



**GOOD PRACTICE IN  
ASSESSMENT**  
AT ACU



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
<b>1 Introduction</b>	02
<b>2 Multiple Purposes of Assessment</b>	03
<b>3 Designing Assessment Tasks</b>	04
<b>3.1 Cultural Diversity</b>	05
<b>3.2 Academic Integrity</b>	05
<b>4 Assessment Tasks</b>	06
<b>4.1 Types of Assessment</b>	06
<b>4.2 Group Work</b>	12
<b>4.3 Assessment Schedules</b>	12
<b>4.4 Marking Schemes</b>	13
<b>4.5 Feedback</b>	13
<b>4.5.1 Assessed online discussion groups</b>	14
<b>4.5.2 Incorporating peer feedback</b>	14
<b>4.6 Allocating Grades</b>	15
<b>4.7 Frequently Asked Questions about Grading</b>	17
<b>5 Moderation of Assessment</b>	19
<b>6 Special Consideration</b>	19
<b>7 Education Inclusion Plans</b>	20
Works Cited	20



# 1

## INTRODUCTION

These guidelines complement the **Assessment Policy and Procedures** and the **Academic Regulations** in guiding good practice in assessment at ACU. Rather than seeking to provide a comprehensive resource on assessment, these guidelines aim to provide an overview of pedagogical and pragmatic issues in assessment and direct staff to other resources for further consideration.

The Assessment Policy and Procedures outline the rationale for assessment, listing the general principles that underpin assessment. Assessment at ACU should be founded upon the University's Mission and the Policy on Quality Learning and Teaching

incorporating The Learning Paradigm, usually known as student-centred learning, which directs the University to provide '*the right kind of learning experiences*' and '*to discern methods and approaches that best suit the needs of students*'. They are also designed to assist compliance with the **Disability Standards for Education 2005**

1. Which are subordinate legislation under the **Disability Discrimination Act 1992**
2. In particular, 6.3 of the Standards states:

*Measures that the education provider may implement to enable the student to participate in the learning*

*experiences (including the assessment and certification requirements) of the course or program, and any relevant supplementary course or program, on the same basis as a student without a disability, include measures ensuring that:*

- f) *The assessment procedures and methodologies for the course or program are adapted to enable the student to demonstrate the knowledge, skills or competencies being assessed.*



# 2

## MULTIPLE PURPOSES OF ASSESSMENT

Melbourne University's *Centre for the Study of Higher Education's Guide for Reviewing Assessment* (3) gives the following list of the many uses of assessment:

Assessment is used to:

- ▶ Measure students' preparedness for further study or professional accreditation.
- ▶ Rank students, relative to one another, for the purposes of competitive scholarships or other opportunities.

- ▶ Provide feedback on student learning for both students and staff.
- ▶ Provide feedback on teaching for staff.
- ▶ Define and protect academic standards.
- ▶ Direct students' learning.

Obviously, achieving all these purposes in our assessment plan for a unit is a complex balancing act, and makes assessment development critical to learning and teaching quality.

# 3

## DESIGNING ASSESSMENT TASKS

Carefully designed assessment tasks directly affect the way students approach their study and so contribute to the quality of their learning. Well designed assessment provides clear expectations, establishes a reasonable workload, and provides opportunities for students to monitor their own progress, practise their skills and receive feedback. Assessment is an integral component of a coherent educational experience (4).

**Gibbs and Simpson** (5) identify 10 conditions under which assessment supports student learning. The first three relate to students' engagement with the tasks and are listed below. The remaining seven relate to feedback and will be considered later.

1. Sufficient assessed tasks are provided for students to capture sufficient study time. (In other words, the assessment tasks should form a reasonable amount of the 150 hours we expect students to spend for each unit. The principle is 'assessment for learning'.)
2. These tasks are engaged with by students, orienting them to allocate appropriate amounts of time and effort to the most important aspects of the course.
3. Tackling the assessed task engages students in productive learning activity of an appropriate kind.

Lecturers-in-Charge are responsible for designing the assessment tasks for a unit. **The Guide for Reviewing Assessment** (3) gives 16 indicators of effective assessment in higher education. The following list is (slightly) adapted from Harris's 16 indicators and can be used as a checklist when designing assessment tasks.

A checklist for quality in student assessment

- a) Assessment is treated by staff and students as an integral and prominent component of the entire

teaching and learning process rather than a final adjunct to it.

- b) The multiple roles of assessment are recognised. The powerful motivating effect of assessment requirements on students is understood and assessment tasks are designed to foster valued study habits.
- c) There is a University policy that guides individuals' assessment practices. Unit assessment is integrated into an overall plan for course assessment.
- d) There is a clear alignment between expected learning outcomes, graduate attributes, what is taught and learnt, and the knowledge and skills assessed.
- e) Assessment tasks assess the capacity to analyse and synthesise new information and concepts rather than simply recall information previously presented.
- f) Different types of assessment are employed so that the limitations of particular methods are minimised and a variety of graduate attributes developed.
- g) Assessment tasks are designed to assess relevant graduate attributes/generic skills as well as subject-specific knowledge and skills.
- h) There is a steady progression in the complexity and demands of assessment requirements in the later years of courses.
- i) There is provision for student choice in assessment tasks and weighting at certain times.
- j) Student and staff workloads are considered in the scheduling and design of assessment tasks.
- k) Excessive assessment is avoided. Assessment tasks are designed to sample student learning.
- l) Assessment tasks are weighted to balance the developmental (formative) and judgemental



