

EDUBYTE 11, MARKING TO NARROW THE LEARNING GAP

INTRODUCTION

Marking is sometimes a tedious job. It takes a lot of time out of our busy lives. When working through a huge pile of marking, a teacher may ask herself: Why am I doing this? 'Is there any point to keeping up with all this marking?'



Experienced teachers learn that **effective** and regular marking DOES help most students to progress and improve their work. Marking has two main purposes:

- Students act on feedback and make progress over time.
- It informs the teacher about future planning and teaching.

Working the gap

To answer the question, Why am I doing this? Effective marking and feedback is about more than just ticks and crosses. Good feedback sits at the heart of good learning. It's about "working the gap" so that the gap between what a learner already knows, understands and can do and what he will know, be able to understand and do in the future is narrowed. Effective marking helps a learner understand the mistakes he has made and offers an opportunity to improve his learning.

MARKING AND FEEDBACK TO NARROW THE LEARNING GAP

Ticks and crosses don't help a learner to advance his learning. Marking becomes feedback when constructive comments and corrections are added. Imagine being a student and getting your book back with only a few red ticks and a couple of red crosses.

- Would you be motivated to improve your work? Unlikely!
- Does that help the student to recognise his/her mistakes? Yes, possibly.
- Does that help the student to recognise his/her mistakes **and** take action to improve their learning? No, definitely not.

Marking without constructive and positive feedback is pointless. Marking should be meaningful, manageable and motivating. Teachers who mark as a "window dressing exercise" – to show learners, managers and parents that they have looked at the work – do learners a great disservice.

Should I be marking every single piece of work?

The answer is: 'ABSOLUTELY NOT!!'

The amount of marking depends on the learning area and the ability of the students. Before you mark a piece of work ask yourself, 'Is it going to make a difference to the students' learning?' If not, rather use an alternative way to mark the work. Here are some suggestions:

Peer marking: Peer marking involves learners in the assessment process, with them taking on the role of teacher by reviewing work of other learners against a set criteria. It is a key 'assessment-for-learning' strategy that can help teachers quickly determine the level of knowledge and understanding of learners. Learners swap books or answers and acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of the work they have marked using the criteria and guidelines given to them.

Self-marking: This involves learners evaluating their own work and learning progress. Self-marking is a valuable learning tool as well as part of an assessment process. Through self-assessment, students can:

- identify their own skill gaps, where their knowledge is weak
- see where to focus their attention in learning
- set realistic goals
- revise their work
- track their own progress

This process helps learners stay involved and motivated and encourages self-reflection and responsibility for their learning.

Marking as a class: This is useful when learners do routine work, like Mental Maths or when you are marking revision work. It saves time and promotes the involvement of learners in identifying standards and/ or criteria to apply to their work and making judgments about the extent to which they have met these criteria and standards. It involves them in the process of determining what is 'good work'.

When to mark written work

Plan your marking beforehand and decide what will be best marked by the teacher or using one of the methods above. For example:

- Peer marking or marking as a class gives learners instant feedback and allows the class to correct and move on.
- Some pieces that are important for progression, especially at the end of a section or chapter, should be marked by the teacher to check the level of mastering the concept. This is where constructive feedback to the student will make a huge difference in their progress.

An example of positive and constructive feedback

The image shows a student's handwritten work on a grid background. At the top, there are four arithmetic problems:

- a) $-7 + (-7) = -14$
- b) $+4 + 1 = 5$
- c) $+3 - 8 = -5$
- d) $-3 + 6 = 3$

Below these is a feedback box with a smiley face icon and the text: "you have tried very hard with adding and subtracting positive and negative numbers." Below this, it says "To improve remember" and lists two rules:

- $+ -$ (subtract) $- -$ (add)
- $- +$ (subtract) $+ +$ (add)

Below the feedback box, it says "Try these please" and lists eight numbered arithmetic problems, each with a red checkmark:

- 1) $-6 + 5 = -1$
- 2) $-5 - 4 = -9$
- 3) $-2 + 7 = 5$
- 4) $+4 - 8 = -4$
- 5) $-4 + 3 = -1$
- 6) $+10 - 3 = 7$
- 7) $+12 + 10 = 22$
- 8) $+12 - 10 = 2$

Annotations on the right side of the image:

- An arrow points from the feedback box to the word "Positive".
- An arrow points from the feedback box to the word "Constructive".
- A bracket on the right side of the numbered problems is labeled "Intervention".

