Marking and Grading

The careful work of designing learning outcomes, assessment tasks and marking schemes comes to fruition during the marking and grading process. There are five important tasks in this phase:

1. Developing a marking strategy for the assessment task
2. Providing feedback on the quality of student work
3. Making judgements on the quality of work
4. Moderating of marking
5. Deriving and reporting final grades.

Developing a marking strategy

Assessment tasks can range from multiple-choice to extended written tasks. Although each has its own marking logic, all must be judged consistently and accurately. Consider some of the following strategies:

- Before commencing, revisit the marking criteria and standards and ensure all markers within the team share a common understanding of expectations and standards.
- For assessments that involve a single task, such as an essay, scan student scripts and get a sense of the overall quality. Loosely order the scripts to represent a ‘first cut’ on standards. Revise as necessary during the marking process.
- For assessments involving multiple tasks, including examinations, mark each task for all students first, then return to mark the next task.
- Be strategic with your time. Don’t try to correct everything, focus on several key things that are optimally useful at that time for the student. In written tasks, resist the temptation to edit the work. If grammar or language is a problem, edit a sample paragraph only and refer the student to appropriate sources of support and assistance.
- Remember that all marks are always subject to moderation.

Providing feedback

Providing feedback on student work is a core part of our teaching. The aim of feedback is to help students improve the quality of their work, so feedback is most usefully focused around three areas:

1. The overall goals of the assignment
2. How successfully they have been achieved in this assignment
3. What can be done to improve the performance.

When providing feedback, consider the following strategies:

- Organise your feedback around three central points. One point may be acknowledging what has been done well. The remaining two points could focus on practical things they could do to improve their current grade.
- Ensure the feedback is pitched to the right level. Remember, feedback is teaching. Ask yourself what is optimal for this student to hear, at this point in their development (e.g. first year). Don’t overload your feedback with issues beyond their grasp. Use the marking rubric to guide the feedback necessary for each criterion.
- Provide a group feedback sheet. This sheet might reiterate the goals of the assignment, noting areas that were handled well by most students, common misunderstandings, and how they could be improved. It may also include discussion about the next assessment task. Group feedback sheets consolidate the individual feedback provided, and may also save individual marking time.
Making judgements about student work

While some tasks have clear answers, more commonly we are required to make judgements. In these instances we are required to interpret, using our professional expertise, how successfully each criterion has been met, and apply marks, or an overall grade to the work. We aim to do this with accuracy, consistency and transparency. However, human error may occur when there is:

- a lack of shared understanding about criteria and standards among the marking team
- student work that is performing well against some criteria, but very poorly against others
- personal stylistic preferences or dislikes of individual markers not shared by the team
- unconscious bias about particular students and their abilities
- grade variance or slippage during long marking sessions, often resulting from fatigue.

We need to be on our guard about all possibilities of human error, and be able to explain and account for our grading judgements. If we are uncertain, it is important to gain a second opinion through moderation.

Moderation of marking

Moderation of marking aims to regulate the marking of individuals to achieve consistency in the application of criteria and standards. Moderation occurs fluidly during the marking process, when the marking team confer on the interpretation of criteria and standards, and any other concerns about consistency. Moderation also occurs when all marks have been provisionally awarded, but before grades are finalised. Common moderation practices at this point include:

- spot checks – where the unit assessor samples random scripts for consistency
- sampling at the margins – where students’ scripts which are close to the margins of grades are double marked and discussed before a final grade is decided upon
- double blind marking – where sample scripts are double blind marked and differences are discussed
- problem scripts are tabled and discussed among the panel, including potentially failing works.

In each case the Unit Assessor is the final arbiter, although the process also aims to develop the expertise and confidence of less experienced markers to make accurate and reliable judgements.

Deriving and reporting of final grades

It is the Unit Assessor’s responsibility to derive a final grade from students’ accumulated assessment results over a session, and report all grades, via e-Academic, to the school Board of Assessors at the end of each teaching session. Aspects of this final step in the assessment process include:

- deriving a final raw mark for each student and converting this to a band of achievement (e.g. HD, D etc.)
- making discretionary judgements about students whose raw marks are on the margins of grades
- finalising and reporting grades, and monitoring students who are incomplete
- responding to any queries at Board of Assessors
- acting upon student queries or appeals about grading decisions
- reflecting, in the light of experience and student feedback, on how assessment may be improved for the next iteration.

There are various supports for markers, including the unit assessor or teaching team, the relevant course coordinator, the Centre for Teaching and Learning, as well as the guidance offered by the University’s Assessment Policy.

Sources
