ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK TOOLKIT

MARKING, FEEDBACK AND MODERATION

DEVELOPING GOOD WRITTEN FEEDBACK

> **This guidance is linked to Principle 8 and 9 in the CU Assessment Strategy and is underpinned by the CU Assessment Policy.**

'… any consideration of quality feedback should examine the whole feedback process rather than any single stage such as lecturer input…quality staff-student written feedback needs to take into account not only what the staff member produces but also how the student engages with and responds to it'
Dunworth and Sanchez (2016, p. 577)

INTRODUCTION

The quality of feedback undoubtedly affects the willingness and ability of students to engage with the feedback, however, as the quotation above by Dunworth and Sanchez (2016) states, the quality of feedback is only one part of the feedback process. While this guide focuses on written feedback, it does not by any means suggests that this should be the only format of feedback given. This guide should therefore be read alongside the guidance documents on 'Engaging students with feedback', 'Developing Assessment Literacy' and 'Methods of giving feedback'.

WHAT MAKES MEANINGFUL WRITTEN FEEDBACK?

Nicol (2010, p.110) provides a good summary of what makes good written feedback for students:

- Understandable: Expressed in a language that students will understand.
- Selective: Commenting on two or three things that the student can do something about.
- Specific: Pointing to examples in the student's submission where the feedback applies.
- Timely: Provided in time to inform the next piece of work.
- Contextualized: Framed with reference to the learning outcomes and/or assessment criteria.
- Non-judgmental: Descriptive rather than evaluative, focused on learning goals not just performance goals.
- Balanced: Pointing out the positive as well as areas in need of improvement.
- Forward Looking: Suggesting how students might improve subsequent assignments.
- Transferable: Focused on processes, skills and self-regulatory abilities.

HOW DO WE PUT THIS INTO PRACTICE?

UNDERSTANDABLE, SELECTIVE AND SPECIFIC

- Avoid using one word comments such as 'good', 'why', 'No' or symbols, such as √, X, ?, which is non-specific and does not tell students the specifics. Explain clearly what you think is 'good' and provide examples. E.g. instead of simply saying 'this is a good point', explain, 'this is a good point supported by clear literature and demonstrates your insights into the current debate'.

- Use plain English that is inclusive to all students rather than idioms which could be difficult to understand for international students.

- Focus on a selective number of comments and feedback that students can improve on, rather than correcting every single typo, grammatical or spelling mistakes, which is likely to overwhelm students and overshadow the key feedback message.

TIMELY

- The university assessment policy states a clear turnaround time for summative feedback. However, this is only one part of the 'timeliness'.

- Feedback should be provided to students before the next piece of work (whether peer or tutor feedback), so students have a clear opportunity to apply the feedback to their future work. One of the ways to ensure students receive and incorporate feedback in a timely manner is to provide formative feedback before the summative deadline.

CONTEXTUALIZED

- Feedback should be provided in line with the criteria and learning outcomes of the module and course. The feedback should be aligned with the grade given and using the wordings within the criteria in your feedback could help students understand why they achieve the grades they have.

- Consider breaking down the feedback under different criteria along with an overall summary.

NON-JUDGMENTAL AND BALANCED

- Feedback should be honest, but constructive to the learners. It should be written in a tone that encourages learners to move towards their learning goals rather than a focus on all the mistakes.

- Hughes' (2011) idea of ipsative feedback is a good way to ensure feedback focuses on student's personal progression as well as the wider learning goal. Hughes (2011) uses the concept of coaching where she suggests that feedback should also focus on students' 'personal best', recognizing their personal development. This is difficult to achieve when feedback is provided anonymously, but for multi-stage/formative tasks, this is a useful way to encourage and recognise a student's progression.

- Provide honest praise when it is due, but avoid providing praise to 'soften' the criticism as it could be confusing to students, especially when it does not align with the grades.

FORWARD LOOKING AND TRANSFERABLE

- Feedback should provide clear action points for students to develop and act on for future assessment and learning. Feedforward is the term that is often used to describe feedback that is 'forward-looking' and specifically to do with the student's development. Consider providing feedback under the heading 'action points for next time' to highlight to students what they could do differently next time.

- Provide clear suggestions on how students could achieve the next grade even when they have done well. This is especially the case when students have achieved 60 percent or 70 percent. It is important to explain to students what they need to do to achieve the higher grades in order to encourage progression.

REFERENCES

Dunworth, K. and Sanchez, H.S., 2016. Perceptions of quality in staff-student written feedback in higher education: a case study. Teaching in Higher Education, 21(5), pp.576-589.

Hughes, G., 2011. Towards a personal best: A case for introducing ipsative assessment in higher education. Studies in Higher Education, 36(3), pp.353-367.

Nicol, D (2010) 'Good Designs for Written Feedback for Students' IN: McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers (2009), 13th Edition, Houghton Mifflin, New York. pp. 109-121

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