

Giving quality feedback

Advice and guidance on how to give effective feedback to students on their assessed work

INTRO

This guidance will be helpful to both new and experienced colleagues. It could also be used as part of induction processes, or in developmental activities at module, programme, or department/school level. It provides questions and prompts to consider along with a brief rationale drawing on current good practice. It also offers suggestions for useful strategies for working with colleagues to improve consistency and fairness of approach, and with students to encourage meaningful engagement with feedback.

This guidance is structured in terms of things that you can think about at key stages in the assessment process:

- during the assessment design process and before marking
- during the marking process
- after marking is completed.

Colleagues involved in teaching as well as assessing students should find each stage useful. Those colleagues responsible solely for marking will find the 'during' stage most relevant to their needs.



BEFORE

Before the assignment is due

To think about:	Why is this important...		How to achieve this
	For colleagues?	For students?	Suggested strategies
How does the assignment relate to module outcomes?	Effective feedback is predicated on an understanding of the purpose of the assignment and how it aligns with the module learning outcomes and assessment criteria.	Encouraging student understanding of why they are completing the assignment and how they will be assessed promotes transparency and purposeful engagement with both assessed task and feedback.	<p>Including learning outcomes and assessment criteria on assignment briefs helps students understand the purpose of the assignment and how they will be assessed.</p> <p>Provide students with activities which unpack the alignment between learning outcomes, assignment and assessment criteria when the assignment is introduced.</p>
How does the assignment relate to other assessments in the module and/or programme?	Understanding how an assignment relates to others in the programme enables you to give feed forward rather than just feedback.	When students see the value of feedback in relation to future assessments, they are more likely to engage meaningfully with it.	<p>Providing students with an assessment 'roadmap' can show how assignments relate to each other across the programme.</p> <p>Encourage dialogue by providing students with a means to identify areas of their work they would like the marker to concentrate on and/or show how they have used prior feedback to improve their work.</p>
Do the marking team and students have a shared understanding of the assessment criteria?	Effective feedback makes explicit reference to the assessment criteria. Shared understanding of assessment criteria underpins consistency and fairness in marking and feedback.	Explicit reference to assessment criteria in feedback helps students understand the mark they have been awarded, but also provides the basis for their developing understanding of what is valued in their discipline.	<p>Conducting calibration activities with an experienced marker and/or the module team develops a shared understanding of expectations and standards. This provides the basis for consistency of academic judgement and parity of marking and feedback practices.</p> <p>Formative peer marking activities in which students grade exemplar assignments using the same criteria against which they are going to be assessed help to develop students' ability to self-assess and improve their own work.</p>
Are you familiar with University policy and procedure relating to marking and feedback?	Adherence to policy ensures a baseline of good practice and consistency across the institution.	Students should be informed of what they can reasonably expect in terms of assessment and feedback policy and practice: for example, anonymous marking, 15-working day turnaround, part 1 students should receive at least one instance of formative or summative feedback before the vacation in the autumn term, step marking, etc.	<p>As a minimum requirement, colleagues with responsibilities for marking and giving feedback should be familiar with the following sections of the University Assessment Handbook:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 5: Assessment regimes, Section 7: Examination and Assessment Arrangements for Students with Specific needs • Section 9: Academic integrity, Section 10: Marking, Section 12: Providing feedback to students, Section 13: Moderation
Are you familiar with the feedback features available in the online assessment tools being used?	Understanding the options for providing digital feedback ensures that feedback is provided effectively using the most appropriate methods.	Students need to be made aware of how they will receive their feedback and where to access it.	Proper induction is key. In addition to any calibration activities (see above), this might also include speaking with experienced colleagues about expectations for marking and feedback, for example, tools used (e.g., QuickMark comments, use of rubrics, audio feedback), whether work should be moderated before being returned, etc.
Are you familiar with local practices relating to marking and feedback?	Alignment with local practices ensures consistency and fairness within the programme/ department/school.	Students will have expectations based upon prior experience within the programme and may become confused and frustrated if these expectations are not met.	<p>Check the details of which assessment tool is being used for different assignments. Ensure that students are aware of how to access their feedback.</p> <p>Read the EMA support guides, attend staff development sessions, or consult the TEL team and colleagues for advice on how to use assessment tools effectively.</p>

