Enacting educational principles with assessment technologies - a practical guide

Here we set out principles for using assessment and feedback technologies, derived from the literature and a 2016 study of UCL students using both Moodle Assignment and Turnitin Assignment, and relate these principles to the different ways of giving feedback.

Please note that although we focus here on Moodle and Turnitin, there is much more to do outside these particular technologies - not least the kind of 'community work' of sharing standards and coming to terms with unreliability described by Bloxam (2015).

Teaching teams and departments can organise a hands-on session with Digital Education to explore Moodle Assignment and Turnitin from the perspectives of students, markers and administrators. This exposure will help immeasurably with designing efficient, considerate processes and workflows.

Feedback principle	Enacting the principle in Moodle Assignment	Enacting the principle in Turnitin Assignment
Assessment criteria principles		
Develop a shared understanding of the criteria before students start the work.	Present criteria within a **Rubric** - this displays the criteria along with descriptors for levels of achievement. Considering that students generally struggle with the terms used in the criteria, one important Moodle opportunity is the linked **Glossary** of terms.	Present criteria within a **Rubric** - this displays the criteria along with descriptors for levels of achievement.
Communicate to students that they are intended to work with the criteria. Make the criteria conspicuous before the submission deadline i.e. at the point students start work.	Moodle Assignment does display a **Rubric** conspicuously before the deadline, but its existence does need to be communicated to students.	Turnitin Assignment doesn't make a **Rubric** conspicuous before the deadline, so its existence does need to be communicated to students.
Support students to benchmark their own work to the criteria.	**Rubrics** in Moodle Assignment let assessors click the **level** achieved for each **criterion**, and moreover allow a **comment** for each which can briefly explain the level achieved.	**Rubrics** in Turnitin Assignment let assessors click the **level** achieved for each **criterion**, but any explanation needs to be given in the **summary comment**.
Address doubts about the educational value of criteria. Communicate to students what working with the criteria might look like. Demonstrate clearly that assessors do indeed refer to the criteria when marking.	**Rubrics** with **comments** at each **level**, as explained above, support students to relate specific aspects of feedback to the criteria.	As well as **Rubrics**, Turnitin Assignment allows each **Comment** or **Quickmark** to be associated with a single criterion. This supports students to relate specific aspects of feedback - and, importantly, their own work - to the criteria.
Feedback principles		
The feedback comments most valued by students explain the issue, make links with the assessment criteria, and include advice about what students should do next.	**Comments** in Moodle Assignment are not yet as advanced as those in Turnitin in terms of specificity, navigability or presentation. They also do not afford links with specific criterion. However, they can be positioned on the page, so used judiciously they are helpful here.	**Comments** in Turnitin can be precisely positioned to help with specificity. They also allow links and can be colour coded. They can be viewed in different ways (as lists or on the page) and they can be searched. Again, Turnitin Assignment makes it easy to associate a **Comment** or **Quickmark** to a single criterion in a **Rubric**.
If your feedback is dispersed across different modes (e.g. bubble comments, rubric, summary comment, annotated uploaded file, model answer, cohort feedback), be explicit with students.	Be focused. Be explicit about what kinds of feedback students should expect, how to find it, and how to work with it. Remind students about Moodle's **MyFeedback Report**, which brings together all feedback that year.	Note that Turnitin summary Comments do not display directly in Moodle's MyFeedback Report (although there is a link to them). Be explicit about what kinds of feedback students should expect, how to find it, and how to work with it.

Communicate explicitly to students that feedback exists, especially if it is dispersed across different modes (e.g. bubble comments, rubric, summary comment, annotated uploaded file, model answer, cohort feedback). Provide explicit guidance on how to interpret and cross-reference these different feedback modes.	Make use of **UCL Moodle's Test User accounts** to experience a student perspective first hand. That way you can make informed decisions about how, when and where to direct students' attention, so that they know what to expect and what to do. **Demonstrate** to students how to access the feedback. We provide guidance which you may like to link to. Monitor students' **engagement** with feedback by referring to the MyFeedback report, which will tell you whether students have visited their assignment after you released feedback (an imprecise proxy, but some indication).	Make use of **UCL Moodle's Test User accounts** to experience a student perspective first hand. That way you can make informed decisions about how, when and where to direct students' attention, so that they know what to expect and what to do. **Demonstrate** to students how to access the feedback. We provide guidance which you may like to link to. Monitor students' **engagement** with feedback by returning to the Inbox where you can find out whether students have spent more than 30 seconds on the feedback page.
Students tend to want to be told how to improve their work, and consequently can be more interested in feedback on problems than on what they did well. To interest students in positive feedback, also highlight suggestions for further improvements.	Use **Comments** (summary comments, inline comments, or Rubric comments).	Use **Comments** (Quickmark comments, bubble comments, or summary comments).
Students need to be confident they can approach tutors about their mark and feedback without fear or prejudice in future assessments.	Ensure that the feedback **comments** explain the **numeric mark** in ways students can understand.	Ensure that the feedback **comments** explain the **numeric mark** in ways students can understand.
Workload demands		
The more feedback is dispersed between different modes, the more demanding it is for students to relate it to each other, to the criteria, to their own thinking, and to their numeric mark. There is evidence that many students do not make optimal use of their feedback. Where more than one mode is used, there is a need to distinguish between the purpose and content of each kind of feedback, signpost their relationships, and communicate this to students.	Typed feedback is far easier to understand than handwritten, as a general rule. Be focused and concise. Explain why you have chosen to use each kind of feedback, and what distinct benefit it provides in relation to any others you have used.	Typed feedback is far easier to understand than handwritten, as a general rule. Be focused and concise. Explain why you have chosen to use each kind of feedback, and what distinct benefit it provides in relation to any others you have used.
If individual comments have a lot in common, these can be given as general feedback to the cohort. Assessors can then spend the time they save on repeating themselves, and give more student-specific comments instead	Moodle Assignment makes it straightforward for a shared feedback file to be uploaded for each student. Moreover the feedback will display in Moodle MyFeedback.	Turnitin does not allow a feedback file to be uploaded in common, and it will not display in Moodle MyFeedback but you can upload a file to Moodle an direct students' attention to that.

Find out more

- Assessment and feedback technologies at UCL - a signpost page.
- Digital Education's miniguides on assessment technologies.
- Arena Centre's Assessment and Feedback Quickguides.

References

- Bloxham, S., den-Outer, B., Hudson, J., Price, M., 2015. Let's stop the pretence of consistent marking: exploring the multiple limitations of assessment criteria. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 1–16. doi:10.1080/02602938.2015.1024607.
- Douarin, E. and Vogel, M., 2016 How can we use online feedback to maximise engagement with the assessment criteria? UCL E-Learning Development Grant project report, 2016. http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1521089/