- (summative) roles of assessment. Early low-stakes, low-weight assessment is used to provide students with feedback. Formative assessment is primarily for the purpose of giving students some sense of what they 'know', what skills they have mastered, and whether they have the appropriate academic skills. It may have no marks attached (e.g. a self-test online quiz), or it may have a small summative element (e.g. 10% of total unit marks). It is often timed early in the unit to guide/alert students of the need for extra work. Summative assessment is any task where marks contribute substantially to the final grade. Summative assessment tasks should also be designed so the student can learn from them, and from the feedback teachers provide on the tasks.
- m) Grades are calculated and reported on the basis of clearly articulated learning outcomes and criteria for levels of achievement.
  - n) Students receive explanatory and diagnostic feedback as well as grades.
  - o) Assessment tasks are checked to ensure there are no inherent biases that may disadvantage particular student groups.
  - p) Plagiarism is minimised through careful task design, explicit education and appropriate monitoring of academic integrity.

### 3.1 CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The cultural diversity of the student population is a factor to consider when designing learning and teaching strategies and assessment tasks. It is important to remember that International and Indigenous students are not the only source of diversity within your classes. For example, there can be large differences between students based on the suburb in which they grew up and the facilities (including schools and leisure activities) it offers. It is best to assume that all classes will have some cultural diversity. The following list of questions from *MacKinnon & Manathunga, 2003* (6) should be considered when designing assessment tasks in all units.

- ▶ What am I assessing in terms of intellectual engagement?
- ▶ What am I assessing in terms of generic and discipline-specific skills?

- ▶ Why am I assessing these skills and engagement with content?
- ▶ How am I going to assess these skills and engagement with content?
- ▶ What resources have I provided that both enable and assist the students to understand the skills and content knowledge they will need to demonstrate to complete this assessment?

MacKinnon and Manathunga then provide a series of reflective questions designed to assist academics to explore their assumptions about subject content (6). These have been adapted slightly and are presented below:

- ▶ Does my content assume Australian or western cultural or historical knowledge?
- ▶ Am I explicit about the fact that education in Australia reflects a

western worldview?

- ▶ Does some of my content assume that students know about Australian television and culture?
- ▶ Have I provided students with a glossary of key terms and phrases?
- ▶ How will I know students have actually engaged with the content of my unit?
- ▶ How will I find out?
- ▶ How can I give students the choice of bringing in their own cultural knowledge and other skills?
- ▶ Will the material be culturally sensitive?

### 3.2 ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The first part of the Academic Honesty Policy affirms ACU's commitment to Academic Integrity.

Academic honesty is a fundamental principle of the University as an institution devoted to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research and service, and to respecting the value and dignity of each person. Conduct which breaches academic honesty attacks the integrity of learning and scholarship, contravenes academic values of respect for knowledge, scholarship and scholars, and represents a form of fraud.

No one area of the University has sole responsibility for 'enforcing' honesty. The Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) has several resources dealing with these issues. The four main strategies mentioned in that material are as follows (*Centre for the Study of Higher Education, 2009*):

- i. A collaborative effort to recognise and counter plagiarism at every level from policy, through faculty/division and school/department procedures, to individual staff practices.

- ii. Thoroughly educating students about the expected conventions for authorship and the appropriate use and acknowledgment of all forms of intellectual material.
- iii. Designing approaches to assessment that minimise the possibility for students to submit plagiarised material, while not reducing the quality and rigour of assessment requirements.
- iv. Installing highly visible procedures for monitoring and detecting cheating, including appropriate punishment and re-education measures.

Observe that the detection of dishonesty is listed last. It is more effective to design assessment tasks that minimise the possibility for students to submit plagiarised material, than to attempt to detect such dishonesty after students have submitted their work. It is worthwhile checking the CSHE website, in particular the 36 strategies to minimise plagiarism presentation (7).



# 4

## ASSESSMENT TASKS

### 4.1 TYPES OF ASSESSMENT

When planning the assessments for a unit there are many factors to consider. As each type of assessment task has inherent limitations, and because students learn in different ways, a variety of different types should be used.

In a large study, *Nightingale et al. (1996)*(8) provided a large list of different types of assessment tasks. The table to the right is adapted from that list (*Assessing Learning in Universities, 1996* (8)).

Since this relatively old list was compiled there has been a vast increase in online assessment. The list below gives a sample of some of the types of online assessment being used at ACU:

- ▶ Discussion contributions
- ▶ MCQs (Multiple Choice Quizzes)
- ▶ Short answer and other types of quiz
- ▶ Self-assessments
- ▶ Links to ePortfolios and websites
- ▶ Uploaded essays
- ▶ Group assignments
- ▶ Creation of website
- ▶ Role plays.

