

Staff guide

Writing good assessment criteria

Assessment criteria are used as a benchmark or a set of standards to measure the level of a student's work. The issue with focusing heavily on assessments without interlinking it to learning outcomes means that there is a disconnection between actual 'learning' and assessment. Clear learning goals enhance student performance through clarifying the link between knowledge and assessment practices.

The purpose of assessment criteria is to check whether students have achieved the intended learning outcomes, whilst measuring how much they know by assessing their work against achievement criteria. Clear criteria are needed for students to be aware of what is expected of them, otherwise they are unable to reflect and direct further learning.

What creating good criteria can achieve

- Clarifies to students what they need to know
- Students are able to focus their attention (and therefore prioritise their time) on the most important and valuable learning outcomes
- Students are able to understand what needs to be done to attain different levels of achievement
- Cements together teaching practices and learning goals.

Stages of writing assessment criteria

Before writing the assessment criteria

- Review learning outcomes. Ensure that these are short and clear. To determine whether the learning outcomes are valid, criteria should be matched with each learning outcome. To make targets more attainable, they should be written at a pass level, rather than writing the expectations of a high achiever
- Break down learning outcomes. Consider what is most important for students to know, and which learning outcomes are an added bonus. An example may be: Essential learning, Useful to know and Optional
- Use resources. Incorporating material from the institution and wider faculties such as grading scales, exemplars, guidance's and models can ensure consistency in academic standards
- Make it clear what is most important in the curriculum. Highlight to students what will be the focus of an assessment from the given learning outcomes
- Select a range of methods to be used for assessment. This allows for an increase in evidence of learning while testing students who have diverse talents. Consider whether you are using the most appropriate method to evaluate your student's understandings.

Whilst writing the assessment criteria

- Select, outline, describe and organise what needs to be known by students to pass the programme
- Focus the criteria on what the students has achieved, not what they have not done.
- Outline the different standards required to meet the criteria
- Be realistic. Consider whether students will achieve all the desired outcomes in the given time frame
- Describe what standards needed to attain each level of achievement (or grade). Be clear and distinctive between each. Students should be able to understand what is expected to reach each level. E.g what distinguishes between a first and an upper second class grade
- Use positive and encouraging language. Motivating students to climb up the levels requires making each level seem attainable and within their means.

After completing writing the assessment criteria

- Consider opportunities for reflective learning. Provide rich feedback that can be indicative of what areas need improvement. Assessment criteria can help students be self-aware of what level they are working at but requires feedback to aid their development further
- Avoid repeating information or overlapping information
- Ensure that marks and feedback relate to each other. The assessment criteria should be able to justify the reasons for a student's mark. This is important in keeping assessments fair
- Ask for student feedback. Respond to feedback on what can be improved by updating future assessment criteria.

Do

Ensure each criterion is distinct from the other
Make criteria manageable – students should be able to handle the cognitive workload whilst being able to understand what is expected of them
Describe how outcomes can be demonstrated
Be consistent in aligning your learning outcome with the assessment criteria – this can avoid giving mixed messages
Make learning outcomes easy to assess by avoiding too broad or too narrow targets.

Do not

Do not use evaluative or ambiguous language – this can lead to a wide range of interpretations
Do not repeat outcomes through different wording
Avoid introducing new criteria as grades go up. Instead, they should increase in demand in a particular aspect
Tell students what to do exactly – criteria should be used to facilitate independent learning.