



Assessment: Setting and Marking Assessment Tasks

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INTRODUCTION

In the modules on assessment, there has been a strong emphasis on the important principles that need to underpin assessment processes and tasks. The most important point is that assessment is integral to the entire teaching and learning process of the paper. This module focuses on the specifics of task instructions, but it is worth reiterating some of the broad questions that you need to ask when you set an assessment task. These questions can act as a checklist, as it is easy to lose sight of the big picture when you are caught up in the specifics of the particular task.



Checklist to see if the task conforms to sound assessment principles

- Does the assessment task clearly align with the paper learning outcome(s)?
- Has the relevance of the assessment to course learning been made explicit to students?
- Is the complexity and weighting of the task appropriate for its stage in the paper?
- Is the weighting of the task proportionate to the workload and level of complexity?
- Is the task level appropriate?
- Does the task provide opportunities for students to develop self-evaluation skills?
- Does the task link in any way with workforce requirements in the particular discipline?
- Is the task significantly different from the assessment in the previous year?
- Does the assessment require evidence of individual engagement with the task?
- Does the task encourage or require students to demonstrate process competencies as well as produce a finished product?
- Have in-class opportunities been provided to discuss and practise the assessment requirements?
- Does the assessment task provide for the learning of material and /or the development of skills as well as measuring student competency?
- Does the assessment link with the other assessment tasks?
- Does the task enable students to make use of earlier formative feedback?



- Have the teaching approaches been in line with and supported the assessment requirements?
- If this is a final summative assessment, have the students had ample formative assessment opportunities to develop the required competencies and understanding?



WRITING CLEAR TASK INSTRUCTIONS AND ESTABLISHING DIALOGUE AROUND THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

One of the most common concerns expressed by students is that they do not understand what a particular assessment task requires. Correspondingly, students begin tackling a task with only a very crude sense of what is required. Sometimes, a vague and muddled piece of work is directly related to a lack of clarity in the task instructions. There used to be a view that was very prevalent among academics that a part of the “test” for students was to unravel the mystery of an assessment task. This view is part of a broader perception of assessment as a test, a perception which also incorporates the notion of the assessor seeing assessment as an instrument of power and control. However, if we focus on the learning opportunities offered by assessment and see assessment as part of the teaching and learning experience, it is vital that students fully understand requirements and that the assessment task is framed by as much conversation and preparation as possible. Furthermore, if another goal of assessment is to prepare students for lifelong learning, then it is important to invite them to participate actively in the assessment process at all stages.

Tips

- Invite a colleague to read your assessment task and explain how he or she understands the requirements.
- Try doing the task or question yourself. Often the ambiguities and uncertainties only emerge when you try something out.
- Generally avoid essays instructions that consist of a long quotation and then an instruction word such as discuss. This can feel be very confusing for students.
- Ask questions directly rather than implicitly.



- Avoid giving too many detailed pieces of advice as the students can become confused about the focus of the question.
- Be careful of overused instruction words and do not assume that students know what they mean. Favourite instructions include: Critically analyse; critique; issues; discuss critically.
- If these skills are important to your paper learning outcomes then they need to be a regular part of your teaching conversations and students need opportunities to practise them.
- Invite peers from other cultures to read your assessment tasks to check that you have not used culturally specific terms or idioms and to check whether the tasks depends on culturally specific knowledge.
- Where possible, set tasks that invite students to contribute examples from their own cultures.
- Where possible design an assignment in a number of smaller stages so that teachers can quickly gauge students' understanding, pick up problems and provide instructional formative feedback. In this way, students can develop their learning, as opposed to finding out that they have completely missed the boat when a piece of assessment is returned.
- Experiment with getting students to write for or present in a range of contexts and to different audiences (see handbook on types of assessment tasks).
- Provide classroom time for pre-assignment discussion.
- Give students opportunities to practise using task marking criteria or invite students' active participation in the development of task criteria.
- Show students previous examples of work on similar tasks.



