

Using marking schemes effectively

Shared understandings between the academic team can be enhanced by:

- Using marking schemes
- Providing model answers to sample questions / assignments / exams
- Providing TNE partner institution staff with examples of work marked by their Australian-based colleagues

Marking schemes

In literature and in practice, a number of terms are encountered when talking of marking schemes, for example:

- marking guides
- marking criteria
- marking matrices
- rubrics
- marking keys

Sometimes these terms are used synonymously. For example, Bloxham and Boyd (2007, p.235) refer to a marking scheme as a matrix-based instrument that applies grade descriptors according to the level of achievement against specific assessment criteria for an assignment. This is similar to the definition of a rubric as “a scoring tool that lays out specific expectations for an assignment (and divides it) into its component parts and (provides) a detailed description of what constitutes acceptable or unacceptable levels of performance for each of those parts” (Stevens & Levi 2005, p3).

Marking schemes generally classify assessment criteria on the basis of qualitative categories such as ‘poor’, ‘good’ and ‘excellent’. Exact meanings of these terms when applied to students’ work are not necessarily self-evident, however, and dialogue may be required to establish shared understandings that will result in consistency and fairness in marking. Marking schemes may also just locate a student’s performance for an assessment item (or part thereof) as, for example, a Credit which might represent a range of marks like 65 to 74. Dialogue between markers may then be required to establish what standard of work would characterise a low, mid or high Credit.

An example of a marking scheme/rubric is provided at

<http://academicintegrity.curtin.edu.au/local/docs/writingrubric.doc>

A useful web resource for marking schemes/rubrics which includes links to software to aid in construction is available at http://www.adelaide.edu.au/clpd/online/assessonline/assess_tools/

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The reason I started (providing marking schemes) was peace of mind and they really want it. I do it for all – they love it. The more detailed you get it seems the more comfortable they are – the more they like it.”

Australian academic

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A more focused instrument to allocate marks is a marking key but this is usually associated with multiple choice and/or short answer assessment rather than with discursive work. Here is an example of a 'summative assessment marking key' for an exam:

http://www1.curriculum.edu.au/sciencepd/teacher/assessment/light_smk.pdf

Benefits of marking schemes

- Promote fairness and consistency in marking assessment
- Develop shared understandings around assessment of formative and summative work related to, for example, an assignment or exam answers
- Help judge the quality of discursive work like an argument in an essay or an open-ended text response to an exam question
- Promote shared understandings of expectations between teams of markers, which in turn, can lead to greater consistency and fairness in marking across student cohorts and locations, and over time
- Promote respect, understanding and trust among academic staff
- Make expectations explicit

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“Sometimes the marking scheme is difficult to follow”

Transnational partner academic

Tips on using marking schemes

- Person who writes the assessment should develop the marking key, scheme or rubric
- Ensure sufficient thought has gone into the production of the instrument to ensure their quality, clarity and usefulness
- Provide marking guides to markers in plenty of time
- Discuss the marking scheme amongst the teaching team
- If policy dictates that marking guides should be used, then stick to policy. If policy does not stipulate their use, realise that there are good reasons for using them anyway!

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“Marking guidelines should be sent out and some academics don't do it.”

Transnational partner academic

References:

Bloxham, S. & Boyd, P. (2007). *Developing effective assessment in higher education: a practical guide*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Stevens, D. & Levi, A. (2005). *Introduction to rubrics*. Virginia: Stylus Publishing.