DURING

During marking (The 7 Cs of quality feedback)

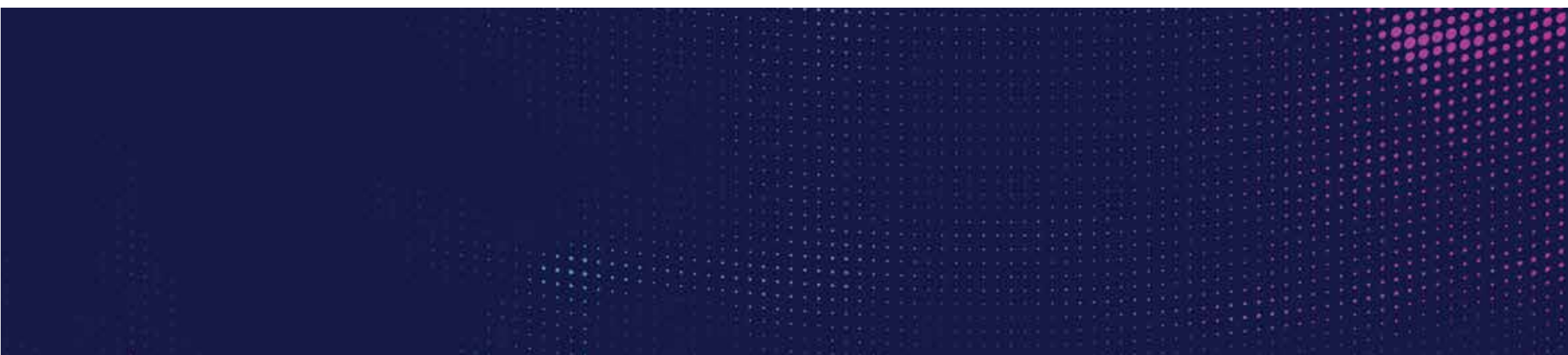
To think about:	Why is this important...		How to achieve this
	For colleagues?	For students?	Suggested strategies
Is your feedback constructive?	The purpose of feedback is to promote student learning. It should be positive and encouraging, identifying where students need to improve, but also where they have done well.	Positive, encouraging feedback that provides clear pathways for development can be motivational for students.	Effective feedback focuses on the work, not the individual. That is, it should be personalised, but not personal. E.g., 'The essay does not address the key issue...' usefully identifies an issue with the student's work without framing it as a personal failing. It should identify and explain strengths as well as areas for improvement in students' work and aim for a balance between the two.
Is your feedback clear?	For feedback to be effective, it must be accessible, understandable and actionable.	Clear, specific guidance based on concrete examples in their work that can be readily addressed promotes students' personal effectiveness and self-awareness.	Use consistent, clear language appropriate to the discipline and the level of the programme. Formative pre-assessment peer marking activities can help students unpack and develop their understanding of potentially difficult disciplinary and academic terms (such as 'criticality', 'analysis', etc.). Consider working in partnership with your students to co-create a glossary of academic and disciplinary terms and definitions likely to be used in feedback. Feedback should refer to specific aspects of the work rather than simply saying it is 'good' or 'in need of improvement' and explain why it is good or requires further development.
Is your feedback commensurate?	Providing quality feedback is time-consuming and resource intensive. It is important that resources are directed to where they will have the most impact on student learning.	While it's important that students feel that the amount of feedback they receive is proportionate to the effort they put into an assignment, it is also important that they receive feedback in a form that is useful to them; more feedback is not necessarily better feedback.	Programme teams may wish to decide where to focus their resources to ensure that students get the feedback they require when it is most useful to them. For example, it may be appropriate to focus on providing formative feed forward at the expense of more detailed summative feedback. Where decisions have been made strategically to direct resource to the provision of feedback in some areas at the expense of others, it is important that this is conveyed to students with a clear rationale in order to manage their expectations.
Is your feedback current?	The university is committed to returning marks and feedback to students within 15 working days of submission.	Feedback is more likely to be meaningful to students when it is received while the assignment is still fresh in their minds and is appropriate to their needs.	Generic feedback can be compiled relatively quickly and can be an effective way of sharing feedback with students before the 15-day turnaround. It can also be linked to model answers, study support guides and further reading or other support materials to enable students to take immediate action in response to their feedback. Where there are multiple assessments in a module, ensure that students receive feedback in enough time to allow them to apply it to their next submission.
Is your feedback contextualised?	An integrated and coherent assessment strategy promotes students' development throughout the programme.	Feedback and feedforward play an important role in supporting students on their learning journeys through their programmes.	In addition to specific areas of the student's work, it should also identify strengths and areas for improvement in relation to the overall approach taken (e.g., structure, style, use of sources, etc.) which might readily be transferable to other contexts. Where appropriate, it should explicitly provide feed forward into other assignments in the module and/or programme.
Is your feedback criterion-based?	Student performance should always be measured against criteria, not in relation to the performance of other students (norm-referenced assessment).	Clearly articulated, transparent assessment criteria promote assessment literacy and confidence in the fairness and consistency of academic judgement.	Feedback should reference the assessment criteria explicitly in order to justify the marks awarded. For example, this can be achieved by providing a highlighted marking matrix/rubric for each student showing how they performed against the criteria.
Is your feedback conversational?	Appropriately worded feedback encourages dialogue and promotes useful reflection as part of students' learning.	Learning through reflection allows students to articulate what and how they have learned, develop an awareness of their strengths and areas to develop, and (importantly) plan for future development.	Asking questions in feedback can promote useful reflection. E.g., 'How might you approach this task if you were doing it again?'; 'To what extent do you agree with x's statement on...' Schedule time in class for student reflection on feedback, encouraging students to identify what they have learnt and to plan for how they intend to apply this learning to future work.



