Five Tips for Effective Marking

1. Using a Coversheet/Marking Rubric
   a. Explain the coversheet and any marking rubric you use to students before work is due.
   b. Use a departmental/school marking rubric or adapt one of your own; Most marking rubrics allow students to gauge performance on general elements of content and presentation. You can also use a marking rubric to diagnose writing problems, and to recommend the WriteSite.
   c. Marking rubric elements are relative to the subject, assessment task, and unit of study aims. You may deem one element central to one assignment, and a different element central to another. Make sure students know relative importance of the various elements for each assignment.
   d. Most cover sheets have a space for summary comments. Keep these brief, but try to express something individual to each student. (See tip #3 below)

2. Making Written Comments
   a. Use the coversheet to summarise feedback not to avoid it; make additional brief comments where appropriate.
   b. Don't lose the forest for the trees. Focus on the most important matters and the best advice to help the student improve. Often the maxim "less is more" holds for written comments.
   c. Avoid overly general or unclear remarks, e.g.: 'weak', '?', 'awkward', '✓'. Instead, try to make your comments as precise and concise as possible, e.g.: "x is inconsistent with y" (where x and y are marked in the student's work).
   d. If you use a system of abbreviations, don't assume students will understand them. Make sure they have access to the abbreviations key.
   e. Don't respond to everything. For assignments that have manifold significant problems, a summary comment describing these problems (perhaps including an example) is more effective.
   f. Help the student become a better writer, but correct spelling, grammar and bad style efficiently. Proofreading marks are useful and uniform. Mark run-on sentences and clauses masquerading as sentences. Indicate paragraphs. Even native speakers often need help with these things.
   g. Save longer comments for the summary remarks. Remember: 100 words of comments x 100 assignments = 10,000 words!

3. Making the Summary Comments
   a. Let the students see that you understand what they were trying to do. Students appreciate individual attention and don't want to feel anonymous.
   b. Don't just write a one-word throw-away: "Super!", "Good", "You can do better!" Identify distinctive accomplishments by indicating briefly what makes the work so good.
   c. Be critical, but dispassionate. Avoid personal, or disparaging comments.
   d. Where possible, provide a formative comment, e.g. "Here's how to do x better."

4. Budgeting your time
   a. Be realistic about how and when you will complete your marking.
   b. Be equitable. Try to ensure equal time and quality conditions for all assignments.
   c. Set an appropriate date for return. Marking requires a balance between timely feedback and individual attention. Set a realistic date for return (as early as practicable) and stick to it. Students will respect that even if it is later than they might have hoped.
   d. Timesavers: include setting a good topic, knowing your topic well, reading assignments in batches, keeping comments concise, using the marking guide, setting and observing time limits.

5. Assigning Marks for an Assessment
   a. Place assignments in rough order as you go (either physically or on a draft marksheet). Use grade descriptors as a guide to the overall grade (HD, D, Cr, P, F).
   b. Make a quick review of your comments as a reminder before assigning the final numerical mark.
   c. When two assignments are very similar in quality, try to make a decision about which you think is better. (This may be important for awards and prizes and scholarships, even much later on.)
   d. Double-check all the failed assignments. Check with your department about standard practice for very poor assignments, incomplete assignments, and marginal failures.

If you use the coversheet effectively, keep your comments brief and precise, explain to the students why they did well or poorly, while offering advice for improvement, you will tend to mark efficiently, fairly, and usefully. Students will appreciate such professional attention to their work.

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