

# Stop staring at the grade!

## Improving student engagement with feedback

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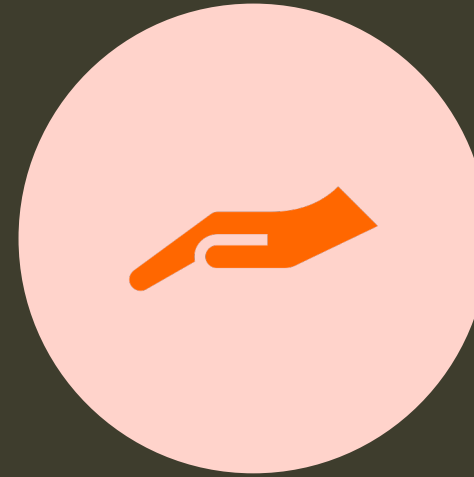


ALT Conference – Aston 2021

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There is an academic aspect to this presentation



There is a 'hands on' aspect



The academic bit.....

Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2007) *Using Constructive Alignment in Outcomes-Based Teaching and Learning Teaching for Quality Learning at University* (3rd ed., pp. 50-63). Maidenhead: OUP.

Constructive alignment requires tutors to ensure that learning activities and assessment are aligned to learning outcomes

If we tell students that we want them to achieve (learning outcomes) and then assess them against other assessment criteria they will feel cheated and will become cynical surface learners

To achieve constructive alignment there must be clarity, identifying the links between learning and assessment

Constructive alignment facilitates deep learning

In order to ensure it occurs, tutors should identify and communicate to students the learning outcomes

Teaching and learning should allow students to construct the knowledge required to achieve these learning outcomes. Assessments should be created that directly relate to these learning outcomes

Wiggins, G. 1997. 'Feedback: How learning occurs', in *Assessing impact: Evidence and action*..ed. E.Chaffee, 31-9. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education

- It must be timely
- It must be specific
- It must be understandable to the receiver
- It must allow the student to act on the feedback- (Feed-forward) - help them recognise gaps in their learning and use that data to move forward with the intent of closing the gaps (refine, revise, practice and retry)
- Most are familiar with the REAP project work of D.J. Nicol, D. Macfarlane-Dick, (2006), 'Formative Assessment and Self-Regulated Learning - A model and Seven Principles of Good Feedback Practice' in *Studies in Higher Education*, pp.7-14.

<http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/rap/docs/nicol.feedback.pdf>

