

How to Develop Marking Criteria

A Guide to support implementation of the Assessment Policy and the Assessment, Moderation and Examination Procedures

Purpose of Criteria

Assessment criteria make it clear to students what factors will be taken into account when making judgements about their performance and assist them to use their time and energy effectively. The number of criteria for a single task needs to be suitably small in order to enable students to clearly understand what is expected of them.

While criteria define what students will be assessed on (e.g. ability to synthesise, write, reference), they do not define how well students must demonstrate those characteristics - that is the job of the standards descriptors. The standards descriptors provide further information, in more detail, about what would be required to demonstrate achievement at the different levels.

Tips for developing robust criteria

1. Base criteria on learning outcomes

Marking criteria should be clearly based on learning outcomes, each of which will contain a verb – what the student need to do to demonstrate learning. For example, if students are to be able to “advise clients about options available to them within the Western Australian justice system” a criterion might be “quality of advice offered to clients”.

2. Separate variables

When developing criteria for interpretive marking, it is useful to keep each one separate, even if the learning outcome combines them. For example, if the learning outcome is “analyse and interpret data” it would be simpler to have one criterion for the quality of analysis and another for the interpretation of data.

Likewise, if a learning outcome is to “explain likelihood and impact of risks”, it would be better to measure the explanations for likelihood and impact separately. This avoids confusion about how to grade work that clearly and accurately explains the likelihood of risks but is incorrect or incomplete in explaining impact.

The key to a well written criterion is that it works as an instruction to students, helping them to understand what they need to do and include to meet expectations. When taken together as a group, the set of assessment criteria for any task could be read by anyone and they would have a reasonable level of clarity about what the task involves and how marks should be allocated.

Note: Some disciplines are better suited to marking criteria that are accompanied by marking

keys and worked solutions to tasks. These generally require less interpretation and are less likely to result in discrepancies between markers or over time. In such cases marking keys should be annotated to indicate how marks are allocated when, for example, calculation errors are made but principles are clearly understood and correctly applied.

Developing and describing standards

The pass standard within interpretive marking criteria/rubrics should clearly detail what students need to do to demonstrate that they meet the learning outcome (as measured by the criterion). The other levels describe a higher level of achievement than is required.

An interpretive marking guide (rubric) will:

- Describe ‘the best’ performance that students may demonstrate on the task.
- Identify the performance criteria that will be assessed in the task.
- Describe a range of performances from ‘the best’ and ‘the weakest’ performance in relation to each criterion. Note that the pass description should explain what students need to do to achieve the learning outcome.
- Allocate marks that reflect the relative importance of each criterion.

How many standards?

Note that there may be more categories for some criteria than others, for example “referencing” may only discriminate between two levels of performance whereas “explains (the concept)” may have four or even five performance categories. Each level of performance should be able to be clearly visible in students’ work. If there is disagreement between markers about which category a particular response falls in, consider whether the number of categories needs to be reduced because differences in performance are not obvious or observable.

Reviewing and improving

After the task has been administered and student responses received, review the task and marking guide with a view to adjustments that will make them even more robust (valid and reliable) for future use.

Consider whether extraneous factors have affected student performance and what can be done to reduce the impact of those factors in the future. Quite often equity issues come to the fore at this point. For example, your task may have had an unintended cultural or gender bias, or it may require a response in a format that students are not familiar with.