INFORMATION ABOUT GRADING FOR INSTRUCTORS

Terminology used in this document:
Assessment – any mechanism instituted in a course to provide feedback and measure student learning divided into two sub-categories: formative and summative.

Formative assessment – is *assessment for learning* that is primarily used to inform a student through feedback by verbal, written, or other means, about their learning and progression towards the requirements to successfully complete the course. Typically, formative assessment is not assigned a grade, or if it is, it has a low value.

Forms of formative assessment:

a. *Classroom or embedded assessment* – incorporated into instructional activities, such as using personal response systems, such as iClickers, or classroom assessment techniques. Within a lesson plan for a class, pre-assessment and post-assessment are used. Pre-assessment is a diagnostic used at the beginning of class to determine what students know about concepts for that lesson. Post-assessment determines if students achieved the intended learning outcomes set for that lesson.
b. *Peer-assessment* – students assess other students' work with no grade. There is much research about peer-assessment, and most agree on two principles: (a) peer-assessment should not be assigned grades, and (b) when used as formative assessment, peer-assessment is very effective and contributes to students' ability to self-assess.
c. *Self-assessment* – students are required to assess their own work with respect to certain standards, such as a rubric provided by the instructor. This activity provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their own work to see how they can improve.

Summative assessment – is *assessment of learning* that is graded. Many forms of summative assessment exist, but increasingly *authentic assessment* methods are being used, because they more accurately represent how student learning will be reflected in practice (Wiggins, 1998). For example, according to Wiggins (1998), authentic assessment has the student "do" the subject by simulating real-world contexts so that students can actually apply the subject matter.

What are common approaches to assessment?
There are three main approaches to assessment:
1. Analytically (criterion-based assessment);
2. Holistically (impressionistic); and
3. Normative-based assessment.

Assessing analytically, developed over the past 50 years in higher education, requires a certain amount of pre-set criteria that is used to evaluate students' work (Sadler, 2009). The pre-set criteria can be determined by the instructor or together with students. Alternatively, in holistic or global grading, the instructor looks at the work as a whole and determines what grade should be assigned (Sadler, 2009). Both approaches have been challenged for their scorer reliability (consistency of grades between markers), but there may be other issues, such as the skills of the markers and if each approach can completely represent the whole assignment (Sadler, 2009). Normative-based assessment utilizes comparison to separate students, typically called 'grading on the curve' or 'bell curve', or norm-

Prepared by Cynthia Korpan, PhD, Director of Teaching Excellence, Division of Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation, University of Victoria, 2020

reference measurement (Aviles, 2001). At the University of Victoria, the use normative-based assessment is strictly prohibited. The UVic calendar states:

> A primary purpose of evaluation and grading is to further effective teaching and learning. Any practices which assign a predetermined percentage of students a specific grade, that is, a certain percentage get A, another percentage get B and so on, without regard to individual achievement are prohibited.

Despite issues with all three approaches, an **analytical assessment approach, criterion-based,** is currently considered the best approach to use due to its capacity to be more objective, to reduce favouritism, to increase transparency, to provide more targeted and relevant feedback, and to improve accountability (Sadler, 2009). However, Sadler (2009) points out that using analytic assessment can result in anomalies that render the pre-set criteria insufficient for assessing the work. When this occurs, the instructor has to decide whether to adjust the assessment and let students know, or not. But one of the foundations of analytic assessment is that it is transparent, whereas in holistic grading, the why and how grades were assigned can be hidden. Therefore, Sadler (2009) argues for a combined approach, which he terms 'developing expertise' that informs students of the criteria but also allows for informed academic judgment about the quality of the work. Jackel, Pearce, Radloff and Edwards (2017) call informed judgment by students 'assessment literacy' because it takes student knowledge about assessment beyond rubrics to really understand how assessment works, therefore making assessment more transparent.

What are the common problems with assessment design?

The following are some of the common issues associated with assessment:

- inappropriate methods of assessment selected (timing, type or lack of alignment with learning outcomes) (Pusateri, 2009)
- minimal assessment measures used (Pusateri, 2009)
- the fact that students do not have a chance to act on feedback (Pusateri, 2009)
- omission of formative assessment to support summative assessment (Pusateri, 2009)
- no evaluation of assessment methods used (Pusateri, 2009)
- instructors' use of assessment as a reward system by inflating grades (for those who put in more effort than others or who showed marked improvement over the course) rather than assessing the quality of the task assigned (Sadler, 2009)

Best Practices

General

- Include definitions, types and examples of all forms of assessment in the syllabus: pre-assessment, classroom, formative, post-assessment, and summative.
- Show examples of alignment between all assessment forms, and alignment between intended learning outcomes, instructional strategies, and assessment.

