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From Grading Artefacts to Learning Infrastructure: Co-Creating Competency-Based Assessment Descriptors for Inclusive Learning

Dr Chris Whiting

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York St John University

Descriptors and criteria matter more than we might think

From

	PASS GRADES					FAIL GRADES	
	(100-85)	(84 - 70)	(69 - 60)	(59 - 50)	(49 - 40)	(39 - 20)	(19 - 0)
SUMMARY DESCRIPTOR: Learning accredited at Level 6 (UG) will reflect the ability to critically review, consolidate and extend a systematic and coherent body of knowledge, utilising specialised skills across an area of study.							
	General Characteristics (UG)						
Knowledge & understanding PLO(s): Enter "All" or specific PLO(s). If N/A: ~~Strikethrough~~ or shade row	Subject knowledge and conceptual understanding beyond expectation(s) of the level of study.	Subject knowledge and conceptual understanding that evidences a breadth/depth of reading/research significantly beyond set material.	Detailed subject knowledge and conceptual understanding relevant to the level of study and demonstrating development beyond set material.	Subject knowledge and conceptual understanding consistent with taught content.	Replication of taught content with limited demonstration of conceptual understanding.	Insufficient knowledge and understanding of the subject and its underlying concepts.	Little or no evidence of knowledge and understanding of the subject and its underlying concepts.

To

General Characteristics	**Pass - 3rd** (40 - 49)	**2:2** (50 - 59)	**2:1** (60 - 69)	**First** (70 - 84)	**High First** (85 -100)	**Borderline Fail** (30 - 39) **(Credits may be compensated)**	**Fail** (0 – 29) **(Credits may not be compensated)**
Adjectives	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Exemplary	Not Successful	Unsuccessful
Thinking skills	The work accurately applies most of the thinking skills of the discipline to the core taught content. The work demonstrates a depth of evidence-led understanding beyond recalling or summarising source material.	The work **successfully** applies the discipline's thinking skills to the taught (core and **additional**) content. It demonstrates a broader and deeper level of understanding.	This work applies **critical thinking** to identify **new questions** or **problems** with the source material from taught content or **independent research**.	This work **successfully** applies critical thinking skills to **propose new approaches or offer solutions** to new questions about **complex** bodies of knowledge (taught or independently researched).	This work **applies creative solutions to complex problems**. It successfully proposes **new insights** into existing knowledge(s) within the **field**. The **thoroughness** of the work's thinking supports the **persuasiveness** of its outcomes.	The work may **apply some of the discipline's thinking skills** to the core taught content, but it is limited by **misunderstandings, gaps in knowledge**, or **the absence of higher thinking skills** (such as evaluation / synthesis).	The work **applies few or none of the required thinking skills** to the core taught content.

Moving GADs from compliancy artefact to learning infrastructure

[W]e recommend the language used in the standard GAD is thoroughly reviewed to ensure it is student and staff friendly both in terms of increased clarity, accessibility/inclusivity, and compassionate tone. (2023)

'the generic assessment descriptors should be used as a guide when communicating what was required from students, *but that the [previous] criteria were more related to how to mark the assessments'* (2023, original 2018)

To use Royce Sadler's terminology, the GAD are assessment 'standards', generic grade descriptors which specify what students need to do to achieve a particular grade, as opposed to assessment 'criteria', which are designed to measure how far students have met the desired learning outcomes. (2023)

Methodology



Key Design Changes

	PASS GRADES					FAIL GRADES	
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Key Design Changes

General Characteristics	Pass - 3rd (40 - 49)	2:2 (50 - 59)	2:1 (60 - 69)	First (70 - 84)	High First (85 -100)
Adjectives	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Exemplary
Communication	The work is largely comprehensible. It shows an awareness of relevant technologies and has attempted to use the appropriate writing or presentation style to meet the expectations of an audience.	The work is **clear**, **coherent** and communicates **appropriately** to its **intended audience**. It shows an appreciation of relevant technologies and uses the appropriate writing or presentation style.	The work engages with relevant technologies and communicates using **technically proficient language** appropriate to the medium and its intended audience.	The work communicates **persuasively** and engages ethically with relevant technology. It communicates complex ideas in ways that would be **accessible** to both **specialist** and **non-specialist audiences**.	The work communicates with a **logical flow**. It **successfully** communicates complex ideas in ways that are **understandable** to a range of audiences. The work uses relevant technology in a socially responsible way.