<http://www.braidwood.bham.sch.uk/permalink/4339.html>

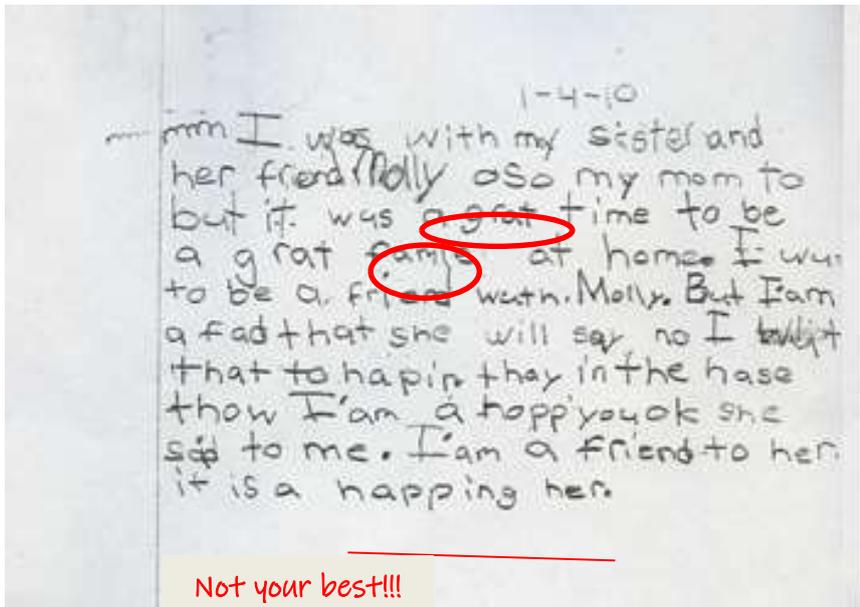
A word about marking literacy

Marking Literacy is challenging, especially when teaching an additional language. UNESCO lists South Africa as having a literacy rate of 93%, but beyond the mechanical ability to identify words, the picture is much bleaker. According to research released by the University of Pretoria, eight out of 10 Grade 4 pupils "still cannot read or write at an appropriate level". It's the teacher role to encourage good reading and writing skills to "enable children to learn much more than their teachers might offer and it enables them to learn independently". (Read it and weep: SA kids struggle with literacy, 2017)

How can marking and feedback help?

Consider this scenario: Grade 4 students got a task to write 6 – 8 sentences about their school. The teacher did not give them any 'new words' to use and it was all their own work.

Following is an example of how the teacher assessed their work (ineffective marking):



Is this marking effective? Does it work the learning gap?

How could it be improved? The teacher could:

- point out the punctuation errors and correct a few of those.
- Make a footnote to state the rule: Start a sentence with a capital letter and with a full stop.
- Identify at least five words the learner misspelled and write the correct spelling of those words underneath the essay – the learner should then take action and do corrections.

This is an open source educational resource drafted by Social Innovations mentor Lisle Loots. It draws from the references listed below. See more EduBytes on www.socialinnovations.co.za

<https://www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&id=140569D73F65912D2D19D0A6557B6F085D210F16&thid=OIP.jh76X3mLwZnMNKg3y2UzgHa>

<http://www.stokeswood.leicester.sch.uk/MainFolder/our-school/Policies/Marking-Policy-Jan-2019.pdf>

<https://educatingmatters.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/effective-marking-teachers-handbook-2013-2014-new.pdf>

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-12-06-read-it-and-weep-sa-kids-struggle-with-literacy/>

<https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/best-practice/mark-and-feedback-strategies-a-tick-or-a-cross/>

<https://www.tes.com/news/pedagogy-focus-peer-assessment>

<https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/resources/teaching/evaluating-students/assessing-student-learning/student-self-assessment>