

Marking exercise: individual activity

Collection: Assessment

Resource: Feedback and marking strategies

Approximate duration

1-2 hours, depending on the number of essays marked.

Learning outcomes

As a result of carrying out this activity you should attain a clearer grasp of the processes of marking and preparing to give feedback.

Introduction

Feedback is the area in which most departments have scored lowest in the [National Student Survey](#): students are concerned both about the timeliness and usefulness of feedback. It is also all too often the case that the discursive worlds of those giving feedback and those receiving it fail to overlap.

It is all too easy to fall into a set of automatic responses when marking written work, dispensing comments about grammar, spelling and referencing conventions and cryptic instructions such as 'Be more critical', or 'too descriptive'. It is equally easy to write far too much--discussing student work with an attention to detail that would be invaluable to the students were they to take it on board properly, but which, all too often, is bypassed by essay-writers keen simply to know what their mark is.

This activity will help you focus your feedback on the needs of students more effectively.



The activity

1. The 'Word' files containing the three different student essays with the title 'Discuss the 'Fallen Woman' as a Familiar Feature of Victorian Writing' are available from this resource folder in the assessment collection in HumBox. Print out, and read one of the three sample essays.

- [essay one](#)
- [essay two](#)
- [essay three](#)

2. Mark the essay, availing yourself of the assessment criteria used by your department or academic unit. Try to come out with a mark as well as comments of a kind you could give to a student.

You could use the comment facility in Word and mark the essay electronically. Alternatively, you might prefer to print the essay out and mark it in longhand.

3. Compare your marking to the comments on them on the Teesside University website: how far do you agree with the comments made there? (Note that this website is designed to help students improve their written work, rather than as a guide to marking strategies for lecturers.)

- [essay one with comments - http://discc.tees.ac.uk/Sam/SALH-Excellent.html](http://discc.tees.ac.uk/Sam/SALH-Excellent.html)
- [essay two with comments - http://discc.tees.ac.uk/Sam/SALH-Problems.html](http://discc.tees.ac.uk/Sam/SALH-Problems.html)
- [essay three with comments - http://discc.tees.ac.uk/Sam/SALH-Good.html](http://discc.tees.ac.uk/Sam/SALH-Good.html)

4. You can repeat steps 1-3 with the other two essays.
5. Some things to ponder: how do you yourself achieve a relative weighting for different aspects of an assignment? Are you apt, for example, to prize initiative and good ideas over, shall we say, spelling or presentational errors? What adjectives do you tend to fall back on when thinking aloud about an essay?



2 | This resource is part of a set of professional development resources for Higher Education English (including English Literature, English Language & Creative Writing) called 'The Pool'. The resources were developed by the English Subject Centre in 2011 as part of a JISC/HEA Open Educational Resources (OER) Project.

This work by the English Subject Centre is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales License.

(Plodding? Brilliant? Heavy-going?) In achieving some degree of self-awareness as a marker, you need to look out for things that particularly irk you. You may well be able to justify your dislike of comma-splices, misplaced apostrophes, or the repetitive introduction of quotations by the word 'states', but you do need to be aware of your own reactions.

One of the key things we need to think about is the question whether academics and students actually share the same discourse community, specifically here in connection with the language of marking. Go through your own commentary, identifying which terms derive from a 'marker' vocabulary. That vocabulary in turn will be underpinned by a set of assumptions not necessarily shared by students. How likely for example is your reader to understand the force of the comment that 'this paragraph / essay is too descriptive'? What other such formulae of marker shorthand can you think of?

Something else for [your teaching journal](http://humbox.ac.uk/2734/) (see <http://humbox.ac.uk/2734/>): the imagined audience of your colleagues - which may indeed be a real audience if the essays or scripts you have marked are going on to a second marker or a moderator. There is quite a bit of evidence that markers (especially but not exclusively those new to the profession) are worried about what colleagues may think of their standards, and want in some way to prove themselves. Obviously, the effect of this will usually be to depress marks. Another activity for you, then, is to take an example of an assignment you have just marked and make yourself some notes about how you would justify your comments and mark to another colleague.

Links & References

- [Minimal marking](#). Summary of an approach to marking devised by Richard Haswell putting the onus of detailed correction onto students.
[http://www.iwu.edu/~writcent/minimal_marking.htm]
- Deirdre Burke and Jackie Pieterick, *Giving Students Effective Written Feedback* (Open University Press, 2010)
- Catherine Haines, *Assessing Students' Written Work* (Routledge, 2004)
- John C. Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (Jossey-Bass, 1996)



Relationship to the Professional Standards Framework

- **Areas of Activity 3:** Assessment and giving feedback to learners
- **Core Knowledge 2:** Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme
- **Core Knowledge 5:** Methods for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching
- **Professional Values 1:** Respect for individual learners
- **Professional Values 3:** Commitment to the development of learning communities
- **Professional Values 4:** Commitment to encouraging participation in higher education, acknowledging diversity and promoting equality of opportunity

More information about the Professional Standards Framework can be obtained from the summary factsheet in the *Subject & Pedagogy* collection in HumBox.

<http://humbox.ac.uk/2731/>

Resources in the Assessment Collection

- Assessment: introduction to the collection
- Assessment audit: resource overview
 - Auditing English: individual activity
 - Auditing English: group activity
- Designing and running innovative assessments: resource overview
 - Creative assessments in Literature: outcomes, criteria: individual activity
 - Creative assessments in Literature: outcomes, criteria: group activity
- Assessment SWOT analysis: resource overview
 - SWOT analysis: individual activity
 - SWOT analysis: group activity
- Mix and match: resource overview
 - Matching assessment to outcome: individual activity
 - Matching assessment to outcome: group activity
- Creative assessment: resource overview
 - Creative criticism



- Feedback and marking strategies: resource overview
 - **Marking exercise: individual activity (*you are here)**
 - Marking exercise: group activity
- Computer-aided assessment: resource overview
 - Writing multiple-choice questionnaires: individual activity
 - Writing multiple-choice questionnaires: group activity
- What is assessment for? : resource overview
 - Balancing the interest groups: individual activity
 - Balancing the interest groups: group activity



5 | This resource is part of a set of professional development resources for Higher Education English (including English Literature, English Language & Creative Writing) called 'The Pool'. The resources were developed by the English Subject Centre in 2011 as part of a JISC/HEA Open Educational Resources (OER) Project.

This work by the English Subject Centre is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales License.