MARKING CRITERIA

Dialogue around assessment criteria and ensuring general understanding of what they mean is one of the most significant parts of a successful assessment regime and one that promotes optimal student learning. Getting common understanding of the assessment criteria BEFORE students undertake the task has numerous benefits:

- Students and lecturers are likely to have a better shared understanding of the assessment task requirements
- Students have tools to self-evaluate as they prepare their assessment and developing student self-assessment competencies is an important learning goal
- Very well understood and articulated criteria enable teachers to mark with greater precision and consistency.
- Mutually agreed on criteria provide an appropriate basis for the provision of formative feedback and post-completion task discussion.
- Mutually understood criteria provide a basis for discussion should students want to question any aspect of the feedback or marks that have been allocated to a task
- Dialogue around criteria helps to make the assessment processes more transparent and diminishes the power differential between lecturer and students. The approach is in keeping with a constructivist approach to teaching and learning.

It is important to remember that when we evaluate work in relation to criteria we are working within a criteria-referenced system. However, many academics and managers are still influenced by the models and thinking associated with a norm-referenced system in which students are ranked in relation to the group of students as a whole. As a consequence, people sometimes mark in relation to criteria and then worry if the sample does not conform to a bell curve. Sometimes managers expect this kind of spread, but it is entirely possible to get an uneven distribution of marks if working within a criteria-referenced system. Moon (2002) provides helpful definitions for the criteria-referenced system:

Criteria-referenced Assessment

A student's learning performance is measured in relation to a set of clearly defined criteria which have been designed in advance of the assessment and which are explicitly linked to course learning outcomes.

Threshold Assessment Criteria

These criteria designate the minimum level of the learning outcomes needed to ensure a pass.

Grading Assessment Criteria

Assessment criteria must be directly linked to the learning outcomes. Moon (2002) suggests that the learning outcome indicates the base level of the required performance, while grading criteria indicate "how well students achieve above the threshold" (p.90).

Grading criteria indicate the standard or quality of the student's performance of a particular outcome. A dilemma for teachers is to find the balance between giving clear guidance as to what is expected and being too prescriptive and thereby encouraging a mechanistic approach. Criteria can be holistic or analytical. Holistic criteria indicate the standard of performance required in order to attain different grades. It is usually easiest to begin with the optimum and lowest levels of performance when working out criteria and then work out the grades in between.

Analytical criteria break a task up into its component parts or domains. A percentage of the total mark is allocated to each domain.

While analytical criteria can be precise and clear, they can easily encourage a mechanistic approach from students and lecturers and may get in the way of an appreciation of the work as an integrated whole.

Grading criteria indicate the level of learning above the base level of the learning outcomes that a student has attained. (Moon, 2002, p.90)

EXAMPLES OF ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Task: In general terms the assignment requires students to investigate and report (in 2000 words), the extent of human rights protection for a particular interest group and the desirability of a bill of rights from the point of view of the interest group.

From Dunn, Morgan, O' Reilly, & Parry (2004) p.27 & 28

HOLISTIC CRITERIA

Pass: The report demonstrates a sound understanding of human rights and of its application in the context of a particular interest group. It reflects an awareness (where appropriate) of gender and cross-cultural issues as they affect human rights in law, and it shows evidence of a capacity to examine critically a range of legal and non-legal issues in human rights. The argument in the report is generally logical and objective, and the report is clearly and concisely written.

Credit: In addition to satisfying the requirements for a pass, the report reflects mastery of a wide range of literature concerning human rights in law. The argument is consistently logical and objective, and the report is very clearly and concisely written.

Distinction/High Distinction: The report is exceptionally well researched and argued. In addition to satisfying the requirements for a credit, it demonstrates a high order of critical and argumentative skills appropriate to the discipline or field, and a highly developed ability to write clearly, creatively and concisely.

