

ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK TOOLKIT

ASSESSMENT DESIGN

WRITING AND ENGAGING STUDENTS WITH ASSESSMENT BRIEFS, CRITERIA AND RUBRICS

This guidance is linked to Principles 4 and 10 in the CU Assessment Strategy and underpinned by the CU Assessment Policy.

...describing and making clear and public what the learner is intended to achieve changes the nature of assessment from a tutor-led system with fuzzy objectives and undisclosed criteria, to a student-led system with greater emphasis on formative development and personal responsibility (Otter, 1995, p.45)

INTRODUCTION

Clear and explicit assessment criteria and rubrics are meant to increase the transparency of the assessment and aim to develop students into 'novice assessors' (Gipps, 1994) facilitating deep learning. It does not mean "dumbing" down the standard or "spoon-feeding", instead, it is about maximising inclusivity with regard to individual differences in language, cultural and educational background (Gilbert and Maguire, 2014).

The terms 'assessment brief', 'assessment criteria' and 'assessment rubrics' however, are often used interchangeably causing confusions that affect the design and the communicative effectiveness of the assessment brief. Therefore, it is important to first clarify the definitions of these terms:

Assessment Brief

An assignment brief refers to the instructions provided to communicate the requirements and expectations of any non-exam assessment tasks, including the assessment criteria and rubrics to students.

Assessment Criteria

Assessment criteria communicate to students the knowledge, understanding and skills the assessors expect from them in any given assessment task. A criterion is 'a property or a characteristic by which the quality of something maybe judged'. The criterion outlines what we expect from our students but does not itself make assumptions about the actual quality (Sadler, 1987, p. 194). In figure 1, the yellow highlighted boxes such as reflection, evidence of scholarly practice, presentation, etc are examples of assessment criteria.

Assessment Rubric

An assessment rubric is a tool used in the process of assessing student work that usually includes three essential features: 1. evaluative criteria, 2. quality definitions for those criteria at particular levels and 3. a scoring strategy (Popham, 1997 and Dawson, 2017).

'Quality Definitions' and the 'Scoring Strategy' define the level of achievement students can aspire to attain. They define the standards outlining the definite level of quality (or achievement, or performance) expected (Sadler, 1987, p. 194).

Please see figure 1 for an assessment rubric (please note this is just an example **NOT** a template).

Figure 1 - An example of an assessment rubrics (NOT A TEMPLATE)

		(evaluative) Criteria				
Scoring Strategy		Reflection, Critical Analysis and Impact of Practice	Evidence of the effective design and delivery of learning-centred learning experiences	Evidence of Scholarly practice	Presentation, Grammar and Spelling, Accurate Referencing and Bibliography	Quality Definitions
Outstanding 80-100% (distinction)	reflective practice demonstrating personal development and impact on practice. Clear insight shown into required professional values, principles and competencies and professional development planning.	clear evidence, for decision-making in learning design and delivery that places the student at the centre of the learning experience.	and locating practice within relevant theory and policy; demonstrating outstanding knowledge and depth of relevant scholarly work and policies.	Using correct grammar and spelling, excellent cross-referencing and links to supporting evidence. Presented to a publishable standard. Accurate referencing and bibliography correctly using the CU Harvard Style		
Excellent 70-79% (distinction)	Excellent use of analytical skills and reflective practice demonstrating personal development and impact on practice. Clear insight shown into required professional values, principles and competencies and professional development planning.	Excellent case, supported by clear evidence, for decision-making in learning design and delivery that places the student at the centre of the learning experience.	Clear evidence of open critique and sharing and locating practice within relevant theory and policy; demonstrating excellent knowledge and depth of relevant scholarly work and policies.	Excellent presentation, competently structured, using correct grammar and spelling, clear and easy to use links to supporting evidence. Appropriate referencing and bibliography correctly using the CU Harvard Style		
Good Quality 60-59% (Merit)	Good use of analytical skills and reflective practice demonstrating personal development and impact on practice. Insight shown into required professional values, principles and competencies and professional development planning.	Good case, supported by evidence, for decision-making in learning design and delivery that places the student at the centre of the learning experience.	Clear evidence of open critique and sharing and locating practice within relevant theory and policy; demonstrating good knowledge and depth of relevant scholarly work and policies.	Good presentation, competently structured, acceptable grammar and spelling, acceptable links to supporting evidence. Generally well referenced with correct use of the CU Harvard Style		
Acceptable 50-55% (Pass)	Acceptable use of analytical skills and reflective practice demonstrating personal development and impact on practice. Insight shown into required professional values, principles and competencies and professional development planning.	Acceptable case, supported by limited evidence, for decision-making in learning design and delivery that places the student at the centre of the learning experience.	Acceptable evidence of open critique and sharing and locating practice within relevant theory and policy; demonstrating acceptable knowledge and depth of relevant scholarly work and policies.	Acceptable presentation and structure, acceptable grammar and spelling, adequate links to supporting evidence. Acceptable referencing. Generally accurate use of CU Harvard Style.		
Adequate 40-49% (Pass)	Adequate use of analytical skills and reflective practice demonstrating personal development and impact on practice. Limited insight shown into required professional values, principles and competencies and professional development planning.	Adequate case, supported by little evidence, for decision-making in learning design and delivery that places the student at the centre of the learning experience.	Adequate evidence of open critique and sharing and locating practice within relevant theory and policy; demonstrating adequate knowledge and depth of relevant scholarly work and policies.	Adequate presentation and structure, grammar and spelling, links to supporting evidence. Adequate referencing. CU Harvard Style used but may contain some inaccuracies.		
(Referral) (or fail) (all learning outcomes not met) 39.5% or less	Little use of analytical skills and reflective practice demonstrating personal development and impact on practice. and/or Insufficient/no use of analytical skills and reflective practice demonstrating personal development and impact on practice.	Little or no case, supported by little or no evidence, for decision-making in learning design and delivery that places the student at the centre of the learning experience.	Little or no evidence of open critique and sharing and locating practice within relevant theory and policy; demonstrating little or no knowledge and depth of relevant scholarly work and policies. No insight shown into required professional values, principles and competencies and professional development planning.	Poor/weak presentation, grammar and spelling, links to supporting evidence and/or Unacceptable presentation, grammar and spelling, structure is very poor, links to supporting evidence. Little or no referencing, incorrect style, or very inaccurate use of CU Harvard		

