

## 'Now I know what you mean': Improving the Feedback Mechanism and Students' Capacities for Self-Critique

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## Learning-Oriented Assessment

- Assessment should be an opportunity to learn rather than just a tool for student performance measurement
- 3 principles of Learning-Oriented Assessment (Carless, 2007):
  - (a) assessment tasks should stimulate the kind of learning that is sought (i.e. be related to the course's key concepts and have practical application)
  - (b) assessment should involve students **actively engaging with assessment criteria, notions of quality, and their own and/or peers' performance**
  - (c) **teacher feedback concerning student performance should be timely and forward-looking** so as to support current and future student learning

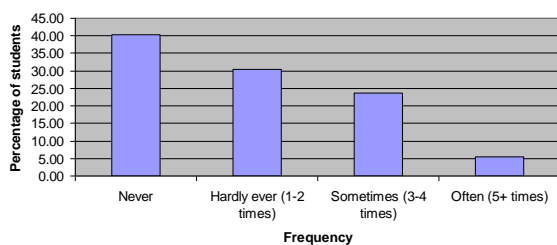
## Rationale

- Can we assume that students understand, or take notice, assessment criteria?
- Do teachers provide useful feedback (i.e. that is clearly articulated, comprehensive, timely, forward-looking etc.)?
- Do students retrieve work that has been assessed, and do they read the feedback?

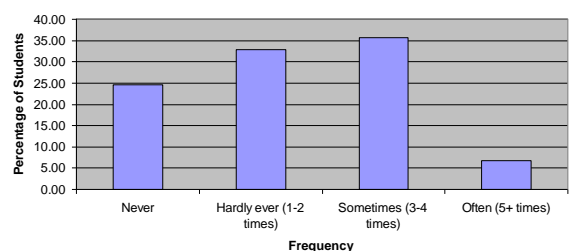
## Rationale: Survey of Students

- Semester 2, 2008
- 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Year History students (n=73) completed an anonymous and non-compulsory questionnaire regarding their previous experiences of assessment and feedback at the University of Adelaide (mainly in the Faculty of HUMSS)
- response rate of 86%

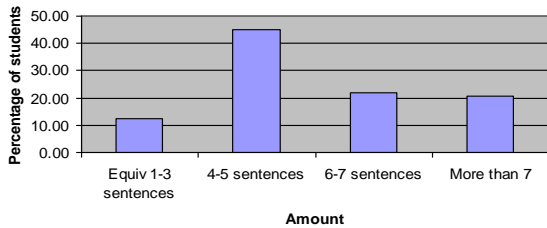
Occasions that graded assignments not retrieved by students



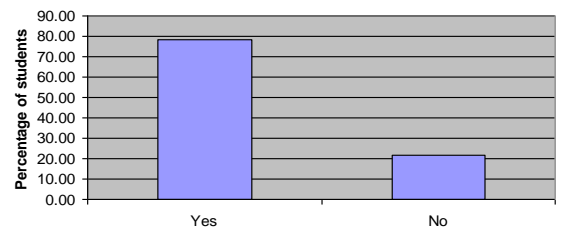
Occasions when no written feedback received



**Average extent of written feedback (including margin comments: 6 words = 1 'sentence')**



**Do you always read all of the written feedback on your assignments (including margin comments)?**



## Aims of Activity

- (a) encourage students to read and take heed of written feedback on their assessed assignments
- (b) assist students to gain a greater understanding of the requirements of academic essay writing and the level of performance required to receive a particular grade

## A Self-Assessment Activity

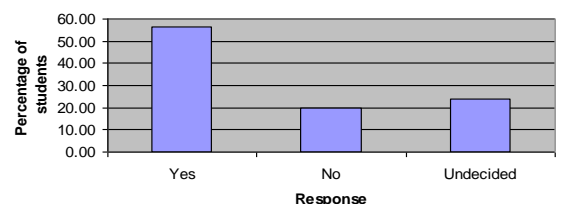
- tutor returns assignment to student with written feedback but withholds grade
- student required to re-read assignment, re-consider assessment criteria and grade descriptors, and award own grade
- student submits grade with 100-word justification
- if grade discordance between tutor and student: possibility of changed grade (based on strength of justification statement), or meeting to discuss discrepancy

