

# How Can the Use of Varied Exemplars Help Direct Entrant Students Better Understand Assessment Guidelines and Criteria?

TILT Course Leader Conference

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# Background/Context

Postgraduate  
Certificate in  
Academic  
Practice  
(PGCAP)



**DIRECT**  
**ENTRY TO**  
**UNIVERSITY**  
**DEGREE**

# Session Outline

- Introduction
- Rationale
- Project Methodology and Data/Information Generation Methods
- Findings
- Implications for Practice

# Assessment Literacy

“Students’ understanding of the rules surrounding assessment in their course content, their use of assessment tasks to monitor or further their learning, and their ability to work with the guidelines on standards in their context to produce work of a predictable standard”

(Smith et al., 2013, p. 46).

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Smith, C. D., Worsfold, K., Davies, L., Fisher, R., & McPhail, R. (2013). Assessment literacy and student learning: The case for explicitly developing students 'assessment literacy'. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 38, 44-60.

# Introduction (What I Did)

- Project aim
- Module and assessment background
- Teaching session

# Rationale (Why I Did What I Did)

- Increase in Direct Entrant students
- Students often find written descriptions of assessment guidelines and criteria difficult to interpret and apply (Handley & Williams, 2011; Hendry & Anderson, 2013)
- Range of internal and external quality assurance guidelines

Handley, K., & Williams, L. (2011). From copying to learning: Using exemplars to engage students with assessment criteria and feedback. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 36*, 95-108.

Hendry, G. D., & Anderson, J. (2013). Helping students understand the standards of work expected in an essay: Using exemplars in mathematics pre-service education classes. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 38*, 754-768.

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# HEA Literature Review on Assessment and Feedback

“Integrating assessment literacy into learning encourages students to become autonomous learners with the capacity to reflect on and review their own learning progress, as well as the progress of their peers. Being an active agent in this process can help students to develop a sophisticated understanding of assessment”

(HEA 2017, p.20)

HEA (2017). *Assessment and Feedback in Higher Education: A Review of Literature for the Higher Education Academy*. York: Higher Education Academy.

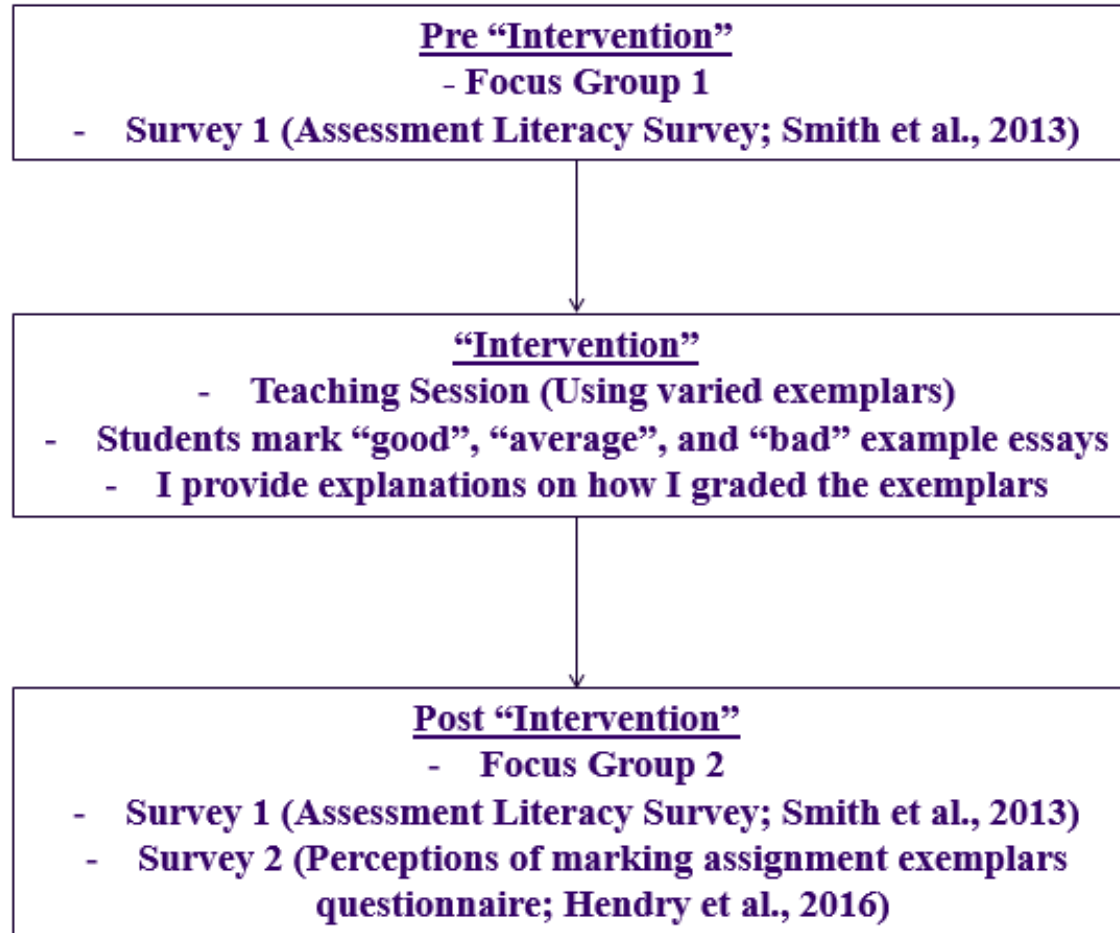
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# Project Methodology (How I Did It)