Annotated bibliographies	Discourse analysis of policy documents of programs	Patient interview
Autobiography	Ethnography of professional site paper and presentation	Portfolio of professional experience
Action research project	Essay	Poster
Case study examination	Examination	Presentation
Class participation	Interview	Profile
Client interviews	Job application	Project
Clinical performance	Journal	Research assignment
Creation of web pages	Laboratory report	Simulation
Critical incident analysis	Learning journal	Social history (report)
Critique	Literature review	Social mapping
Database	Minitest	Tutorial





**There are two ways of looking at assessments in the online environment:**

- ▶ Can you do a particular type of assessment online? The answer will usually (but not always) be 'yes', but there may need to be some involvement of educational technology/online educational design experts to help you think through the transfer.
- ▶ Can you do some assessment strategies more effectively and/or efficiently online? The answer is 'yes', with the very obvious example being quizzes, but there would be others.

Whatever type of online assessment you choose, it is critical that it be accessible to and appropriate for students with disabilities.

Consult the campus Disability Adviser for advice on appropriate education adjustments for the types of online assessments you wish to use.

**For example**

- ▶ Online discussion contributions, uploaded essays or group assignments can be inappropriate for a student with a learning disability, whose disability is thus revealed to all. This can be

humiliating for the student. If the work is submitted directly to the lecturer, the matter remains between the student and the lecturer.

- ▶ Short answers and other types of quiz, if access is switched off after a pre-set time, can disadvantage students with mobility impairments or print disabilities.

Further information about online assessment may be obtained from the following:

**FACULTY eLEARNING COORDINATORS FOR PEDAGOGY SUPPORT**

The eLearning Coordinators for each Faculty can be contacted via email.

**Faculty of Arts and Sciences**  
felc-fas@acu.edu.au

**Faculty of Business**  
felc-fbus@acu.edu.au

**Faculty of Education**  
felc-fed@acu.edu.au

**Faculty of Health Sciences**  
felc-fhs@acu.edu.au

**Faculty of Theology and Philosophy**  
felc-ftp@acu.edu.au

**National pedagogy support**

Information on national support for pedagogy is available from the eLearning page:  
[www.acu.edu.au/113574](http://www.acu.edu.au/113574)

**TECHNICAL AND OPERATIONAL SUPPORT**

**Blackboard Support:** 1800 730 288

**Email:** [blackboard.support@acu.edu.au](mailto:blackboard.support@acu.edu.au)

8am-10pm

Monday to Friday

9am-5pm

Weekends and Public Holidays

## 4.1 TYPES OF ASSESSMENT (CONTINUED...)

It is important to choose your assessment methods to enable you to assess the learning outcomes of your unit. This includes the assessment of the graduate attributes. A summary of the value and limitations of some types of assessment task is given in Table 1. This table is adapted from *Types of Assessment Methods* (9).

**TABLE 1**

Type of Assessment	Value	Limitations
Regular practical work, computer simulations and exercises, laboratory work, problems to solve, reflective learning statements, self test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Keeps students on task</li> <li>- Encourages students early</li> <li>- Formative in nature as there are opportunities for students and teachers to make adjustments</li> <li>- Can encourage application, translation and interpretation of concepts learnt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can be time consuming for teachers</li> <li>- Can become a hoop jumping exercise</li> </ul>
Final Exams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assurance that students have attained the appropriate knowledge, skills and dispositions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Summative</li> <li>- A measure of poise: a capacity to recall information under stress</li> <li>- Often reproduction rather than transformation of information</li> </ul>
Essays and assignments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opportunity to develop an extended argument</li> <li>- Can achieve depth rather than breadth of learning</li> <li>- Opportunity to develop capacity to interpret, translate, apply, critique and evaluate</li> <li>- Opportunity to problem pose and conduct inquiry</li> <li>- Opportunity to explore the boundaries of what is known</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time consuming to assess</li> <li>- Highly subjective</li> <li>- Often occur at the end and leave no opportunity for students to make use of the feedback</li> <li>- Often one-off and fail to require students to make note of, and utilise, feedback (value added)</li> </ul>
Field reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Authentic form of assessment</li> <li>- Develops observation and recording skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Requires organisation skill</li> <li>- Costly to supervise</li> <li>- Difficult to timetable</li> <li>- Need to consider ethical and safety issues</li> </ul>
Article review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Requires interpretation and evaluation</li> <li>- Opportunity to understand how experts proceed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students need to be taught how to review</li> <li>- Difficult to find appropriate articles</li> </ul>
Group work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communication of ideas</li> <li>- Encourages independence</li> <li>- Collaboration and co-operation</li> <li>- Opportunity for authentic skill development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Difficult to assess individual input</li> <li>- Time consuming for students to organise</li> <li>- Students do not know how to work successfully in groups</li> </ul>
Portfolios: A collection of student work with inclusions carefully selected and justified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can be used to demonstrate progress towards, and achievement of, topic or course objectives</li> <li>- Understanding of complexity of professional roles</li> <li>- Synthesis of what students have learnt in a number of topics</li> <li>- Capacity to use new understandings in novel ways in unpredictable work contexts</li> <li>- Valid and authentic assessment as they can include real world tasks</li> <li>- Focus on higher order thinking</li> <li>- Students have to accept a high degree of responsibility so it encourages engagement with learning intentions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low stakes</li> <li>- Consistency between students is low</li> <li>- Time consuming for students and teachers</li> </ul>

**TABLE 1 (CONTINUED...)**

Type of Assessment	Value	Limitations
Performances and presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Provides alternate modes of assessment</li><li>- Authentic</li><li>- Develops skills</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Difficult to capture and reflect on in order to assess</li></ul>
Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Authentic, real world tasks</li><li>- Capture students' interests</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Time consuming to set up</li></ul>
Independent study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Encourages engagement with material</li><li>- Captures students' interests</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Consistency is low</li></ul>
Learning contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Focuses on individual learning needs</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Consistency is low</li></ul>

One of the important things to consider when designing assessments is how they help students to develop and assess the ACU Graduate Attributes.





