

Learning and Teaching Support Handbook

Chapter 10 – Peer and self assessment in student work: principles and criteria

Introduction

Self and peer assessment are important aspects of ‘assessment for learning’ practice. Assessing their own work or that of others can help students to develop their understanding of the Intended Learning Outcomes and the Assessment Criteria. Research has shown that learners make more progress when they are actively involved in their own learning and assessment.

Self and Peer Assessment will:

- Enhance students’ active engagement with their studies.
- Increase the amount of feedback students receive.
- Augment learning as peer feedback invariably requires explanation and justification.
- Help students understand what is considered good work and why, thereby increasing their ability to achieve.

Self-assessment “is the involvement of students in identifying standards and/ or criteria to apply to their work, and making judgments about the extent to which they have met these criteria and standards.....[it] means more than students grading their own work; it means involving them in the process of determining what is ‘good work’.”¹

Peer Assessment is where “students use criteria and apply standards to the work of their peers in order to judge that work. Both self and peer assessment are “formative, in that it has beneficial effects on learning, but may also be summative, either in the sense of learners deciding that they have learned as much as they wished to do in a given area, or....it may contribute to the grades awarded to the students”.²

The focus is not necessarily on having students generate their own grades, but rather providing opportunities for them to be able to identify what constitutes a good (or poor!) piece of work. Some degree of student involvement in the development and comprehension of assessment criteria is therefore an important component of self-assessment.

Developing effective peer and self-assessment takes time and effort. However once fully embedded in learning and teaching, these assessment strategies can be particularly effective in motivating learning. An effective starting point is for teachers to model the process of peer assessment and feedback, for example how to give feedback that is constructive, detailed,

linked to assessment criteria, objective, focused etc. Whole-group marking can be a useful method of introducing effective assessment and feedback as it allows for discussion and exchange of ideas.

Developing reflective skills provides students with the ability to consider their own performance and to identify their strengths, weaknesses, and areas that require improvement. Students can then use this knowledge to influence their future work, whether on a programme of study or in employment, by playing to their strengths and/or directing their efforts in areas they have already recognised as needing further improvement. You could consider self-assessment as a teaching and learning exercise, as much as an assessment method and its inclusion within a course provides your students with the opportunity to develop a core lifelong learning skill.

Principles and Criteria

1. Principles

1.1. *The purpose for using self and peer assessment should be explicit for staff and students.*

A major reason for using self and peer assessment is for its role in student skill development, in improving learning and in helping students to improve their performance on assessed work. Additionally, it has a place as a means of summative assessment.

1.2. *There is no reason why peer and self-assessment should not contribute to summative assessment.*

In many such cases such assessment will not contribute a major proportion of the mark until it has been well tried and tested. However, in a well-regulated scheme, there is no reason to limit the proportion of the marks involved. It is particularly important that the principles below are noted.

1.3. *Moderation.*

For any situation in which the mark from peer or self-assessment contributes towards the final mark of the module, the Module Convener should maintain the right to moderate student-allocated marks. The initial step in alteration of a student-allocated mark may be negotiation with the student(s) concerned.

1.4. *Instances of unfair or inappropriate marking need to be dealt with sensitively.*

Any instances of collusive ('friendship') marking need to be dealt with sensitively and firmly.

1.5. *The quality of feedback on student work must be maintained.*

In situations of self and peer assessment, students are usually in a position to learn more than from situations of Module Convener-marked work. They learn from their engagement in assessing and frequently from oral, in addition to written feedback. However, the Module Convener should monitor the feedback and, where appropriate, elaborate it to ensure that students receive fair and equal treatment.

1.6. *Assessment procedures should always involve use of well-defined, publicly available assessment criteria.*

While this is true of all assessment, it is particularly true where inexperienced assessors (students) are involved. The assessment criteria may be developed by the Module Convener, but greater value is gained from the procedure if students are involved in developing the criteria themselves.

1.7. *Involvement of students in assessment needs careful planning.*

Many students see assessment as a job for staff, but at a later stage they are likely to recognise the benefits to their academic learning and skill development. Initial efforts will take time and Module Convener support. For these reasons, it is preferable that the use of peer and self-assessment is seen as a strategy to improve learning and assessment across a whole programme. The common situation is for these assessment procedures to appear in isolated modules, often not at level 1.