- Research Design
- Participants
- Procedure, data collection, and data analysis



# Procedure and Data Collection Process



# Findings (Positive Impact)

- **Confidence and clarity around structure**
  - **Variety of exemplars**
    - “it is . . . important for students to be exposed to more than one exemplar, so they can discern that quality can be expressed in different ways” (Carless & Chan, 2017, p. 932)
    - “With the structure, they [the exemplars] were quite diverse. I don’t think they were all the same and they’re all different lengths on each section so that sort of helps you say there is no set guideline for how long you need to write about something for and it gives you a bit more independence”.
  - **Perceived fairness in marking**
    - “I feel confident that the assessment is conducted fairly” (4.33 → 5.00)
  - **Application of skills to own work**
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# Findings (Intended Impact Not Realized)

- **Students not being able to accurately predict the grade their piece of work would receive based on assessment guidelines**
    - Lack of meaningful change for 23/30 items on Student Assessment Literacy Questionnaire (Smith et al., 2013)
    - Discrepancy in students prediction vs. final essay grade
  - No relationship between an exemplar-based activity and students' subsequent performance in the assessment (Hendry et al., 2016).
  - Although students might understand what is expected of them from engaging in exemplars, this does not necessarily mean that students can apply this understanding to produce good writing.
  - **Students' explanations for predicted grade based on 'effort'**
    - "my rationale for this is due to the amount of effort I have put into my assignment"
    - "When I came out of the critical debate [first assessment in term one], I knew that I'd put 100% into it"
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# Implications for Practice

- Two self-report questionnaires
  - Student Assessment Literacy (Smith et al., 2013)
  - Perceptions of Marking Exemplars (Hendry et al., 2016)
- Spend more time during the support session unpicking the assessment guidelines and GBA grid
- Better understand mismatch between what students take away from the support session (e.g., clarity around structure) versus their ability to apply this understanding to their own essay (e.g., typically weak writing)
- Impact on recruitment of Direct Entrant students

# References to Self-Report Questionnaires

## **Student Assessment Literacy Questionnaire**

Smith, C. D., Worsfold, K., Davies, L., Fisher, R., & McPhail, R. (2013). Assessment literacy and student learning: The case for explicitly developing students 'assessment literacy'. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 38, 44-60.

## **Perceptions of Marking Exemplars Questionnaire**

Hendry, G. D., White, P., & Herbert, C. (2016). Providing exemplar-based 'feedforward' before an assessment: The role of teacher explanation. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 17, 99-109.

# Other Relevant References

Carless, D., & Chan, K. K. H. (2017). Managing dialogic use of exemplars. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 42, 930-941.

Handley, K., & Williams, L. (2011). From copying to learning: Using exemplars to engage students with assessment criteria and feedback. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 36, 95-108.

Hendry, G. D., & Anderson, J. (2013). Helping students understand the standards of work expected in an essay: Using exemplars in mathematics pre-service education classes. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 38, 754-768.

HEA (2017). *Assessment and Feedback in Higher Education: A Review of Literature for the Higher Education Academy*. York: Higher Education Academy.

# Thank you

Any questions?



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