The following table provides some methods that might be used to assess each of the ten Graduate Attributes. In order to develop graduate attributes, students need to be provided with opportunities to practise the attributes and should be assessed on their attainment of the attributes. Some courses are using e-Portfolios to collect assessments that develop these graduate attributes.

Graduate attributes	Sample assessment methods	
1. Demonstrate respect for the dignity of each individual and for human diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Case Studies</li> <li>- Stakeholder analyses</li> <li>- Group tasks where students are assigned to diverse teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Compare the experiences of diverse people in situations as appropriate to your discipline</li> <li>- Various assessments based on the application of these aspects to your particular discipline area, for example, an essay on the lost generation that asks students to conclude by</li> </ul>
2. Recognise their responsibility to the common good, the environment and society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Include aspects of these as criteria in various types of assessments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ask students to reflect on their own responsibilities as they relate to different aspects of social justice or the environment</li> <li>- Role plays</li> </ul>
3. Apply ethical perspectives in informed decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Debates</li> <li>- Essay that asks students to defend a point of view</li> <li>- Ethical dilemmas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consideration of ethical issues in statistics or research</li> <li>- Apply codes of ethics to ethical situations within a discipline area</li> </ul>
4. Think critically and reflectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Journals</li> <li>- Ask students to reflect on some aspect of their learning as part of another assessment</li> <li>- Critical analysis of articles</li> <li>- Use critical thinking aspects as criteria when assessing students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear articulation of their argument</li> <li>- Logical organisation of ideas</li> <li>- Consider both sides of an argument</li> <li>- Draw conclusions based on good quality evidence</li> </ul>
5. Demonstrate values, knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the discipline and/or profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most types of assessments would address some aspect of this attribute</li> </ul>	
6. Solve problems in a variety of settings taking local and international perspectives into account	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ask students to consider Indigenous issues or global perspectives and use this as a criteria while undertaking various types of assessments</li> <li>- Case Studies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Application of theories, models or formulae to problems in a discipline</li> <li>- Computer programs</li> </ul>



Graduate attributes	Sample assessment methods	
7. Work both autonomously and collaboratively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In individual assessment ask students to provide a schedule of milestones and then to evaluate themselves against this afterwards.</li> <li>- Peer review can be used to help students develop their ability to evaluate their own work and that of others thus developing both their ability to work autonomously and collaboratively.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group or Team tasks. Try to ensure that every member of the group participates and evaluate how students work in a group as well as the final task.</li> <li>- Set up group rules or group contracts at the start of a group project to allow them to articulate good group practice.</li> <li>- Evaluate the group's ability to manage conflict and come to consensus.</li> </ul>
8. Locate, organise, analyse, synthesise and evaluate information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In first year, you might teach students how to locate and evaluate the quality of sources using an Annotated Bibliography and show them how to avoid plagiarism.</li> <li>- Analysis of article/s</li> <li>- Research essay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Research presentation</li> <li>- Analysis of current topics from newspaper articles</li> <li>- Report writing – synthesising, summarising and organizing information – can include use of graphs, tables and figures</li> </ul>
9. Demonstrate effective communication in oral and written English language and visual media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Oral communication can be assessed through debates, discussions, role plays or presentations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Written communication might be assessed through essays, reports, summaries, case studies as well as through thesis or dissertations.</li> <li>- Posters, exhibitions</li> </ul>
10. Utilise information and communication and other relevant technologies effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use of online technologies, for example, online discussions, blogs or wikis</li> <li>- Use of specialist technologies in your discipline</li> <li>- Use of specialist databases to search for information in the discipline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using technologies appropriately while doing presentations or writing reports</li> <li>- Development of web pages</li> </ul>

The Learning and Teaching Centre has developed a variety of resources on this aspect of assessment that can be found on the Graduate Attributes website at <http://www.acu.edu.au/204423>

## 4.2 GROUP WORK

You should also check section 3.6 of *the Assessment Policy and Procedures* document.

The use of group work as a learning or assessment strategy requires some care from both teachers and from learners. The following information on group work has been adapted from various Australian university websites.

### GROUP WORK: PRODUCT, PROCESS OR BOTH?

*Adapted from Group Work (10).*

Being able to work successfully in a group that is not necessarily of your choosing is a key skill required by employers of professionals.