AFTER

After marking is completed

To think about:	Why is this important...		How to achieve this
	For colleagues?	For students?	Suggested strategies
<p>Are you familiar with the arrangements for internal moderation in your local context?</p>	<p>The purpose of moderation is to ensure that the assessment criteria have been applied consistently. It also provides an opportunity for benchmarking standards and ensuring consistency of approach to both marking and feedback.</p>	<p>It is an important aspect of students' assessment literacy to understand how the University ensures consistency and fairness in its marking and feedback processes. This includes both internal and external measures.</p>	<p>Moderation meetings (whether face-to-face or virtual) are invaluable for all staff, as agreeing common standards is a socially constructed process.</p> <p>Colleagues are encouraged to familiarise themselves with Section 13 of the Assessment Handbook which covers Moderation.</p> <p>Ensure that students are aware of moderation practices in your context and whether marks have been internally moderated when they are released.</p>
<p>How do you encourage students to engage with their feedback?</p>	<p>Feedback provides an important opportunity for colleagues to engage in dialogue with students about their learning.</p>	<p>Appropriately designed activities can support and scaffold feedback literacy and develop students' ability to make effective use of it in their learning.</p>	<p>Consider sharing exemplars of work with accompanying feedback and encouraging students to work in pairs to identify how it could be used to inform future performance.</p> <p>Providing students with an opportunity to identify specific areas of feedback to focus on can be helpful in encouraging them to engage with and apply their feedback to future work.</p>
<p>How do you develop your marking and feedback practices?</p>	<p>Reflection on your practice is an important part of your continuing professional development as a teaching academic.</p>	<p>Student satisfaction is strongly correlated to their sense that staff are engaged and enthusiastic about their role.</p>	<p>Internal and external moderation and review processes can be useful sources of professional development and can feed into enhancements to assessment design, e.g., rubrics can be fine-tuned and improved, aspects of the assignment brief clarified, etc.</p> <p>Consider providing students with an opportunity to give feedback on your feedback.</p> <p>Engage in scholarly and developmental activity relating to marking and feedback, e.g. attending CQSD workshops.</p>



CQSD-ADE Supporting Enhancement

CQSD-ADE work with colleagues across the institution to create a thriving community where teaching excellence underpins student success.

We are here to empower and support colleagues in the enhancement of assessment and feedback practices.

