

Handbook

Writing Assessment Criteria & Performance Indicators

This guide is a revision of "Guide Number 2: How to write assessment criteria" (2008) produced by Bridget Winwood and Chris Glover in 2008 which was based on the original version by Rosie Bingham (Learning and Teaching Institute, Sheffield Hallam University, 2005).

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What

This handbook introduces assessment criteria, how they are written and why they are used. It includes some background information, but its main aim is to be a practical reference for teaching staff to support assessment design and communication.

Why

Briefing

Clear, well-articulated assessment criteria and performance indicators should be given to students as part of their module assessment brief. They will provide students with an understanding of what they need to do to successfully complete the assessment and they give students an indication of what they must demonstrate to achieve a particular grade.

Marking and peer assessment

The use of standards descriptors or performance indicators in the marking process make marking fairer, more consistent, and transparent, especially where marking is done by more than one person.

Similarly, rubric/marking grids can assist the moderation process by providing a record of the standard a marker judged each piece of assessed work demonstrated for each assessment criterion, this enables moderators to see that the criteria have been consistently applied by the marker(s).

They are useful for self- and peer-assessment activities too. Discussing where a piece of work sits against criteria on a grid can provide a rich learning opportunity.

Giving feedback

When used in feedback rubrics (marking grids), assessment criteria and performance indicators are useful for showing students where and why particular marks were awarded to their assessed work and they act as a structure for giving feedback and feedforward. Such grids are quick to produce and turnaround for each student and this means they provide the basis for giving more detailed feedback on selected points using a variety of methods.

Developing and writing your Assessment Criteria

Assessment criteria are statements that describe to a student how they can demonstrate that they have achieved a learning outcome. They should communicate to the student what they are expected to do, what is important and consequently where they need to direct their effort.

Some assessment criteria employ terms used in the learning outcomes whilst others describe things which are implicit in the learning outcomes. For example, if the learning outcome requires the student to 'predict', one of the assessment criteria might articulate the characteristics of the predictive skill(s) the student will be expected to demonstrate when achieving the outcome. Other assessment criteria may relate to conventions specific to the assessment task (e.g. essay/report/dissertation structure and referencing). But remember, the primary reason for the assessment is to judge whether the student has met the learning outcome not their proficiency in the assessment method. So you will have to carefully consider the weighting you apply to these implicit criteria when developing your marking scheme for the assessment.

Relationship of learning outcomes to assessment criteria

The following is an example of a learning outcome and an associated assessment criterion.

Learning Outcome

You will be able to...'describe your own styles of interpersonal communication'

Assessment Criterion

You will be judged on...

'the clarity of the description of your own style of interpersonal communication; your use of examples; and relating your own style to context'

Words (nouns) commonly used in assessment criteria to describe the key characteristics of the student's performance in the assessment task include:

accuracy	currency	depth	impact	legibility
originality	succinctness	relevance	fluency	clarity
quality	rigour	objectivity		

Other examples used in assessment criteria (Cordiner, 2006-10) are given in Appendix 1.

Other examples of assessment criteria:

You (the student) will be judged on:

- the accuracy of your interpretation and analysis of data and information about clinic case histories;
- your proficiency in making observations and measurements from experimental laboratory work;
- the originality you demonstrate during the development of x;
- the quality of the application of your knowledge of engineering principles.

Criteria are not standards

Learning outcomes and assessment criteria should not be written as standards: their role is *not* to convey a sense of how well a student has done. You should avoid using words like accurately, fluently or clearly (adverbs) or accurate, fluent and clear (adjectives) in these statements. These words should be used in your 'standards descriptors'.

Developing and writing your Performance Indicators

Performance indicators, sometimes called standards descriptors, are statements that describe the differences in the quality of students' work. They articulate the typical characteristics a student's assessed work will need to demonstrate to achieve within a grade band.