HOW TO WRITE A CLEAR ASSESSMENT BRIEF, CRITERIA AND RUBRIC?

Consider the following questions:

For your assessment brief:

- Have you outlined clearly what type of assessment you require students to complete? For example, instead of "written assessment", outline clearly what type of written assessment you require from your students; is it an essay, a report, a reflective journal or a blog etc. If your assessment is a portfolio, breakdown the individual tasks clearly within the brief to ensure transparency.
- Is the purpose of the assessment immediately clear to your students, i.e. why the student is being asked to do the task? It might seem obvious to you as an academic, but for students new to academia and the subject discipline, it might not be clear. For example explain why they have to write a reflective report or a journal.
- Are all the important task information clearly outlined, such as assessment deadlines, word count, criteria and further support and guidance?

For your assessment rubrics and criteria:

- Consider the number of criteria you will assess in any particular task. Are they realistic?
- Are your criteria related and aligned with the module and the course's learning outcomes?
- Are the criteria and standards (your quality definitions) aligned with the level of the course? The SOLO Taxonomy (Biggs and Tang, 2007) and the QAA Subject Benchmarks in Framework for the Higher Education Qualifications are useful starting points to consider.
- Do the criteria capture the multiple dimensions of the student's performance? E.g. knowledge, skills and understandings.
- Are the criteria clear and have you avoided using any jargon?
- Consider how specific you are wording your criteria, it should be explicit but at the same time not overly-specific to avoid students adopting a mechanistic approach to your assignment. E.g. instead of stating a minimum number references, consider the use, awareness or critical analysis of literature and scholarship.
- Does your scoring strategy clearly define and cover the whole grading range? E.g. distinguish between the distinctions (70-79%) and 80% and above.
- Are the wordings in your quality definitions i.e. the judgement for different criteria, clearly outline and enable students to distinguish between the different judgements? For example, how do you differentiate between Outstanding, Excellent and Good?
- Have you discussed with your peers and got feedback from your course/module team on your assessment rubric and criteria?

HOW TO ENGAGE STUDENTS WITH THE ASSESSMENT BRIEF, CRITERIA AND RUBRIC?

Assessment criteria and rubrics as outlined in the assessment policy should be released to students with the assessment brief. However, research (e.g. Rust, Price and O'Donovan (2003)), has identified that simply providing the criteria and rubrics to students does not mean they will understand or engage with the criteria.

There are a number of good practice examples identified in the literature that would help engage students with assessment criteria and rubrics:

- Provide dedicated assessment guidance time in class, surgery hours or timeslots to discuss the assessment brief and criteria with students.
- Provide **and** discuss examples of assessment from previous cohorts or sample assessment from across the grading range to help students understand the criteria. Consider asking students to mark the sample assessment to help students internalise and better understand the criteria. Rust, Price and O'Donovan (2003) provide a good case study in how to achieve this in class.

- Ask students to self-assess their work against the rubrics and criteria or provide peer feedback using the assessment brief, rubrics and criteria as a formative exercise. Bloxham and West (2004) provide a good case study on this.
- Working with students to develop the criteria or have students identify one of the criteria to be used. Orsmund et al (2000 and 2002) provide two good case studies on how student generation of criteria, along with tutor support, enabled students to develop better awareness of the standards required.

All of the suggestions above would require tutor support (at least initially) and 'the development of a course climate in which the giving and receiving of peer feedback is a normal part of teaching and learning processes' (Liu and Carless, 2006, p.288 stating Boud, 2000).

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