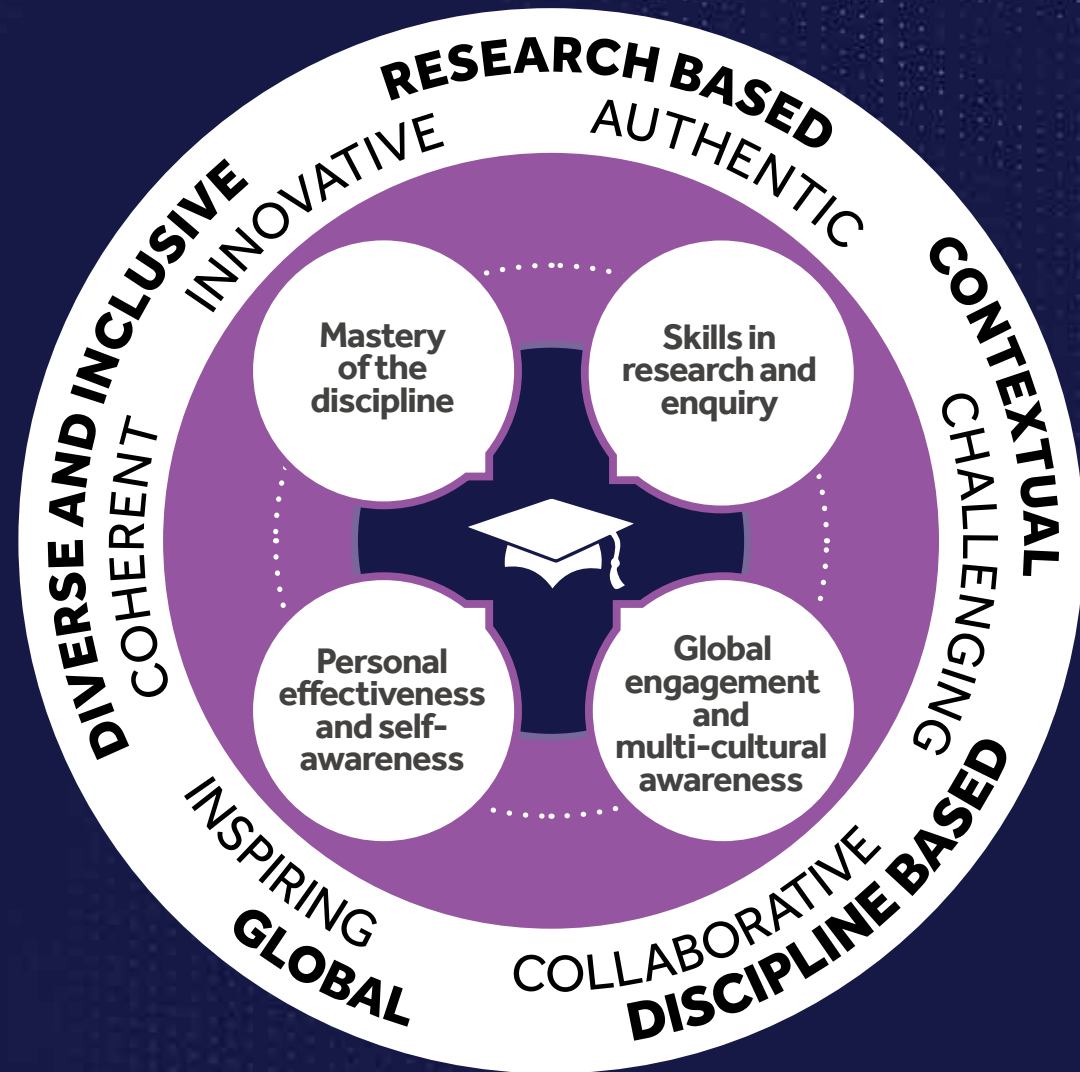
Resources:

- Assessment Handbook
- EMA (Electronic Submission, Feedback and Grading) help
- Talis Focus on Feedback reading list



Start a conversation today:

cqsd-ade@reading.ac.uk



What does the Curriculum Framework say about assessment and feedback?

"Assessment is for learning. It is carefully planned across a programme. It contributes directly to learning and skill development; it is authentic, varied and proportionate. There is an appropriate balance between formative and summative assessment, and formative assessment prepares students well for summative assessment. Where possible, students are provided with some choice in assessment methods. Feedback on assessment feeds forward; it is regular, accessible, thorough, and timely"