Many teachers are uncomfortable assessing group work. The group will normally create a piece of work that represents the outcome of the group's efforts. The type of marking required to assess such a product would be similar to that used on an individual assignment. The decision must be made to either award a final mark to all group members or give individual marks or a combination of both. This

decision must be made before the start of the unit and the students informed of the process.

Quite different is the assessment of the group work process. This is an assessment in how well the students work together in achieving their goal. Assessing the group work process, and giving feedback to students on their progress, is necessary if students are to develop collaborative skills. To develop graduate attributes in relation to their capacity to function collaboratively as professionals, it is important to assess group work processes. There are various ways of doing this. Students can be asked to reflect on how their group worked and their own part in the process. They might be asked to review the group process or team members against various criteria. It is sometimes also useful to ask students to document meetings using minutes (showing who attended) and ask them to document who undertook the various parts of a project.

Students can expect to have simple group tasks in their first year, on which they are given feedback on their

performance. More complex problems, requiring more developed skills in group processes, would be required in subsequent years. Final year courses need to offer professionally relevant, complex group tasks.

Also refer to these two resources for further ideas on group work:

***Assessing Learning in Australian Universities:*** 5 practical guides including assessing group work and online assessment.

At this site, you will also find:

***Good Practice Directory: Assessing group learning*** – Use of e-groups to foster collaborative postgraduate learning in a virtual environment by Terry Waters-Marsh, Central Queensland University.

Isaacs, G. (2002). *Assessing group work*. Brisbane: University of Queensland, Teaching and Educational Development Institute.

## 4.3 ASSESSMENT SCHEDULES

You should also check sections 3.3 and 3.4 of *the Assessment Policy and Procedures* document.

While selection of the number and type of assessment tasks is at the discretion of the Lecturer-in-Charge, over-assessment should be avoided. The time needed to complete the assessment tasks should be appropriate to the overall time commitment that learners are expected to allocate to the unit. A 10 credit point unit requires 150 hours of focused learning to achieve the learning outcomes. This includes the hours allocated to all classes, reading required for those classes, preparing assessment work, studying for exams and any field work required for the unit.

As stated in the Assessment Policy and Procedures, a recommended assessment schedule for any one unit would be two or three assessment tasks, none of which is worth more than 65% of the total marks: for example, an essay, seminar and a formal examination each worth between 30–40%.

The workload for students and staff associated with ungraded or 'hurdle' or formative assessment requirements in a unit should also be considered in determining assessment schedules.

The due dates for assessment tasks should be chosen to allow sufficient time to marking of one task to be completed and for students to benefit from any feedback from

that task before the due date for subsequent tasks. In particular, the workload implications of assessment schedules must be considered — is there sufficient time available for the marking team to complete their job and return assignments to students within three weeks?

## 4.4 MARKING SCHEMES

The following quote is from **Dunn et al.(2005)** and describes three of the uses of well prepared marking schemes.

*'Marking Schemes' (in Australia and the United Kingdom) and 'scoring rubrics' (in the United States) are designed to show how the products and processes of student performance in assessment tasks are measured. ...Marking schemes should be aligned with desired learning outcomes and particular assessment tasks to go some of the way to overcoming the 'guessing game' where students try to unravel the mystery of how assessment judgements are made. ...When marking criteria are made explicit they also provide a framework for reliable marking...*

In short you should produce, and provide to students, a marking scheme for each assessment task.

- ▶ Your scheme should describe the level of student performance that is required for each mark/grade
- ▶ You should describe those levels of performance in terms of achievement of the learning outcomes given in the Unit Outline
- ▶ The scheme should be provided to students as soon as it is available, ideally at the start of the unit but certainly well before the due date of the relevant assessment task.

A well-prepared marking scheme allows students to understand what is required of them and allows all markers to understand how to mark reliably.

While there is some overlap, marking schemes for different disciplines and types of assessment task vary widely. There are many examples available on the web, with one good source being **University of Tasmania's Assessment -Teaching & Learning site**.

## 4.5 FEEDBACK

You should also check section **5.2 of the Assessment Policy and Procedures** document.

Feedback should:

- ▶ Be timely, within three weeks after the due date of the assessment item.
- ▶ Be provided at least 48 hours prior to the next related assignment due date.
- ▶ Relate specifically to learning outcomes.
- ▶ Allow students to use the information to improve their performance.
- ▶ Be provided in part within the first half of a study period, that is, students must receive some assessment-related feedback within the first half of the study period.
- ▶ Be constructive and focus on assisting students to improve the quality of their work — the quality of feedback relates to the quality of teaching. Lack of feedback is the biggest complaint by students at ACU and elsewhere.

A set of conditions under which assessment supports learning has been proposed by Gibbs and Simpson (5). They include the following seven conditions which relate to feedback:

1. Sufficient feedback is provided often enough and in enough detail.
2. The feedback focuses on students' performance, on their learning and on actions under the students' control, rather than on the students themselves and/or their characteristics.
3. The feedback is timely in that it is received by students while it still matters to them and in time for them to pay attention to further learning or to receive further assistance.
4. Feedback is appropriate to the purpose of the assignment and to its criteria for success.
5. Feedback is appropriate in relation to students' understanding of what they are supposed to be doing (conceptions of task, learning, knowledge, discipline discourse).



