

Self and Peer Assessment

Studies have shown that by actively involving students in the assessment process, we can encourage students to become more responsible, self-directed learners. Two ways of achieving this are through self and peer assessment.

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is the process of critically appraising ones own learning, for example a student appraising their contribution to an assessment task.

Self-assessment could involve, for example, writing a short summary of the strengths and weaknesses of their contribution or using a rubric to assign scores or grade bands to their work.

Assessment types

Most assessments can be self assessed, however some assessment types are ideal for self-assessment such as reflective journals and portfolios.

Prerequisites

Depending on the level and type of self-assessment required, students will ideally be provided with guidelines, such as questions encouraging reflection or an evaluation sheet including the assessment criteria and a marking rubric. Where possible, it is preferable to base assessment criteria on the learning outcomes.

It has been shown that involving students in the creation of assessment criteria, leads to them engaging more seriously in the assessment task. This involvement encourages ownership of the assessment process and they students are more likely to understand what is expected of them.

Example

Self-assessment can quite easily be incorporated into

Example cover sheet content

Name, Assignment details, etc...

Please provide a short commentary outlining

Strengths: _____

Aspects that could be improved/difficulties encountered: _____

Tutor's comments:

Student grade:

Tutor grade:

existing assessment practices, with just a few small adjustments or additions.

For example, ask students to submit work with a cover sheet. The cover sheet will outline the students' appraisal of their work, see example inset. Other possibilities include:

- a checklist of assessment requirements, e.g. abstract, introduction, hypothesis, spelling and grammar check, ...;
- a marking rubric against which the submission has been scored.

Tutors generally find the quality of submitted assessments improve when some form of self-assessment is included and some studies have reported better performance in tests among students who engaged in self-assessment within a course.

Accuracy improves over time, and is enhanced by tutor feedback.

Moderation

The self-assessment task should be moderated. While the student has provided their own feedback, there should also be some level of feedback from the tutor to support or, if needs be, refocus the students own appraisal.

Any moderation should be relatively light touch, so as not to undermine the self- or peer-assessment process by discounting the students' appraisal in favour of the tutors.

For graded assessments, some tutors agree with the students that both student and tutor will assess the work. If the grades awarded are within, for example, 5% of each other then the higher grade will stand.

Peer-Assessment

Peer assessment is the process of involving students in the appraisal of their peers' work. Peer-assessment can be of individual or group work and can be anonymous or not.

Similar to self-assessment, studies have shown that students benefit from engaging in peer assessment. There are some prerequisites to success outlined below.

Assessment types

There are many suitable assessment types for peer-assessment, given adequate preparation and training for students. Among those are presentations, annotated bibliographies, practical work, posters and portfolios.

Prerequisites

It is important to invest some time prior to the assessment task, discussing the process and developing assessment criteria with students. In fact studies have shown that a involving students in the criteria making process is critical for success.

It is advisable to have more than one peer assessor of a given piece of work in order to ensure consistency, and discourage some potential problems (see FAQ below).

Tips for success

Both forms of assessment can (in theory) be used for both formative and summative assessment purposes, but students will gain more from formative uses.

Be prepared to spend some time **training** students on the assessment process.

Include some level of tutor **moderation**. This will ensure students don't lose their way and help maintain reliability and consistency in assessment.

Involve students in the criteria making process – it is important to involve students in order for them to understand the assessment process and what is expected of them as assessor and assessee. In fact, studies have shown that involvement in setting the criteria is critical for the success of self-/peer-assessment.

Allow students the chance to **practice** peer-assessing. Students skills will improve with practice and the time investment for both tutor and student will pay off.

FAQ

Common concerns raised about using peer assessment include the friend factor, collusion, and in group work, non-contributors benefiting from others' work.

How do I discourage students from overmarking themselves?

Generally, the experience in self-assessment is that good students will tend to underrate their performance, whereas weaker students will overrate their performance.

Agree with students that if the moderator's mark and the self-assigned mark fall within 5% of each other, the higher mark will be awarded. Otherwise, the moderator's mark will stand.

How do I discourage students from overmarking their friends?

In some cases, especially in very large classes, making the peer assessment exercise anonymous will be enough to discourage overmarking of peers.

Ask assessors to justify the mark they are awarding using a rubric or written feedback on the assessment.

Also, ensure that each assessment piece is assessed by two peer assessors. Outliers can then be more easily spotted.

Can I use peer- or self-assessment with my first year class?

Studies have shown there is no difference between 1st, 2nd and 3rd years when it comes to self- or peer- assessment, but the process of self- or peer-assessment will improve with practice.

How will I ensure there is equal participation in group assessments?

There are various suggestions for detecting and dealing with 'free-riders' in group work. Some suggest that the group submit a summary of the percentage participation of each member with the assessment. Others suggest that each student should write a reflective piece on their contribution to the task.

In cases where there are questionmarks over participation, an oral presentation can help detect non-contributors, but care needs to be taken...?

In Summary

It has been shown that when students understand assessment, they are much better placed to perform well. The best way of helping students to understand assessment is by involving them in assessment, as co-creators of assessment criteria and as assessors.

While there will be an initial time outlay in training and preparing students, there are rewards for both student and tutor. Students also receive more timely feedback than with conventional assessment methods. This feedback is sometimes more easily deciphered than instructor feedback.

Developing and using assessment criteria and marking guidelines will help ensure the validity and reliability of assessment.

As with all forms of assessment, peer- and self- assessment tasks should be linked as closely as possible to the learning outcomes.

Resources

There are a number of resources available online from example rubrics to self-assessment checklists and submission sheets.

Blackboard supports the creation and moderation of self and peer assessment tasks as does Turnitin, the plagiarism detection software. Blackboard also supports rubrics for both guidance for students and as a marking tool.

Phil Race wrote a useful briefing on self and peer assessment available from the UK HE Academy: <http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/ftp/Resources/gc/assess09SelfPeerGroup.pdf>.

Additional resources and support are available from CELT.