A Way Forward

A question we routinely receive regarding working with faculty on assignment design is how to get started. What if assignments have never been shared and faculty are reluctant to do so? What if there isn’t safe space to talk about assignments? What if we can’t start conversations with assignments and need another way in? Fortunately, Karen Ford from the University of Sheffield addresses these issues by providing a means to initiate conversations with faculty about assessment ranging from the value and purpose of learning outcomes, assessments, and rubrics to issues of assignment design. In her interactive presentation, “Let’s Face It”, Karen outlines a faculty development workshop that is backward designed to create a space to openly discuss issues of teaching, learning, and assignment design. The collaborative workshop allows faculty to make connections between assessment practices in specific courses with the learning outcomes of a program and institution. The approach raises faculty assessment literacy by engaging them in assessing an assignment as a group, working their way through uncovering the value of learning outcomes, assignment prompts, and rubrics. The work is trans-disciplinary in that it takes an issue-based approach to problem solving as opposed to a disciplinary lens. Karen (2016) states in a paper accompanying a presentation given at the Assessment in Higher Education Seminar on the activity,

I suspect we are all so busy getting on with the business of assessment, that taking the time to scrutinize what we collectively know about assessment and how it is applied in practice beyond our sphere is perhaps something we feel unable to justify. After all, assessment is taking place and students are graduating, so an assumption is easily made that all those involved in the assessment process are cognizant of underlying principles and processes and explicitly operating in light of them. I am not convinced this assumption is a sound one.

Karen designed the faculty-led activity to use a staged approach, immersing participants into the grading an assignment with intentional issues built into its design, providing a safe space by using an example already developed. She writes of the experience working with faculty from different universities, colleges, and disciplines that the conversations were candid, frank, practice-based, and created space for dialogue. We are delighted to share her resource as part of the assignment toolkit and hope you find it as useful as the faculty who have participated in the activities.

Natasha Jankowski
Director, NILOA

You can download the PowerPoint presentation to edit and modify to fit your context here.
Let’s ‘Face it’: Striving for Fair, accurate and transparent assessment

Dr Karen Ford: Professional Development Team for Learning & Teaching

Use your own title as appropriate but please acknowledge where the activity comes from at some point in the proceedings and invite feedback to pass back to Karen at k.ford@sheffield.ac.uk – thanks.
Here are the learning outcomes (this is the one related to the ‘Face it’ activity – see the PDF of entire three hour workshop for wider context)

We will be talking about learning outcomes in relation to assessment later more today.
Overview

• Assessment:
  • Grading student work
  • Using assessment criteria and rubrics
  • Moderation and external examiners
Assessment: Key concepts

Validity: The assessor is measuring what the assessment is intended to measure

Reliability: Consistent marking - as an individual and among markers

Briefly outline these and say we will focus on validity first
Framework for learning design

**Intended** Learning outcome – what the learners are expected to achieve – intended because you can never be sure that they will achieve them.

Assessment tasks – how the outcomes are measured

Teaching & learning activities - to enable learners to achieve outcomes – might look good on paper but they need to be appropriate for the learners to be considered aligned

Called Constructive Alignment

Don’t linger – simple example coming on next slide

Example

Learning outcome
- Students will be able to identify different forms of communication

Teaching and learning activities
- A lecture on forms of communication

Assessment task
- Multiple choice exam questions which require identification of forms

Suggest adding your own example to suit your audience
Ask participants to discuss with the people around them for 2-3 minutes
In the UK we talk about programme and module level – use whatever is right for your context!
Who decides?
When?
These are typical answers for the UK
Edit to suit your context.

Present your answers and see if they have anything to add.

Then move on.
In my experience there is likely to be a wide range of knowledge amongst participants about assessment criteria and rubrics.

The first activity is designed to help us consider why we use assessment criteria and rubrics, ILOs and briefs (and other supporting information) and what happens when we don’t.

Ask participants who are knowledgeable about assessment to please just go with it, so others get the benefit of working through the process.

