



Writing inclusive assessment briefs

During the early stages of university, clarity around the presentation and requirements of assessments stands to enable students to develop confidence and independence for the later years of their degree. Practices that require students to clarify the expectations of their assessments with their teachers or other students are unlikely to be inclusive. In particular, students from widening participation backgrounds may lack confidence in their academic abilities, so they are poorly served by unclear assessment briefs and are less likely to ask for help.

An inclusive approach to writing assessment briefs draws on the following principles:



CONSISTENCY

- Within the context of your discipline, clarify with students the common meaning of different assignment task verbs (e.g. 'justify', 'identify', 'critically evaluate').
- Make sure all students are aware of opportunities to engage in dialogue.



ACCESSIBILITY

- Avoid use of sentences with more than two subordinate clauses, and avoid double or treble negatives.
- Avoid the use of colloquial phrases, idioms or references to culturally specific knowledge.
- Avoid use of terms such as "You WILL" and "You MUST" especially when also used with capital letters.
- For an assessment type that students may not have encountered before, consider providing an exemplar, and scaffolding students towards fully understanding the requirements.



RATIONALE

- Explain to students why this particular task has been selected as part of the module's assessment strategy.
- The module learning outcomes assessed by the task should be presented as part of the assessment brief. By linking the assessment to the programme learning outcomes which apply across modules, students can see where they can directly apply feedback from one assignment to another.



TRANSPARENCY

- Make sure students know the criteria against which they will be assessed. This might be the standard University Grade Descriptors, or a subject-specific mark scheme.
- Provide students with clear guidance on formatting, referencing style, and what is and is not included in the word count for the assignment.
- Give the assessment a meaningful title, not just 'Assignment 1' or 'Essay', and use that title in all cases where you refer to the task.

An inclusive assessment brief template, guidance, exemplars and promotional materials can be obtained by contacting Kieran Balloo: k.balloo@surrey.ac.uk

What do students think about inclusive assessment briefs?

Inclusive assessment briefs provide a checklist

"[The] lab report brief had a checklist of all the ideas we need to include, which helped me streamline the process"

"When there are checklists of what to include it's much more reassuring, to be able to tick things off than just guessing at what they want us to do"

"[The brief] broke down learning objectives into simple checklists for us"

Inclusive assessment briefs clarify expectations

"[The briefs] helped me through the feedback as I'm an international [student] I feel [it is] harder to achieve what I'm doing"

"The learning outcomes give me an outline of what should be included"

"[The brief] makes me know what to write and how to phrase it in order to get a better mark"

Inclusive assessment briefs provide reassurance

"[The briefs] make the assignment much clearer, which makes me feel more able to write the assignment and less anxious"

"[The briefs] are specific enough that we are not confused, but broad enough that we can tailor our work to an area we are interested to explore"

Inclusive assessment briefs link to other useful resources

"[The briefs] have suggested resources that may be helpful"

"[The briefs] have helped me with planning my essays"

"I believe that these assignment [briefs] contribute to connecting the course materials"

Further Resources

Baloo, K., Evans, C., Hughes, A., Zhu, X., & Winstone, N. (2018). Transparency isn't spoon-feeding: How a transformative approach to the use of explicit assessment criteria can support student self-regulation. *Frontiers in Education*, 3(69). <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2018.00069>

Gilbert, F., & Maguire, G. (2014). Developing academic communication in assignment briefs to enhance the student experience in assessment: <https://assignmentbriefdesign.weebly.com/>