6. Feedback is received and attended to by the student.

7. Feedback is acted upon by the student.

The following examples of feedback strategies are extracted from **Techniques for giving feedback to improve student learning** (11).

- ▶ Assignment-related discussion groups.
- ▶ Incorporating peer feedback.

Some have found success with giving students the written feedback one week before giving them the grade. They have found that students read the feedback more diligently if they do not have the grade.

### 4.5.1 ASSESSED ONLINE DISCUSSION GROUPS

Not all feedback is summative (given at the end of an assignment task for a grade/mark). Feedback can also be formative, giving students a measure of how they are progressing during the learning experience.

One way in which staff have successfully incorporated formative feedback into their courses is by running an online discussion group specifically related to an assessment task. Assignment-related discussion groups are a communication device whereby both the student and the lecturer extract benefit from the activity.

To make assignment-related discussion groups successful, you need to:

- ▶ Make very clear at the start what the expectations are for communication within the discussion group so that students understand that there will be no other form of communication about the assignment (for example no e-mail, telephone or visits in relation to the assignment). If students have a question related to the content, assessment process or even marking criteria related to a particular assignment, then they must use the discussion group to voice that question.
- ▶ Steer students towards the discussion group if students begin to approach you with questions (for instance by e-mail or telephone), sometimes sitting with them as they post their first messages if they are unfamiliar with the technology.
- ▶ Stipulate online office hours – that is, when ‘online time’ is scheduled to deal with any questions that might be in the discussion group, or alternatively activate NOTIFY within the online discussion group to receive an e-mail whenever a message has been posted.
- ▶ Suggest to students that they all activate NOTIFY so that they can receive an e-mail whenever a question or response has been posted.
- ▶ Support students with the technology by pointing them to appropriate web sites so they know how to post messages and, if necessary, demonstrate the process during a face-to-face session.
- ▶ Provide students with behaviour protocols by linking them to guidelines.
- ▶ Decide whether students will be allowed to answer questions of other students and make that clear to the students.
- ▶ Consider protocols for participation in the discussion, with particular emphasis on ‘tone’ and style of writing, which needs to be a slightly more informal style than usual. Students need to feel safe participating in this type of forum.

### 4.5.2 INCORPORATING PEER FEEDBACK

Students receive more feedback if their peers are included in the process. At HERDSA 2005, Tom Angelo discussed a peer feedback approach for seminars that he has found to be very successful. He hands out pieces of paper to students on which to write anonymous feedback in response to presentations by their peers, pertaining to the following questions:

- ▶ What did the presenter do that you would encourage them to do again?
  - ▶ What area would you recommend that the presenter further develop for their next seminar presentation?
- These are handed in to the teacher for moderation and then provided to the student presenter.
- Another way to incorporate peer feedback is to move learning conversations to the online environment, where more people can see them. Online discussions are established that require participants to post and respond to each other.



#### 4.6 ALLOCATING GRADES

You should also check sections **3.2 and 5.4 of the Assessment Policy and Procedures** document.

Lecturers-in-Charge are responsible for collating and recording the results for all assessment tasks and recommending a final result grade or interim result for each student in a unit. Each student's aggregate marks for a unit are allocated a grade according to the descriptors for each grade as listed in Table 2 [*in section 5.4 of the Assessment Policy and Procedures*].

Final Result Grade	Notation	Descriptor
High Distinction	HD	Clear attainment of all learning outcomes, with complete and comprehensive understanding of the unit content, development of relevant skills and intellectual initiative to an extremely high level.
Distinction	DI	Substantial attainment of most learning outcomes, with a high level of understanding of the unit content and development of relevant analytical and interpretative skills to a high level.
Credit	CR	Sound attainment of some major learning outcomes, with good understanding of unit content and development of relevant skills.
Pass	PA	Satisfactory attainment of a range of learning outcomes, with basic understanding of unit content and development of relevant skills.
Fail	NN	Little or no attainment of learning outcomes, with limited understanding of course content or skill development.

Extract from *Assessment Policy* – Table 2

Assessment tasks in all units will be developed so that, typically, the following proportions of students will achieve the stated final grades:

Final Result Grade	Percentage
Distinction (DI) or better	20% or better
Credit (CR)	30%
Fail (NN) Interim Fail (NF) Fail Supplementary (NX) Fail in an ungraded unit (NN) Pass Conceded (PC)	No more than 10%

Where the final grades significantly deviate from these proportions, the Lecturer-in-Charge will provide to the School Assessment Review Committee relevant evidence to substantiate the decision. Assessment tasks in a unit will be moderated by an independent moderator (external to the unit) prior to implementation with students (refer: *Principles for moderation of assessment*)

Final Result Grade	Notation	Justification of point of view
High Distinction	HD	Effectively supports their point of view with well-reasoned, integrated arguments using appropriate evidence from quality literature sources. Also considers and counters other views
Distinction	DI	Clearly presents and justifies own view using appropriate evidence from quality literature sources while qualifying or integrating contrary views
Credit	CR	Presents and justifies own position using evidence from literature but ignoring alternative evidence
Pass	PA	Offers little appropriate support to justify their own position
Fail	NN	Fails to present and justify own opinion through reference to literature

There are several points to be drawn from this:

- ▶ At ACU grades are awarded on the basis of the grade descriptors included in the **Assessment Policy and Procedures** document and shown in Table 2. The marks awarded are only a guide to the grade that a student may obtain. The marking criteria should reflect these descriptors for the different criteria. For example, if you had a first year essay and had 'justification of your own point of view' as a criterion, you might have the following in your marking criteria. (In a third year essay you might expect something at a higher level to obtain an HD.)

