QUICKBITE: PRACTICAL GUIDELINES for WRITING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA and STANDARDS

STAGE	GUIDELINES
BEFORE YOU START	
i. Review the Course Profile:	Check that: • course learning objectives clearly and comprehensively describe the learning to be developed by students • the assessment tasks you have designed provide adequate opportunity for students to demonstrate intended learning objectives.
ii. Clarify your understanding of the terms 'criteria' and 'standards' –	It is important to understand the distinction between criteria and standards. A clear understanding of these terms will make the development task easier. Sadler (1987) defines these terms as: **Criterion:** a property or characteristic by which the quality of something may be judged. Specifying criteria nominates qualities of interest and utility but does not have anything to offer, or make any assumptions about, actual quality. In the example below, the criterion "fluency of expression" is expressed as a noun phrase which does not imply a specific quality. It is better to avoid the use of adjectives or adverbs (eg" *fluent* expression", "expression is *fluent"* or "expresses ideas *fluently"*) as these imply a level or standard rather than a *criterion*. **Standard**: a definite level of achievement aspired to or attained. Standards are about definite levels of quality (or achievement, or performance). **Table 1: Distinguishing between criteria and standards** _(see table below)_ The standards described in this example illustrate three distinct levels of quality, achievement or performance. While it is true that standard labels such as "Excellent", "Proficient" or "Fail", often used in conjunction with marks, can convey standards to some extent, the guidelines that follow are based on the belief that verbal descriptors (such as those in the example above) are the most effective way of supporting student learning. Criterion-and standards-referenced assessment does not require the use of marks or percentages, however, should marks or percentages be required, they can be assigned to the verbal descriptions as illustrated above.

iii. Locate useful resources:	Personal resources
	• Course Profile
	• Course Assessment program
	• Exemplars of student learning at different levels
	Other resources
	• Generic taxonomies
	   o Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives
	     http://www.tedi.uq.edu.au/downloads/bloom.pdf
	   o Biggs structure of, the observed learning outcome (SOLO) taxonomy

Table 1: Distinguishing between criteria and standards

Criteria	Standards		
	Fail standard (3-4 marks)	Pass standard (5-7 marks)	High standard (8-10 marks)
quality of expression	stilted, awkward and/or oversimplified expression resulting in overall lack of clarity of meaning.	correct but occasionally stilted or awkward expression although meaning is generally retained.	clear, concise, scrupulously accurate polished and sometimes innovative or original language used to express complex and abstract ideas and information

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	http://www.tedi.uq.edu.au/downloads/Biggs_Solo.pdf o Orrell, J. (2003). *A Generic Learning Rubric*. Available online at: http://www.newcastle.edu.au/services/teaching-learning/guide-teaching/assessment/workshops/Generic-Assessment-Rubric.doc o Price, M., & Rust, C. (2004). *Assessment Grid*. Retrieved 28 October, 2004, from http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/embedded_object.asp?id= 20263&prompt=yes&filename=ASS016 (Business)
iv. Investigate possibilities for collaboration	Developing criteria and standards in collaboration with colleagues is a good opportunity to share the workload and gain additional perspectives. Involving students in the development of criteria and standards is an effective teaching and learning activity as well as a way of promoting shared understanding of the basis for assessment judgments.

GETTING GOING

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v. Select/develop and organise criteria	Assessment criteria are intended to increase the transparency of assessment judgments by alerting students to all the factors that will be considered in the making of judgments. If criteria such as 'creativity' or 'use of writing conventions (eg spelling, punctuation)' are considered to be important to the assessment judgment, they should be included in the written criteria. **Sources of criteria** The criteria that will form the basis of assessment judgments should reflect the learning objectives of the course and should be worded and organised in a way that makes this obvious to students. (Bloom's Taxonomy is a useful resource.) If learning objectives have been grouped according to the UQ Graduate Attributes, criteria can also be organised according to this framework as illustrated below. **Table 2: Linking learning objectives and criteria** Criteria for all the assessment tasks that comprise the course assessment program should together provide a comprehensive coverage of the major learning objectives of the course. They should not introduce additional learning objectives such as those implied by the selection of unfamiliar text types that have not been addressed during the teaching and learning activities of this or any prior courses (eg technical report, client interview). Rather, this new learning should be specified with the learning objectives of the course. To be effective, criteria should be manageable in number so the desire to be comprehensive needs to be tempered by a realistic notion of how much information students can handle in relation to an assessment task.

Table 2 contents:

Learning Objective	Assessment criteria
In-depth knowledge of the field Demonstrate knowledge of literature relevant to …..	Familiarity with literature relevant to ...
Effective Communication Communicate ideas and information in written and oral forms appropriate to the ….discipline	Appropriateness of citation and referencing to the …discipline
Critical judgment Develop and support arguments on current issues relating to ….	Development and support of arguments relating to…

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vi. Decide how many standards will be described	Developing verbal descriptions of standards that make adequate distinctions between and among each of the seven levels of the UQ grading scheme would be an extremely difficult task. Most examples find it sufficient to describe four levels in answer to the following questions: • What is the best possible standard that can be anticipated in this learning environment?" • What is the least standard that will be considered acceptable? • What standards lie between these two?

