

Moderation

Assessment and Student Progression Manual: Principles & Requirements

FAIR ASSESSMENT

Every student in a unit should receive the same opportunity for a fair assessment regardless of who is marking their assessment task. Moderation processes offer this assurance. Moderation refers to quality assurance processes directed towards ensuring that assessments are marked with accuracy, consistency and fairness and feedback processes are rigorous, fair and consistent. It is required for every assessment which involves a degree of subjectivity. It includes the entire assessment event, including the design and post-event analysis of the fitness of the assessment for student learning and in meeting the unit outcomes.

The process of moderation can include the adjustment of student marks, but always based on the re-assessment of student work. As part of the moderation process, adjustments to student marks must occur before the script or the marks have been communicated to the student. Note that objective testing (such as multiple choice assessment) also needs moderation, but this is done in a slightly different way. This usually involves a review of the questions prior to their use, combined with a post-hoc analysis of student results.

Unit coordinators are responsible for the moderation processes undertaken within a unit of study. They are required to involve the teaching team in this process. The Chair of the Thesis Committee for master and doctoral students reviews the examiners marking and determines if an adjudicator is required or not, refer to [Rule 10: degree of Doctor by Research](#) and [Rule 11: Degree of Master by Research](#).

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESSFUL MODERATION

Moderation is likely to work best when it is based on the following principles:

- assessments are designed so that they are clearly linked to the intended learning outcomes;
- assessment criteria are clearly communicated to students, both in the pre-assessment phase and also when providing feedback;
- assessments are subject to regular review: their frequency, style and the relative success rate of students are appraised as a regular part of the improvement cycle, and
- pre-marking, intra-marking and post-marking meetings or related activities are undertaken to ensure that assessors are able to clarify their understanding of the assessment criteria and marking reliability.

These principles are articulated in Curtin' Assessment Workflow Cycle. The processes of REVIEW occur across the five phases in the cycle and at each stage this presents opportunities for ongoing improvement and evaluation.

Contracts already in place with offshore campuses and partners will influence how moderation will be conducted. All contractual obligations must be observed.

Assessment Design

In the design phase when assessments tasks are considered pre-marking moderation processes can also be considered. The nature of each task may require a different approach to moderation. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA, 2012) includes suggestions, such as "blind marking' marking criteria", "online automated marking; model answers"; "multiple marking based on sample of 20% of assessments" (p. 31).

Ideally, try to involve the teaching team in the design of the assessment criteria. Engaging markers at this early stage is likely to lead to a much deeper understanding of what the criteria

Principle 1: Assessment practices will be subject to quality processes

Principle 8: Assessment is valid and reliable

Requirement 3.3.6

Assessments will be subjected to a review prior to their release to students to ensure that they reflect good practice. Reviews of assessment tasks, conducted by the unit coordinator, will invite comment from colleagues within the institution or those external to it. A review would typically cover the following points to ensure that each assessment is:

- aligned with the intended learning outcomes;
- consistent with the scope and level of the unit;
- clearly and unambiguously described in terms of the task and assessment criteria;
- equivalent when offered in multiple locations;
- designed to avoid the inadvertent encouragement of plagiarism, and
- appropriately weighted and scheduled across the study period.

really mean. You could also invite external comment on assessment criteria – either from colleagues working in the field or from those experienced in assessment design. The input from others is likely to strengthen the criteria established.

Communication

Students must be provided with information in the unit outline on the moderation process that will be undertaken for each assessment task. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA, 2012) require universities to provide “details of moderation and any other arrangements that will be used to support consistency and reliability of assessment and grading across each subject ... noting any differences in these processes across delivery methods, delivery sites, and/or student cohorts” (p. 30). The TEQSA suggestions for unit outline descriptions include: “blind marking, marking criteria, assessors external to those teaching in the unit, marking guide, online automated marking, model answers, multiple marking based on sample of 20% of assessments” (p.31).

A consensus marking meeting could be held at some stage prior to the commencement of assessment marking to ensure clarity of the expectations of the assessment task and the application of the marking criteria. Convene a meeting (which may be face-to-face or online) with all markers to discuss the marking criteria and their application. This approach can be enhanced if actual student work (either past or present) is used to ‘road-test’ the marking criteria. Communication with markers at this stage will significantly reduce the number of issues that can present post marking, for example anomalies with marking and assessment appeals.

