

GUIDANCE ON PROVIDING FEEDBACK TO LARGE CLASSES

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the place of useful learning

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This resource presents some ideas for providing useful feedback to large classes of students. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list. A university website on sharing effective practice in learning and teaching, including in the area of assessment and feedback, is under development (expected 2014-15). This website will provide a platform for students and staff to share effective and innovative practices.

Questions/comments related to any of the practices detailed here and/or ideas staff wish to share can be sent to Education Enhancement at educationenhancement@strath.ac.uk.

What is the definition of a large class size?

Opinions will vary between disciplines as to the number of students that constitute a large class. The following approaches to assessment and feedback may facilitate the provision of timely, constructive, and supportive feedback to students.

1. Distribute the marking load across a team of markers

Where markers (or potential markers) are available with the requisite knowledge to mark an assessment, the burden on a single or small team of markers can be reduced by distributing the assessment across multiple markers, including trained postgraduate students.

Example from Psychology

Class sizes in first year psychology exceed 500 students. Individual written feedback is provided to students on classwork (e.g. essays) and is always returned within 3 weeks of the assessment submission. To achieve this feedback turnaround time, around 16 postgraduate markers are employed to each mark and give feedback on around 30 students' assessments. Markers are provided with training, marking notes, assessment criteria, a feedback pro-forma, and generic comment banks (see section 1.2 below). Markers are given 2 weeks to complete and return marking, so that the module leader has 1 week to moderate marking, and if necessary, request changes from markers. To ensure consistency in grading and feedback between markers, module leaders sample each marker's marking, and compare the average mark and range of marks for each marker and the class as a whole.

2. Use generic comments for electronic marking

To speed up the feedback process when marking electronically, compose a bank of generic comments for use by all markers that relate to comments that are made most frequently. These comments can then be referred to in, or copied and pasted into, students' work. As well as saving time, this approach also improves the consistency of feedback between markers.

Example from Psychology

Lists of generic comments are provided to all markers when marking undergraduate coursework. The comments reflect common strengths and weaknesses in students' work. Students submit their work in Word format via Myplace and markers use the 'insert comment' tool in Word to provide in-text feedback. Generic comments are provided to markers in Word format.

For example, the following generic comment relates to the overuse of secondary sources in an essay or report:

There is too much reliance here on secondary sources (e.g. Smith (2005 cited in ...). As far as possible, aim to locate primary sources, whether these are journal articles or book chapters, and read these rather than reading someone else's summary. Web of Science, accessed via the University Library's webpages, is a useful database for locating relevant primary sources.

Example from Physical Activity for Health

Staff in Physical Activity for Health use GradeMark within Turnitin to mark and give individual written feedback on students' work. GradeMark allows markers to share generic comments, which they can then 'drag and drop' into students' work. Rubrics (see 1.3) can also be created in GradeMark, and feedback can also be provided in auditory format.

Relevant resources

See this link to learn more about GradeMark:
http://turnitin.com/en_us/features/grademark.

3. Use a rubric to show students their levels of attainment against the assessment criteria

Rubrics are used to grade students' work against a set of relevant assessment criteria. Typically, rubrics are presented in a matrix format, where rows represent separately each assessment criterion (e.g. use of evidence), and columns, performance standards or levels of attainment (e.g. very good, mark in the 2.1 range). The cells within the matrix contain a qualitative descriptor that characterise the standard of performance for each assessment criterion. Rubrics can be an efficient way for staff to communicate to students the extent to which they have attained each assessment criterion.

Example from the Business School's Management Development Programme

Staff in the Business School's Management Development Programme (MDP) has been providing feedback to students on presentations using rubrics set up in Myplace. To provide timely feedback, staff use tablet devices to access the Myplace rubrics during the presentations, so that students can access their feedback at the end of the presentation session.

Relevant resources

See this link for a review paper on the use of rubrics in higher education: <http://class.web.nthu.edu.tw/ezfiles/669/1669/img/1381/6.Areviewofrubricuseinhighereducation.pdf>

See the slide presentation by Mrs Fiona Conway (previously the Business School, now OSDU) from on using rubrics within Myplace for feeding back on presentations in the MDP class: <http://classes.myplace.strath.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=19580>

4. Provide whole class feedback

Providing generic or whole class feedback via email or face-to-face class can be an efficient way to communicate the general strengths and weaknesses of students' work in relation to the assessment criteria. This type of feedback is particularly useful when it characterises the differences between students' work at different grades e.g. the differences between an assessment being awarded 65% and one that is awarded 70%. Students should be asked to consider how the general feedback applies to their own work.

