

UNIVERSITY OF WORCESTER

# Assessment Criteria Working For All: guiding staff to support students



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## Connecting staff with assessment criteria

### Why do we need this guidance?

The University **Generic Grade Descriptors** have been updated in light of the descriptors within The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ), and the Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 published by the QAA in 2019. Due to this update, all course teams will need to revisit assessment criteria at a course, modular and type of assessment level to ensure alignment by September 2021.

Additionally, there is an expectation that all courses will be using electronic marking of assessments incorporating Turnitin® from September 2020. Assessment criteria rubrics can be generated in Turnitin and we envisage more course teams utilising this facility in future.

Across the higher education sector, one of the lowest scoring NSS questions is associated with making assessment criteria clear in advance of marking. In 2020 the University of Worcester metric for this question was 79.85% which is above the sector average of 72.19%; there is significant variation, however, between courses against this measure.

### QUOTES FROM THE CES 2020 SURVEY INCLUDED:

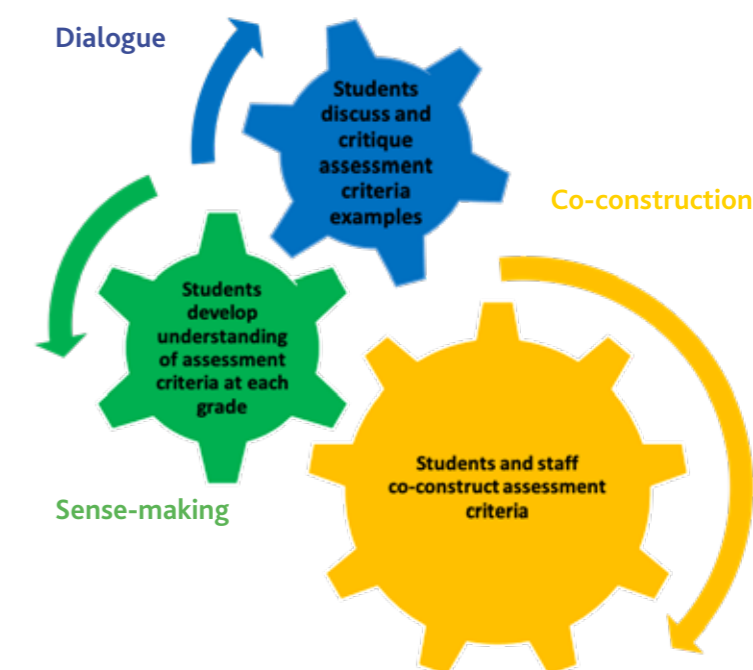
*"Assessment criteria could be made clearer by simplifying the requirements for certain grades, less academic jargon and more simple instructive criteria for everyone to understand fully."*

*"Assignments should have the assessment grid attached so that there are goals to aim for in assignments."*

*"I think assessment criteria should be mandatory on Blackboard...the criteria for the assignment changed weekly and the grade for that assessment was my lowest grade."*

*"Proper assessment briefs and marking criteria have not been given for all assignments."*

The information contained within this guidance has the student at the heart of the learning process and reflects best practice in making assessment criteria more accessible and comprehensible to promote student agency.



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## Expectations at a modular level

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In order for assessment criteria to be meaningful to students, staff should make every effort to enhance students' accessibility to, awareness of, and engagement with the assessment criteria for each assessment throughout their degree programme. This is especially significant at Level 4 when students are commencing their higher education studies.

All students should be assisted to better understand the expectations set out in the assessment criteria and the relationships between these expectations, the intended learning outcomes of a module and the types of approach they might develop to respond to them.

Best practice denotes that assessment criteria should be devised for each form of assessment within a subject with due regard and reference to the University generic assessment criteria (Worth 2014).

Subjects should use the generic criteria as a basis for evaluating and developing their own more subject-specific criteria for each level of their taught curriculum. In addition, more specialised criteria may be desirable for particular forms of assessment, for example presentations or group assessments. Subject specialists leading courses and modules are best placed to translate the generic criteria into subject-specific language for a given topic and form of assessment.