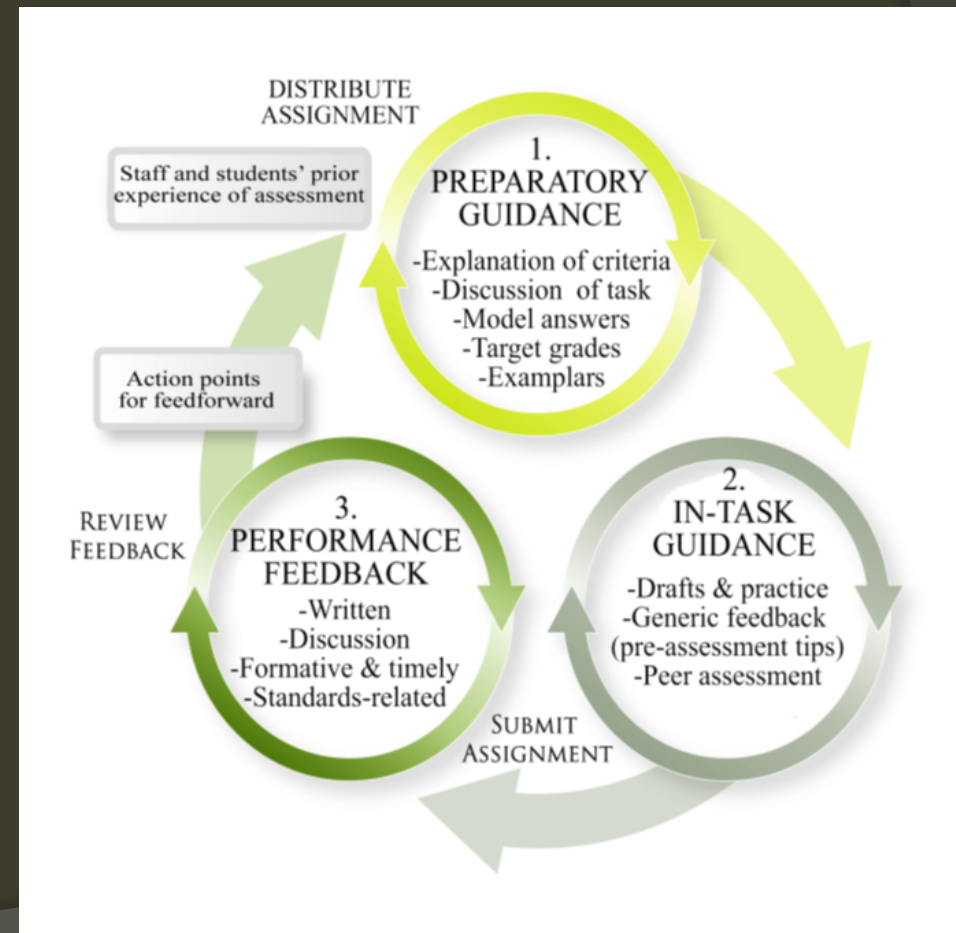
## REAP – 7 principles of good formative assessment and feedback

- Clarification of what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards)
- Facilitate the development of self-assessment and reflection in learning
- Delivery of high quality information to students about their learning (inc. feedback)
- Encourage interaction and dialogue around learning (peer and teacher-student)
- Encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem
- Opportunities to act on feedback (to close any gap between current and desired performance)
- Provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape their teaching

C. Beaumont, M. O'Doherty, L. Shannon, (2008), '*Staff and Student Perception of Feedback Quality in the Context of Widening Participation*', HEA Report, p.42.

176 students - only 65% agreed that they understood the feedback they received

- Dialogic Feedback Cycle (DFC)
- Criticisms...
- Spoon-feeding
- A lack of originality
- Plagiarism



My approach to improving engagement with feedback?.....it reflects how law is often studied and viewed by students...

- Students often 'compartmentalise' law ....fail to making links between other disciplines (e.g. politics, sociology, criminology, psychology, philosophy etc) e.g....strategies for reducing knife crime or tackling 'hate crime' ...
- Students can fail to make links between legal subjects...e.g. between family law and criminal law (domestic abuse, sexual offending, OAP) ...or .....IT law and criminal law (cybercrime and malicious comms) ...or...land law and criminal law (aspects of theft and criminal damage)...

Some of this is due to lack of opportunity or prompting....not fault!



- Students can also fail to make links between topics within legal subjects....

### Advanced Criminal Law option

Firearms offences under the FA 1968 - *Hussain* [1981])

Possession of drugs - s.5 - MDA 1971 - *Warner v MPC* [1969])

Possession of an offensive weapon - s.1(1) PCA 1953 - *Russell* [1984]

Possession of extreme pornography - s.63 of the CJA 2008 - *Ping Chen Cheung* [2009]

Receiving stolen goods - s.22 Theft Act 1968 - *Smith* [1855]

So...regarding assessment and feedback engagement ...

Students also tend to look at assessment in a discrete way, without adopting a holistic 'making the links' approach .....

My own view is that students need to understand the following.....

.....How 'General Learning Outcomes' for law.....

Relate to.....

.....Specific 'Assessment Outcomes' .....

And how our ...

.....Feedback Comments.....