1.8. *Self and peer assessment procedures should be subject to particularly careful monitoring and evaluation from the Module Convener and students' point of view.*

It can take time for such procedures to run smoothly and for this reason, the initial involvement of relatively few marks - or solely formative assessment is wise. Student feedback to the Module Convener on the procedure will be important.

1.9. *The use of peer and self-assessment should be recognised as skill development in itself.*

Such procedures are not just another means of assessment but represent the development of self-appraisal, evaluative, analytical, critical and reflective skills. These are important as employability skills and can be recognised in the learning outcomes of a module.

2. Assessment criteria

2.1. Sample Assessment Criteria for an Oral Presentation

The following is a list of ideas for criteria for assessment of an oral presentation. The criteria may require more description in order to be better and more consistently understood by markers and in order to meet the expectations of the achievement at different levels.

Audibility - Can you hear clearly throughout?

Pace - Is the pace of the speech, or flow of ideas, too fast or too slow?

Fluency - Is the speech pattern fluent, indicating familiarity with the material and rehearsal of delivery?

Tone and Energy - Is there sufficient variation in tone? Does the presenter seem enthusiastic?

Appropriateness to the Audience - Is the content and approach relevant, interesting and engaging?

Structure and Cohesion - Was the structure clearly outlined? Is the order logical and easy to follow? Is it signposted throughout? Is the balance of various elements effective? Is timing accurate?

Use of Visual Aids - Is there a suitable amount? Are they easy to read? Do they effectively support the oral delivery? Does the presenter use them competently?

Content - Does the content relate to the title and/or purpose of the presentation? Is the breadth of the content sufficient?

Is the depth of the content sufficient? Is the message clear? Is the argument consistent?

Argument - Is there sufficient evidence to support arguments? Is there evidence of critical thinking? Are conclusions drawn effectively?

Creativity - Was the presentation innovative or creative in style and/ or content? Was the approach an original one? Was humour used to engage or persuade?

Alongside criteria it can be useful to ask for identification of strengths and weaknesses and areas for improvement.

2.2. Sample Criteria for Assessment of Team Functioning

The actual criteria picked for team or group work will depend on the purpose of the assessment. Sometimes the reason for assessment is to check that all of those involved in the group are contributing to the project in hand. Sometimes the focus is the ability of individuals to operate within a team as a specific skill.

The most fundamental way of assessing group work is where a mark is given to each member of the group based on a single piece of work submitted by the group. The main

advantage of this for the Module Convener is that it reduces the time spent marking individual student scripts. If this approach is used for formative assessment, where the process of encouraging students to work in a group may be the main objective, then this method can be very effective. Potential problems may arise when it is used for summative assessment when students often resent other group members for not doing their fair share of the work and so contributing negatively to their own mark. This can be overcome to an extent by making the students aware that they must ensure that all group members participate or by including an additional mark for individual effort. An extension to the method of requiring a single report from the whole group is to ask each team member to generate an anonymous peer mark for each individual member of their team. The mark may be based on their assessment of the overall group interaction and contribution to the workload. In this way, each student gets a mark based on the quality of the group report or assignment but also a mark based on their individual efforts. Problems can arise if students feel that they are being marked subjectively by their peers, for example if one person falls out with the group but still does their part of the overall work. In order to avoid such problems clear marking guidelines must be prepared for the students so that there is no ambiguity about how they are being assessed. If these guidelines are developed in discussion with the students then they gain a better understanding of what is required of them and what makes effective group work.

Assessment Criteria for use in assessing an individual contribution to group work could include the following questions:

- a. is engaged in the group and with the group.
- b. can show qualities of leadership.
- c. is able to provide direction for group activity (e.g. project planning).
- d. is involved in the execution of the project work.
- e. can play a supporting role of others in group activity.
- f. can suggest solutions.
- g. is involved in the presentation of the group's work.
- h. demonstrates interest in the maintenance of the group functioning as well as the project.

3. Further information

3.1. For further information and advice, please contact the [Academic Development Team](#).

¹ Boud, D. (1995) *Enhancing Learning through Self-Assessment*; Kogan Page; London.

² Boud and Falchikov (1989) in Falchikov, N. (2005) *Improving Assessment Through Student Involvement*; Routledge Falmer; Oxon.