Troubleshooting marking

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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
• Presentation by Prof. Perdita Stevens: Marking and automarking
• Your own problems
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 student 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 it easy 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 handwriting (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 handwriting 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
Presentation by Professor Perdita Stevens
- Marking and Automarking-
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 workshop:** “**Assessment and providing feedback in the sciences**”, Wed 27th Feb