other written assignment of the course. The results of the MYOB Project in semesters 1 and 2 of 2018 are displayed below:

Overall results of MYOB Project

	Class size	No of submission	Pass rate (all)	Pass rate (submitted only)	Mean (all, out of 100%)	Standard Deviation
Semester 1, 2018	60	54 (90%)	88%	98%	65.9	9.8
Semester 2, 2018	132	122 (92%)	87%	96%	66.6	13.4

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