



# Troubleshooting marking

Cristina Adriana Alexandru  
Cristina.Alexandru@ed.ac.uk

# Schedule

- Why is preparing for potential marking problems important?
- How can we identify solutions to our problems?
- Tackling frequent problems during marking
  - Problems from students
  - Problems from self
- Your own problems
- For markers who marked at least once : invitation to evaluation study for the MarkEd marking, feedback and moderation tool

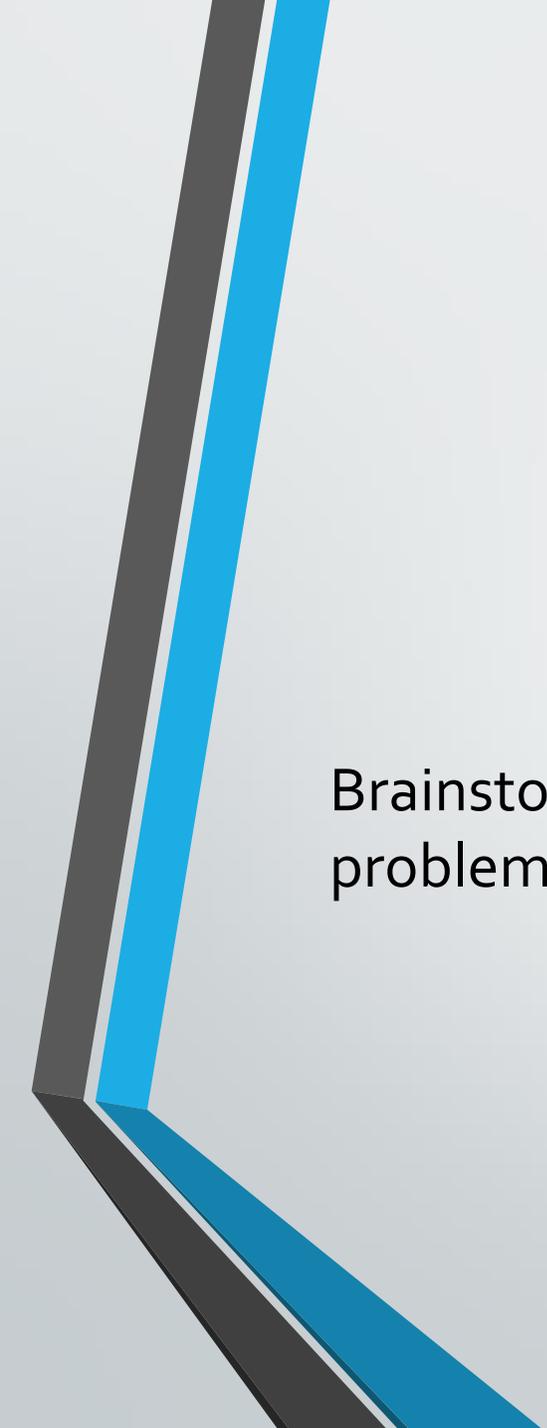


# Why is preparing for potential marking problems important?

Brainstorm the motivation for troubleshooting when preparing for marking

# Why is preparing for potential marking problems important?

- Marking often involves large amounts of work and tight deadlines, and may be very time consuming; we need to try to be *efficient*
- We need to respect the very basic principle of *fairness* towards our students
- We need to provide feedback which is *useful*
- The above may sometimes contradict themselves
- Students can surprise us, but we can also surprise ourselves!
- It's best to have some strategies at hand to avoid being suboptimal markers



# How can we identify solutions to our problems?

Brainstorm the different sources of support for finding solutions to our problems



# How can we identify solutions to our problems?

- **Through self reflection, trial and error**
- Through discussion with colleagues from the course team
- Through discussion with other tutors and demonstrators
- By participating to training (Informatics, IAD)
- By looking them up in educational literature

# Frequent problems during marking

## - From students -

In a piece of assessment:

- *A student misinterprets a task and does something else than required*
- *A students used a different approach than expected according to marking scheme*
- *A student seems to have a fundamental misunderstanding*
- *A student's hand writing is difficult to read*

# My advice: marking students who misinterpret the task

- Go back to task instructions:
  - Are they clear?
  - Is difficult to misinterpret them the way that student did?
- If not, **contact the person/people responsible for setting up the assignment** (TA, lecturers); Will they accept the student's interpretation of the task, and if so what is the marking scheme? You can also propose your own
- If the instructions are clear, use your existing marking scheme; you may need to consult with the course team about partial marks, if not covered in it
- Update your marking scheme, to ensure consistency for other students
- Inform the markers marking the same tasks, for consistency across markers.