(Instead of pass, credit, distinction you could substitute C, B and A grades)

ANALYTICAL CRITERIA for the same assessment may have been written like this:

- Coverage of key relevant material and issues: 20
- Logical, well-presented argument: 25
- Written communication skills: 15
- Familiarity with appropriate research: 25
- Critical and creative approach: 15

An approach to designing assessment criteria: outline of a process

(Michael K. Potter and Erika Kustra, CTL, University of Windsor)

STEP ONE: Choose your *Domains*

- Domains are the criteria you're using to assess a student's performance.
- Choose domains by identifying knowledge or skill or dispositions that the activity is supposed to give students a chance to develop and demonstrate.
- For example, a rubric for assessing essay-writing might use the following domains: comprehension of subject, mechanics (grammar and spelling), organisation, and quality of argument (logic, rhetoric, use of evidence).

***Your domains are the **ROWS** of your rubric ***

STEP TWO: Choose your *Levels of Achievement*

- Decide how many levels of achievement you will recognize and what you will call them—the names matter!
- Most rubrics use four levels of achievement.
- There is a lot of variation when it comes to the names. Some variation of “exceptional, good, average, and poor” is more common, but some don't even use names at all.

*** Your levels of achievement are the **COLUMNS** of your rubric***

STEP THREE: Work on your *Descriptions*

- You're likely to spend most of your time on this crucial step, which involves *describing what performance at each level of achievement, in each domain, looks like*.
- Students need to know the difference between, say, "exceptional" organisation of a paper and "good" organisation of a paper. And so do you!
- Your descriptions tell your students (and yourself) what counts as *evidence of achievement* at each level of each domain.

***Your descriptions fill the **BOXES** of your rubric ***

STEP FOUR: Choose your Rating Scheme

- How many marks will the entire assessment be worth — and how much will a score at each level of each domain be worth?

Domains ↓	← Levels of Achievement →			
	(Description)	(Description)	(Description)	(Description)
	(Description)	(Description)	(Description)	(Description)
	(Description)	(Description)	(Description)	(Description)

Further Examples of Criteria

Example 11 learning outcome: Master's level, reproductive health

At the end of the module, learners will be expected to be able to appraise the consequence of a range of key socio-cultural influences on sexual and reproductive health (including sexually transmitted diseases, adolescent sexuality, female genital mutilation, the effects of culture and media).

Assessment method:

Assessment criteria are derived from the learning outcome, and no specific task is identified. The task could be an unseen question in an examination or an essay question.

Grade assessment criteria:

Fail: the work produced in response to a relevant question suggests that the learner is not able to perform the process of appraisal, e.g. cannot adequately show the consequences of the influences mentioned in the learning outcome; does not identify sufficient or adequately, the nature of the influences. There is no evidence of knowledge even to the extent of that discussed in the lecture, or the question is not answered.

Third: the work identifies some of the socio-cultural influences, suggests some understanding of their effect on sexual and reproductive health, but the treatment of the topic is superficial and/or not discussed in sufficient breadth. There is no evidence of knowledge further than that covered in the lecture.

Second: the treatment of the question is adequate. The learner identifies and discusses at least the socio-cultural influences mentioned in the learning outcome. The work discussion demonstrates useful understanding of the influences and their action on sexual and reproductive health, is of sufficient depth and breadth and demonstrates some reading around the topic in addition to the material recommended.

First: as the description of the criterion for the Second, but there is evidence of reading and thought around the topic that goes well beyond that discussed in the lecture or in the recommended reading.

Example 12 learning outcome: Master's level, learning log module in a leadership programme

At the end of the module, in an oral presentation, making reference to their learning journal entries, learners will be expected to evaluate the role of reflection in their work situations, indicating its values and the role or potential role of negative influences. They will be able to indicate how they can improve their use of learning journals in future use.

Assessment method: an oral presentation for 15 minutes in front of peers and a tutor, all of whom will judge the quality of the presentation against a series of questions on its quality. The individual questions will be judged to be passed if they are ticked by at least all but two of the peers. The tutor will count up responses.

(Comment: peer assessment is to be used here. Learners are to be assessed as 'adequate' or 'not yet adequate'. Those who are judged to be 'not yet adequate' will be expected to repeat the presentation at a later stage in their programme.)

