

Peer Assessment

Peer assessment is a way of providing opportunities to students to view examples of other student work, to practice their own evaluation skills by providing feedback to others, and to receive feedback from someone at their own level. Peer assessment is often used when the number of students, is large, whether teaching face-to-face and online, but it can offer benefits in any situation. Most importantly, it allows students to receive additional feedback beyond what can be provided by the teacher/trainer.

“**Peer assessment** requires students to provide either feedback or grades (or both) to their peers on a product or a performance, based on the criteria of excellence for that product or event, which students may have been involved in determining” (Falchikov, 2007, p.132). If the grading will contribute to a final grade for students, and frequently it does not, it is often an average of the grades assigned by members in a peer group, or is weighted less than the grade of the teacher.
(http://sydney.edu.au/education_social_work/groupwork/)

Creating grading rubrics

Grading for peer assessment is often done using a rubric to guide the grading, which can reduce subjectivity. Rubrics are useful for teachers as well, particularly when many teachers teach the same course or teach as a group and need to be consistent.

Rubric: a scoring scale used to assess student performance along a task-specific set of criteria.

Criteria: characteristics of good performance on a task

Levels of performance: the degree to which the student has met the criterion

Descriptors: what is expected of students at each level of performance for each criteria.

Many rubrics do not contain descriptors, just the criteria and levels of performance. It is not easy to write good descriptors for each level and each criterion. So, you may have to adjust your descriptors over time.

Each rubric has at least 2 criteria and 2 levels of performance:

Criteria	Level of Performance 1	Level of Performance 2	Level of Performance N
Criteria 1	Descriptor	Descriptor	Descriptor
Criteria 2	Descriptor	Descriptor	Descriptor
Criteria N	Descriptor	Descriptor	Descriptor

Here is an example rubric from the WMO Online Course for Trainers:

Grading Rubric for **Performance/Learning Outcomes** and **Content**

Scope sections. At least 1 point is required for completion. In this case, the Criteria are listed on the left, and the Descriptors are in the three boxes to the right.

<p>(1) Performance/Learning Outcomes are included. (2) The Content Scope is presented and linked to the Learning Outcomes.</p>	<p>Outcomes are not related to job tasks or transferable skills and insufficiently measurable. Content Scope does not correspond well to Learning Outcomes or is not achievable.</p> <p>0points</p>	<p>Outcomes are related to job tasks or transferable skills, but should be more direct, complete, or measurable. Content Scope corresponds to Outcomes and is achievable.</p> <p>1points</p>	<p>Outcomes are appropriate, detailed, complete and well written. Content Scope corresponds well to Outcomes, is very clearly presented and is achievable.</p> <p>2points</p>
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Benefits and challenges of using peer assessment (and self-assessment)

(adapted from <http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/UCDTLA0033.pdf>)

Benefits for students

1. High Quality Learning

- encourages transfer of learning
- encourages reflection
- can enhance the learning experience
- allows students to internalize and understand the assessment criteria
- eliminates the mystery that often characterizes the assessment process
- facilitates learning from seeing other students' strengths and weaknesses

2. Skills development

- can contribute to the development of communication and negotiation skills
- can develop the ability to work cooperatively
- promotes lifelong learning skills

3. Personal and affective development

- Increases responsibility
- increases student autonomy/independence
- increases confidence
- reduces stress
- improves motivation

Benefits for academics

1. Can be an efficient and effective way to monitor student progress at regular intervals.
2. Can reduce the time required for assessment.
3. Provides students with more feedback than might be the case when feedback is only given by the lecturer.

Challenges for academics: How to start?

1. Give students training in self and peer assessment.
 2. Give explanations and provide evidence of benefits to students of participating in assessment.
 3. Provide examples (excellent, average, poor) to help students understand the process of assessment.
 4. Involve students in discussing, negotiating and/or developing the assessment criteria.
 5. Use multiple peer assessors to increase student confidence in assessment
 6. Use anonymous peer assessment.
 7. Make explicit to students what role their assessment will have in the course
 8. To minimize bias, ask students to justify their decisions.
 9. If used for summative evaluation, have a trial practice first.
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References

Falchikov, N. In: *Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education* (Boud, D. & Falchikov, N.). 2007. Abingdon: Routledge. pp. 128-144.