Relate to these



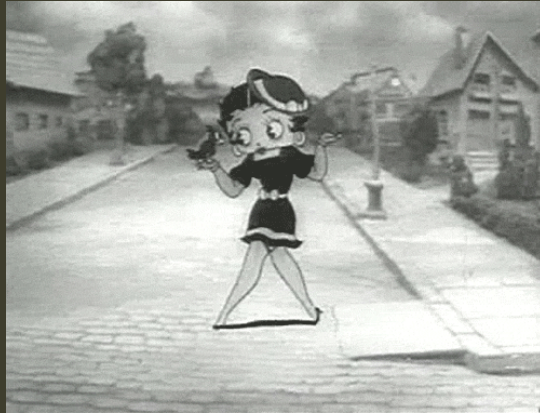
- 2011-12 –
- I devised an **Assessment and Feedback Guide and Corrective Exercises** for students
- I embedded a **Feedback Reflection Component** into my assessment regime – 10%
  - Students marked a short fictitious answer and explained how GLO were met/not met
  - They reflected on their CW1 feedback and were required to identify GLO they had/had not met before their grade was released
  - CW 2 – upon submission they were also required to produce evidence how they met the GLO and fed-forward from CW1
  - Also feedback reflection before the exam
- 2012 -15 - I gave a series of conference presentations on how to encourage law students to understand and engage with their feedback
- Article reviewing the research and reporting on the efficacy of the above-  
**Withey, C (2013) 'Feedback engagement: forcing feed-forward amongst law students' (2013) The Law Teacher, 47(3) 319-344**

Persevered for 2 years....but this was me after marking



Then I did that academic thing...disengaged slightly due to life stuff...and ...the QAA benchmarks changed

- My focus these days...
- Simple is best!...more pragmatic!



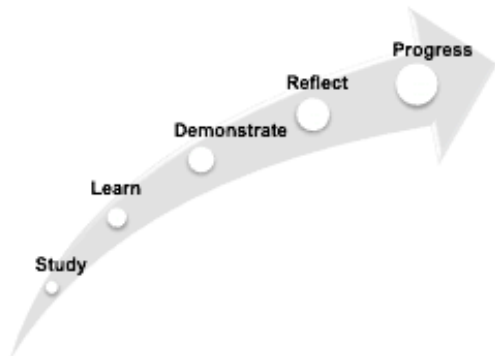
- In late 2020 (and 2 years after taking on role as 'first year tutor') I resurrected and adapted the original **Guide** to take account of the 2019 Law Benchmark statement
- Focus on the **Guide**....

Now the 'hands on' bit !



I will take you through the Guide.....

## Assessment and feedback guide for undergraduate law degree students



1. Moodle and module handbooks
2. Assessment preparation
3. Submitting coursework
4. Extenuating circumstances
5. Assessment feedback
6. Results and retake assessment

School of Law and Criminology



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- January 2021 - the Guide was circulated to law students at the university of Greenwich
- All first years students had an online meeting where I went through the **Guide**
- Also repeated the session in March as entering revision period
- Student feedback...

Some feedback on the Guide

- I would like to say that I have just watched the recording of the meeting that was on yesterday as I have unfortunately missed it and it has been very useful as it allowed me to understand what I need to work on in order to get a better mark in my exam (level 5)
- 'I really like the guide- it softens the jump from level 3 to level 4. It was great in setting out the skills that students will be acquiring and familiarises students with new terminology. It makes the transition to a heavier independent learning environment less daunting.( level 4)
- The detailed breakdown of the learning outcomes was effective in clearly outlining to students what is expected from them. The use of the cartoons in the guide to support the information was cool, it makes the guide fun and user friendly whilst being informative. Whist the examples provided are great for students to refer back to during the process of writing out their assignments for the first time.'( level 5)
- The cartoon strip visuals are really efficient in catching the attention. The 'breaking down' of the learning outcomes into verbs, objectives and specific objectives is really helpful. Section 5 was quite hard to get through and retain. (mature student)



- Next year....
- Session with colleagues
- Presentation in Welcome Week for law students
- Also recorded lecture for all years