- ▶ As the grade descriptors are based upon student attainment of learning outcomes, it can be seen that students are awarded grades based solely upon their level of achievement of the learning outcomes for the unit and the graduate attributes of those learning outcomes.
- ▶ Assessment tasks are to be prepared with the aim that a typical group of students will perform at the prescribed level. Lecturers-in-Charge or Course Implementation Committees must implement this prescription by preparing assessments that are able to differentiate between student performance and measure the

students' attainment of the learning outcomes. The regulation does not mandate the grades but the standards that should be applied. Units will, and should, vary from these proportions as (clearly) groups will differ in their ability level. The regulation also requires that those units that differ significantly be subject to some external oversight or moderation and (very) occasional adjustment in keeping with the Grade Descriptors.

## 4.7 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT GRADING

The following questions arose in various LTC assessment workshops. It is hoped that these questions and answers will assist staff in interpreting the *Academic Regulations* on allocating final result grades and the *Assessment Policy and Procedures*.

Question	Answer
1. Do the grades I allocate have to be exactly the same as the 'typical' distribution in the Regulation?	No, small variations around these targets are not only permitted but are expected. It is important to remember that the descriptors for the grades given in Table 2 need to be taken into account when preparing assessment tasks. Having an assessment task where all the students are able to achieve a DI or HD would not be appropriate and marking criteria need to be set up so that students are aware as to how they can achieve an HD or why they have been given an NN. How students perform against those grade descriptors may vary from year to year and so some variation in the proportions of grades awarded is expected.
2. Does the Regulation mean that 10 percent of students have to fail a unit?	No, the Regulation allows a Lecturer-in-Charge to pass all the students in a unit if they have all satisfactorily achieved the stated outcomes of the unit. It does mean, however, that if significantly more than 10 percent of the group fail, then questions need to be asked about the learning and teaching strategies for that unit, including assessment.
3. Does the 'no more than 10 percent' in the typical proportion of students' final grades include both PCs (Pass Conceded) and NNs (Fail)?	Yes.
4. Should I include the students with a WN (Withdrawn Fail) Grading Code with the NNs and PCs when reviewing the percentage of fail grades?	No. However, when reporting the distribution of grades for an individual unit, it is appropriate to highlight the number of students who have failed the unit as a result of not submitting or not attempting assessment, that is, they have abandoned the unit, but have not formally withdrawn. Including these students in your calculation of the number of Fails and PCs in a unit would give a skewed perception of the percentage of students who failed.
5. If the standard of students' work is expected to improve over the years of their course, why is this not reflected in the policy with different proportions of results expected for each year level?	<p>The standards of students' learning outcomes are indeed expected to improve over the duration of a course. This is why units are coded according to whether they are first, second third or fourth year or postgraduate, and the learning outcomes for units are set at a higher level for each year, that is, expectations are raised higher each year and the level of work that received a Pass in first year would not likely be accepted as a Pass for the third year of a course. The grading descriptors refer to students' achievement of learning outcomes, so you would expect a similar variation in the level of students' performance in all years of their degree.</p> <p>You may want to revisit Bloom's Taxonomy (for example, at the web-site: <a href="http://www.officeport.com/edu/blooms.htm">http://www.officeport.com/edu/blooms.htm</a>) and see how the objectives or outcomes for the units you are teaching reflect increasing levels of expectation of the students' learning. The Solo Taxonomy may also be helpful: see: Biggs, J.B., and Collis, K.F. (1982). <i>Evaluating the Quality of Learning – the SOLO Taxonomy</i>. New York: Academic Press. xii + 245 pp.</p>