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	• What standard can be anticipated as unacceptable? Sadler, 1998 However, the number of levels depends on the ability of the assessment task to make fine distinctions in a reliable way and the degree to which fine discrimination is required, eg a *competency* approach means a "Pass" standard only is required. Though some schemes avoid describing a "Fail" standard, this can be quite useful in helping students identify behaviours that they should eliminate from their practice.
vii. "Label" the verbal descriptors of standards	Verbal descriptions of standards need to be linked in some way to the model to be used calculate final grades so that it describes and supports this process. Some examples are provided below. *Note that these are used to 'label' verbal descriptions of standards, and do not serve as substitutes for standards.* **Table 3: Some common terms used to 'label' verbal descriptions of standards** Of the examples above: 1 links verbal standards to the university grade descriptors. 2 is used by lecturers who prefer profiling. 3 can be used when percentages are required (eg for the calculation of class of honours). 4 constitutes a simple marking scheme. 5 uses general descriptive terms.
viii. Develop clear descriptions of each standard for each of the criteria	Standards have to be pitched at a reasonable level. They should be neither so hard that no one can succeed nor so low that everyone succeeds at the highest level. They must also be described in brief, clear, specific language that is accessible to students. Criteria need to be 'unpacked' before writing standards to identify relevant component attributes. High standards will often incorporate additional attributes such as metacognitive understandings or originality of perspective. Accept that standards will never be able to carry all the detail of the explicit and implicit understandings students are to develop. Attempting to achieve levels of precision that remove all subjectivity from assessment judgements of complex learning will result in documents made unwieldy and therefore unfit for purpose through their length and obtuseness. Reference to concrete examples in course assessment tasks, examples of student work and exemplars obtained from previous iterations of the course will help in framing clear standards. Additional writing guidelines are provided in Table 4. **Table 4: Developing verbal descriptions of standards**

Table 3: Some common terms used to 'label' verbal descriptions of standards

1. **Grades**	1-2	3-4	5	6-7
2. **Letters**	D	C	B	A
3. **% Bands**	0-39%	40-59%	60-89%	80-100%
4. **Marks**	0-4	5-10	11-16	17-20
5. **Labels**	Fail	Competent	Advanced	Excellent

Table 4: Developing verbal descriptions of standards

When describing standards…	Use…..	Rather than….
Specify demonstrable behaviour	*Rephrases problems in own words and identifies major issues*	*Understands and interprets problems*
Describe the behaviour - *not* the student	*The ideas of others are acknowledged in ways outside the conventions of this discipline*	*You are not good at referencing*

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	Pointing out what *was* done in demonstrating lower than optimal standards is often more supportive of learning than listing what *was not*	*Argument consists of a series of assertions only*	*No supporting evidence provided for arguments*
	Avoid vague terms which are open to a wide range of subjective interpretation such as "critical", "appropriate", "excellent", "analytical"	*Evidence of familiarity with recommended course reading* *Analysis demonstrates an awareness of the implications of significant detail*	*Evidence of appropriate reading* *Sophisticated analysis*
	Use terms likely to be understood by students – avoid the obscure or esoteric	*Demonstrates comprehensive and detailed knowledge of major facts, concepts and procedures addressed in course materials*	*Secure and pronounced knowledge(Woolf, 2004)*
	Avoid relative terms - comparatives are rarely helpful without a benchmark standard	*Major issues are identified with discrimination and without distraction by irrelevant material* *Solutions to problems are original and/or innovative without losing feasibility*	*Analysis is more analytical* *More creative solutions offered to problems presented*
	Ensure a balance between validity and reliability ie don't seek precision through quantitative statements which can trivialise complex learning outcomes.	*References included have limited relevance to the problem (low standard)* *Discerning selection of references from within and beyond recommended course materials*	*Includes two references (low standard)* *Includes more than six references (high standard)*

AFTER YOU'VE FINISHED

ix. Check, review, revise	Check for: • grammatical consistency • alignment with institutional grade descriptors to maintain standards Regularly review your assessment criteria and standards to: • benefit, through consultation, from the experience and expertise of peers • respond to feedback from students • ensure they fit adjusted assessment tasks • maintain currency with changing university policy and regulations • take advantage of new resources • reflect your increasing expertise in their development.
x. Using criteria and standards	To ensure that assessment judgements are defensible, consist and transparent, it is essential that criteria and standards are used in conjunction with exemplars of student work and moderation processes. Formative activities such as practice marking, self and peer assessment, provision of feedback and structured reflection are additional ways of using criteria and standards for the enhancement of student learning.

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