

Students' Experience of, and Views on, Marking Criteria in Assessment

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Background

As post-graduate scholars, we deeply value the notion of enhancing the 'learning' process for both students and faculty members alike. Assessments serve not only as indicators of students' acquired knowledge but also as invaluable feedback mechanisms for faculty members to refine their teaching practices. Through this endeavour, we aimed to share the preliminary understanding we have gathered about the views of post-graduate students from multiple departments in LSE, outlining the challenges we encountered, and potential areas for future research. Therefore, this project sets the stage for further exploration in areas of feedback and assessment.

Methodology

We gathered insights from a series of interactions aimed at understanding student perceptions and experiences concerning marking criteria. Our approach involved circulating journals for self-reflection, having informal conversations with students and distributing questionnaires to capture both general and specific feedback. Firstly, through our 'Journal' initiative, we sought to grasp the initial perceptions students have about marking criteria. Subsequently, we circulated a questionnaire to pinpoint more specific areas needing improvement. Although the responses were not entirely satisfactory, they did provide valuable insights into common concerns, notably the negative perceptions surrounding current practices. Finally, we sought to explore how students are coping and assisting themselves in addressing these issues.

Literature review

The relationship between understanding assessment criteria and student performance has been a subject of significant academic interest. This literature review examines existing research on the impact of assessment criteria, feedback, and motivation on student performance, and how this study fits into and challenges the wider research landscape. This study contributes to the existing body of research by focusing specifically on the role of understanding assessment criteria in improving both academic performance and student well-being. It builds on the work of Van der Kooij et al. (2021) and Hsieh (2019) by highlighting the importance of frequent, clear, and detailed feedback tied to transparent marking criteria in enhancing student motivation and performance.

Our study challenges existing practices by emphasising the need for more transparent and detailed feedback mechanisms. While Parma et al. (2023) argued against the benefits of lenient success criteria, our findings suggest that clarity and specificity, rather than leniency, are crucial for effective learning. Additionally, our focus on cultural and linguistic sensitivity in feedback extends the work of Kapp et al. (2020), highlighting the need for assessment practices that consider the diverse backgrounds of students. In conclusion, this literature review underscores the importance of transparent and detailed assessment criteria in enhancing student performance and well-being. Our study contributes to and challenges

existing research, providing new insights into the role of assessment criteria in the academic success of students.

Findings: Part I

Impact on Motivation:

- *Demotivating Feedback*: Some students felt demotivated by formative grades, especially due to unclear expectations and structure in essay writing. This indicates a need for more transparent grading criteria and educational support or avoiding having marks on formative feedback.
- *Confidence Boosting*: Other responses indicated that detailed feedback, especially when tied to clear marking criteria, boosted students' confidence and helped them identify strengths and weaknesses.

Feedback Effectiveness:

- *Helpful Details*: Feedback that included a chart of marking criteria was found particularly useful as it clarified which areas needed improvement.
- *Lack of Detail*: Several students noted that feedback was too brief and lacked sufficient detail to be actionable, suggesting a need for more comprehensive and specific comments from educators.

Mixed Reactions:

- *Uncertainty About Relevance*: Some students expressed mixed feelings, unsure how feedback would assist them in examinations, although they acknowledged potential benefits for writing summative assessments.
- *Cultural and Language Considerations*: A notable comment highlighted the importance of professors understanding the challenges faced by non-native English speakers, suggesting feedback should be sensitive to linguistic diversity.

General Feedback Perception:

- *Variability in Detail and Helpfulness*: Feedback quality varied widely, with some students describing it as "quite detailed" and "fair," while others found it "not that helpful."

Findings: Part II

Initial Observations

The extensive marking criteria may not be effective for all students and can often be confusing. To address this, students frequently rely on specific feedback from faculty on their work during office hours. This feedback sometimes helps students understand the marking criteria, but at other times, it is not sufficient. Another approach students take is utilising LSE LIFE resources and attending events focused on essay writing according to the marking criteria.

Quick Fixes

First, faculty should incorporate the marking criteria into their feedback, making it easier for students to identify specific areas for improvement. *Second*, promoting LSE LIFE events more effectively would further assist students in navigating the marking criteria.

Recommendations

1. *Promote LSE LIFE Resources*: Actively market the study resources provided by LSE LIFE to enhance student preparation and understanding of the subject matter.
2. *Incorporate Practical Study Tips*: Encourage professors to include practical study tips and skills within their curriculum to better equip students for exams.
3. *Encourage Formation of Study Groups*: Professors should consider fostering environments that encourage the formation of study groups to enhance motivation and provide stress relief among students – participation should be voluntary.

For Further Research

1. *Focus on Stress and Well-being*: Expand research efforts to explicitly study the impact of marking criteria on student stress levels and overall well-being, beyond just

academic performance.

2. *Department-Specific Studies*: Due to the diversity in assessment criteria and guidelines among departments, conduct separate studies for each department to tailor approaches and solutions more effectively.
3. *Course-Level Analysis*: Investigate the effects of marking criteria at the course level to identify specific challenges and opportunities within individual courses.
4. *Include Undergraduate Students*: Incorporate undergraduate students in future studies. Unlike postgraduate students who have shorter academic engagements and limited experiences, undergraduates provide a broader data set over longer periods, which could yield insights into the development and improvement over time.

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