

Introducing peer assessment

Involving students in defining/clarifying success criteria

By collaborating with the teacher to define success criteria students begin to develop an understanding of what 'quality' means in relation to a learning task or goal.

The following process can be used to involve students in deciding on success criteria.

Step 1: Brainstorm –

Students brainstorm a list of possible 'look-fors' for a learning task or goal.

- Select a task or activity that is familiar to students (e.g. setting class rules, identifying components of a science investigation, descriptive writing, taking notes).

Have students brainstorm success criteria ('look-fors') for quality performance.

- Use the Think-Pair-Share-Square and ask, *What would it look like to do this well?*
 - Record all responses from the students during the brainstorm.
 - Discuss to elicit students' understanding, to clarify meaning and to build consensus on the success criteria.
 - Guide the discussion and, if necessary, add your own success criteria to ensure that the list reflects what is significant to a successful performance.
- Use samples and exemplars to guide the development of 'look fors'.

Step 2: Sort and categorise – involve students in sorting and categorising success criteria.

Sorting and categorising helps to refine success criteria, deepen students' understanding of 'what to look for', and ensure that the criteria are organised in user-friendly categories.

Sorting and categorising helps students to remember, prioritise and internalise the success criteria. It can also increase students' commitment to the instructional goals (Rolheiser & Ross, 2001).

Clustering 'like' success criteria under a single heading helps students to identify aspects of their work that need improvement, while prioritising and limiting the number of success criteria they need to attend to.

Step 3: Share and display the success criteria –

Make the success criteria available for all to see.

Sharing and displaying success criteria makes the 'look-fors' visible to students during the learning.

The success criteria can be listed in many ways using templates, checklists, anchor charts, and/or rubrics depending on the purpose and nature of the learning activity.

Step 4: Add, revise, refine –

Review and revise the descriptors and the language of the success criteria if necessary.

Reviewing success criteria as students are learning provides opportunities for the teacher and students to:

- further clarify the ‘look-fors’
- prioritise those success criteria with greatest impact on the learning
- add additional success criteria based on new learning
- ensure that success criteria facilitate meaningful feedback
- readily highlight next steps.

Step 5: Design rubrics (where applicable) –

Rubrics can be used in a student-centred environment as an assessment tool to deepen understanding and improve learning.

Engage students in co-developing a rubric (where applicable) so that the language used in the descriptors and qualifiers will be student friendly and make it easier for students to give specific descriptive feedback, identify concrete next steps and set individual goals.

Alternatively, ask students to examine a rubric you have designed, or one they will use, to identify two descriptors – one they understand and one that they do not understand. Have them try to rewrite both descriptors in student-friendly language. Engage your students in a class discussion and have them share their observations after the discussion. Have them include the revised criteria in the rubric, giving specific feedback on what was done well and what needs to improve.

Teaching students how to apply success criteria

As with any new learning, peer assessment needs to be taught through explanation, modelling and demonstration. While this may sound time-consuming it will be beneficial for students in the long-term.

Tips for teaching students how to apply success criteria

- Co-develop some rules for peer assessment, make them explicit and ensure that students understand and use these when peer-assessing, for example:
 - respect the work of others
 - identify successful features
 - think about the learning intention and the success criteria when suggesting improvements
 - make positive suggestions.
- Identify an assessment skill (for example, offering descriptive feedback on a written piece of work) or a criterion (for example, correctly uses noun/pronoun references) that you wish to target.
- Use a ‘think-aloud’ strategy to model providing feedback on an anonymous sample of work.
- Be explicit as you model, pointing out to students how you are structuring your comments to identify something that was done well, an area for improvement and a suggestion for how to improve.
- Ask students to give you feedback using the peer assessment rules that have been co-developed.
- As you model, use assessment language such as: learning intention; success criteria; descriptive feedback, rubric.
- Emphasise how all of the feedback you are giving is connected to the success criteria.
- Demonstrate the use of cover sheets, checklists, feedback forms, colour coding/highlighting etc., that you require the students to use.

