



# Economics Network Economics PG Teaching Assistant Workshop

Assessment and Feedback

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## Assessment Design

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## Student Learning

- What is the single most influential factor affecting students' learning strategy?
- Students take their cue from what is assessed

## Assessment Purpose

- What is the purpose of the assessment?
  - Pass or fail a student
  - Rank a student
  - Provide students with feedback
  - Diagnose a student's strengths and weaknesses
- Summative vs formative assessment

## Validity, Alignment and Taxonomies

- What about the design of the assessment?
- Validity (fit for purpose)
  - What you wish to 'measure' Vs what the task actually 'measures'
- Alignment
  - Alignment between objectives and tasks
- Taxonomies of learning
  - Hierarchy of skills and capabilities



## Assessment Criteria

## Marking Criteria

- Criteria sheets
  - Grade criteria or competences
  - Structured approach
- Criterion-referenced grading
  - Characteristics of a 1<sup>st</sup>, 2:1, etc.
  - But, don't forget the level/year of your students too

## Ensuring Reliability

- Assessment criteria helps to ensure reliability between markers and the same marker over time
- Assessment matrices
- Level performance descriptors

## Marking Criteria Task

- Fill in the descriptor to differentiate between different grade classifications. Ensure that justifications can be easily understood by students



## Providing Feedback

## Feedback

- Many students do not read, engage with or act upon the feedback we provide.
- NSS suggest that students are less satisfied with the feedback they receive than any other aspect of their learning experience in higher education
- How can we make students read and engage with feedback?

## Simple ways of improving written Feedback

1. the language we use
2. where we write the comments
3. the balance between strengths and weaknesses
4. the tone and phrasing
5. reference to learning outcomes.

## The Language we use...

- Students find it difficult to understand comments because we write them in (a) the specific disciplinary language of the subject and (b) the terminology of Bloom's taxonomy i.e. synthesis, analysis, evaluation.
- Big issue for 1<sup>st</sup> year students.
- Avoid excessive and unexplained use of academic jargon.
- Remember comments are for the students to understand and act upon rather than the external examiner.
- *Tip: Always remember you are writing feedback comments for the students to act upon rather than another academic such as the external examiner.*

## Where we write the comments...

- In-text comments and notations facilitate understanding of students in comparison to given feedback only at the end of the essay.
- Ferguson (2011): 1 or 2 word feedback is completely useless – try to avoid.
- Trade-off: detailed comments vs time
- Online marking can help
- *Tip: Explain three or four areas for improvement in detail rather than providing brief comments on a large number of points.*

## Balance between strengths and weaknesses...

- One purpose of feedback is to motivate students to take appropriate actions to deepen their learning.
- If the comments only focus on weaknesses and fail to identify any strengths students are likely to ignore feedback.
- *Tip: Always try to find something positive to say otherwise there is a danger the students will take no notice of any of the feedback*

## The tone and phrasing...

- Students are more likely to engage with feedback comments if they:
  - are constructive and avoid using harsh language or being over judgmental
  - stress the normality of making mistakes in the learning process
  - place greater emphasis on the importance of effort over academic ability
- Example:
  - “This is wrong/incorrect – you do not understand this concept”
  - “This is a common error. Many students find this concept difficult the first time they study it, but the majority obtain an in-depth understanding after a prolonged period of study and go on to do well in future assessments”

## Reference to learning outcomes...

- Feedback is more effective when it refers to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for that particular piece of work.
- There is also evidence that it is not common practice.
- *Tip: Make sure you carefully re-read the assessment criteria and intended learning outcomes before reading the assignments and providing feedback.*