Key Design Changes

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Adjectives	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Exemplary
Collaboration	This work demonstrates an ability to cooperate / negotiate with others mostly as directed to achieve shared outcomes which exceed the potential of working independently. The work shows an awareness of the differences that result from working with different team members.	The work demonstrates an ability to cooperate / negotiate with others, and to **contribute effectively** to collaborative tasks to achieve **productive outcomes** as a team. The work shows an appreciation of the differences that result from working with different team members.	The work demonstrates **effective cooperation / constructive negotiation** with others. It **recognises, evaluates, and adapts the individual's role** to best achieve the **shared goals** and **future outcomes** of the team. The work evidences an engagement with the differences that result from working with diverse team members and an **openness to change.**	The **work recognises and evaluates the strengths and abilities of the team**, as well as the **opportunities and challenges of the collaborative work**. The work **develops** and **deploys** additional resources (professional / specialist) and embraces of the differences that result from working with diverse team members.	The work recognises, **critically evaluates**, and **develops** the individual's role and practice, and **supports / leads similar developments amongst the team**. The work uses teamwork in its approach to community building and **actively** embraces the differences that result from working with diverse team members and other perspectives.

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[Module name] Assignment Brief

Contents

Module Details 1
Assignment Description 2
AI Use 2
Learning Outcomes 3
Advice and Guidance 3
How is this assessment marked? 4
Marking Criteria 5

Module Details			
Module code:		**Level of Study:**	6
Module Leader(s):		**Credits:**	
Assessment format:		**Method of submission:**	
Deadline or Assessment Period:		**Feedback date and place:**	
Assessment limits: length, load, word count, etc.		**Component number:**	
Is this exempt from anonymous marking under the policy?		**Component weighting:**	

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Assignment Description

Describing the task:

- *Context (try to think authentically wherever possible) for example; in what contexts might students use this knowledge or skill after graduating; how would a client expect this as a product or service; how are these skills used in the industry?*
- *Mode and / or medium of assessment e.g., A presentation focusing on verbal and visual communication, or an essay demonstrating academic writing proficiency.*
- *Audience such as 'to your peers', 'for a client' or 'an academic in the same field'*
- *Incorporate / emphasise the Programme-level Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and/or the expected requirements such as 'at least two of the theories presented in lectures', 'using a case study method', 'demonstrating three skills from the list of core taught content', etc.*
- *Consider what skills your students will need for this assessment (academic writing, audio editing, poster design, collaborative working) and ensure you have capacity/resources to support these.*
- *What limitations are there on the use of Generative AI?* If limited use is permitted, make these limitations explicit.*

**Have you tested your assessment through a Generative AI tool? Could you share the results with students to discuss why this is (not) acceptable to use or how the GenAI outputs could be improved by the students to demonstrate their learning?*

[Replace/delete grey guidance text after reading].

AI Use

No AI Use
It is not possible to use AI in this assessment.
AI is not available at any point during the assessment.

Some AI Processes Accepted
AI can be used for planning or editing processes such as:

-

Provide a list of possible processes that students could undertake using AI. It will be necessary to adapt these for the particular assignment and context.

to hide white space

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You are able to **use** or **not use** AI within these parameters. However, you are required to demonstrate that it is you – and not AI – that has achieved the learning outcomes.

If the assessor is unsure about how you have used AI, they may request additional evidence, such as transcripts, or arrange a discussion to talk through your process or check your understanding.

Full AI Use Possible
AI can be used for the processes indicated in the assignment description above and for the creation of your [*assignment product*].

You will be required to submit evidence of these processes to demonstrate your learning, in accordance with the YSJ Guiding Principles for Using AI: (1) you stay in charge, and (2) be honest and transparent. Details of how you will evidence this are given in the assignment description above.

You are able to **use** or **not use** AI within these parameters. However, you are required to demonstrate that it is you – and not AI – that has achieved the learning outcomes.

If the assessor is unsure about how you have used AI, they may request additional evidence, such as transcripts, or arrange a discussion to talk through your process or check your understanding.

rning Outcomes

You must successfully achieve the following Learning Outcomes to pass this assessment:

Only include the LOs that are … students focus on improving th…

vice and Guidance

Things you might consider plac…

- *Assessment Limits (in l…*
- *Frequently Asked Ques…*
- *Common mistakes chec…*
- *Glossary of technical ja…*
- *Additional resources*

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Advice and Guidance

*These could be hyperlinked to aid brevity but try to emphasise where things are **required** or are additional.*

How is this assessment marked?

Your work will be marked according to the assessment instructions provided within this document and the selected Learning Outcomes' (LOs) (see above).

Furthermore, this assessment is marked using the assessment marking criteria or a similar rubric that aligns with the University's Generic Assessment Descriptors (see below).[1] This is to ensure all assessment decisions are comparable regardless of the discipline or mode of assessment.