This type of grading practice is called 'criterion referenced assessment', i.e. the student's work is being judged against precise and explicit criteria and clearly articulated levels of achievement. These performance indicators can be given to students as part of the assessment brief and subsequently can be used in rubrics for marking and as the basis for giving feedback.

the student's work is being judged against precise and explicit criteria and clearly articulated levels of achievement

These descriptors are not easy to develop. It can be a difficult and time-consuming process to articulate what you are looking for in a student's work and how you decide grades. There can be tensions between academic value judgments and

describing these in a meaningful way to the students. However, the creation and use of these descriptors helps to ensure students are clear about the assessment requirements and they ensure consistency during the marking process. As such, they are an essential and empowering part of assessment design and provide sound educational practice.

Performance indicators also support staff to provide consistent and meaningful feedback to students about their assessed work. Because they are succinct they can be presented visually as a matrix of assessment criteria and indicators in an assessment rubric. While rubrics may not convey great detail, they are easy to use and communicate to a student how well they have done and how their performance can be improved.

Performance indicators need to be brief, clear and use specific language that students will be able to understand. Some helpful writing guidelines, provided by Hughes (2007), are given in Appendix 2 and a flow chart developed by Rosie Bingham (2005) is given in Appendix 3.

*Be brief,
clear and
specific*

Well written standards descriptors contain words which convey how well a learner needs to address something to achieve a given grade band. Examples of the words (adjectives and adverbs) that can be used indicate levels of performance students need to demonstrate have been compiled by Cordiner (2006-10) and are given in Appendix 4.

Example: How Assessment Criteria and Performance Indicators work together

The following is an example of an assessment criterion and its associate pass level descriptor and differentiated standards descriptors.

Assessment criterion:

You will be judged on...'the clarity of the description of your own style of interpersonal communication; your use of examples; and relating your own style to context'

Pass level descriptor:

For a typical pass, you will...'describe the main personal styles of communication you generally use, with relevant examples of each main style' from a specific context.

Performance Indicators/Standards Descriptors:

Refer	3rd	2.2	2.1	1st
Few styles of communication described which may be unrelated to self, in a confused manner. Inadequate or irrelevant examples.	Describes main personal styles of communication generally used, with a relevant example of each main style from a specific context	Describes the difference in own personal styles used in different contexts, with relevant examples from each context.	Describes a range of personal styles which might be used and justifies why particular ones were used in a particular context.	Describes a wide range of personal styles of communication which they could use and describes how they exploit one style in a particular context, to

				maximise its effect.
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Tips for developing performance indicators

Developing performance indicators takes time – you need to articulate your thoughts, select appropriate and meaningful language, clarify the progression from one grade to another, and check they are understandable with others. The following tips could help you through this process:

Work as a team

You may find it useful to create descriptors with a colleague(s) or the module team – discussion helps in the often difficult process of articulating standards.

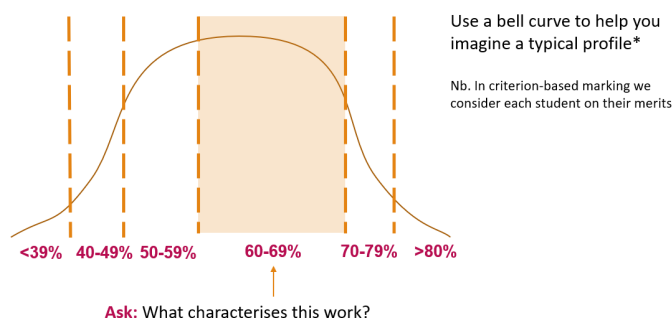
Working across your course team and subject group aids consistency and so enhances the student experience.

You could select 5 pieces of work, ranging from referral to excellent. Describe the characteristics which denote the level of achievement the pieces demonstrate and use these to help you develop descriptors.

You may find it helpful to look at examples of performance indicators used on other modules and modify and adapt them to you needs, i.e. using others' words, if they express and articulate your thoughts.

Decide where to start drafting your indicators

You may find it helpful to start by developing the criteria for the 40-49% grade band – think about what is the minimum standard required to pass? Alternatively, you could start with the 60-69% band - you may wish to think of this as the standard you would anticipate most of your students achieving. Once this is articulated, you can build up and down the bands.