Assessment criterion—the real criterion is that at least five out of seven more potential passes on question will indicate 'adequate', and two or more 'not passed' will constitute 'not yet adequate'. The means of judging whether the criterion has been reached poses as questions:

In the presentation does the learner evaluate the role of reflection in the work situation in a considered manner? *Yes/No*

Do the illustrations read from the learning journal represent good examples of reflection in the work situation? *Yes/No*

Does the evaluation indicate the values of reflection? *Yes/No*

Does the evaluation appropriately discuss negative influences? *Yes/No*

Has the presenter considered how the learning journal can be used in a future situation? *Yes/No*

Example of grade assessment criteria

Example 15 learning outcome: level 1 introduction to acting/drama programme

At the end of the module, the student will be expected to be able to work with others in small task-orientated groups, participating and interacting in the group in a productive manner for him/herself and for the group as a whole.

This learning outcome, according to the definition of learning outcome statements given in the last chapter, is written at threshold. An example of a desirable learning outcome that could guide the writing of grade assessment criteria is:

The high-achieving learner will be able to work with and to lead others in small task-orientated groups, participating in and interacting with the group in a productive manner for him/herself and for the group as a whole. S/he will be aware of his/her role in the group, and be able to describe his/her strategies and actions.

Grade assessment criteria will now be guided by both the learning outcome that provides the pass-fail point information and the desirable learning outcome that indicates the qualities of better performance that will attain a higher grade. The assessment criteria might be:

Fail: the learner cannot or does not participate or does not work towards helpful co-operation in a group situation.

Average pass: the learner works with others in a task-orientated group, participates and interacts in a productive manner for her/himself and the group.

High average: the learner works well with others in a task-orientated group, participating and interacting a very helpful manner that suggests an increasing awareness of his/her role in the group and an increasing orientation towards the taking of leaders roles when appropriate.

Excellent: the learner is able to lead and to act as a participant in a task-orientated group, is aware of his/her role in the group and is able to describe strategies and actions.

Moon (2002), pp. 92, 101-102



More examples of Criteria

	Criteria	0	50	60	70	80	100
Articulation	Concisely and clearly written	Rambling, some irrelevancies and errors, incomplete statements	Reasonably succinct, simple and understandable	Succinct and poignant, clear and grammatically correct			
Understanding	Mastery of concepts (WHAT is it?)	Limited evidence of conceptual understanding, description often incorrect	Reasonable coverage of concepts, description not completely correct	Complete comprehension demonstrated, description correct			
	Depth of argument, justification and illustration (WHY is it this?)	List of points or sweeping statements without justification, not linked to practice or illustrated by examples	Relevant, reasoned argument, justified through practice and/or example	Points and statements fully address main question, comprehensive justification illustrated through appropriate evidence			
	Synthesis of information and breadth of evidence (HOW does it fit together?)	Not integrated, points and statements are not brought together to address main question	Partially integrated, two viewpoints built from several materials inter-linked	Fully integrated, points and statements link together to comprehensively address the main question			

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Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this paper, students are expected to be able to:

1. **Define** and **describe** fundamental concepts and principles of E-Business and Supply Chain Management.
2. **Explain** how integrated thinking is essential to good business practice.
3. **Demonstrate** how these concepts and principles practically apply in business contexts.
4. **Begin constructing** arguments to explain their point of view.
5. **Assess** and **reflect** on their own ways of learning and how they can be better students.
6. **Evaluate** their experience of working with others in a group.

Jan-13



Content

Main focus

Test 1 +
Test 2

Test 3
and
Group
Tasks

Interview
and
Reflection

MSYS111

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MCOM 331: Grading Rubric for Group Project