The University follows a fixed scale marking system, meaning marks are awarded using set grade points rather than every individual percentage point. Further guidance on the fixed scale marking system can be found in the *Code of Practice for Assessment and Academic-related Matters*.

Please note that you **must** meet the required baseline standards (40 – 49%) which will include the LOs and minimum expectations of the assessment. Further still, you must ensure you meet the requirements of each grade boundary to progress to the next, i.e., you should demonstrate your learning through the standards of a Pass, 2:2, and 2:1 to achieve a 2:1 (60 – 69%). These standards are designed to scaffold and build your learning to achieve your fullest potential in each criterion being assessed.

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Marking Criteria

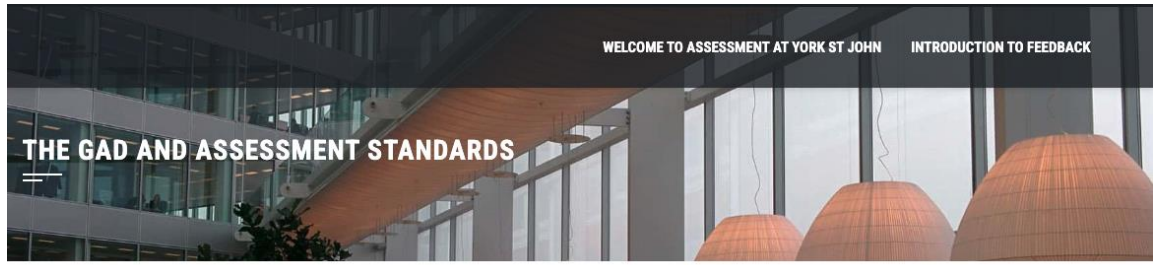
Pass Grade Bands (100 – 40) (Learning Outcomes must be met)
Fail Grade Bands (39 – 0) (Learning Outcomes are not met)
Assessors, please insert your own assessment marking criteria relevant this module which provides further detail and disciplinary specificity, etc. For more information on how to use the GAD to guide your assessment marking criteria visit Marking Criteria.

[The GAD is inserted here as an example and a handy reminder of the refreshed GAD 2024.]

General Characteristics	3rd (40, 42, 45, 48)	2:2 (52, 55, 58)	2:1 (62, 65, 68)	First (72, 75, 78, 82)	High First (85, 88, 92, 95, 98, 100)	Borderline Fail (32,35, 38) (Credits may be compensated)	Fail (0, 2, 5, 8, 12, 15, 18, 22, 25, 28) (Credits may not be compensated)
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Research skills	The work mostly uses established methods to process data and describe and comment on particular aspects of the taught content.	The work **successfully** applies appropriate research methods from the taught content to **solve problems** or **answer research questions** (taught or independently researched).	The work **selects, justifies,** and **rigorously applies** appropriate research methods (taught and independently researched). It **generates new data** and / or **insights**.	The work clearly articulates how its selected research methods operate within a **wider context** and / or **methodological approach**.	The research **successfully applies a coherent and justified methodology.** This methodology demonstrates a thoughtful and rigorous understanding, design, and implementation of the research.	The work may **use some of the taught research methods** to answer some questions / solve some problems, but it has **not yet demonstrated a reliable ability to interrogate sources / data / research contexts**.	The work **applies few or none of the research methods** discussed in the taught content to questions, problems, data, or the contexts of research.

