Moderation and standard setting
Principles and good practice

We use moderation and standard setting to make sure that the way we mark assessments at UWA is fair and reliable. Every unit needs to use moderation, even units with one marker.

**Standard setting** is a process of deciding the level of performance expected of students before the assessment takes place.

**Moderation** is a process to ensure that the marking of each individual assessment item (or task within that) is consistent, fair, and reliable – both between the markers in your unit, and against the standard.

Setting the standard
No one expects students in a level 1 unit to produce the same standard of work as we do in a level 3 unit! As the subject expert you and your colleagues are the best placed to articulate the standard your students need to achieve at each level of their studies.

The standard you are looking for needs to be set in advance – it is not acceptable to wait until the students have finished to decide what counts as good enough. Setting the standard in advance makes what we expect of our students clear to both students and staff. For assessments where using a rubric is appropriate, the standard could be represented as the “descriptors” – the text in the cells of the rubric for each criteria and level of achievement which describe what that looks like.

To help you determine the appropriate standard, you should reflect on two questions:

1. What level of achievement do I expect from students at this level?
2. How will I identify that level of performance?

When determining the appropriate level, consider:

- Is this their first year of study?
- What previous experience do your students have with this material?
- Is this a broadening unit?
- How does the standard you have in mind fit with the UWA grade descriptors?

Start by considering a hypothetical student who is just competent in your unit – not your dream student who gets an HD, but one who achieves the minimum level of competency. What is a reasonable level of achievement for your borderline competent student? Once you are satisfied you can describe that standard relevant to the learning outcomes, you can tease out higher and lower levels of performance until you have described the range of achievement.

**Note:** Setting a standard is not the same as setting the pass mark. At UWA, the pass mark is always 50%.

You don’t have to do this alone! You should consult:

- Your colleagues
- Your Learning and Teaching Committees
- Your local Learning Designer
- Last year’s standard
- Course level outcomes (where applicable)
- Accreditation standards (where applicable)
- Colleagues at other Universities
- Employers in your students’ future industries

More perspectives create a more balanced standard.

How to moderate
There are a range of different moderation and marking methods and the right fit for your unit or discipline may vary. The process of moderation should start before you begin marking and continue throughout the marking process.

Where a unit has more than one marker, the process should always start before overall marking begins with a meeting and moderation exercise using one of the marking methods below.

No matter the method chosen, the purpose is to make sure that all the markers understand the standard expected and how to identify it in the student’s work. If you are the only marker you do still need to use moderation in the unit, but the markers meeting may not be necessary!
There are a few methods you might like to try:

**Double blind marking** is where two markers independently mark a piece of work, and then agree on a mark.

**Double open marking** is where two markers jointly mark a piece of work and arrive at the mark together.

**Second marking** is where after one marker originally marks the piece of work, a second marker reviews the work to confirm or challenge the mark. If you have students who land near the boundary between two grades, particularly between pass and fail, you may find this method particularly useful.

### Bringing it all together

Standard setting happens **before** the students take the assessment. Moderation happens **before, during, and after** the marking process.

**Before the students take the assessment:**

- Set the standard
- Finalise and publish the marking key
- Decide the moderation method

**Before marking:**

- Have a marking meeting, making the standard and moderation process clear to markers

**During marking, depending on your method:**

- Mark work independently, then agree on a final mark with another marker, and/or
- Mark work jointly, and/or
- Have work second marked to confirm or challenge the mark (e.g., borderline marks)

**After marking:**

- Arrive at consensus on a final mark for work with more than one marker
- Unit Coordinator reviews and confirms marks

- Publish the preliminary assessment marks to students, and provide them with feedback about their performance. Make sure the feedback is prompt, informative, and helpful!
- Reflect – did the students achieve the expected standard? Why or why not?
- Identify how, if at all, you need to change the assessment next time it is conducted

### If you find a problem...

If the range student performance did not meet the expected standard, *it is not appropriate* to scale the marks to mask the issue. In a criterion-referenced system of assessment, it is technically possible for all students to achieve 100%, or to fail the assessment.

If the marks don’t look like you expected, it’s important to investigate and address why.

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<tr>
<th>IF</th>
<th>THEN MAYBE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One marker’s results differ significantly from other markers</td>
<td>There is an issue with the application of the standard by the marker, or the group of students may be unusually high- or low-achieving</td>
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<tr>
<td>The performance in one question or element of the assessment differs significantly from the rest</td>
<td>There is an issue with the constructive alignment of the assessment. Students might need more opportunities to develop their skills and/or knowledge in this area before taking the assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>The entire cohort performs significantly above or below the expected standard</td>
<td>The standard may not be set at an appropriate level. Next time the assessment is conducted, adjust either the expected standard or the difficulty of the assessment</td>
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If there is a discrepancy in the marks it is the Unit Coordinator’s responsibility to investigate and confirm the marks. Only the Board of Examiners can scale marks.

### Contact your Faculty EEU team

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<tr>
<th>Arts, Business, Law &amp; Education</th>
<th>Engineering &amp; Mathematical Sciences</th>
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