



Developing marking guidelines for an assessment task, using a standards-referenced approach

In the previous edition of **CURRICULUM SUPPORT** (English) (Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 7), the article, "Designing an assessment program for the Stage 6 English Preliminary Courses", tracked the process of designing an assessment program, from identifying the syllabus outcomes through to setting the date for a task. The present article focuses on the next step in the assessment process, that of marking an assessment task and giving students feedback on their performance. Central to this is setting up marking guidelines for the task that are closely linked to the task and to the outcomes being assessed in the task.

Setting up marking guidelines works best when it is done collaboratively and collegially. The colleagues might be teachers within a school or teachers from other schools in a supportive, energetic network. Such group work and group support are particularly important because planning to implement a standards-referenced approach to assessment is a learning process for most schools. As we move away from a norm-referenced approach, we need to rethink and shrug off a few old habits. Equally importantly we have to decide what to retain from the days of the *old* HSC. Working in a group of like-minded and open-minded experts in English teaching is one of the best ways to do this.

The other thing worth remembering is that we have time on our side. Standards-referencing won't be in full swing until 2003. Therefore, we have time to hasten slowly, to learn, experiment and regroup, gathering expertise and materials as we go. Those who start now will be very comfortable with the process by 2003, and will be best positioned to learn between now and then from new materials and resources as they are released.

This article briefly touches on basic principles of standards-referencing and then focuses on a sample assessment task to demonstrate the processes of developing and implementing marking guidelines.

Terminology

Outcomes

Explicit statements of the knowledge, skills and understanding expected to be learned by students

Criteria

Descriptive statements that markers will use for making judgments about the marks to be awarded for different levels of performance

Rubric

General criteria at the beginning of a section that will be taken into account in marking the questions

Marking guidelines

Provide the criteria for making judgments about the different levels of student performance and the marks to be awarded

Marking scheme

May be identical to the marking guidelines OR elaborate the marking guidelines in the light of student responses

Work samples

Provide student responses that illustrate particular outcomes and provide an indication of levels of performance

Source: Board of Studies, New South Wales, July 2000

Using a standards-referenced approach

In the *old* HSC, assessment and examination marking used norm referencing, where students were assessed by comparing their responses with the responses of the other students doing the same course. The best responses were allocated a maximum or near-maximum mark. Other responses were ranked in relation to each other.

The new HSC uses standards referencing, where responses are marked against a standard of performance set for those responses. The mark allocated to a response is determined by how well that response measures up against the set standard.

There are several excellent support documents available that explain in more detail how the standards-referenced approach operates. Notable



amongst them are *The New HSC Assessment Support Document* and the *Stage 6 English Support Document* (Board of Studies)

www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au

and three New HSC bulletins on assessment:

Assessment — A standards-referenced approach,
Internal assessment in the new HSC, and
Establishing sound assessment practices – developing guidelines for assessment tasks.

<http://www.newhsc.schools.nsw.edu.au/resassess.htm> is the address of the New HSC web page that contains these and other helpful assessment documents. Those interested in reading more detail about the theory and literature related to standards-referenced assessment should go to the Board of Studies site for *Occasional paper No. 1*, “Setting standards and applying them across different administrations of large-scale, high-stakes, curriculum-based public examinations” by Dr John Bennett.

Preparing marking guidelines

Good assessment tasks focus on specific outcomes and content and allow students to demonstrate achievement in different ways. Marking guidelines set out the criteria for making judgements about the different levels of student performance and the marks or mark ranges to be awarded at each level.

Developing marking guidelines for a task is a stimulating professional activity in its own right. As teachers as experts come to understand the outcomes, they engage in thoughtful decision-making and reflection on the assessment task, and recognise how important it is to set tasks in clear and unequivocal language.

In simple terms, preparing marking guidelines for an assessment task involves:

- deciding what outcomes are being assessed in the task
- making explicit the links between the outcomes being assessed and the content of the task
- defining the criteria that describe the performance required in order to be allocated particular marks
- explaining these criteria to students in clear and simple terms
- allocating marks according to the marking guidelines
- checking the marking guidelines and mark allocations against a sample of responses and, where necessary, adjusting the guidelines and the mark allocations.

