

# Assessment, marking and feedback philosophy

ENVM3104 & ENVM7124, Summer Semester 2018

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## Best practice pedagogy for assessment

Assessment and marking in ENVM3104 and ENVM7124 strive to reflect best practice for assessment in higher education, including by applying the following principles:

1. Assessment is designed for and achieves the following purposes:<sup>1</sup>
  - (a) to help students to learn, including by providing constructive feedback that helps them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, evaluate the quality of their own work, and to improve their performance in the future; and
  - (b) to mark and grade students' performance against preset, fair and defensible criteria and standards.
2. Assessment tasks are well constructed and demand active learning using higher order learning skills (including synthesis, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving) appropriate to the level of the students, the learning objectives for the course, and as a component of the overall course of study being undertaken by the students.
3. Assessment tasks and expectations are clearly communicated to students in terms that can be understood by them, such as through explicit criteria and standards (feedforward).

## Marking philosophy

Marking in ENVM3104 and ENVM7124 is set against high standards for assessment consistent with UQ's commitments to excellence and to providing a world class educational environment.

Staff mark students' work fairly according to the criteria and standards that were stated at the outset for the assessment item. There is no "bell-curve" or expectation of a percentage of students who will receive a particular grade, nor is the aim to pass everyone. Criteria and standards are applied based on what is reasonable to expect having regard to:

- the level of the course (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year undergraduate or postgraduate);
- the credit value of the assessment item;
- the word limit;
- the time available to complete the assessment item;
- the instructions, guidance and learning resources provided to assist students; and
- any other relevant factor.

Staff bear in mind when marking a student's work that this is a learning environment, so not every mistake generates a failing mark or even a significant reduction in marks where there are other parts

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<sup>1</sup> Not all assessment involves both of these objectives but most will do so. For example, [formative assessment](#) to monitor student learning may not be graded and some [summative assessment](#), such as an end-of-semester exam, may only involve feedback where a student requests it.

of the assessment that are well done. Balance and perspective is required. A student's work is marked as a whole rather than as a series of disconnected parts.

Staff review and moderate marking within each class for consistency and fairness.

### **Philosophy for constructive student feedback**

Staff provide constructive, honest and accurate feedback on students' work. The feedback is respectful and identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the work and how it can be improved in the future. The points for improvement should be specific, backed by examples, and encouraging. The feedback should be delivered in a timely way when it still matters to students.

Staff seek to create an environment that encourages learning and that helps students to excel. Evaluations and feedback ultimately should leave a student wanting to try again. A scathing evaluation that deters a student from ever trying again is a very poor reflection on a teacher.

### **Tips for markers for giving constructive feedback**

- Link the feedback to the stated criteria and standards
- Be honest, accurate and encouraging
- Identify the strengths and weaknesses and how the work can be improved in the future
- Recognise praise-worthy elements before identifying weaknesses and points for improvement
- Be specific and use examples
- Offer alternatives and solutions as suggestions
- Criticise the work, not the student personally
- Focus on the substance of the work as a whole
- Provide corrections for the first few minor errors and leave the student to correct the rest
- Deliver the feedback with a sense of humility, recognising that the student will weigh up the comments and make up their own mind
- Target the feedback to the level of competency of the student
- Provide consistent feedback across each class
- Keep the feedback to what is manageable for both you and the student
- Be timely in providing the feedback
- Be open to ongoing dialogue and offer to discuss the mark and feedback further if requested

### **References**

- Barrie, S., Hughes, C., Crisp, G., and Bennison, A. 2012. *AAGLO Summary 7: Characteristics of tasks effective in the assessment of GLOs*. USyd, UQ, RMIT ([link](#)).
- Gibbs, G., and Simpson, C. 2004. Conditions under which assessment supports students' learning. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education 1*, no. 1: 1–31 ([link](#)).
- Race, P. 2014. *Making Learning Happen: A Guide for Post-Compulsory Education*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, Sage, London.
- Sadler, R.D. 2010. Beyond feedback: developing student capability in complex appraisal. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, Vol. 35(5): 535–550 ([link](#)).