Ask all while grading to write down any issues or observations to feed into later discussion.
The Assignment

Create an illustration for a greeting card using the theme “Emotions”. The illustration should use a range of colors and the design should be flexible to enable adaptation to a range of card formats.

Ask participants to imagine they are an instructor of design.
This the design assignment their students were given
Tell them to get ready to grade the illustration
Three possible grades: Merit, Pass or Fail
They will be given 2 minutes to decide on their own. While marking write down any issues, or observations to feed into later discussion.
Read the brief out aloud:
“Create an illustration for a greeting card using the theme “Emotions”. The illustration should use a range of colors and the design should be flexible to enable adaptation to a range of card formats.”

Give 1-2 mins to make a decision then:

If you have a small group (less than 40):
Give the blank white cards and get them to record their grade privately without discussion and turn the card face down in front of them.

When you give the signal they reveal the grade awarded to each other.

They take a tally for each grade on the table and report back – summarise in tabular form on whiteboard if possible. If you do this for each marking you can see how things vary as the criteria becomes more specific.

If in larger group:
Take a show of hands for each grade:

Who thinks Pass, Merit, Fail? By show of hands
Grading outcome

- Did we all agree on the grade to be awarded?
- Why, why not?
- If we all agree, have we graded accurately?
- Ask yourself how would we know? (think about evidence)

Did we all agree on a Merit, pass or fail

Why/why not

And even if we did – does this mean we graded accurately?

No- because we do not know how we each came to the judgement we made

What would we need to help us grade?
Ask them to think about the last question then move to the next slide which lists the evidence for achieving learning outcomes
The learning outcomes for this were that students’ illustrations would demonstrate

Create a greeting card illustration on the theme of Emotions that:
Communicates specific emotions clearly
Uses an appropriate range of emotions
Uses a range of colors
Uses space in a flexible way to enable adaptation to alternative card formats

Grade again using these
Give a few mins to make a decision then do as before (below):

If you have a small group:
Give out blank white cards and get them to record their grade privately without discussion and turn the card face down in front of them.

When you give the signal they reveal the grade awarded to each other.

They take a tally for each grade on the table and report back – summarise in tabular form on whiteboard if poss. If you do this for each marking you can see how things vary as the criteria becomes more specific.

If larger group:
Take a show of hands for each grade:

Who thinks Pass, Merit, Fail?
Did we all agree on a Merit, pass or fail this time

Ask if anyone changed their minds from last time

Why/why not

And even if we did – does this mean we graded accurately?

No - because we still do not know how exactly we each came to the judgement we made
We only know what evidence of achievement to look for what else do we need to know?
– elicit answer from whole group (level of achievement)
Or just move to next slide.
We need the level – see next slide

Can ask how might we view levels? How do they engage with that? (Most likely answer will be rubrics)
Distribute the rubric (assessment criteria) handout 1 per person.

Elicit all the names for this item in your context e.g. matrix, rubric etc. etc.

Tell them they will be given longer to assess this time and that they need to tick the 'box' for each aspect to show their decisions for each.

Remind them to write down any issues or observations for the discussion that’s coming up.

If anyone asks about weighting say its equally weighted – if not say nothing about this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Merit</th>
<th>Pass</th>
<th>Fail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of emotions</td>
<td>Emotions are clearly identifiable with viewers likely to agree on all of the emotions represented, ambiguity is very unlikely.</td>
<td>Emotions are clearly identifiable with viewers likely to agree on some of the emotions represented, but a level of ambiguity is evident.</td>
<td>Emotions are not clearly identifiable with viewers likely to disagree on any of the emotions represented, a high level of ambiguity is evident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of emotions</td>
<td>More than four different emotions are evident (the artist has attempted to represent more than three).</td>
<td>Three different emotions are evident (the artist has attempted to represent three).</td>
<td>Less than three different emotions are evident (the artist has not attempted to represent more than two).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of colour</td>
<td>More than four colours have been used (not including the background).</td>
<td>Three or four colours have been used (not including the background).</td>
<td>Less than two colours have been used (not including the background).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of space</td>
<td>The illustration fits within the chosen format (rectangle or square or circle) and could fit in either of the other formats with little or no work required.</td>
<td>The illustration fits within the chosen format (rectangle or square or circle) but some work would be required to adapt the illustration to fit in either of the other formats.</td>
<td>The illustration fits poorly within the chosen format (rectangle or square or circle) and a significant amount of work would be required to adapt the illustration to fit in either of the other formats.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After giving them longer (you judge how long) to mark their responses, ask them to calculate/determine the overall grade to be awarded. Someone should ask about weighting if it hasn't already come up.

