

Case Study 2: **Feedback on written examinations**

Abstract

Surprisingly, feedback is rarely provided on formal written examinations in HE History. This is partly because traditionally this was not the practice and also because of the pressure of time during the examination period. Yet, setting assessments which have no feedback mechanisms is not good practice and students are left with no guidance about their performance or how to improve. This case study considers a department-wide initiative to introduce feedback on written examinations. The strategy used was to produce a simple template for a cover sheet. This could be used by both students and examiners. Student feedback was brief and focused on 'ways to improve'. The system has been in place for three years and is commended by external examiners and by the students themselves.

Key words: examination feedback, dialogue

Context	Project rationale (link to pedagogic research)
Subject: History	Providing feedback on examination performance which had hitherto not been given
Level: 2 and 3	Focusing on ways to improve
Number of students: 50	Manageable staff workload
Format: (e.g. seminar)	Same form may be used for students, internal and external examiners
Level 2 Option	Research
Gender, History and Politics	On feedback
Advanced Option	On examination feedback
The Victorian City	

Initiative outline	Implementation advice (including resources)
<p>The template was introduced for all examinations in the department of History</p> <p>The first marker completes the front of the cover sheet with brief comments on each question and 3-4 bullet points on ways in which the students' performance may be improved.</p> <p>The second marker/external examiner adds comments to the back of the sheet (some of these comments may be communicated to student).</p> <p>The mark is then agreed between examiners.</p> <p>Students attend one-to-one tutorials within 2-3 weeks of the examination to receive feedback from the front cover.</p>	<p>Standardised template for cover sheet (attached)</p>

Benefits for teaching and learning
<p>Students receive feedback on all examinations taken (previously received none)</p> <p>Students receive feedback in a timely manner</p> <p>Feedback is specific and focuses on ways to improve performance (see attached)</p> <p>The procedure is efficient in terms of time for the marker as they only complete one sheet for both students and other examiners</p> <p>Students receive feedback in a similar format for all examinations</p> <p>Comment from an external examiner:</p> <p><i>All assessed work is seen by two examiners. The first provides comments and marks, the second responds and agrees the provisional final mark. The expectation is that the second marker will read the submission; in practice, some submissions are virtually blind double-marked. This system was first used last year (2009) and has run this year very smoothly and efficiently. The examiners' comments were judicious and helpful. The form employed has been adjusted (as suggested last year) so as to allow room for confidential comments and students' feedback. I am particularly impressed by the quality of the feedback. The assessment process is thus employed very helpfully to make the marking as transparent as possible, assist students' progression, and address each student's weaknesses and strengths.</i></p>

Troubleshooting tips

It works well when introduced at a Departmental level rather than for an individual module

Ways to improve should be as specific as possible and refer to particular questions/aspects of examination performance

Department of History

Examinations Coversheet

STUDENT NAME:

(To be completed by module leader once marking has been completed by first and second marker)

Student no: 0927942

Year of study: 2nd

Degree course: History & Politics

Full time

Module: Gender, History & Politics

Tutor: Sarah Richardson

Provisional Mark:

(Please note that these internally agreed marks may be changed by external examiners during the final examining process next June)

Comments on Examination:

1 Enlightenment writers: lots of relevant detail and a full analysis of More, Rousseau and Wollstonecraft. The essay touched on some of the relevant secondary literature but there was scope to engage with this more critically and extensively.

2 Women's suffrage: a good overview particularly of the NUWSS and WSPU but the answer did not always get to grips with the question about **why** the campaign was so divisive. There was scope to look beyond these two organisations as well. The answer also lacked engagement with the secondary literature on this issue.

3 (if answered) Interwar period: the answer is not always focused on the question. There are some relevant points but the essay does not focus on the key issues of the interwar period eg the rise of welfare feminism, the pro-natalist agenda and employment during the depression. In addition, there is no reference to the secondary literature.

Ways to Improve:

- Try and incorporate more discussion of the relevant secondary literature into your answers. Highlight the debates and different interpretations of historians and treat this critically
- Use case studies and examples to add detail to your answers – try and avoid over-generalisations
- Ensure you are always answering the question rather than the question that you would prefer to answer!