

# POSTGRADUATE TRAINING SEMINAR

## Marking Strategies & Study Skills

Here are some suggestions you may wish to consider when marking course submissions.

1. Before collecting submissions, spell out your expectations (if you are leading) or determine expectations (if you are not the lead instructor); in the second case, consider sharing resources with the lead instructor
  - “Here is a handout to demonstrate what our expectations are...”
  - Give examples of good vs. bad writeups
  - Make a checklist/guidelines you will be looking for as a tool for their writeups
  - “I will collect all exercises but mark an unspecified subset”
2. During marking
  - Get solutions from module supervisor (has he/she already included a rubric?)
  - Formative (comments) vs. summative (score) feedback? Marking can include both; if you are only giving formative feedback, suggest the instructor includes a numerical score anyway, to show where their writeups fall on the grade scale. It is important to *identify both the score and comments as feedback!*
  - Write down a sub-rubric as you mark, noting common errors for follow-up in tutorials
  - Team marking can make things go much more efficiently and fairly; this requires some organization, but is well worth the effort
  - Could pick 1 question to mark fully and give full solutions plus rubric for a second question so that students can mock mark the second question on their own (teaching critical assessment of their own work)
  - Could ask your students what they believe they should be graded on (this works if the atmosphere in your classroom is “good” and a real conversation can be had)
3. After assignments are returned
  - Go through the common errors in first 5 minutes of class
  - If things are really bad on a particular assignment, excerpt passages from 1/10 and 9/10 submissions (with no names/IDs) to discuss/include when you pass back assignments
4. At any point in the process: clarify what constitutes groupwork, why we do it, and give some tips on how to work in a group effectively in a timed setting. Students can try to
  - Encourage input from each member
  - Keep notes for “readback” (not just one secretary for the group)
  - Devise a plan of attack (this may be all they have time to do)
  - Division of labor (writing, checking)
  - Contrast their strategy with those of other groups

*I was once told (tongue-in-cheek, I think) that  
the secret to undergraduate teaching is  
“Never let a student get between you and the door.”  
–S. Krantz*

Tutorials also provide an opportunity to embed positive study habits. Here are some ideas you may wish to incorporate into your discussions with undergraduates.

1. During tutorial (some points apply only if you are leading the session—or you can ask to give a brief presentation)
  - Discuss topics covered in general terms, pointing out essential vocabulary
  - “If you were give a quiz right now, could you define X?”
  - When visiting a group, ask them to give you a plan of attack orally (*put your hands in your pockets*)
  - “Can you think of an example of A? Can you adjust B so that it is countably infinite instead of finite?”
  - Point out explicitly that the questions you are asking are ones they can ask themselves when studying
2. Immediate concerns: your midterm is on date X
  - “In the two weeks prior to the exam, here is one suggested study plan...” This will give them an idea of the quantity of material they need to review.
  - Compile a list of suggested items to prepare with consultation of Module supervisor (this may or may not already exist on the QMPlus page!)
3. Less immediate, but also important: long term strategies/philosophy can be conveyed using analogies
  - Can you learn to ski by watching someone else on the slopes?
  - You become a pianist not by going to your piano lessons weekly, but by creating music when you practice
  - “You don’t prepare for a marathon by running a marathon the day before...”
  - If you were majoring in German, you would be expected to learn *vocabulary, grammar, written and oral skills*. The expectation would be a *command of the language* in the first year and *fluency* by the second.
4. If you have access to past students of the course (or just students in a subsequent year), you can ask them what they consider to be an invaluable study skill and feed this information back to your class. Students appreciate this kind of input differently, even if it is the same content as what you have been saying all along.

Here are some challenges we currently encounter (to varying degrees). Any ideas or suggestions?

- Students not submitting courseworks which do not count toward their final marks
- Students not collecting their marked courseworks
- Students not reading the formative feedback (e.g., when a numerical score is included)
- Students not happy with the feedback they are receiving (quantity, quality, consistency/fairness, etc.)
- The current “submission box” system is impersonal and difficult to organise amongst multiple graders
- Any issues or problems from your side of things?
- Do you think marking with a “feedback coversheet” would help (you, them, overall)?