**Observe the number of Merit, Pass and Fail as before.**
**Ask if anyone changed their minds**

All going as planned THERE SHOULD BE NO FAILS!
We might not still all agree – i.e. not consistent among markers – this is reliability which we will talk about next.

Ask them to discuss with peers:
The grade you awarded and why – look for areas of agreement and disagreement
What issues did you discover from discussion and as you were assessing?
After the discussion ask groups or areas of the room for feedback on their findings, in particular problems and how they could be addressed.
Things to note if they don’t come out of feedback (below are the key ones only – there are many more).

The rubric forces you to ‘pass’ even though the drawing is quite poor and unlikely to be acceptable greeting card material(!)
Point out no learning outcomes related to purpose (a card for purchase) or atheistic qualities and therefore no assessment for this either
We don’t know the weighting or if any aspect of the card has to ‘pass’ for the overall grade to be a pass
How to measure ambiguity – you are marking alone so how can judgements be made about agreement!

Use of terms and their meaning in this case is ‘appropriate use of color’ really just about the number used – format could be specified in sizes or templates?

Exemplars could be used to ‘standardise’ / calibrate reviewers before marking to strive for consistency.

The value of giving the rubric to students and supporting them to develop their assessment literacy (e.g. through working with exemplars)

**Finally ask how these issues are dealt with in their own experiences** – this usually happens without having to prompt.
Valid Use of Rubrics

• Discuss any concerns about the rubric to the appropriate person (this can help for the development of the rubric and criteria)

• However, your opinion of the rubric is irrelevant from a marking point of view

• To ‘ensure’ valid marking you must use the rubric

Suggestions for what to do if you experience problems with the “…pointing out the injustice to students” of not applying the rubric consistently when you mark their work.

Also, the problems that arise by of comparing pieces of work with each other instead of using the rubric against each one.
Checklist for reviewers:

- What is the assessment task?
- What teaching and learning activities have led to the assessment task?
- What learning outcomes are being assessed?
- What are the assessment criteria & rubric - evidence for achievement and levels
Recapping this far – edit to suit your context

Now time for reliability

Standardisation of reviewers
Inter reliability – between reviewers
Intra reliability – by same reviewer

Assessment task reliability (one year to the next and if there is more than one paper).
Inter reliability – between papers
Intra reliability – between questions
With your neighbours….

…..brainstorm the factors that can affect reliability in assessing student work.

…..identify what can be done to improve reliability?

2-3 mins with neighbours then be ready to report your ideas back to the group

Take answers to factors that can affect reliability expected responses – subjectivity, bias, ‘the pile’, time constraints etc

Move to next slide for answer to what can be done…
Processes

Standardisation
- To the rubric for individual reviewer consistency (before using the rubric)
- Ask how your department does this (e.g. samples of work)

Moderation
- Consistency among reviewers

Change the terminology to suit your context

These are the processes designed to ensure reliability …well at least strive for it…

What happens in your department, school, institution?
Add to your checklist…

• What is the assessment task?
• What teaching and learning activities have led to the assessment task?
• What learning outcomes are being assessed?
• What are the assessment criteria and rubric-evidence for achievement and levels?
• Others?

Edit to suit your context

Practice will vary – check in advance do not wait until you have a pile of assignments to assess, ask at the beginning of the course.
Learning outcome revisited

Can you:
- Discuss how to assess student work accurately and fairly?

Can they do these now?
Reference