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Practical skills	The work demonstrates safe, competent, and effective selection and practice of a range of taught skills and (where relevant) skills from independent study.	The work applies, explains and / or adapts a range of taught and self-taught skills and techniques safely, competently, and effectively in a range of contexts. It uses these skills and techniques to begin to **replicate** or **emulate disciplinary / professional / industrial / commercial practices / styles**.	The work **confidently** uses a range of skills and techniques safely, competently, and expertly. These skills have been integrated, combined, adapted, or transformed to support an emerging (disciplinary / professional / industrial / commercial) mode of practice.	The work is nearing disciplinary / professional / industrial / commercial standards / expectations. Application of skills to tasks is safe, competent, and expert, and has created a recognisable style or mode of practice which draws on recognised research and / or scholarship.	The work evidences a safe, competent, and expert professional practice which is **well established, proficient,** and **consistent** by disciplinary / professional / industry / commercial standards. It is grounded in evidence and open to future development and enhancement.	The work may **use some practical skills competently** to complete tasks but there are **gaps or skills that need further development** before full competency, safety and effectiveness can be demonstrated across all the required taught skills.	The work has **applied few or none of the relevant taught skills** to produce required outcomes.
Professional Learning skills	The work has demonstrated an ability to self-manage learning. It attempts to reflect on experiences and / or feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of learning processes / goal setting. The work shows engagement with further resources / opportunities for support and growth.	The work has proposed (with initiative and autonomy) future actions to generate **identifiable improvements** in the learning processes / goal setting. The work shows engagement with further resources / opportunities for support and growth **in response to new challenges**.	The work has applied **critical reflections** to learning experiences and / or feedback. These have resulted in **significant developments** to learning processes / goal setting. The work shows **sustained engagement** with further resources / opportunities for support and growth in response to new challenges.	The work has used feedback and guidance from **additional sources** (professional / specialist). The work demonstrates how gaps, limitations or opportunities have been **recognised, reflected upon, and responded to / managed.** The work shows **critical engagement** with further resources / opportunities for support and growth. Decision making in the work is **considerate** and **ethically aware.**	The work has applied **critical self-awareness** to develop learning **without supervision**. It demonstrates a confident and aspirational approach to learning / goal setting which recognises a broad range of useful knowledge and contexts for **lifelong learning**. The work shows **sustained critical engagement** with further resources / opportunities for support and growth in response to new challenges. Decision making in **the work evidences integrity.**	The work may evidence **some self-management, reflective thinking,** or **application of feedback** to produce **meaningful improvements** to work and / or practice. However, this is currently **too limited or isolated to enable effective self-evaluation or planning** for future development.	The work **evidences little or no self-management of learning, engagement in individual reflections or** with **feedback / guidance,** resulting in **little or no improvement** to work or practice.



What's expected of us?

Assessment holds significant importance in Higher Education (HE) and can sometimes be a bit challenging to navigate. It sets HE apart from other learning methods like watching YouTube videos or browsing online content as it confirms a standard against the learning. What makes HE learning even more special is the valuable knowledge and skills you will acquire, which you will later apply to your careers and lifelong experiences.

Assessment is essentially how your learning and progress is gauged and to ensure that you've met the necessary standards. Universities often refer to this and similar processes as Quality Assurance (QA).

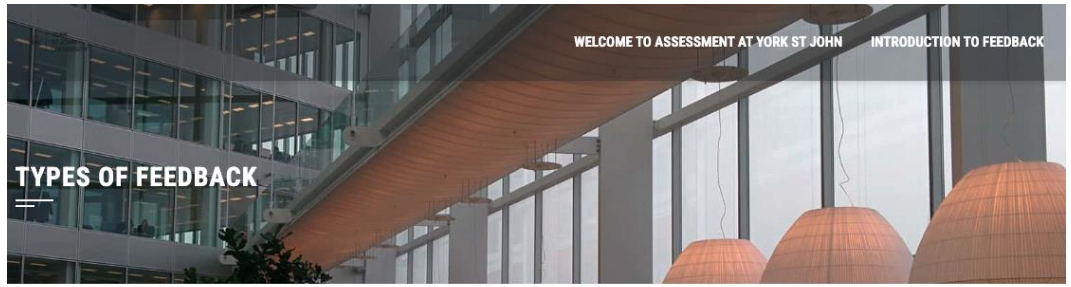
At York St John University (YSJ), we use a framework called Generic Assessment Descriptors (GADs) to outline the assessment star
Think of GADs as a blueprin



MENU

Welcome to Assessment at York St John
- The GAD and Assessment Standards
- Understanding what's being assessed
- University Grading
- Summative and Formative Assessment
- Assessment Formats

Introduction to Feedback
- Types of Feedback
- Examples of Effective Feedback
- Characteristics of Effective Feedback
- Feedback – Key Theories and Concepts



The main types of feedback you will need to give as part of your teaching practice are presented below. Again, as with the feedback theories and concepts in the previous section, the types of feedback elaborated below are not mutually exclusive; for example, many (though not all) examples of formative feedback are also informal, just as summative feedback is often formal.

Informal feedback – this type of feedback can be given at any time – for example, it may be offered verbally in class, as part of a one-to-one tutorial, or via an online classroom. It may come from the educator or from peers (see below). This type of feedback helps students to develop their understanding during a module or course, and also helps learners and educators to build rapport with one another.

Formal feedback – this type of feedback is structured and is planned into assessment. Typically, it results from a particular marking system or set of criteria, such as an assessment rubric. It can be used as evidence both by the learner and by the educator that certain learning outcomes have been achieved.

rormative feedback – this is given prior to summative assessment (see below). It may take be given after short assessments like tests, quizzes, or written responses, or it may be given informally in class or during one-to-one tutorials. Sometimes, students are given the opportunity to gain feedback on early drafts of work prior to final submission, with a view to enabling them to develop their skills fu



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