All modules must provide a breakdown of assessment criteria and grade descriptors within their module outlines and these should be made available to students at the start of each module.

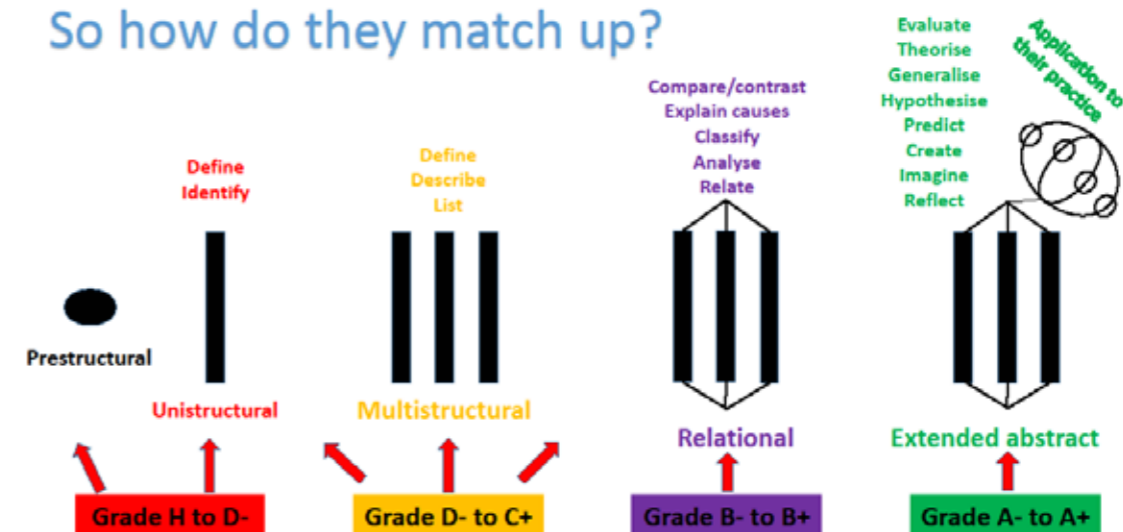
It may also be helpful to accompany the assessment criteria with a glossary or annotated set of the assessment criteria with an explanation of common terms; for example, feedback that asks students to be more critical may only be effective if students understand what this means.



## Best design practice

AREA OF GOOD PRACTICE	RATIONALE/COMMENT
Use of feedback grid/rubric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grids rubrics make it easier for students to "know" what is required in order to achieve a specific grade/pass. These make it easier to distinguish the requirements of a specific grade for the student/marker</li> <li>Academic jargon contained within a rubric should be demystified for students to facilitate student success</li> <li>Use of rubrics is in-line with the sector</li> <li>Tutor feedback should align with the grade identified within the rubric and not conflict</li> </ul>
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feedback should present to students an overview of what the piece of work has achieved and why. This should be concise</li> <li>Feed forward should identify what the students can work on and develop in order to improve their work</li> </ul>
Course-level approach to format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The format and design of the feedback grid/rubric and feed forward section should be consistent across a course</li> </ul>
Developmental feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grade criteria should be presented so that these are developmental and progressive</li> <li>Course teams should consider the presentation of the feedback grid/rubric to enable the student to see and track their potential developmental progress across grades boundaries</li> <li>The current format of feedback grids/rubrics normally starts with A+ or A and moves across the page through the pass grades to the fail grades. Course teams should consider whether students would be more effectively supported if feedback grids/rubrics started with pass grade (D-) and moved to higher grades (A-)</li> <li>Starting the feedback grid/rubric with a fail grade is inappropriate. These should come towards the end of the grid/rubric</li> </ul>
Grading criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whilst grading criteria should be aligned with the University's <b>Generic Grade Descriptors</b> Levels 4-6 (undergraduate), or Level 7 (Masters), good practice recognises that the grid rubric should be specific to each assessment type. The design should be appropriate to the type and format of the assessment eg written essay or report, presentation</li> </ul>
Constructive alignment - see diagram below	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feedback grids/rubrics should be constructively aligned to enable the student to focus on addressing the assignment task</li> <li>Constructively aligned grids/rubrics should enable the marker to identify how the student has addressed the module learning outcomes by addressing the assessment task</li> </ul> <p>Resource: <b>Goodall, D. (2019) How to get an A grade</b></p>