Summative

- Use Track Changes when assessing papers and only correct an error once. You can highlight same error if it occurs again and direct the student to the previous comment (Smith & Palenque, 2015).
- Create a comment bank arranged by topics, such as grammar, content, organization, so that you can quickly access when assessing (Smith & Palenque, 2015).

- Resist using red pen. Red signifies 'danger' 'stop' 'wrong'. If assessing on paper or computer, use blue or green ink for comments (Smith & Palenque, 2015).
- Avoid giving too much feedback. Receiving back a paper or assignment riddled with comments is overwhelming for students and detrimental to his or her learning. Instead, focus only on the most important points that the student needs to take into consideration to make his or her paper better (Smith & Palenque, 2015).
- Do not assess on the curve. Let students know that they are not in competition with the rest of the class and that they can achieve a good grade by doing the work required. If a large number of students perform poorly on certain questions in an exam, then give students another opportunity to resubmit those questions for credit (Schinske & Tanner, 2014).
- Do not repeat feedback, if students don't apply feedback provided on a draft in the final paper or assignment. Simply point the student to the comments provided for the draft (Smith & Palenque, 2015).

Formative

- Have students submit a draft so that you can provide feedback that the student can apply. Think strategically, though. If the student needs to make major revisions due to issues regarding the topic, then don't provide comments on grammar and organization since the paper will change significantly (Smith & Palenque, 2015).
- Ask students, before handing in a final paper or assignment, to write to you, the instructor, a letter on the back that begins with Dear Dr. (Name Here), and then describes the main point in their paper and how they think they did on it (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011). When this method is used, most students self-declare if they did well or not and why. This provides an opportunity for students to enter into a conversation with you about their work and to share responsibility in assigning the grade.
- Ensure that your comments make sense and are understandable by the student. Avoid making vague statements or posing questions that the student may not be able to interpret what you mean. Remember that the purpose of feedback is to help students learn (Smith & Palenque, 2015).
- Give students rubrics (see Appendix 4) when the assignments are given so that it is clear how they are going to be evaluated (Smith & Palenque, 2015).
- Use Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) so that you can observe learning taking place in your classroom and notice when learning is not taking place (Angelo & Cross, 1993).
- Develop student expertise, called 'assessment literacy,' so that students really understand how assessment works (Jackel, Pearce, Radloff, & Edwards, 2017). Sadler's (2009) model is as follows:
    1. Expose students to a variety of works within the genre in which they will be working, which can include previous students' work.
    2. Students need to see a spectrum of poor to excellent quality work.
    3. Students need to see responses from an instructor to assignments.

  The learning process is to have students develop criteria and expand on it as they become more adept at judging the work. Especially important is to have students get to the stage where they can manifest latent criteria. Students often begin with mechanics, such as grammar, punctuation, referencing style, and organization. Sadler (2009) provides an example of how to do this: students need to submit formative tasks, such as "extrapolating, making structural comparisons, identifying underlying assumptions, mounting counter-arguments or integrating

elements" (p. 12). In tutorials, students appraise peers' work, provide feedback and discuss the process. Sadler (2009) terms this "produce and appraise" rather than "study and learn" (p. 12).

References

Angelo, T. A. & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers*, (2nd Ed.), San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Aviles, C. B. (2001). Grading with norm-reference or criterion-referenced measurements: To curve or not to curve, that is the question. *Social Work Education, 20*(5), 603-608. DOI: 10.1080/02615470120072869

Jackel, B., Pearce, J., Radloff, A. & Edwards, D. (2017). *Assessment and feedback in higher education*. York, UK: The Higher Education Academy.

Pusateri, T. (2009). The assessment cyberguide for learning goals and outcomes. *American Psychological Association Education Directorate.* Accessed August, 2018: https://www.apa.org/ed/governance/bea/assessment-cyberguide-v2.pdf

Sadler, D. R. (2009). Chapter 4: Transforming holistic assessment and grading into a vehicle for complex learning. In G. Joughin (Ed.), *Assessment, Learning and Judgement in Higher Education*, 1-15. DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4020-8905-3_4.

Schinske, J. & Tanner, K. (2014). Teaching more by grading less (or differently). *CBE Life Sciences Education, 13*(2), 159-166, doi: 10.1187/cbe.CBE-14-03-0054.

Smith, V. & Palenque, S. M. (2015). Ten tips for more efficient and effective grading. *Faculty Focus: Higher Ed Teaching Strategies from Magna Publications*.

Svinicki, M. & McKeachie, W. J. (2011). *McKeachie's teaching tips: Strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers,* (13th ed.).Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Wiggins, G. (1998). Ensuring authentic performance. In G. Wiggins (Ed.) Educative Assessment: Designing Assessments to Inform and Improve Student Performance (pp. 21 – 42). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.