

Helping students understand essay marking criteria and feedback

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Introduction

- Even though new and innovative forms of assessment have been introduced essay writing remains a common feature in many psychology undergraduate programmes within the UK.
- Better quality essays have been associated with those students that possess a good understanding of the assessment criteria (Harrington et al., 2003).
- Furthermore, students read tutors feedback to varying degrees (Gibbs et al., 2002; Hyland, 2000)
- There is broad agreement that students can only make use of feedback comments if they can understand and internalise the comments and are able to map the comments (either explicitly or intuitively) onto previous and future pieces of work (Ivanic et al., 2000)

Workshop 1 'Mismatch Exercise' (Norton et al., 2002)

Method

Participants

53 undergraduates elected to take part in the research. All students were enrolled on a final year developmental psychology module. 5 lecturers within the Department of Psychology

Procedure

- Students were required to consider ten criteria (as shown in Table 1) and to rank them in order of importance.
- Lecturers carried out the same exercise.

Results

Table 1: Mean rank for students and lecturers. (Students ranking are in blue, lecturers in red).

Criterion	Rank	Rank
Answer the question	1st	1st
Relevant information	2nd	4th
Argument	3rd	3rd
Structure/organisation	4th	7th
Understanding	5th	2nd
Evaluation	6th	5th
Content/knowledge	7th	6th
Wide reading	8th	9th
Presentation/style	9th	8th
English/spelling	10th	10th

Discussion

- These results mimic those of Norton et al (2002).
- Lecturers emphasise the importance of a deep approach (i.e. understanding) and students tend to focus on a surface approach (i.e. relevant information)

Workshop 2

The aim of this workshop was to engage students in thinking about how to apply marking criteria to sample essays. Students were provided with marking criteria (Norton et al., 2002) and asked to provide both a mark and feedback for three sample essays. This exercise was completed on Blackboard so students would be able to access the marks and feedback generated by all groups.



Feedback comments

Only 1 student referred to the level of understanding demonstrated.

Originality of thought was regarded as negative
Number of relevant studies was regarded as important.

Discussion

Students found it relatively easy to mark the poorest essay, but their judgements were considerably more varied for both the 2:1 Class Essay and the 1st Class Essay.

References:

Gibbs, G., Holmes, A., & Segal, R. (2002). *Funding innovation and disseminating new teaching practices*. National Co-ordination Team for the teaching quality enhancement fund. Open University.

Harrington, K., Elander, J., Norton, L., Robinson, H. & Reddy, P. (2003). Do essay assessment criteria refer to transferable skills, deep approaches to learning, or complex learning. *Investigations in University Teaching & Learning*, 1(2), 57-61.

Hyland, P. (2000). Learning from feedback on assessment. In P. Hyland & A. Booth (Eds.), *The practice of history teaching* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

Ivanic, R., Clark, R., & Rimmershaw, R. (2000). What am I supposed to make of this? The messages conveyed to students by tutors' written comments. In M.R. Lea & B. Stierer (Eds.), *Student writing in higher education: New contexts*. Buckingham, SHRE/Open University Press.

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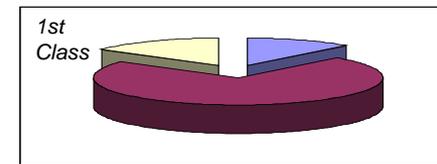
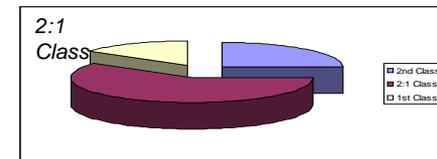
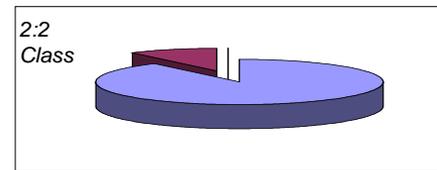


Figure 1: The percentage of marks awarded according to degree class for each essay (lecturers class mark is presented in italics).

