



A spotlight on...

Fair and Student-Friendly Marking Criteria

Centre for Innovation in Education

Overview

Providing clear, precise and fair marking criteria is crucial to establishing students' understanding of the parameters of their assessments, and they are essential to help guide their completion of the assignment. Marking criteria are at their best when they are written in readable language, are communicated clearly to the students well in advance of the assessment's submission, and are fairly and clearly applied in marking process.

Benefits

Fair and student-friendly marking criteria:

- Help students understand the parameters and fairness of assessments.
- Help assessments remain reliable and valid in the context of the wider module/programme.
- Ensure consistency and relevance across markers.
- Ease your marking process by providing areas on which to focus.
- Improve students' confidence – knowing what they will be marked on helps students to worry less about their performance.



Putting into practice - Writing Assessment Criteria

Clear assessment criteria can be tricky to construct, but there are a number of useful starting points that can help make the process easier:

- Consider your situation: are your criteria departmental- or assessment-specific? Assessment-specific marking criteria can be more engaging than generic departmental ones, so if you have an opportunity to implement this, it's worth considering (Graham, Harner and Marsham, 2022).
- Consider the way that the criteria are written. Do you think your students will be able to understand and apply them in their assessment? Are they as free of esoteric language (jargon) as possible, or if it is present, are you sure that your students are familiar with it?
- Align your criteria with the learning outcomes that the assessment measures. What elements of the assessment will you be looking for to ensure that the learning outcome(s) have been met?

- Consider whether you want to apply different weightings to different criteria, based on their size or relevance to the learning outcomes. Does the assessment place more of a focus on a students' critical or analytical skill versus their presentation style? If so, you might want to consider weighting one criterion over another to ensure it has a greater impact on the overall mark.
- Similarly, decide how much of a focus you want to have on academic standards, writing, referencing or presentation skills if you are formally weighting different criteria. Does this assignment focus strongly on these skills, or are they more secondary?
- Consider your criteria in the context of comparable assessments on other modules.
- Ask a colleague to review them to make sure they are fair, clear, and on a par with other assessments.

Going Further: Communicating Criteria

Effective criteria are at their best when they are communicated clearly to students. Try some of these to help students engage with your criteria:

- Active formative use of the criteria can help students clarify expectations and encourage dialogue between you and your students (Defeyter and McPartlin, 2007). Allow students the opportunity to mark, or peer-mark, a piece of work.
- Participation is critical to improve students' engagement with the assessment (Meer and Chapman, 2015). Ask students to look at a brief and construct criteria for it, then discuss the similarities/differences between students' criteria and your own. You may choose to update your criteria based on this.
- Spend time with your students deconstructing what it is that markers will be looking for. Ensure this includes an opportunity for students to ask questions, too.

Additional Resources & References

Can you help us improve this resource or suggest a future one? Do you need this resource in an alternative format? Please contact us at cie@liverpool.ac.uk



A full list of [references](#) are available on the Centre for Innovation in Education website.