Additional Participant Notes: Grading Tips for TAs
TATP Workshop: Wednesday, May 17, 2007 (2-4PM)
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What can we do to make marking… *fair*?

- Comparing earlier with later results to give a developmental-referenced evaluation
- Post criteria for evaluation so students (and TAs!) can see the criteria ahead of time
- Communicate expectations clearly but don't give out the answer
- Exchange papers (representative sampling) between graders
- Publish rubrics beforehand and use it during grading
- Be constructive with criticism: balance negatives and positives
- All graders should have a standard set of expectations
- Show "troublesome" tests, exams, assignments to other TAs
- Compare assignment with highest mark to one with the lowest mark to see "what the missing link?" was
- Grade same question for all exams/assignments before moving on to next questions

What can we do to make marking… *helpful to students*?

- Write detailed, specific, constructive comments
- Elaborate on common problems and take it up during class
- Explain and comment on mistakes and achievements equally
- Provide a comprehensive rubric beforehand to allow students to prepare for the assignment well ahead of time
- Avoid using red ink to mark
- Identify areas of improvement on the exam sheet
- Focus on one main mistake rather than all mistakes
- If there are a lot of grammatical errors, encourage students to seek additional help in writing centres

What can we do to make marking… *formative*?

- Give constructive feedback and not just point out the negative
- Raise questions to get students to think things further
- Provide checklist of expectations repeated throughout the semester
- Encourage students to do self assessments
- Show an "A" paper to demonstrate expectation
- Identify common mistakes and find out what is the underlying cause for the error
- Assignments should be returned promptly to allow students to incorporate feedback into their next assignment

- Take up questions (before and after the assignment) during tutorials for additional clarity and further discussion of concepts

What can we do to make marking …*time efficient*?

- Mark the same question for all assignments before moving to the next one
- Use symbols and provide legends for feedback
- Divide the work fairly with other TAs
- Use a detailed marking scheme or rubric
- Divide the marking in small sets
- Avoid making too many corrections on assignments instead post a complete and detailed answer key for students to correct their errors
- Be well rested before marking student papers
- Do a preliminary "screening" of the papers before marking to get a sense of the overall performance
- Pace yourself while marking (allot a set amount of time for each assignment)

What can we do to make marking …*equitable*?

- Blind evaluation of exams (cover the names of students while marking)
- Acknowledge alternative perspectives when marking essays
- Select a sample from each grade level and compare
- Refer to respective university standards
- Be aware of diverse student backgrounds
- Follow the same rubric for all markers
- Your TA shouldn't mark your tests
- Be familiar and conscious of own biases regarding students

What can we do to make marking …*consistent*?

- Use a detailed marking scheme divided into appropriate sections ie. introduction, materials and methods, discussion etc.
- Consider having one TA responsible for marking a given question for the entire class
- Meet with course instructor prior to beginning of marking
- Mark the same question for all assignments before moving on to next question
- Ask professor to read all 'A" papers and failed papers
- Go back and read a few sample papers from each grade level you marked
- Use faculty's grading template – follow instituted norms of university
- Check prior work/marks of individual students

What can we do to make marking *…challenging to students*?

- Establish high but achievable expectations at the very beginning of course
- Provide comments and feedback with the goal of expanding and encouraging further thought
- Give clear instructions on how to improve
- Give participation marks
- Employ Bloom's taxonomy - Benjamin S. Bloom *Taxonomy of educational objectives*. Published by Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA. Copyright (c) 1984 by Pearson Education.
  - This provides a useful structure in which to categorize test questions under various competence levels ie. Knowledge, comprehension, application, synthesis, analysis etc.
- Try a peer review or a peer evaluation process – have fellow students review/evaluate another students work in class

What can we do to make marking *…transparent*?

- Provide clear instructions and expectations to students prior to assignment's due date
- Attach a marked copy of the scheme/rubric when returning assignments
- Provide constructive comments and make sure deductions are justified
- Use standardized symbols when correcting
- Set office hours to address potential issues that may arise
- Clarify marking scheme ("A" means excellent)
- Keep records to gauge progress
- Make rubric available to students before assignment is due
- Try to be available for contact outside office hours (phone or e-mail)
- Ensure clear and open communication between course instructor and TAs especially regarding marking expectations
- Don't be afraid to acknowledge that you may have made a mistake with your marking