## So how do they match up?



(Diagram adapted from Biggs, John B.; Collis, Kevin F. (1982). Evaluating the quality of learning: the SOLO taxonomy (structure of the observed learning outcome). Educational psychology series. New York: Academic Press.)

AREA OF GOOD PRACTICE	RATIONALE/COMMENT
Feed forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feed forward should be provided as a concise narrative focusing on specific areas for development</li> <li>Focusing on three specific bullet points of feed forward is appropriate</li> <li>Markers should use in text annotations (comment boxes) to highlight areas of good practice and areas for further development within the text</li> </ul>
Student voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students should be involved in the co-production of marking and grids and rubrics at course level. This could be with the course student representatives or discussed as part of course management committees</li> <li>Student involvement should confirm and test validity and accessibility of the grid/rubric from the student perspective</li> </ul>
External examiners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marking grids rubrics should be included in module outlines and made available to external examiners and students at the start of semester. This will ensure that grids/rubrics are considered within the internal verification process (see section 12 of the <b>UW Assessment Policy</b>)</li> </ul>
Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marking grids/rubrics should be reviewed by module leaders and course leaders regularly to confirm validity and reliability. This could be completed as part of the standardisation process and/or as part of module evaluation review</li> </ul>

## Assessment criteria rubrics

Dawson (2017) offers the following broad definition of the term rubric:

A rubric is a tool used in the process of assessing student work that usually includes Popham's (1997) three essential features: evaluative criteria, quality definitions for those criteria at particular levels and a scoring strategy.

## Definitions

### Evaluative criteria (assessment criteria)

Evaluative Criteria or assessment criteria as they are more universally referred to, are the properties or characteristics by which to judge the quality of the assessment task. The criteria do not offer anything, or make any assumptions, about actual quality.

### Quality descriptors (grade descriptors)

Quality descriptors or grade descriptors clearly describe the differences in the quality of students' work. They articulate the typical characteristics that students' assessed work will need to demonstrate to achieve a particular grade or meet the requirements of a particular grade band.

This type of grading practice is called 'criterion referenced assessment', ie the students' work is being judged against precise and explicit assessment criteria that clearly articulate the success criteria, while the degree of achievement is set out in grade descriptors. These can be given to students as rubrics as part of the assessment brief and will be used subsequently in marking.

### Rubric

A marking rubric contains descriptors of the standards for a number of assessment criteria, usually in the form of a grid or matrix. A rubric is a scoring guide used to evaluate an assessment item, for example a performance, a product, or a project. Rubrics usually contain assessment criteria, quality definitions for those criteria at particular levels of achievement (grade descriptors), and a scoring strategy (for example, indicators of the relative weighting of each of the criteria). The aim of using a rubric is to enhance transparency, accuracy and greater consistency/fairness in determining the grade awarded to an assessment item.

		Particular levels/grades				
		D	C	B	A	Fail
List of evaluative criteria	Evaluative criterion 1	Quality description	Quality description	Quality description	Quality description	Quality description
	Evaluative criterion 2	Quality description	Quality description	Quality description	Quality description	Quality description
	Evaluative criterion 3	Quality description	Quality description	Quality description	Quality description	Quality description
	Evaluative criterion 4	Quality description	Quality description	Quality description	Quality description	Quality description

## Generating rubrics

There should be strong links between the assessment task, intended learning outcomes, assessment criteria and the generic grade descriptors within the rubric so that staff/students have meaningful guidance on how to complete the task(s) and interpret marks/feedback. The descriptors should be viewed alongside the specific statements of intended learning outcomes as approved for a course or a module to inform the assessment and grading criteria for assessments.