## 4.7 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT GRADING (CONTINUED...)

Question	Answer
<p>6. Shouldn't there be allowances for greater variations for small classes and postgraduate students?</p>	<p>There are two parts to this answer now. Firstly, it should be noted that the regulation has been changed so that it now only applies to undergraduate units.</p> <p>Secondly, all units are treated equally as far as significant variation is concerned. In statistics it is true that the confidence interval will be wider for smaller units, but not by as much as is commonly thought. But it is most important to remember that grades are awarded based on the grade descriptors: they are not awarded based upon the proportions given in the <i>Assessment Policy</i>.</p>
<p>7. What kind of evidence can a Lecturer-in-Charge present to an Assessment Review Committee to support a recommendation for a significant variation in distribution of Final Result Grades from the guide in Academic Regulation 6.3.2?</p>	<p>You would need to make the argument based on efficacy of your assessment practices and objective data on the characteristics of the student cohort. Some examples of evidence are outlined below.</p> <p><b>Assessment Practices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of the assessment tasks and marking criteria prior to implementation</li> <li>• Peer review in examination preparation, preparation of a clear marking guide for examinations, item analysis from past use of examination questions</li> <li>• Moderation processes for each assessment task during the semester</li> <li>• Item analysis of current examination questions after marking</li> <li>• Internal and external moderation of marking</li> <li>• Benchmarking assessment results according to industry professional requirements.</li> </ul> <p>Objective data on characteristics of the student cohort Students with high levels of motivation and background knowledge and experience as tertiary learners and in the content area, for example, graduate entry, elective units</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the data does not relate to a specific content area, then one would expect high performance across a number of common units, and not in one unit alone.</li> </ul> <p>Even in such circumstances, care needs to be taken in setting equitable assessment tasks with clearly differentiated criteria and standards. It would not be acceptable for a Lecturer-in-Charge to simply argue that 'all of the students worked very hard and deserve high marks'. The grades awarded must be a reflection of how well each student performed relative to the stated unit outcomes. That performance will not necessarily reflect the amount of time or effort a particular student put into the unit.</p> <p>However, the converse is not automatically accepted, that is, a cohort of students without background knowledge is not expected to perform at less than the typical distribution. The characteristics of the cohort are expected to be taken into account when planning learning and teaching strategies for a particular unit, so that students' learning outcomes reflect the University's standards, for example, strategies to support transition for first year students or students from diverse cultural backgrounds.</p>
<p>8. If the distribution of grades in a unit varies from the guidelines, do grades have to be scaled or adjusted to fit the guide?</p>	<p>The simple answer is that student marks should never be scaled. An atypical distribution of grades does not automatically mean that the results must be adjusted to fit the distribution as listed in the guide. The emphasis at ACU is on the grade descriptors. A lecturer-in-charge may be asked to justify an atypical distribution and some adjustments may be necessary. But any adjustments must be made on the basis that a given student does, or does not, meet the requirements for the grade.</p> <p>Adjustments to final grades may be required where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An examination question was poorly worded and misinterpreted by many students;</li> <li>• There are inconsistencies between assessors (usually addressed by moderation).</li> </ul> <p>Note that in each example given, the problem is likely to be that the assessment tasks have been set or marked at the wrong standard. Adjustments must be made based on the standard of student achievement.</p>
<p>9. A student wants to appeal a grade or mark I have awarded, what do I do?</p>	<p>If a student wishes to proceed formally, their first step would be to seek a clarification of their mark/grade from the Lecturer-in-Charge. If not satisfied they may request a review of their mark/grade. If they are still not satisfied they may appeal.</p> <p>You should consult the <b>Student Appeals Policy</b> for full details (<a href="http://www.acu.edu.au/policy/226818">http://www.acu.edu.au/policy/226818</a>).</p>

# 5

## MODERATION OF ASSESSMENT

You should also check *ACU's Principles for Moderation of Assessment*, particularly for details relating to the frequency at which moderation should be undertaken.

The purpose of moderation of assessment is to foster the three key objectives for quality in student assessment in higher education to

1. Guide and encourage effective approaches to learning.
2. Validly and reliably measure achievement of expected learning outcomes, in particular the higher-order learning that characterises higher education.

3. Define and protect academic standards.

These principles provide the basis for pre- and post-assessment moderation for the purposes of enhancing:

- ▶ Comparability of assessment.
- ▶ Quality of assessment.
- ▶ Adherence to academic standards thus leading to improved outcomes.

Moderation of assessment is a quality review and assurance process by which the University seeks to ensure that its assessment procedures and practices are valid and reliable and are aligned with its stated standards, principles and ethos,



as well as meeting all requirements for professional association standards and discipline standards. Moderation may involve pre-assessment and post-assessment procedures.

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING MODERATION

- ▶ Assessment is a key part of ongoing unit development. All members of the teaching team (including sessional staff) should be provided with the opportunity to be involved in developing the unit.
- ▶ Moderation of assessment by self-review, School processes and internal or external moderators is integral to quality assessment practices each time a unit is offered.
- ▶ Moderation of assessment by an independent moderator/s at regular intervals provides opportunities for independent feedback.
- ▶ Moderation will be most effective when conducted in a spirit of professional learning and quality improvement.
- ▶ Moderators should have appropriate knowledge of assessment practices, policies and procedures and be systematically prepared for the role.

# 6

## SPECIAL CONSIDERATION

Refer to the *Staff Guidelines on Special Consideration* and section **3.7 of the Assessment Policy and Procedures** document.

Other policies that may apply are the *Policy on Elite Athlete Support* and the *Student Defence Reserves and Emergency Services Support Policy*.



## EDUCATION INCLUSION PLANS

In instances where a student has a disability, it will often be the case that one or more of the possible outcomes listed under section 3.7, in particular see Table 1 in that section, will already have been recommended in the student's *Education Inclusion Plan (EIP)*.

In relation to EIPs, this means in practice that, in circumstances where

specific alternative assessments/adjustments are needed, these may be negotiated in consultation with the Lecturer-in-Charge and/or lecturer for the course when the EIP was developed. These are then presented as a recommendation in the EIP, and are signed off by the Head of School. In the case of generic adjustments,

such as extensions for assignments are required, these will be approved by the Head of School in the first instance. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that EIPs are updated to reflect any change in his/her circumstances.

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