You should phrase the pass descriptor in positive terms. Words such as 'inadequate', 'limited', 'inaccurate' generally describe work which does not meet the Learning Outcomes.

You should avoid introducing new criteria into the descriptors as you move up the grade bands. The main features of the criterion should follow up the levels, with an increasing demand in that particular aspect.

How you can articulate the standard of your students' work

There are different ways of articulating the standard of students' work that demonstrate progression through the grade bands:

- an increase in the degree of autonomy you expect the learner to demonstrate, e.g. the level of independence or decision-making needed, initiative, etc.;
- a broader situation/context in which the learner demonstrates they have applied the learning, e.g. a pass might relate specifically to in-module teaching, whilst higher grades might draw on wider experiences/sources;
- an increase in the complexity and range/number of element you expect the learner to demonstrate, e.g. their use of a wide range, a combination, or more advanced skills or techniques.

References

Cordiner, M. (2006-10). Word banks for use in writing criteria sheets, University of Tasmania, www.teaching-learning.utas.edu.au/__data/assets/word.../word-banks-handout-.doc

Hughes, C. (2007). Quickbite: Practical guidelines for writing assessment criteria & standards [Electronic Version]. Retrieved July 21, 2017, from https://www.uq.edu.au/teaching-learning/docs/Writing_Criteria_Standards.doc

Appendix 1 - Nouns used in assessment criteria

abstraction	diagnosis	intonations	research
arguments	essence	iteration	sensitivity
aspects	extrapolation	justification	sequence
coherence	focus	juxtaposition/s	situations
cohesion	generalisation/s	nuances	steps
colloquialisms	hypothesis/es	options	structure
complexity	innovations	organisation	substantiation
components	integration	perspectives	subtleties
concepts	integrity*	principles	thoroughness
contrasts	intensity	processes	validation
conventions	interaction	proposal	variations
correlation	interpretations	protocols	variety
creativity	interrelationships	realisation**	version/s

* e.g. retaining musical integrity; ** of a design, performance, concept.

Appendix 2 - Guidelines for writing standards descriptors (Hughes, 2007)

When describing standards...	Use.....	Rather than....
Specify demonstrable behaviour	Rephrases problems in own words and identifies major issues	Understands and interprets problems
Describe the behaviour - not the student	The ideas of others are acknowledged in ways outside the conventions of this discipline	You are not good at referencing
Pointing out what was done in demonstrating lower than optimal standards is often more supportive of learning than listing what was not	Argument consists of a series of assertions only	No supporting evidence provided for arguments
Avoid vague terms which are open to a wide range of subjective interpretation such as "critical", "appropriate", "excellent", "analytical"	Evidence of familiarity with recommended course reading Analysis demonstrates an awareness of the implications of significant detail	Evidence of appropriate reading Sophisticated analysis
Use terms likely to be understood by students – avoid the obscure or esoteric	Demonstrates comprehensive and detailed knowledge of major facts, concepts and procedures addressed in course materials	Secure and pronounced knowledge (Woolf, 2004)
Avoid relative terms - comparatives are rarely helpful without a benchmark standard	Major issues are identified with discrimination and without distraction by irrelevant material Solutions to problems are original and/or innovative without losing feasibility	Analysis is more analytical More creative solutions offered to problems presented
Ensure a balance between validity and reliability i.e. do not seek precision through quantitative statements which can trivialise complex learning outcomes.	References included have limited relevance to the problem (low standard) Discerning selection of references from within and beyond recommended course materials	Includes two references (low standard) Includes more than six references (high standard)

Appendix 3 - Flow chart for developing assessment criteria and performance indicators (Bingham, 2005)

When developing criteria and performance indicators, you might find it helpful to think of them in terms of a flow chart, linking one stage to the next.

