10.1: Applying assessment criteria

Teacher's notes

Background

These exercises help students to understand how their coursework will be assessed, by giving them the assessment descriptors that will be used to grade their work, and showing how these have been applied to essays written by former students. Students can then evaluate their own work. An important aspect of this exercise is the opportunity for discussion of assessment descriptors and their application with peers and with the teacher.

Aims

- to familiarize students with the criteria and standards used to grade their work
- to provide an opportunity to apply these criteria and standards to sample essays
- to examine feedback from a teacher which is linked to the assessment criteria

Material

Student writing in response to a specific question or topic, e.g., an exam question or a piece of writing set for homework.
Assessment descriptors for evaluating student writing (an example set is given but you should use the descriptors for your institution). Examples of writing, in response to a similar question, done by former students, which can be used to practise applying the descriptors.

Procedure

1 In small groups, students discuss the following questions:

   - How do you think your written work should be assessed?

   - What aspects should the teacher consider in order to give you useful feedback?

   - Which of these aspects will be most important for assessment on university courses?

   Students will usually identify the main categories of task achievement, organization and language, but will often be able to give more detail for language, e.g., grammar and vocabulary, than for the other aspects. They may also consider language to be more important at university than either organization or task achievement, although there is likely to be some discussion about this.

2 Hand out the assessment descriptors used by your institution (or the example set provided on the tasksheet *Assessment criteria for student writing* pages), and ask students to decide the weighting for the criteria by assigning maximum marks to each criterion, and deciding the marks for each level. A typical distribution of marks might be 30% for each of the first three criteria, and 10% for presentation, with marks distributed evenly across the levels.

3 Give students some sample essays on a topic similar to one they have written. Choose essays with a range of grades. Ask students to use the assessment descriptors to grade these pieces, and to discuss their reasons for giving the grades, based on the descriptions of standards in the descriptors.

4 Tell students what grades were given to the essays by teachers, and discuss any differences in the grades they assigned, or any difficulties they had in giving grades. In particular, you can comment on the greater weighting given to task achievement and organization compared to language which would be given by university lecturers.

Follow-up

Students evaluate their own writing, using the assessment descriptors, and predict their grade. They then compare this with the teacher's feedback on their writing, which is linked to the level statements in the descriptors.

Tasksheet: Assessment criteria for student writing

The following criteria will be applied when assessing your written work. Decide how important you consider each of the four criteria to be by allocating the maximum number of marks (out of 100) for each one. Then, in the column to the left of the descriptions of standards for each criterion, decide how many marks (out of the maximum) should be given for each level.

1 Task achievement (maximum number of marks _____)

This concerns the main issues to be discussed, as well as the ability to establish a clear focus on the essay question or the task set. It also includes consideration of the length.

	Fully answers all aspects of the task in sufficient depth.
	Answers the task in sufficient depth to cover the main points.
	The main points are discussed, but there may be some unnecessary or irrelevant ideas.
	Not all aspects of the task are covered or not in enough depth.
	Misses the topic entirely or is much shorter than the required length.

2 Structure and organization (maximum number of marks _____)

This relates to the overall structure of the essay, and the presence of an introduction and conclusion, as well as the division and linking of paragraphs.

	There is a suitable introduction and conclusion. The sequence of paragraphs enhances understanding of the points being made. Paragraphs follow a general to specific structure. Understanding of the text is enhanced by the use of sentence linking devices, including summarizing noun phrases.
	There is an introduction and conclusion. The sequence of paragraphs contributes to an understanding of the points being made. Most paragraphs follow a general to specific structure. The use of sentence linking devices, including summarizing noun phrases, largely helps the reader to understand the text.
	There is an introduction and conclusion although they may be rather brief. The sequence of paragraphs may show some weaknesses. Some paragraphs follow a general to specific structure. Sentence linking devices, including summarizing noun phrases, are sometimes used incorrectly, leading to misunderstanding.
	There may not be a suitable introduction or conclusion. Attempts to sequence the paragraphs are evident but insufficient. There is a general lack of structure in paragraphs. Sentence linking devices, including summarizing noun phrases, are incorrectly or rarely used, making it difficult for the reader to follow the ideas or understand the text.
	The essay is unstructured, or structured in a way that prevents understanding. Very few sentence linking devices appear, and these are usually used incorrectly.

3　Language (maximum number of marks _____)

This relates to the use of functional language and accuracy in grammar.

	Mistakes are not significant. A wide range of functional language is used which is appropriate for the essay question. Vocabulary is appropriate throughout. Appropriate academic style is used.
	Occasional mistakes occur, which do not prevent understanding. A good range of functional language is used which is appropriate for the question. Vocabulary is mostly appropriate throughout. Academic style is used for most of the essay.
	Repeated mistakes occur which sometimes prevent understanding. Some functional language is used. Vocabulary is not always appropriate, and the style is sometimes not academic.
	There are a large number of very serious mistakes. Meaning is often unclear. There is only limited use of functional language. Vocabulary and style are frequently inappropriate.
	The student has very little control over grammar and vocabulary, and is unable to make the meaning clear to a reader; or the language is clearly not the student's own.

4　Presentation (maximum number of marks _____)

This concerns the overall appearance of the essay: layout, spacing, coversheet with accurate information, spelling and punctuation.

	The essay is extremely well presented and easy to read with no mistakes in spelling or punctuation.
	The essay is well presented and easy to read with only a few mistakes in spelling or punctuation.
	This essay is readable, but mistakes in spelling and punctuation interfere with the smooth flow of reading.
	Mistakes in spelling and punctuation make it difficult to understand the points being made.
	The essay is poorly presented, e.g., with no cover page, and basic word processing tools, such as spell and grammar checkers, have not been used.

Percentages and grades are matched to evidence of learning outcomes in the table below.

Assessment grades	Evidence of learning outcomes
A = 70%–80%	Has fulfilled all, or the majority of, the specified learning outcomes to an excellent standard, and will experience few difficulties with the demands of a degree programme. Has near-native speaker fluency.
B = 60%–69%	Has fulfilled all, or the majority of, the specified learning outcomes to a proficient standard, and will cope well with the demands of a degree programme.
C = 50%–59%	Has fulfilled the majority of the specified learning outcomes to a competent standard, and is able to cope with the demands of a degree programme.
D = 40%–49%	Has fulfilled the specified learning outcomes to the minimum acceptable level, but is unlikely to be able to cope with the demands of a degree programme and should continue to study academic English.
E = 35%–39%	Has fulfilled the specified learning outcomes to the minimum acceptable level for the award of credit points, but will not be able to cope with the demands of a degree programme.
F = 25%–34%	Has fulfilled almost none of the specified learning outcomes, even at the minimum acceptable level.