

APPENDIX 5.4

MARKING POLICY

MARKING POLICY IN THE DEPARTMENT OF PROSTHODONTICS

As a result of having to go practically word by word through papers with students who failed (and whose parents didn't believe it!), I raised the question of uniformity of marking and of marking memoranda at the last Departmental meeting. I was requested to put a few things down in a 'policy paper', which is what this is.

Marking

The principle here, is that the marks indicated on the paper and for each question, are calculated at the rate of a mark a minute, in order to guide the students into knowing how long they are expected to spend on the question, and therefore how much depth is required of that answer.

BUT, when marking a question, the principle to be followed is not to give marks according to that time determined mark, but to give a *percentage* mark. The era of computers is now old enough for there to be no excuse as to how to work out, say, 45% of an 18-mark question, because the computer will do it for us!

Quite apart from that, though, is the related and far more important question of the degree of discrimination with which it is possible to mark in the first place. If you mark to a 1% discrimination level, ask yourself this: do you honestly think you can get close to that if you re-mark one week later, not knowing what mark you gave in the first place? No, of course you can't. But if you mark at 5% intervals, your own intra-rater reliability will be far greater. Can you really tell the difference between 52% and 50%? No, of course you can't. But you definitely know the difference between 50% and 55%, don't you?

So, the principle to be followed is this: ***Only give a percentage mark and only mark at 5% intervals.***

Feedback

All questions other than those for a final examination are for both summative *and* formative assessment. They are both as important as the other, in fact it could be said that the formative nature of the assessment is often *more* important. This means that you should annotate the questions liberally with your comments, and the students should be told just where they have gone wrong (or right!). It is in our own best interests to do this, because as you know, marking a good answer is always easier than marking a bad answer.

Now this annotation does mean a greater commitment to marking, but can be made easier, again by having computers come to the rescue. If you find after marking a few questions that there are some common errors, and you are making the same or similar comments, type these into your computer (with a very small font of about 8 or 9 point) and print them out, cut them up and paste them on to the student answers! Saves an awful lot of time, and, more importantly, gives you a very good indication of what to concentrate on when you give the feedback, *and* when next you teach that topic!

Final exams are a little different. Now, you do not want to unduly influence an independent, external marker, and so you should only give a mark, and NOT annotate the paper in ANY way at all. In other words, NO TICKS! If a student asks to see the paper, it is possible for them to add up the ticks, and ask why the mark is less than the ticks. Try explaining *that* to an irate parent.

Moderation

A word about moderation. All courses should be moderated, and some should be externally examined. In the past, we have referred to an 'internal external' and an 'external external'. Current parlance is that someone from within the School or University (the 'internal external') can act as an *internal moderator*, and should be moderating at least 50% of the assessments, including approving the questions asked. An *external examiner* is normally used for the final stages in a course, for integrated assessments, and for any other assessments a Department may deem necessary.

An internal moderator and an external examiner should examine a representative proportion of answers, from the bottom, middle, and top of the range of all answers.

Memoranda

Some marking memoranda are in fact full and perfect answers. This is nice, but not necessary, and very time consuming. It is also difficult to know at what level to give the mark, if there is no indication (as there generally is not), of just what constitutes an acceptable pass mark and what constitutes a perfect mark. Such memoranda, wonderful as they are, are not a lot of help for marking.

Instead, it is better to list a series of points which you feel ought to be covered by a student answering a question at that particular level. Some of these points can then be identified as the minimum required to obtain a passing mark (50%). The degree of conformity of the answer to the remaining points will then give an indication of the actual mark to be awarded between 50% and 100%. And yes, it should be possible to obtain 100%. If a student returns everything on your list, why not give 100%?

Similarly, if the minimum points are not present in the answer, then the maximum mark that can be obtained is 45%, and the actual mark will be between 0% and 45%, depending on the presence or absence of any other points.

Another alternative works quite well for such things as partial denture designs. Here, it is often best to assume that 100% is the starting point, and then *deduct* marks (again, 5% at a time) for errors identified in the design. Certain errors might be considered cardinal sins, and if present, cause the maximum mark permissible to be 45%. Some errors, or combinations of errors may be specified as requiring a mark of 0%. For example, for a design that can be drawn, but simply cannot be made!

Setting questions

No question or series of questions should ever be set by one person, without the advantage and advice of an independent group. That is why we have established an assessment committee. Preferably, all questions to be asked during a term should be determined at the start of that term,

and all these questions put to that committee at one time. Then you will have an independent view on the suitability of those questions, and their relation to the competencies to be tested.

As a matter of principle, all questions should be tested for the appropriateness of the learning domain to be tested, as well as for their relationship to the relevant competency. Once again, a collective opinion on these matters is important, and there are several examples available for the types of questions in Prosthodontics and their relation to learning domains which will guide you in asking, and marking, questions.