

Association for Achievement and  
Improvement through Assessment



# Pupils Learning from Teachers' Responses



## AAIA South West Region

*The Association for those with a professional interest in the  
assessment, recording and reporting of achievement*

# **PUPILS LEARNING FROM TEACHERS' RESPONSES**

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# PUPILS LEARNING FROM TEACHERS' RESPONSES

MARKING STRATEGIES

FEEDBACK TO PUPILS

## HELPING PUPILS TO ASSESS THEIR OWN WORK

### INTRODUCTION

Teachers spend a great deal of time responding to or marking pupils' work. This publication is designed to help teachers consider: *how effective are my comments to pupils - how effective is my marking?*

Subject leaders and curriculum co-ordinators have responsibility for monitoring and developing school teaching and assessment policy and practice. This publication is designed to help subject leaders and curriculum co-ordinators consider: *how effective are our approaches to marking and feedback – how effective is our formative assessment?*

Advisers, trainers and consultants work with teachers and curriculum managers to evaluate and improve teaching and learning. This publication is designed to help advisers, trainers and consultants consider: *how effective are the references, sources and examples we use to analyse and promote good formative assessment – how effective is our advice?*

This publication offers principles, guidance, and illustrations of good practice.

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## SECTION A: MARKING

### Marking Principles

*Teachers spend a large proportion of their time assessing and marking pupils' work. This time is spent most effectively when the following principles are applied:*

#### Shared Principles

- it provides opportunity for prompt and regular written or spoken dialogue with the pupil;
- teachers and pupils are clear about the learning objectives of a task and the criteria for success;
- teachers provide constructive suggestions about ways in which the pupil might improve his/her work;
- teachers agree the next steps with the pupil;
- teachers follow up the agreed targets with the pupil to see how far they have achieved them.

#### Teacher-Centred Principles

- teachers are selective in the aspects they choose to comment on;
- teachers comment on specific, positive aspects of the assignment;
- teachers recognise effort as well as quality; not in a vague or generalised way, but linking effort to specific skills or understanding
- teachers use the information gained together with other information to adjust future teaching plans.

#### Pupil-Centred Principles

- pupils are encouraged to comment on the work themselves before handing it in or discussing it with the teacher;
- pupils are praised when they focus their comments on the learning objectives for the task;
- pupils are given time to act on the feedback they are given.



It does not help for teachers to think they are marking for inspectors or ‘quality controllers’. If marking successfully supports and guides the pupils, it speaks for itself, and this will be recognised by whoever monitors or evaluates its effectiveness.

### **What Different Ways of Marking Are There?**

- Each piece of work should be marked – by the teacher, the pupil, or another pupil – showing at least that notice has been taken.
- Not all pieces of work can be ‘quality marked’. It helps for the teacher and pupils to be clear about whether a piece of work will simply be acknowledged, or whether it will receive detailed attention.
- When introducing a new style of marking, teachers can take deliberate steps to help the pupils get the best out of it. A whole-team or whole-school initiative might also involve communicating with parents about changes being made and their purpose.

### ***Quality Marking***

Quality marking should enable all pupils to understand their own achievements and know what they need to do next to make progress. It sets the pupil’s particular performance in the context of the work’s purpose and in the context of the pupil’s previous efforts. It provides positive feedback and promotes high expectations of progress linked to the main learning objectives. Comments might, for example, follow a pattern of two ‘goods’ and a ‘wish’.

Avoid ‘but’ as a link between the two parts of a comment. ‘But’ sets up a negative which can devalue the preceding positive statement. Try ‘and’ instead. ‘Now’ is better still.

### ***Highly Selective Marking of Writing***

It is not always necessary to mark every piece of writing which pupils produce. Here are some examples of strategies for marking with a tight focus – provided the pupils know the rules of the game!

#### **Scoring:**

- *Random sampling* – useful if the pupils respond well both to measures of achievement and to competing either against their own performance or against one another’s: e.g. give the total number of errors in a chosen sentence or paragraph
- *Error-free work* – useful if pupils are trying hard to sustain technical accuracy in writing: e.g. give the number of words or sentences the pupil has written before they made their first mistake

#### **Highlighting:**

- *Language features* – useful in reinforcing specific aspects of language use: e.g. praise or correct or extend the use of adjectives/verbs/conjunctions/paragraph links/punctuation/...
- *Key concepts or facts* – useful in checking or improving pupils’ grasp or recall of content: e.g. tick each successful point and signal any omissions or confusions

## **Do Pupils Have To Follow Up Their Teachers' Marking?**

Follow-up is essential after marking; it is the crucial element.