# My advice: marking students who use a different approach than expected

- Questions to ask yourself:
    - Is that approach a true alternative?
    - Does it showcase any criteria which was included in the marking scheme? Is that criteria clearly reflected by the task instructions?
    - Does it offer additional advantages?
    - Was it taught, or does it show students going deeper into their reading?
  - Discuss with the **person/people responsible for setting up the assignment (TA, lecturers)**, describing the student's approach, advantages, potential problems with instructions; Will they accept the approach, and if so what is the marking scheme? You can also propose your own
- Inform the markers marking the same tasks, for consistency across markers.

# My advice: marking students who have a fundamental misunderstanding

- If misunderstanding transfers across multiple tasks, **consult with the person/people responsible for setting up the assignment (TA, lecturers) whether you should deduct marks for the same issue multiple times**
- Update your marking scheme and inform other markers as appropriate
- In your feedback to the student:
  - Be honest about misunderstanding and point to any tasks where it was repeated
  - Be clear about why this is an important misunderstanding; provide high level explanation
  - Be constructive and not destructive: provide suggestions, what to read, examples
  - Offer encouragement

# My advice: marking students with hard to read handwriting

- Try to decipher the hand writing (you may manage to read some of it)
- Consult any diagrams, code, figures etc. that are associated with it
- If still not clear what the student's solution is, get help from a colleague
- Bottom line, give marks for the parts of the solution that are readable only; you may want to consult with person/people responsible for setting up the assignment (TA, lecturers) about marks for effort
- In your feedback to the student, offer suggestions for making hand writing more readable (e.g. writing in capitals).

# Frequent problems during marking

## - From self -

When you mark a piece of assessment:

- *You have the tendency to be subjective due to your knowledge of the students (e.g. you also see them in tutorials or labs)*
- *You have a tendency to change your detailed marking scheme as you go through the submissions, as you discover the real level of the students*
- *You find it difficult to keep consistent with the other markers*
- *You spend too much time writing lengthy feedback*

# My Advice: avoiding being subjective when marking due to your knowledge of the students

- Cover the student names, or don't look them up if only student ids provided
- See the marking scheme as strict, try to keep to it
- If you have already seen a name:
  - re-consider your marks
  - compare with students with similar solutions
  - shuffle submissions before continuing
  - suggest to colleague marking same task to mark that student

# My advice: avoiding changing your marking scheme as you go

- Start by looking through a subset, or all submissions without marking, to make an impression about the students' level; detail the marking scheme as appropriate, in consultation with person/people responsible for it (TA, lecturers)
- See the marking scheme as strict, try to keep to it
- Use the marking criteria and annotate it as you go through papers to mark similarly the same mistakes
- Keep a record of marks and justification for each student; Compare between students as you go
- Keep good/average/weak anchor solutions for comparison

# My advice: keeping consistent with other markers

- If possible, propose splitting responsibilities such that each of you marks a different task
- Have a group marking session in which everyone grades a few papers or exam answers and compares them.
- Mark together in the same room
- Keep informing each other about updates on detailing the marking scheme from the TA/lecturers, or how you are further detailing it
- Consult about detailing the marking scheme
- At least share results and feedback, so that you can compare and revise your marking if necessary

# My advice: avoiding spending too much time writing lengthy feedback

- Balance justifying all mark deductions against time you have available
- Always keep track of time
- Remember that lengthy feedback can do more harm than good (demoralising, not read by students, difficult to understand what biggest problems were)
- Structure your feedback using a table or headlines
- Recycle feedback (often students make similar mistakes)
- Consider only justifying important mark deductions
- If you are tutoring or lecturing as well:
  - consider using group feedback for common issues rather than pointing them out in written feedback to all students
  - Offer 'see me' option



Evaluation study for the MarkEd marking,  
feedback and moderation tool

- Andrius Girdzius and Oktay Sen-Hasan-

# Resources

- [Informatics Teaching Support training webpage](#)
- **“Tutoring and Demonstrating: a Handbook”** [chapter 6](#) (“Marking and Commenting on Essays”) and p. 36-37 [chapter 4](#) (“Problem solving classes”)
- **“Assessment and providing feedback “** material on the [“IAD Resources on Tutoring and Demonstrating” channel in Learn](#)
- [UoE “Enhancing feedback” website](#); especially all resources under **“Effective marking and commenting”**
- IAD workshops: [“Assessment and providing feedback in the sciences”](#), Wed 26<sup>th</sup> Feb