

## **Assessment and marking**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Student assessment is central to improving teaching and learning in the faculty. Assessment is the most powerful element of the curriculum as far as students are concerned – it ensures that students have clear expectations of what's required of them, and is an important tool for teachers to use to stimulate the type of learning that they want their students to achieve. Often assessment is the primary vehicle through which students are afforded an opportunity to develop and demonstrate key generic skills, such as critical thinking or teamwork. It follows that assessment practices are highly significant in improving teaching and learning.

Feedback is strongly tied to assessment. In focus group interviews with students we have asked them what they mean by feedback. Their view is that feedback is only associated with assessment tasks. Verbal assistance given to them in tutorials is not feedback nor are written answers to their questions provided through the Online tutor although both of these are seen as useful to their learning. While we can and should work to change this perception it is important to provide students with appropriate feedback through the assessment process.

Tutors play an important role in the assessment of students work and in ensuring that students receive helpful feedback on their work. However the extent of that role will be largely dependent upon the nature of the assessment tasks, and on your subject coordinators expectations of you in relation to assessment and marking. These expectations might be explicit where the subject coordinator clearly lays out expectations of you, provide examples of student work at different levels and delineates grading criteria. In some subjects however the expectation may be that you formulate your own criteria and apply that criterion to student work. It is important therefore that you seek guidance and direction from your subject coordinator or tutor-in-charge in all matters related to assessment and marking of student work.

### **TYPES OF ASSESSMENT:**

Assessment generally is characterized as either formative or summative. Formative assessment is used to establish where the student is at during the subject to inform you as to what the next stage in learning might be or where aspects of the subject need to be re-visited before progressing further. Summative assessment is given at the end of the subject and is to determine what details about the subject the student has understood and is able to use. A more complete description follows:

1. Formative, to provide feedback during learning. Formative assessment is designed to gain an ongoing overview of a student's progress. It evaluates the students increasing knowledge, skills and understanding and provides feedback to the student. This feedback ideally summarises the student's progress while also focussing on any knowledge skills or gaps the student may need to address. Formative assessment is associated with deep approaches to learning.
2. Summative: To provide an index of how successfully the student has learned when teaching has been completed. Formative assessment is basic to good teaching and deep approaches to learning. Summative assessment is that form of assessment that is epitomised by the end of semester examination. Assessment is not continuous, its purpose is to provide a final mark or grade and feedback may or, more typically, may not be provided (Brown and Knight 1994 p 15)

## THE MARKING PROCESS

There are a number of key issues related to marking: scales and standards; reducing variability; criteria and feedback. Each will be dealt with in turn.

### 1. Scales and standards

In the faculty of Economics and Commerce at the University of Melbourne the grades are N, Pass, H3, H2A, H2B, H1. The real question, of subject, is 'what does each of these grades mean, in terms of the nature, quality, maybe quantity, of work?' In other words, what are the assessment criteria? There should be some published guidance on this given to your tutors.

In the faculty of Economics and Commerce the grade distribution guidelines are:

#### Grade ranges in the faculty Economics and Commerce at Melbourne

Year level	%N	%P	%H3	%H2B	%H2A	%H1	Average mark
100	4-11	27-34	13-20	13-23	12-14	10-16	65.32
200	5-13	31-37	15-19	15-18	10-14	10-17	65.46
300	4-10	21-33	14-19	17-20	13-20	9-20	66.60

### 2. Reducing variability

When marking you want to ensure that, as much as possible only the student's performance is reflected and that other extraneous factors have as minimal an effect as possible. For example, whether the student's essay was first in the pile, or last and so forth. In other words another marker given the same assessment task should broadly be in agreement. There are a number of strategies that minimise the variability. For example:

- use previously established criteria (see 3 below) that are known to students and tutors at the outset.
- use second markers where resources permit,
- mark first 5 then mark the rest, return to first five and remark.
- mark by question not by script if an examination.
- or skim read all then loosely put in pass, fail and honours piles. Then go back and mark all scripts
- in all of this, anonymity of writers a requirement

### 3. Using criteria–

Adopting a standard set of criteria is a significant strategy to improve objectivity of marking process and hence minimize the variability. Generally your subject coordinator or tutor-in-charge will provide you with established set of criteria from which to work from. Should criteria not be made available we strongly encourage you to formulate your own prior to marking. This can be done in conjunction with

other tutors within the same subject, or you may wish to seek assistance directly from the Teaching and Learning Unit.

**There are a number of reasons for using criteria:**

- to clarify assignments for students and to help them internalise the grading criteria
- to clarify the assignment for yourself and to help you decide what writing features you most want to emphasise in the class
- as a teaching tool to help students evaluate their own work (before they start to work on the assignment, as they're working on the assignment, and/or after they've finished working on the assignment)
- to help students gain practice in using the criteria on someone else's paper

**Some characteristics of clear criteria include:**

- identify the most important features of the assignment (as a whole) or of some portion of the assignment (e.g. introduction, conclusion, methods section, discussion section, problem statement, statement of purpose)
- specify what the student needs to include to successfully meet your expectations
- when appropriate, assign separate scores (or grades) to individual sections of the paper
- when appropriate, assign an overall score to the assignment (to address issues of flow, consistency, overall cohesion)
- may rank the criteria from most important to lesser importance (and make this ranking explicit to students)
- avoid qualitative words (such as good, bad, clear) unless they are further tied to specific features or qualities that are more understandable to the student
- assign a point value to each criterion (to reinforce importance of each section or feature)
- when appropriate, specify page lengths or recommendations (for instance, minimum and maximum length for introduction)
- may differentiate between students' existing knowledge and your expectations (for instance, by explaining that the introduction you want from them differs from other kinds of introductions in specific ways and then identifying those ways)
- may set ground rules for what all students must do (or they will be required to redo the assignment) as opposed to what they will be graded on
- may explain the interactions between individual sections (for instance, the conclusion must refer explicitly to your thesis statement and state your findings)
- use words that students find understandable (that is, if "analysis" means something specific within your discipline, explain to students what you mean -- as opposed to what it means in lay person's terms)