The role of marking guidelines

Marking guidelines:

- support the process of gathering specific information about student achievement, information that can be used to monitor their ongoing achievement and shape teaching programs
- contribute to a structure for standards-referenced assessment
- establish the link between the assessment task and the outcomes being assessed
- allow for differentiation among responses
- provide a clear basis for distinguishing between different levels of achievement
- provide the basis for useful feedback to students on their demonstrated achievement
- support consistency in marking, both over the time of the marking and where more than one marker is involved.

Note: High achievement should not be defined solely in terms of the quantity of information provided.

Good marking guidelines: a checklist

- Relate to course outcomes and content ✓
- Provide clear criteria to identify and differentiate students' achievement of the course outcomes ✓
- Inform students about how their work will be assessed ✓
- Reflect the relative importance and difficulty of parts of a task where it consists of a number of parts ✓
- Describe the range of student achievement in relation to what is expected to be demonstrated ✓
- Include harder-to-define characteristics, such as originality and flair (where appropriate) ✓
- Indicate the quality of response required to gain marks or a sub-range of marks ✓

Note: Check that the wording used is consistent with the definitions of key words in the New Higher School Certificate Assessment Support Document. These definitions have been reprinted in this issue for your information (see p.9).



Sample task with criteria and marking guidelines

The following sample demonstrates how links among outcomes, task and performance criteria are created and how the criteria shape the marking of the task.

This task requires students to produce three pieces of writing, each of which is to be accompanied by a late draft of the piece.

The instructions to students, for example the due date, other organisational details and stimulus material, have been edited out of this exemplar so that the focus can be on the assessment process.

PRELIMINARY ENGLISH (Standard)

Assessment task: Writing folio

The task is to submit a portfolio containing your responses to the three writing exercises outlined below.

Identify the intended audience for each piece of writing and attach one prior draft. Neatness of the draft is not an issue, though it must be legible.

Each piece of writing, including the draft, is of equal weight.

The Preliminary English (Standard) course outcomes to be assessed by this task are:

Outcome 1 A student demonstrates an understanding of the relationships among composer, responder, text and context.

Outcome 7 A student selects appropriate language forms and features, and structures of texts to explore and express ideas and values.

Outcome 8 A student articulates and represents own ideas in critical, interpretive and imaginative texts.

Outcome 12 A student reflects on own processes of responding and composing.

1. Composition one: Creative writing

Compose a complete piece of creative writing, that is, not a chapter from a book or an excerpt from a longer text. You are free to choose the idea, issue or theme.

Length: 500 – 1000 words

Criteria: You will be marked on how effectively you demonstrate, through your text and the draft, the following:

- (a) use of language which is effective and appropriate for purpose and audience
- (b) development of an idea, issue or theme
- (c) creation of a fresh and/or original piece of writing
- (d) reflection on your own draft writing and development of it into a completed piece of writing.

2. Composition two: Response to media

Compose a response to the attached cartoon. Your response is to be in one of the following forms:

- (a) an article or report that is either hard news or human interest
- (b) a feature article
- (c) a letter to the editor, or
- (d) an editorial.

Length: 350 – 700 words

Criteria: You will be marked on how effectively you demonstrate through your text the following:

- (a) use of language which is effective and appropriate for the form that you choose
- (b) link between the cartoon and your written response
- (c) logical development of an idea, issue or theme in a fresh, original piece of writing
- (d) reflection on your own draft writing and development of it into a completed piece of writing.

3. Composition three: Dialogue or script writing

Select a photograph, drawing or painting that contains two or three characters and items, for example, people, animals and inanimate objects. You must include either a clear photocopy or the original image with your response. Write the dialogue that might take place between these characters.

Length: 500 – 750 words

Criteria: You will be marked on how effectively you demonstrate through your text the following:

- (a) use of language which is effective and appropriate for purpose and audience
- (b) development of an idea, issue or theme
- (c) creation of a fresh and/or original piece of writing
- (d) reflection on your own draft writing and development of it into a completed piece of writing.