Marking

In the marking phase the main concern is to ensure reliability (consistency) between different markers. Marking reliability can be improved in a number of ways:

- allocate all assignments to one marker where feasible; alternatively allocate one particular section of an assignment for marking by the same marker. This will require a system of rotating submitted assessment work across the marking team;
- encourage markers to review work marked earlier (e.g. from marking undertaken the day before) to ensure that their marking standard has not changed;
- check mark very high and very low scoring assessments;
- use anonymous marking to avoid bias towards or against any student in the marking process, and
- second marking of some assessments may be undertaken. In larger units this might involve a random sample being subjected to second (double) marking or blind marking, where markers do not see each other’s comments or grades until after marking is completed. Discrepancy in the grading needs to be considered carefully and resolved. Where markers agree closely, small differences can be resolved by averaging. Larger differences should be handled through discussion involving the unit coordinator and a third marker (ideally the unit coordinator) should be used to help resolve any contentious cases.

The scheduling of an intra-marking moderation meeting or opportunities for a marker to discuss issues with the unit coordinate and other markers early in the marking process allows for the detection of any problems/issues in applying the marking criteria and the type and manner in which feedback is provided. It is extremely helpful if the unit coordinator is able to identify issues as they arise during marking and resolve them before markers have completed marking to avoid unnecessary workload if marking needs to be readdressed.

Feedback

After marking is completed the unit coordinator should review the results provided and conduct an analysis of the marks and feedback to determine marking consistency across the team. These results can be shared at a post-marking review meeting. If opportunities to address issues with the marking criteria were made possible at pre and intra marking meetings they should be less need for mark adjustment at this stage. At this meeting the team should consider:

- the assessment task (was it appropriate? was it too difficult or too easy?);
- the assessment criteria (could students and markers follow? do they need refining?);
- the timing of the assessment, the marking and moderation processes, and
- feedback comments to students (e.g. was there time to provide both formative and summative feedback).

Requirement 3.5.2

Where multiple markers are used, assessors are to be provided with sufficient information to ensure comparability of marking. Assessors should be provided with the assessment criteria and relative weightings in advance of the marking task. Evidence suggests that the reliability of grading decisions is substantially improved when markers have an opportunity to discuss the assessment criteria, to apply the criteria to samples of previous work, and to compare marking decisions prior to the commencement of marking with the current cohort.

Requirement 3.5.3

Where multiple markers are used, unit coordinators will ensure that they are available to assessors to provide clarification and/or guidance should this be required during the marking process. Markers, particularly those new to the assessment (or the assessment type) often need additional support and guidance from more experienced unit coordinators.

Requirement 3.7.4

Where multiple markers are used, markers should be provided with feedback on the effectiveness and efficiency of the marking and moderation process. Feedback to markers may include a review of the:

- assessment task to establish whether it was set at an appropriate level;
- assessment criteria to establish whether they were easy for students and markers to use;
- timing of the assessment, marking and the moderation processes employed, and
- feedback provided to students.

The outcome of the post-marking meeting may inform the assessment design and the criteria for marking for subsequent study periods.

Once the marks are verified as consistent and reliable the assessment work with grades can be returned to the student. The unit coordinator may indicate that the moderation processes have occurred.

Requirement 3.6.2
If anomalies are detected, student work will be reassessed and marks adjusted accordingly before work and marks are released to students.

References

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. (2012). *Application Guide: Application for accreditation of a higher education course of study (AQF qualification)*. Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from http://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/Course%20Accred%20Guide_final_080212.pdf

Practical information

Assessment Moderation toolkit. Retrieved from <http://resource.unisa.edu.au/course/view.php?id=285&topic=1>

Recommended readings

Bloxham, S., & Boyd, P. (2007). *Developing effective assessment in higher education: A practical guide*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Sadler, R. (n.d.). *Introduction to the process of moderating assessments*. Retrieved from http://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/225795/Introduction_process_of_moderating_assessments.pdf