Subject groups or courses are encouraged to use the generic grade descriptors as a basis for evaluating and developing their own, more subject-specific criteria at a course level for different types of assessment; however, this may need to be customised for specific assignments of a similar type.

To clarify, where multiple assessments within a course have a similar structure or focus, it may be possible to use the same assessment rubric. Conversely, where assessments have very different formats or test highly divergent skills/knowledge, it is likely that separate rubrics are needed. For example, it would be difficult to use the same rubric to assess a clinical examination and a literature review assignment. Best practice suggests that assessment criteria/markings rubrics should be written for each mode of assessment.

Bartholomew (2018) advised "If an assessment strategy includes multiple assessment items of varying methods that measure divergent knowledge, attributes and skills, then separate rubrics would need to be built for each item."

The **TEL Unit's guidance** offers support on how to generate assessment criteria rubrics. Where a series of rubrics are used across a course (whether generated in Turnitin or not), there is value in achieving as much consistency as possible in terms of appearance; the kind of feedback fields used; and choice of terminology. This will help the cohort (and course team) progressively build a consistent vocabulary and become more familiar with how to work with rubrics. It is advisable that the pass bands and a single fail band be detailed within the

Turnitin rubric due to readability of the rubric. The full range of grades (A – H) should be made available in module outlines so that students are aware and staff can use the full granularity of fail grades should they need to.

Dependent on the stage of academic study, the generic grade descriptors provide the threshold expected to pass at a given academic stage and subsequent differentiation across the grade levels. It makes sense, therefore, to start by formulating the quality definition required to pass each one of the intended learning outcomes and then work progressively upwards and downwards from this reference point.

Presentation of the rubric should start with the highest grade band (Grade A) to the lowest pass grade band (Grade D). The fail grades should appear in the final columns.

Quality definitions need to be clear, concise and explicit so that students are provided with guidance on how to perform well and course teams are provided with sharp, clear, well-defined manifestations on which to judge performance.

Rubrics can be used to provide valuable feedback. They are particularly beneficial during formative assessment when students have an opportunity to engage with the criteria and time to respond prior to the summative assessment. Some courses use weighted assessment criteria. In these instances, students should be made aware of weighting through a clear rationale in module guides.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that a rubric is not a static document. Rather, the need for changes or enhancements might arise from markers' experiences of using it on the 'frontline'; student feedback; modifications to the associated assessment; or developments in the local context or wider discipline. Consequently, it is important that teams revisit the rubric periodically (eg on an annual basis) to check that it remains fit for purpose.