If nothing happens following marking, pupils soon get to know that they don't have to respond in terms of improving their work.

Some primary teachers ask their pupils to leave three finger spaces for the follow-up work. Some secondary teachers give ten minutes for pupils to work on marking prompts in key assignments. Other teachers write their comments in a box on the record or dialogue sheet, and have a box for the pupils to comment in, for example, explaining what they have done by way of response to the teacher's marking.

***Key:- The teaching team needs to establish, share, maintain and evaluate the routines it uses to give pupils sufficient time to read and act on the comments they receive.***

## SECTION B. FEEDBACK TO PUPILS

*'Praise should be contingent – it must depend on some particular thing the pupil has done rather than on their general performance. Some would say it should be for a specific behaviour not for the child.'*

*'It should be specific – it should identify the specific behaviour being praised and the reason why, so that the pupil knows what aspect of their work is being singled out for praise.'*

*'The praise must be credible; praise that follows a 'formula' (i.e. is always expressed in the same way) or which sounds insincere is likely to be ineffective since pupils can see through this very quickly. Praise should be spontaneous and expressed in a variety of ways.'*

Mike Askew and Dylan Wiliam, *Recent Research in Mathematics Education* 5 – 16, 1995

### How clear is the feedback given to pupils?

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| "Develop these ideas further"..... | <b>Yes, but how?</b>   |
| "More detail needed" .....         | <b>Yes, but I'd thought it had all the details it needed, so now I'm not clear</b> |
| "You must try harder".....         | <b>!!!!!!!!!!</b>  |
| "Ask" .....                        | <b>About what?</b>   |
| "A lovely story" .....             | <b>So is it perfect, then?</b>   |
| "Good work" .....                  | <b>How good? In what way?</b>  |
| "Spellings" .....                  | <b>Which?</b>  |
| "Use paragraphs" .....             | <b>Yes, but I don't know how, which is why I didn't in the first place</b>         |

### How do pupils interpret feedback?

'A tick means he probably likes it' (Year 6)

'He wrote on it so it must be good' (Year 3)

'If it's a tick I'm quite happy because it means its good work, but if it's two sentences at the bottom it means it's quite bad.' (Year 6)

'*Good* doesn't help much – he's just saying that it's not really very good. I'd like it if he just told the truth' (Year 3)

'It's one of my best because my handwriting is joined up neat.' (Year 3)

'Smiley faces are for working hard, neat handwriting, spelling, the date right.' (Year 3)

*from The LEARN Project – September 1999 – report for QCA.*

## Feedback – Spoken and Written

- ‘Feedback for learning’ is a better description than simply ‘feedback’ as it encompasses the processes of review and next steps.
- Pupils must be clear about expectations – do they really know what it is they have to do?
- Feedback must be given against the initial expectations.
- The skills of responding to feedback must be explicitly taught and pupils must be given dedicated time to respond.
- Is feedback about getting pupils to do X better or about helping pupils to learn better? Schools need to address this as a whole school issue, as feedback will only be truly effective when embedded in a whole school policy which is consistently applied. Learning how to learn is the deeper issue, bringing profound and lasting benefits to pupils’ progress and attainment.
- Examples of feedback strategies include:
  - getting pupils to give their personal understanding of the learning objectives and what they need to do;
  - prompting an exchange of comments between teacher and pupil (e.g. “I’ll tell you one good thing about your work, and you then tell me one ...”);
  - feedback sandwiches:
    - Contextual statement:* “I liked your description of ..... character”
    - Now/Next time* .....
    - Interactive statement,* e.g. a question about the work.
- Feedback should be teacher-to-pupil and pupil-to-pupil, involving dialogue. Pupils should be supported to move from ‘I’m proud of this piece of work because it’s neat’ to ‘I’m proud of this piece of writing because I used some very descriptive words’. The more pupils refer to learning objectives in their self-assessments, the more effective the teachers know their teaching is.
- Be prepared to tackle how you use feedback and how the pupils respond to it. Social and educational cultures are very powerful and tend to reinforce precisely the opposite kind of message from the one you would like to convey. Work on building confident relationships as a foundation for the risky business of being honest about what you think of the pupils’ work, so that they can learn to be honest too.
- Schools need to work with parents to explain changes to marking policy and practice. Help them engage with the use of targets as a way of bringing motivation and direction to pupils’ learning activity.