Example from Psychology

Whole class feedback on examinations is emailed to students following the January and May examination diets. For each essay/short answer type examination, the feedback typically notes the general observations of marker(s) and emphasises both strengths and common misconceptions or weaknesses. Whole class written/verbal feedback is also provided on classwork, in addition to individual feedback, and is accompanied by norm-referenced feedback (e.g. the distribution of the marks awarded in the class, the average mark etc) that lets students know how they are performing relative to their peers.

5. Use online class tests or examinations

Computer-based class tests or examinations can be run within Myplace using the 'Quiz' tool. The quiz tool can be used for invigilated summative assessment, or simply for non-summative assessment to allow students to self-assess. The tool offers a range of question types including multiple choice questions, calculated answers, numerical or text-based answers, as well as various options in the set-up of the test or examination. For some question types, marking and feedback can be automated. An advantage of using the quiz tool is that it automatically provides quantitative analyses of students' performance on each question; information which can then be used to enhance teaching.

Example from Chemical and Process Engineering

Staff in Chemical and Process Engineering has been using the Myplace quiz tool for both summative and non-summative assessments. Questions often include the use of images and equations, and calculation based questions can randomly allocate students to different data sets. The automatic grading of some question types means students receive their grades quickly (in some cases immediately after completion of the quiz). For non-summative quizzes, feedback is also provided instantaneously, and for summative quizzes, feedback is provided during class time.

Relevant resources

The following weblink details the options for running class tests or examinations in Myplace http://wiki.lte.strath.ac.uk/display/MS/*Staff*+Quiz+Activity.

See the slide presentation by Dr Ashleigh Fletcher from Chemical and Process Engineering on using online quizzes: <http://classes.myplace.strath.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=19580>

6. Use of the Personal response system (PRS) or 'clickers'

Personal response systems can be used in class to assess students' understanding of the material. Students' responses to questions asked by the lecturer provide an opportunity not only for students to assess their understanding, but allow the lecturer to modify their teaching based on students' responses. When used effectively, in-class personal response systems can enhance student learning and engagement.

Example from Strathclyde Institute of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences

All students in SIPBS are provided with a coded PRS handset at the start of their studies. The use of the handsets results in more dynamic and interactive lectures, with the lecturer tailoring their teaching according to students' responses. Students' responses are recorded and stored on the VLE (Spider), and are then used as a basis for discussion between

Relevant resources

Review paper on the use of clickers: Caldwell JE. (2007). Clickers in the Large Classroom: Current Research and Best-Practice Tips. *Cell Biol Educ.*, 6(1):9–20. doi: 10.1187/cbe.06-12-0205. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1187/cbe.06-12-0205>.

See the slide presentation by Dr Eddie Rowan from SIPBS on using PRS in lectures: <http://classes.myplace.strath.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=19580>

7. Use peer review to involve students in giving feedback

Providing students with the opportunity to use assessment criteria to evaluate and give feedback on each other's work helps students to develop their understanding of the assessment criteria, and to evaluate their own work in light of the criteria. It also provides students with another source of feedback. Peer review can be easily implemented in Myplace using the 'workshop' tool.

Example from Psychology

Students in a third year Research Methods class submit the Method section of their practical report to Myplace for peer review, 6 weeks before the submission of the summatively assessed report. Students are provided with the assessment criteria and instructions on how to give constructive and helpful feedback. Myplace randomly, and anonymously, allocates the assessments for review so that each student gives feedback to, and receives feedback from, 3 of their peers. Students can then use this feedback to improve this part of their report before the assessment deadline. Once the peer review activity is set up, the involvement of staff is minimal.

Example from Engineering

Students in a first year Engineering class at Strathclyde participated in peer review. Students' perceptions of the experience are documented in this paper by David Nicol, Avril Thomson, & Caroline Breslin:

http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02602938.2013.795518#.U_xNTcVdXT0

Relevant resources

See the slide presentation by Mr Howard Ramsay from Education Enhancement on using peer review in one of the University MOOC classes:

<http://classes.myplace.strath.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=19580>

See advice from David Boud on 'Guidelines for giving and receiving feedback':

<http://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/Giving-and-Receiving-Feedback.pdf>

Other useful references and online resources

Other online resources:

JISC has a range of resources on the use of technology in assessment and feedback:

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/improving-student-assessment>

The Higher Education Academy has a range of resources on assessment and feedback:

<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/workstreams-research/themes/assessment-and-feedback>

[The University of Technology, Sydney hosts the 'Assessment Futures' website:](http://www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/teaching-and-learning/assessment-futures/overview)

<http://www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/teaching-and-learning/assessment-futures/overview>