# MODERATION OF ASSESSMENTS

## What is moderation?

- Moderation is a quality assurance process that ensures appropriate standards.

- It is a process for ensuring that marks or grades are awarded appropriately and consistently.

- Moderation involves checking and reviewing assessment schemes, items and assessor judgments.

- It is essentially a form of feedback to markers to help them align their marking standards with those of other markers.

## USQ moderation requirements

- Each course is allocated a Moderator to:
    - review and endorse the assessment scheme;
    - review and endorse each summative assessment item;
    - verify and endorse the final grades allocated to students.

- In addition, faculty *boards of examiners* meet each semester to moderate and award all final grades based on recommendations of course examiners.

## What influences successful moderation of grades?

The amount of effort required depends on factors, such as the degree of subjectivity, variability in student work, the amount of inconsistency that can be tolerated, marker numbers, past experience of markers, and the time and cost that can be afforded.

Moderation of grades is most successful when:

- it is collaborative;

- involves open and transparent communication among assessors;

- provides constructive feedback and professional support.

## Stages of moderation

*Planning:* Moderation should be planned as part of course design and implementation. It should not be left to afterthought or chance. The primary focus is consistency in the application of standards within a course, with a secondary issue of consistency across courses within a program.

*Course preparation:* Review assessments independently prior to delivery to ensure that they are well designed and include clear guidelines for students and markers.

*Assessor preparation:* Familiarise all markers with the marking scheme and agree on marking processes. Trial marking to refine the marking scheme and generate common understandings of expected standards. Inclusion of someone external to the course helps align the adopted standards with other courses in the program. Discussion with a colleague is especially important where there is a single marker.

*Review during marking (before marks or grades are finalised):* It is too late or too awkward to change marks after all the marking is done. It is better to monitor and refine marker performance during the marking.

*Post-marking review:* This stage does not affect the marks and grades given to students but is important for the future. Questions to ask are 'How consistent were we?' and 'How can we do better next time?'

## Some moderation procedures

*Creating transparency:* Well-designed assessments provide clear specifications about what is expected. The assessment criteria should be made explicit. Consider also making statements or providing examples that illustrate different standards of performance (grade levels).

*Self moderation:* Markers can be inconsistent within themselves, especially if there are many assessments to mark and it takes several marking sessions. It is important to check back over scripts that have been marked to ensure that scripts marked earlier and later have been treated similarly.

*Expert moderation:* Sometimes an independent viewpoint is needed. This person could comment on samples of student scripts or on borderline or difficult cases, thus providing an independent perspective and overview.

*Peer moderation:* Markers meet to review their marking. This should occur early in the marking and preferably at other times during the marking to keep markers 'on track'.

*Selecting scripts for review:* When numbers are small, all scripts might be reviewed. When numbers are large, sampling is needed. Sampling can be random (possibly stratified within levels) or deliberate (e.g., mid-grade, borderline or problematic). The number of scripts sampled depends on many factors such as number of markers, variability of performance, tolerance of inconsistency, logistics, time and cost.

*Blind re-marking:* In this case, the moderator (expert or peer) is not informed of the previous marker's judgment of a script. This means placing no marks or annotations on the script—often an unrealistic requirement. Where any difference exceeds a threshold, especially across grade levels, discussion is needed to resolve the difference and reach common agreement.

*Confirmatory review:* This is often more realistic and more helpful than blind re-marking. The moderator (expert or peer) is completely informed of the previous marker's judgment of a script. The reviewer's task is to check whether they can agree with the previous marker. Discussion is needed where the reviewer cannot find the evidence to sustain the marker's judgement.

*Allocation of scripts:* Typically, scripts are re-marked or reviewed by one other person. With multiple markers, the sample can be randomly shuffled among markers. For some purposes (e.g. assisting new markers or at later stages of marking) pairs of markers might review a selection of each other's scripts.

*Resolving differences:* When a pair of markers cannot agree on a result, an arbitrator is needed. Recalcitrant markers may have to be replaced.

*Follow through:* Agreements about the standards applied to the sample scripts need to be applied to all other scripts. The message is 'go and do likewise'.

*In-situ marking:* Some assessments are conducted in-situ (e.g. orals, presentations, music or drama performance, field or lab work). Sometimes an audiovisual record is kept as backup, but the in-situ performance is marked, not the record. In those cases, it is desirable to have more than one marker and to reach consensus through discussion.

*Moderation across courses:* At a wider level, program coordinators need to monitor standards across courses and create linkages between staff in different courses to encourage greater consistency in assessment processes and application of common standards.

## References

*Marking and Grading Assessments*, Curtin University of Technology
http://lsn.curtin.edu.au/publications/chapter7.pdf
*Moderation*, Learning Connection, University of South Australia
http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/LearningConnection/staff/assessment/moderation.asp

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