## Summary of Findings

- Evaluation based on non-compulsory, anonymous, self-completed questionnaire (n = 73; 86% response rate)
- **Grade agreement:** 64.7% of students submitted grades that agreed with the tutor's grade
- other the students who disagreed: half under-estimated and half-overestimated
- 36.1% admitted deliberately under- or over-estimating grade

## Findings

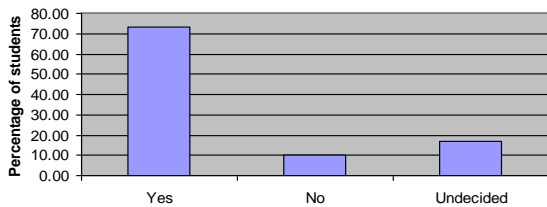
**Has the self-assessment task given you a better understanding of what is required in writing an academic essay?**



## Findings



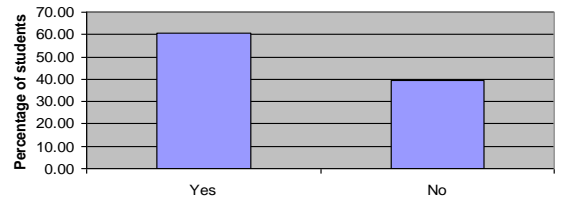
Has the self-assessment task given you a better understanding of the generic grade descriptors (i.e. the marking criteria)?



## Findings



Did the self-assessment task encourage you to take more notice of the tutor's written feedback than you otherwise would?



## Further Evidence



- 100-word justifications offered further indication that students were reading and engaging with the **assessment criteria** and the **feedback** provided by their tutors, and were **enhancing their skills in critiquing their own work**.

"I think my essay is a high-distinction essay trapped in a distinction-essay's body. If we focus on the first half of the essay, all of the high-distinction attributes are achieved. For example there is evidence of wide, independent research and insight beyond the surface of the topic. As noted, it is also well articulated and follows the conventions of academic essay-writing extremely well. Things fall apart a little bit in the last part of the essay ... The argument is a bit watery and doesn't touch on some important points related to the topic."

– a student who wrote an agreed 'Distinction' standard essay

## Further Evidence



"In terms of my research for this essay, I think I read beyond the core texts and materials, using quite a few primary sources and documents such as newspaper articles. However in order to improve this mark I would have perhaps tried to explore more aspects of these documents and also analysed and evaluated their context and value more closely ... In evaluating this essay I realised there were many things that I could have included to improve it."

– a student who wrote an agreed 'Credit' standard essay

## Further Evidence



"The comment you gave about not giving enough time to examine the counter argument in this essay is definitely a key problem in my essay ... To tell you the truth this is not exactly the best piece of writing I have done, the style I wrote it in could have been a lot smoother, especially the placement of paragraphs. Although my research is definitely inadequate in many cases, I have definitely felt that I gained a better knowledge of communism in Australia in the 1950s ... [I]t could have been much stronger, if a little more thought, time and research had been put into its construction."

– a student who wrote an agreed 'Credit' standard essay

## An Invitation for a Student Consultation:



"From the marker's comments, it appears that my originality was not supported by expert opinion, which was a downfall that does not damage the argument too much. Evaluative skills were clear and reasonably developed, for both sides of the argument were considered in depth and weighed against one another. The marker of this essay did not encounter many issues with expression, suggesting that this area was highly developed."

- student awarded High Distinction, tutor awarded Credit

## Refining the Activity



- incorporation of peer assessment
- invite students to participate in the process of devising the nature of the assessment and the assessment criteria
- use of assessment rubric – although problematic
- Retain core principles of Learning-Oriented Assessment: assessment as an opportunity to learn rather than just a means of measuring student performance