Marking guidelines

	Marks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> composes highly-developed, sustained and cohesive texts that skilfully address specified contexts, purposes and audiences composes texts characterised by highly sophisticated language choices, imagination, coherence, flair and a sustained, engaging style demonstrates a highly-developed understanding of how to assess own writing and develop a draft by editing content, structure, style and expression effectively 	13-15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> composes sustained and cohesive texts that address specified contexts, purposes and audiences composes a text characterised by some sophisticated language choices, imagination and a sustained, engaging style demonstrates a well-developed understanding of how to assess own writing and develop a draft by editing content, structure, style and expression effectively 	10-12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> composes cohesive texts that address specified contexts, purposes and audiences composes texts characterised by appropriate language use, some imagination and a sustained style demonstrates a sound understanding of how to assess own writing and develop a draft by editing content, structure, style and expression 	7-9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> composes texts that address specified contexts, purposes and audiences composes texts characterised by use of language which is mainly appropriate demonstrates some understanding of how to assess own writing and develop a draft by editing content, structure, style and expression 	4-6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> composes texts that demonstrate some understanding of how to address specified contexts, purposes and audiences composes texts characterised by use of some appropriate language demonstrates some understanding of how to assess own writing and develop a draft by editing surface features of the text 	1-3



Trialling and amending the criteria and marking guidelines

When students have completed the task, the teacher or teachers who are doing the marking might discuss a sample of responses. They would do so mainly to check that all relevant aspects of the outcomes have been articulated in the marking guidelines so that teachers will make consistent judgements about demonstrated achievement.

Given the complexity and individuality of writing, for example, the responses could demonstrate skills that are neither specified nor implied in the criteria, though they are relevant to the outcomes being assessed. It is important that these skills are included in the guidelines so that marking is both consistent and fair.

At the same time it is essential that looking at a sample of responses does not draw the markers back to a norm-referenced approach in which the best and worst responses set the standard.

Finally, it is wise to group mark or double mark either a sample of responses or all responses. This is good practice at all stages of implementation.

Once again, collegiality is crucial. As teachers articulate reasons for allocating a particular mark, and as they listen to their colleagues, markers can:

- develop a consistent approach to the marking by checking that everyone is interpreting the guidelines in the same way
- become familiar with and internalise the guidelines
- identify any problems in the marking process, and
- prepare the substance of feedback to students about the criteria used to differentiate responses.

As part of an ongoing reflection and refinement process, it would be useful for a copy of the task, the criteria, the marking guidelines and samples of students' responses for each level to be filed for future reference after this assessment has been completed.

THE PRELIMINARY ENGLISH (EXTENSION) COURSE

Progress report from Sydney Boys High School

In this article, Su Langker and Mary-Anne Wood, who teach English at Sydney Boys High School, describe how they coordinated the programming of the Preliminary Extension course. They also detail some of their faculty's approaches to implementing the course.

Su and Mary-Anne teach in a selective boys school and so their approaches will differ administratively from those of teachers in other types of schools. However, the type of work is applicable everywhere.

We would like to publish articles from other schools about implementing the Stage 6 English syllabus. If you would like to contribute, please contact Paul Hardage, CEO English, by fax on (02) 9886 7654 or by phone on (02) 9886 7624.

At the moment there are five Preliminary English (Extension) classes at Sydney Boys High. We expect that the numbers will drop, with fewer doing the HSC Extension course next year.

The Preliminary English (Extension) course consists of a compulsory module entitled "Texts, culture and value". There are three identified outcomes in the syllabus:

1. A student understands how and why texts are valued in and appropriated into a range of contexts.
2. A student develops skills in independent investigation involving particular texts and their manifestations in various forms, and within particular cultural contexts.
3. A student develops skills in sustained composition in a range of modes and media for different audiences and purposes.

When our faculty was planning the course program, we took the following key phrases from the module description in the syllabus:

- "texts from the past have been appropriated into popular culture", and
- "how and why cultural values are maintained and changed".

(English Stage 6 Syllabus, page 87)