***Key:- Be creative in finding activities that stop the pupils from seeing feedback as a dull judgement or nit-picking criticism, and help them see feedback as one of the ways they can work with you to achieve higher standards.***

## Feedback in Written Form – Guidance on Marking Work

- The purpose of individual pieces of work should be made clear.
- How the work is to be assessed should be made clear i.e. the success criteria should be made explicit.
- Teachers should let pupils know when they can expect their work to be marked and returned.
- Pupils should be quite clear what follow-up is expected to any piece of work: e.g. ‘do corrections’, ‘finish it off’, ‘practise certain skills’, ‘develop the work in certain ways’.
- Teachers’ comments should focus on the success criteria already established. They should be positive in overall tone. They should be personalised, e.g. using the pupil’s name.
- A grade, score, level or code, if used, should be fully understood by the pupil.
- Teachers sometimes correct single errors, but they should routinely look for opportunities to teach patterns.

Some good ways of doing this are:

- having the pupils do follow-up learning work, e.g. using a special notebook or pages in their exercise books to collect word families/spelling patterns;
  - setting targets: at word level (e.g. spelling or vocabulary), at sentence level (e.g. punctuation, structure, tense, sense), or at text level (e.g. paragraphing, cohesion, introduction, development, ending).
- When targets are used, they should be referred to in the marking of subsequent pieces of work, until the targets are hit. Targets give the marking focus.
  - Use targets as a way of encouraging the pupils to take ownership of their learning. Lesson objectives are usually defined by the teacher, but the pupil should have a real investment in choosing targets for improving her/his work.

## SECTION C. DEVELOPING PUPILS' SKILLS IN ASSESSING THEIR OWN WORK

### Do Pupils Know What Makes a Piece of Work Good?

Ask them:

- Do you know when you have done a 'good' piece of work?  
Can you tell me what makes it good?
- When I write a comment or a mark on your work do you always know what I mean?  
Do you know why I do that?  
Do you always know what you need to do next/think about?
- How do you feel about comments?  
Are you sometimes surprised by the comments I make about the work you have done?
- Do you sometimes feel pleased with work you have done?  
Can you think of a piece of work that you felt you did really well?  
Can you remember why you thought it was good?
- Do you ever ask your friends what they think of your work?  
Does what they say help you?  
Do you ever compare your work with theirs?
- When you do the next piece of work do you think back to what you did before, what you/your teacher/your friends thought about it and how you thought about improving it?  
Does this help you to do the next piece better?
- How can marking help you to be even more successful in your learning?

### How Can Pupils Assess Their Own Work, Self-Correct and Use Self-Correction To Get Better?

It is only when teachers are clear about what the expected learning outcomes of a lesson are, and when they share these with pupils, that they help pupils to apply assessment criteria to their learning.

#### *Step One*

Use a piece of written work, possibly produced by a child in the previous year, completed to meet certain expected outcomes and assessment criteria. Remove the child's name and distribute a copy to every child in the group explaining what the expected outcomes and the criteria were. Now take them through it as a teacher-directed exercise, explaining how you would mark and commenting on the work in relation to the given criteria.

#### *Step Two*

Divide the children into mixed ability groups of four or five. Give each group copies of a piece of written work which can be judged by clear criteria. Each group has a different piece. Their task is to mark and annotate the piece with reference to the criteria. The group's judgement is recorded on a separate sheet along with the reasons for their decision with reference to the criteria. The group will include on the sheet feedback to the pupil about the piece of work, how well it had been done and how it could be improved. This feedback should be specific and clearly related to the expected outcomes and the assessment criteria.

When the groups have completed this task, the pieces of written work, together with the comments, are passed on to another group. Each group first reviews the new piece of work against the criteria and then looks at the previous group's marking, explanation and feedback.

They need to consider:

- Was the comment appropriate?
- Was the explanation properly related to the criteria?
- Was the feedback clear, constructive and helpful?