1. Learning Outcome →	2. Assessment Criterion →	3. Pass/threshold standards descriptor	4. Differentiated performance indicators
A statement of what a learner should know, do or understand.	A statement of which aspects of learner work will be judged, in relation to the learning outcomes.	A statement of the typical pass requirement, in relation to the learning outcomes.	A description of what the learner must do to achieve a particular grade/mark against the assessment criterion.
By the end of the module, a learner should be able to...	Learner work will be judged on...	For a typical pass the learner will...	In order to achieve a particular mark/grade (e.g. degree classification) the learner's work will...
The critical question is:	The critical question is:	The critical question is:	The critical question is:
Where do you want the learner to get to?	On what basis will you judge whether they've got there?	What must they do to get there, i.e. to meet the criterion?	How will you know how well they have got there?
For example:			
By the end of the module, you (the learner) should be able to...	Your (the learner's) work will be judged on...	For a typical pass, you (the learner) will...	You (the learner) achieved... because...

<p>Design a constructively aligned 'active learning' activity</p>	<p>The clarity of your description of the activity;</p> <p>The quality of your explanation of the function of the activity with reference to an active learning model and the practice of constructive alignment.</p>	<p>Describe a teaching activity.</p> <p>Your explanation of the function of the activity will be consistent with active learning and constructive alignment.</p>	<p>70+ You clearly and succinctly described your learning activity including any supporting materials/resources. You skilfully explained the function of the activity with reference to you chosen active learning model and constructive alignment.</p> <p>60 - 69% - You described the key details of your learning activity and supporting materials/resources. You explained the function of the activity with reference to your chosen active learning model and constructive alignment.</p> <p>50 -59% - You described a learning activity. You discussed the active learning model and constructive alignment and the activity appears consistent with both.</p> <p>40 - 49% - You described a teaching activity. The activity appears consistent with active learning and constructive alignment.</p> <p>< 40% - You described elements of teaching. The activity was unclear and/or inconsistent with active learning and/or constructive alignment.</p>
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Appendix 4 – Words for indicating quality

Examples of the words (adjectives and adverbs) that can be used as indicators of the quality of students' work Cordiner (2006-10).

accurately and consistently	established (e.g. with reference to established arguments)	partly correct
alternative	every day (e.g. used every day rather than academic language)	perceptive, perceptively
astutely	exhaustive	plausible (e.g. argument, implication, scenario, hypothesis)
attributed	explicitly (e.g. explicitly acknowledged all sources by....)	populist
audible	extraneous	powerful, powerfully
basic	finely (e.g. finely balanced)	relevant
biased	focussed	repetitive
brief	formal (e.g. formal academic language, formal attire)	reputable (e.g. sources)
clear, clearly, clarity	foundational	resonant
coherent	general (e.g. general facts, general statements)	rudimentary
cohesive	idiosyncratic	scholarly (e.g. sources, writing, genres)
collated	incisive, incisively	sensitive, sensitively
commonly-used	inclusive	simple (e.g. solve simple numerical problems)
complex	innovation-related (e.g. problems)	skilful, skilfully
comprehensive	innovative, innovatively	soft (e.g. soft sounds)
conceptual	integrated	substantial

concise	insightful, insightfully	subtle
considered (e.g. making a considered decision about...)	inventive	succinct
continuous	key (e.g. key concepts)	sweeping (e.g. made sweeping statements about...)
contrary	lively	synchronous
conventional	loud	tenuous
convincing (e.g. argument, performance, portrayal, pitch to a producer)	melodic	thorough, thoroughly
correlated	modulated	useful
delicate	necessary (e.g. clearly set out all the necessary steps in your calculations)	valid
descriptive	neutral	valid (e.g. argument, solution, proposal)
detailed, in detail	nuanced	visually- appealing
dynamic	obvious	vivacious
effective, effectively	open-ended	vivid, vividly
elegant	opposing	well-placed
emergent, emerging (e.g. trends, futures)	partially (e.g. partially structured the content, partially integrated the information)	
energetic	partly (e.g. located and collated partly relevant information)	

This handbook was produced by LEAD, 2018