Criteria	Poor	Acceptable	Strong	Outstanding	Score
Well argued and logically structured essay (0-20)	Essay lacks a clear structure and does not have a logical flow. Main ideas are not distinct and linkages between main points are vague or unstated. At least half of the ideas are not supported with evidence. (0-5)	Essay has a clear structure yet main points are not always logical. Linkages between main points are clear or unstated. Main ideas have clear paragraphs with little repetition. Some ideas are not supported with evidence (6-10)	Essay has a clear structure and main points flow logically. The linkages between main points are generally clear. Main ideas have clear paragraphs with little repetition. Ideas are usually supported with evidence (11-15)	Essay has a clear structure and main points flow logically and are linked together. Main ideas have clear paragraphs and no repetition. Ideas are supported with evidence in all cases (16-20)	
Comments: Use of research for arguments (0-20)	The report uses less than the required 15 research sources. The sources are not used well to make reasonable arguments in support of the three purposes. Many arguments lack clarity or full development. (0-5)	The report uses the required 15 research sources. The sources are used to make reasonable arguments in support of the three purposes. A number of arguments lack clarity or full development. (6-10)	The report uses the required 15 research sources. The sources are generally used to make strong arguments in support of the three purposes. Some arguments lack clarity full development. (11-15)	The report uses the required 15 research sources. The sources are used to make outstanding arguments in support of the three purposes. All arguments are clear and well developed (16-20)	
Comments: Synthesis (0-20)	The studies are only summarised or even poorly synthesised in support of the arguments (0-5)	The studies are reviewed reasonably well with some details lacking. The research is only marginally synthesised. There is a mix of summary and synthesis. (6-10)	Most studies are reviewed well and much of it is synthesised in support of arguments. Some studies may not be fully integrated to the argument. (11-15)	The literature is reviewed well and synthesised in support of the arguments in the essay. (16-20)	
Comments: Professional Presentation (0-15)	Essay has poor grammatical structure and punctuation and has writing errors that interfere with the message. Usage of APA style is inconsistent in the citations and references. Word count is outside the 10% margin (0-4)	Essay has reasonable grammatical structure and punctuation and has some writing errors. Usage of APA style is inconsistent in either the citations or references. Word count is outside the 10% margin (5-8)	Essay has good grammatical structure and punctuation and is relatively free of writing errors. Consistent usage of APA style for citations and references with only slight errors. Word count is within the 10% of total (9-12)	Essay has excellent grammatical structure and punctuation and is free of writing errors. Correct usage of APA for citations and references. Word count is within the 10% of total (13-15)	
Comments: Preparation of programme (0-5)	The purpose is not clearly stated in terms of the participants. Topic is not appropriate for the course or audience. Facilitation tools are not relevant to the focus (0-1)	The purpose is either not clearly stated or not stated in terms of expected outcomes or achievements for participants. Topic or angle chosen is not relevant to the course focus. Facilitation tools and session activities/methods chosen are marginally relevant to the course focus. (2)	The purpose is clearly stated in terms of expected outcomes or achievements for participants. Topic, topic angle, facilitation tools, or session activities are not a great fit for the course or expected outcomes (i.e., 1 of the 4 is not a great fit). (3)	The purpose is clearly stated in terms of expected outcomes or achievements for participants (not facilitators). Topic and/or topic angle chosen is relevant to the course focus and the scheduled topic and readings. Facilitation tools and session activities/methods chosen are relevant to the course focus. (4-5)	

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MCOM 331: Grading Rubric for Group Project

Comments: Implementation of FC (0-10)	The structure, activities and tools do not meet the objectives. There is either too much or not enough materials for the session. Creativity is minimal. (0-2)	The structure, activities and tools meet some, but not all objectives. There is either too much or not enough materials for the session. Creativity is marginal. (3-5)	The structure, activities and tools meet objectives. They are also relevant and generally sufficient for the participants in the time allotted. Too much may be attempted or creativity is acceptable and not outstanding. (6-7)	The structure, activities and tools are excellent for meeting objectives. They are also relevant and sufficient for the participants in the time allotted. Creativity is evident in the design. (8-10)
Comments: Performance of FC (0-10)	Presentation is dominating by only 1-2 members. Facilitators just speak at the audience and do not promote participation by audience. (0-2)	All presenters participate and yet some do more than others. Facilitators do some talking at instead of speaking to audience. Activities promote participation by some but not all. (3-5)	All presenters participate and yet some do more than others. Each facilitator generally engages with audience. Activities promote participation by all. (6-7)	Presentation is shared by all members and each facilitator engages with audience. Activities promote participation by all. (8-10)
Comments: Total Score (out of 100):				