Working with samples

Samples can take many forms – artefacts, projects, presentations, research papers, and performances in oral, written and video form – and can come from a variety of sources – previous years’ work, texts, teacher resources, professional publications. Choose samples that directly relate to your work with your students.

- Begin compiling a collection of samples:
 - use anonymous samples – remove student identification from the work
 - don’t limit samples to pencil-and-paper products, video recordings of performances, such as a volleyball serve or a speech also provide valuable evidence of learning
 - collect samples that show a range of performance on specific success criteria – giving students samples of stronger and weaker performances enables them to continue refining their understanding of the success criteria
 - devise a strategy for gathering and storing quality samples to meet the different purposes of assessment.
- Samples can be used to:
 - show evidence of expected outcomes
 - guide improvements
 - compare and contrast work with samples prior to submission of the final product
 - help generate success criteria when brainstorming
 - model how to apply success criteria
 - practise applying success criteria.

Providing guidance as students apply success criteria

While progress may appear to be slow and incremental at first, students quickly move towards independent practice with appropriate guidance.

Tips for providing guidance

- As students give feedback to one another, provide feedback on the ‘quality’ of the information that is being shared. That is, give feedback on students’ feedback. Students become increasingly confident and competent in giving descriptive feedback linked to the success criteria if they receive guided practice.
- After explaining, modelling or demonstrating an aspect of peer assessment:
 - have students practice in pairs using an anonymous sample
 - observe and circulate giving feedback and support related to the peer assessment criteria.
- As students become more confident, allow them to practise using each other’s work. Start small – it could be applied to a particular criterion or a section of the work.
- Have students indicate who has assessed the work by initialling the work, checklist, cover sheet, etc. This allows you to follow up with further peer assessment support if necessary.

Supporting students with peer assessment

Providing a template assists students to stay on track when peer-assessing and giving feedback.

Tips for supporting students

- Start simple and work towards improvement suggestions.

For example:

1. Start with a checklist of success criteria for the task and have peer assessors determine whether one or two predetermined criteria have been met.

Name:

Peer assessor:

Success criteria	Yes
Criterion 1	
Criterion 2	

OR

Name:

Peer assessor:

Two things you did well:

2. Identify criteria that have been met as well as determine areas for improvement – where criteria haven't been met or could be improved.

Name:

Peer assessor:

Success criteria	Yes	No
Criterion 1		
Criterion 2		

OR

Name:

Peer assessor:

What worked well?
Even better if:

3. Peer assessors offer improvement suggestions.

Name:

Peer assessor:

Success criteria	Yes	No	Try this
Criterion 1			
Criterion 2			

OR

Name:

Peer assessor:

<p>What worked well?</p> <p>Even better if:</p> <p>Next steps:</p>
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- Sentence starters and prompts can increase a student’s confidence and comfort when giving feedback to peers. Prompts provide the descriptive language and ensure that students have the appropriate focus when assessing work. These can be co-developed with students.

Start simple and work towards improvement suggestions.

What was done well	What can be improved	Next steps for improvement
<i>You did a good job when you ...</i>	<i>You could work harder on ...</i>	<i>Would you consider changing ...?</i>
<i>Something you did well was ...</i>	<i>You could get some help with ...</i>	<i>A next step for you could be ...</i>
<i>You are good at ...</i>	<i>You could get better at ...</i>	<i>The next time you could ...</i>
<i>I like the way you ...</i>	<i>You seem to have trouble with ...</i>	<i>Do you think you could ...?</i>
<i>Another thing you did well was ...</i>	<i>The criteria you have missed are ...</i>	<i>Would you consider adding ...?</i>
<i>You’re getting better at ...</i>		<i>Next time you could work on ...</i>

References

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), (Department of Education & Training Victoria), (Rolheiser & Ross, 2001)