## Rubric example

Mode of assessment - Level 4 Portfolio assessment criteria

Criteria	Levels of Achievement				
	A	B	C	D	Fail
<b>K&amp;U</b> Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how children, young people and adults learn and associated barriers	Excellent knowledge, understanding and synthesis of a comprehensive range of learning theories and how a range of people learn. Comprehensive insight into barriers to learning. Extensive use of reading and current research.	Thorough knowledge and understanding of a broad range of learning theories. Thorough examination of how people learn and approaches to address barriers. Insightful and well-chosen material that goes beyond course content.	A good range of learning theories are considered. Good explanations of how a range of people learn. Reasons and types of barriers to learning are evident. Good breadth of taught content and reading references included.	Adequate knowledge of some learning theories with an explanation of how a range of people learn. Some consideration of barriers to learning. Relies on limited selection from designated reading list and/or references.	Insufficient knowledge and understanding of learning theories. Limited range of people and/or barriers to learning identified. Limited references/reading.
<b>Application</b> Apply knowledge, skills and competencies required for tutoring in different tutoring contexts	Excellent critical analysis of the knowledge required for tutoring. Excellent demonstration of skills and competencies required for tutoring which are applied creatively to a variety of different tutoring contexts and substantiated with evidence.	Thorough application of knowledge and strong demonstration of skills & competencies required for tutoring that are applied to a broad range of tutoring contexts and analysed.	Good range of knowledge skills and competencies explained and analysed when applied to different tutoring contexts.	Adequate demonstration of knowledge, transferable skills and competencies required for tutoring and how these can be applied to predictable tutoring contexts. Derivative and descriptive with an acceptance of opinions.	Limited comprehension and/or explanation of the skills and competencies required to tutor and their application. Limited range of tutoring contexts considered.
<b>Analysis</b> Analyse how safeguarding practice relate to learning, teaching and	Significant critical and insightful analysis of safeguarding practices. Excellent construction of logical, substantiated and sustained arguments into how these practices contribute to	Good critical analysis of safeguarding practices and thoughtful interpretations of how these contribute to effective teaching, learning and tutoring relationships through	Logically constructed and coherent analysis, evaluation and evidence of safeguarding practices and how these contribute to effective learning.	Adequate analysis and evaluation of safeguarding practices and how these contribute to effective learning, teaching and tutoring.	Limited analysis of safeguarding practices. Limited reference to how safeguarding can enhance learning, teaching and tutoring.

## Connecting students with assessment criteria

### Student awareness and engagement

Enhancing students' accessibility, awareness, engagement and understanding of assessment criteria has the potential to make a positive difference to student outcomes and, at the very least, make a difference to student perception about assessment criteria. Demystifying the academic jargon of assessment criteria for students is therefore vital to facilitate student success.

A combination of activities or exercises which require students to engage critically with assessment criteria may be effective in enhancing students' knowledge and understanding. The list below is not intended to be either prescriptive or exhaustive but provides examples of mechanisms and activities that might be adopted by course teams to enhance student engagement with assessment criteria.

### Student engagement activities

- Essay planning exercises, where groups of students draft essay plans for titles provided by staff, and then compare plans against the assessment criteria for the programme and identify areas that seem undeveloped
- Self-assessment when finalising draft assignments to aid enhancements
- Setting of a practice essay with peer review and group tutorial discussion, or other types of peer assessment. Student anxieties about peer marking due to academic ability can be countered by presenting exercises focused on presentations or practical skills
- Develop a glossary or annotated set of the assessment criteria with an explanation of common terms, eg feedback that asks students to be more critical may only be effective if students understand what 'criticality' means
- Student involvement in the creation and negotiation of criteria to help them understand the vocabulary better, such as asking students (in groups) to rephrase the requirements of a piece of assessment in their own words; or reviewing the intended learning outcomes and designing appropriate criteria

- Marking exercises, where students are provided with an opportunity to mark and then discuss exemplars, or model answers. This could assist students in understanding how to structure their own work and the expectations of the programme, and also to help demystify the marking process
- Involving students in a discussion about the distinctions between marking bands might also help to dispel student concerns about fair marking
- Set up an online facility, eg Blackboard, where students could view exemplars and post comments or questions to tutors and peers on a discussion board
- Other examples of potentially useful activities, including peer assessment and marking workshops are offered as part of the New to Teaching workshop
- Self-assess/peer assess against criteria – formative.

### Related Policies, Documents or Webpages

**Generic Grade Descriptors** [accessed 8.9.2020] [https://www2.worc.ac.uk/aqu/documents/Generic\\_Grade\\_Descriptors.pdf](https://www2.worc.ac.uk/aqu/documents/Generic_Grade_Descriptors.pdf)

**TEL Unit's guidance** Creating a Turnitin Rubric [accessed 25.8.2020] <https://lttu.uk/support/Turnitin/Guide/Rubrics.html>

**UW Assessment Policy** [accessed 25.8.2020] <https://www2.worc.ac.uk/aqu/documents/AssessmentPolicy.pdf>

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## Assessment Criteria

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