
PRINCIPLES SUPPORTING LEARNING- FOCUSED ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

The fairness of assessment and the helpfulness of feedback are often thought about just in terms of the grading and feedback that accompanies marked work. This part of the process, the actual ‘assessment’ phase, is just one small part of the overall assessment and feedback experience from the perspective of the student. In order for feedback to support meaningful learning, it is important to expand our focus from just the grades and comments themselves, to what happens before and after this part of the cycle.

CONSOLIDATION PHASE

Supporting students' learning after work is assessed

PREPARATION PHASE

Supporting students' learning before they submit work



LEARNING- FOCUSED ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK CYCLE

ASSESSMENT PHASE

Supporting students' learning through the way in which work is assessed

The Preparation Phase

The preparation phase represents the ways in which students gain a clear understanding of the assessment task, and the criteria against which their work will be assessed.

Principle 1: Clear and inclusive communication of assessment task requirements

Students are better able to learn through an assessment task where they have a clear understanding of what they are being asked to do. If students do not feel that they have had opportunities to fully understand the task expectations, this can contribute to a perception that assessment has not been fair. Ensuring that all students understand what is required of them is also an inclusive practice, as we know that some students are more likely than others to come forward and ask for further clarification, which can exacerbate attainment gaps.

What this means in practice:

- Provide core assessment information in one place, for example using an [inclusive assessment brief template](#), or recording a video assessment brief or [podcast](#).
- Provide opportunities for Q&A that involve all students (e.g. using seminar time, discussion boards, or a Q&A webinar), rather than just relying on office hours for responding to individual queries.

Principle 2: Opportunities to understand and discuss assessment criteria

Students are better able to learn through an assessment task where they have a clear understanding of how their work will be assessed. Assessment can also be perceived as unfair if students do not fully understand the criteria in advance and then cannot understand why they received the grade that they have. Simply posting generic grade descriptors on the VLE or publishing them in course handbooks, without providing students with opportunities to discuss and perhaps apply criteria, is unlikely to support meaningful learning through assessment. Rather than constituting 'spoon feeding', clarity around criteria can actually [promote students' independence](#).

What this means in practice:

- Provide students with opportunities to discuss criteria and seek clarification on what they mean
- Provide students with [Opportunities to apply criteria](#) through activities such as engaging with exemplars, peer assessment, or live marking screencasts

[Example 'live marking' screencasts (Courtesy of Dr Nigel Francis, University of Swansea): [Poor Report](#), [Average Report](#), [Good Report](#)]

The Assessment Phase

The assessment phase represents the process of marking and providing feedback information on students' work.

Principle 3: Timely feedback that is designed to support future work

The timeliness of feedback is about more than just returning it on time; it is about ensuring that feedback comes at a time where students are able to implement the feedback to inform current or future work.

What this means in practice

- Consider when designing assessment tasks and planning deadlines how the timing of feedback return will enable students to use it to inform subsequent work. It is good practice to map all assessment deadlines and feedback return dates at a programme level, and then explain to students how and where they can apply feedback from one assessment to another.
- Meet agreed turnaround times for feedback return and provide clear communication to students about when their work will be returned.

Principle 4: Forward-looking feedback comments that focus on development

[Research](#) indicates that what students most want from feedback is guidance on how to develop their skills and understanding in ways that support future work.

What this means in practice

- Talk to students to develop a shared understanding of what effective feedback means in the context of your discipline, and what forms of feedback they find most useful.
- Frame comments in [ways that support learning](#).
- Encourage [feedback-seeking](#) by finding out from students at the point of submission what form of feedback they would find most valuable.

The Consolidation Phase

The consolidation phase supports students' learning after their work has been assessed, by giving feedback meaning and relevance.

Principle 5: Facilitating students' use of feedback by giving feedback a 'landing place'

If feedback is to be meaningful and support learning, it should have a 'landing place'; that is, there should be another task or assignment where the comments provided have relevance and can support students in developing their skills or understanding.

What this means in practice

- Map assessment design at the programme level, so that all module leaders have a good idea of the assessment tasks students will be completing before and after their own. This supports identification of 'landing places' for feedback comments.
- Even if the most relevant 'landing place' for a set of comments does not occur until later in the programme, there are [activities](#) that can support students in revisiting and applying feedback comments at a later time.
- When writing feedback, signpost to students potential 'landing places', where they can apply the comments you have provided.

Principle 6: Providing opportunities for dialogue

Feedback comments can be difficult for students to 'decode', and their meaning may remain hidden to students. It is good practice to provide opportunities for students to discuss feedback and consider how they can apply it to future work.

What this means in practice

- Provide clarity regarding how students can contact you to discuss their feedback. These conversations should be framed as supporting students' learning through discussing feedback, not as a requirement to justify marks.
- You can also provide opportunities for dialogue through a [feedback webinar](#), providing generic cohort-level feedback whilst answering queries as they appear in the chat.