



TATP TIPSHEET

What Comes Before Marking?

Marking can be considered the end of a process that begins weeks or months earlier. Here are some helpful tips for the rest of that process that should make your grading experience in tend a smoother one.

Establish expectations

With the professor:

- ✓ Determine what criteria he or she wants you to use while evaluating student work. Guidance in the form of a set marking scheme with specific requirements is vital both for the students and for you. What constitutes an 'A' assignment, or a 'D' assignment? Are there general faculty or department guidelines available?
- ✓ Be aware of how the professor expects you to handle problematic assignments. What is the course policy on how late assignments may be submitted? What are your available options for over- or under-length papers or reports? How do you proceed in cases of suspected academic dishonesty or plagiarism?

With other teaching assistants:

- ✓ If you are not the sole grader for the course, it is important for you and your fellow teaching assistants to ensure that everyone is grading based on the same criteria. In large courses with many teaching assistants especially, consistency and the *appearance* of consistency are both critically important. Students talk to each other, and any discrepancies could cause significant problems.
- ✓ Ensure that all teaching assistants follow the same course procedures for late assignments and questionable assignments.

With your students:

- ✓ Make sure your students are aware of the criteria you're using. If possible, give them a copy of any rubric you are using to mark their assignments.
- ✓ Be as specific as possible with them about what constitutes an 'A', 'B', 'C', or 'D' assignment. If possible, show them a sample of a good lab report or essay. A helpful strategy is to ask students what *they* think constitutes a good assignment. Perhaps have them analyze your model!
- ✓ Be clear about the basic requirements of the assignment (formatting, referencing, calculations, late penalties, length requirements) to avoid any misunderstandings. Ensure you discuss plagiarism and academic dishonesty.

- ✓ Make your students aware of the process for re-marking assignments or appealing grades (with you as their marker, *not* at the department level—*never* suggest to students that they formally appeal their grades!) and what the outcome could be (that the grade could be raised, remain the same, or be lowered). Many instructors require students to submit a written justification of why their mark should be reconsidered before they even think about re-grading an assignment. Students must identify what portions of their assignments deserve a second look and must articulate clearly in writing their reasons for requesting a second look. The possibility of re-grading assignments must be cleared by the course supervisor and supported by all teaching assistants grading for the same course.

While assignments are in-progress

- ✓ Factor in additional time to discuss the assignment in class in the weeks prior to the due date, particularly if you are teaching first-year students or the assignment is of a type that your students have never done before. Especially with beginning students, try and spend at least part of a class discussing essay structure or report protocols and common style errors/technical errors/calculation errors.
- ✓ Ensure you make the necessary connections between the course objectives and course material and the assignments. This can serve a dual purpose (deepening students' understanding of the material and giving them inspiration for the assignment).
- ✓ Always allow time in class for students to ask questions related to their assignments. Encourage those questions by asking students about their progress on a regular basis in class; it helps them understand that sharing questions with the group can be beneficial for everyone.
- ✓ Encourage your students to make use of your office hours if they want to sit down and have a lengthy conversation about the assignment. One-on-one time can be invaluable to them in their researching or writing process.
- ✓ If a student is having difficulty organizing their assignment, ask them to write down their major points. Encourage them to notice which points seem more significant than others, and which follow from others. Ask them what makes their argument or result important or interesting, and what that implies.
- ✓ If it is feasible in terms of your own workload, encourage them to show you outlines or drafts. Though this may be time-consuming, it will actually make your grading easier, and helps your students to develop good work habits. If you do this, however, ensure that you let the students know that your comments on an outline or draft do not guarantee them a particular mark.
- ✓ Direct students to their college writing lab or learning skills centre if they require specialized assistance with writing or time management skills.

Created by Alicia McKenzie, TATP Trainer ©2006

For more TA teaching resources, go to <http://www.utoronto.ca/tatp/resources/index.htm>