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MCOM333 Reflective Essay			Name _____	Due Date _____
Criteria	C	B	A	Mark & Comments
Individual and class learning outcomes are discussed coherently (25)	The essay attempts to tie all the aspects of designing and implementing a campaign together. There is some discussion on personal insights into the benefits of each aspect of undertaking the campaign. The reader gains a perspective on how the student gained academic and practical skills from undertaking a campaign. No discussion of PR's contribution to the awareness of social issues.	The essay identifies and draws together the essential aspects of designing and implementing a PR campaign. The student provides personal insights into the benefits of undertaking the project. There is a discussion of the competencies that the student gained from the campaign. There is some discussion regarding how PR can contribute to the awareness of social issues.	The reflection provides the 'big picture' of the student's experiences and makes clear links with both individual and class learning outcomes. In the essay the student interweaves information regarding specific aspects of the campaign and how he/she feels they benefited from the project. Discusses the importance of PR's contribution to awareness of social issues. The reader is able to identify some unique aspects of the student's experience.	
Experiences and accomplishments (25)	The student does not develop the discussion regarding particular experiences and personal accomplishments. There is minimal discussion of how the student is likely to use this experience in the future.	The student reflects on what he/she has learned through particular experiences and personal accomplishments. There is adequate discussion on how this experience may be used in the future.	The student illustrates personal insights into their learning through discussing particular experiences and accomplishments. There is clear discussion on how the experience of implementation and sense of accomplishment has impacted on thoughts regarding your future.	

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Examples and reflection(25)	Some examples are given which illustrate the student's learning and/or personal response to specific situations. There is some discussion regarding strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for future work experience.	Examples are provided to illustrate learning as well as personal responses and some insightful reflection about how to tackle similar situations in the future. There is a clear discussion regarding strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for future work experience.	Demonstrates the ability to reflect through examples of own and others' work. Examples are given of personal insights into specific situations and how learning has been achieved through these experiences. The student reflects on their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for future work experience.	
Writing (15)	Too many simple writing and grammatical errors. Essay is not well-structured.	Some writing and grammatical errors. There are some organisational issues with the writing but an effort has been made.	Well-structured with few mechanical and grammatical errors. Essay has been proof-read.	
Holistic Judgement (10)				
TOTAL GRADE				

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TIPS

- Develop criteria that match the particular task and associated learning outcomes. Departmental or generic programme criteria are generally bland and written in a way that does not make much sense to students and are not precisely associated with the particular learning outcomes.
- Make sure that students and teachers have a shared understanding of the criteria before students undertake the task.
- Where possible, involve the students in negotiating the criteria.
- Allow students to practise on exercises that use the same criteria.
- Provide samples of work for students to mark using the criteria - this promotes a better understanding of the meaning of the criteria.
- Be sure that course team members have a shared understanding of the task criteria. If possible, course team members should mark a sample of student work and compare and discuss the marks that they have allocated.
- Use a system of cross marking.
- Mark a sample of scripts and then revisit to check allocation of grades.
- Use peer and self evaluation to complement teacher evaluation.

Dunn et al (2004) provide a useful quick checklist for teachers that teachers in relation to relation to grading criteria:

- Have I determined in advance of the task what the standards of performance-and therefore conceptions of quality - are in relation to this task?
- How can I be sure that performance standards will be the same no matter who marks the assessment or whether it is marked first or last?
- How do the various markers of this task know what the performance standards are? How do the students know?
- How clear to students are the standards of performance expected of them? How do they know this? (p.28).

Remember there is no recipe for absolutely consistent and reliable allocation of grades, but we need to put as many safeguards as possible to ensure a high level of consistency and accuracy. These include :

- Well-defined criteria around which there has been dialogue and which are well-understood by all parties.
- Sample marking and discussion by members of a marking team.
- Providing samples of marking to new tutors or lecturers.

REFERENCES

Dunn, L., Morgan, C. & O'Reilly, M. (2004). *The Student Assessment Handbook*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Moon, J. (2002). *The Module and Programme Development Handbook*. London: Kogan Page.



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