**Step Three**

When most of the pupils are ready to do this kind of exercise on their own the teacher can use another piece of written work related to a different set of outcomes and do the activity individually. This time each pupil tries to make a comment and offer feedback on his/her own before comparing findings with others. For pupils less able to manage this process on their own, the teacher may provide support, putting them with a learning partner or using an easier task or fewer criteria. For pupils who are developing the skill more rapidly than others, a more challenging task should be provided.

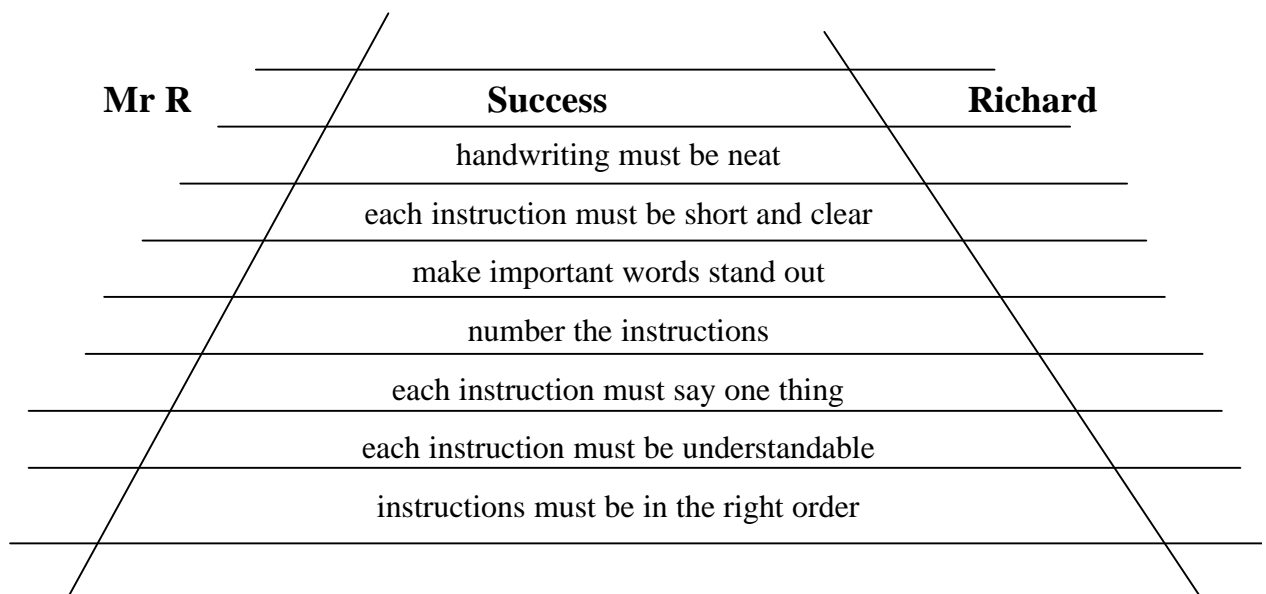
**Key:-** *Being an autonomous learner involves the capability to recognise and correct mistakes.*

**Case Studies of Pupils' Self- and Peer-Assessment**

**Case Study 1**

A group of Y2 pupils were given the task of writing instructions for making a telescope which would be suitable for Y1 pupils.

The group drafted their instructions and tried them out on the Y1 pupils. They received a great deal of helpful feedback! For example, they were told that some words didn't make sense and that some instructions seemed to be in the wrong order. As a result of this feedback the Y2 pupils redrafted their instructions, in some cases completely re-ordering them. The teacher then asked them what they thought he should be looking for when he came to mark their instructions. They came up with a list of suggestions which were turned into a success ladder.





## Case Study 2

One teacher who had used a similar system of self-assessment and target-setting to the ladders above decided to take the work one stage further, particularly within the framework of the Literacy Hour. Working with a Y3 class, she decided to emphasise the key objectives for particular pieces of written work by outlining the success criteria which the work would be marked against. The children had to respond to these in the form of questions before handing in their work, e.g.

### **Task: Writing a fable**

#### **Success Criteria:**

- Does your fable have a character or characters which are animals?
- Have you described your main character?
- Have you described your setting?
- Has your fable got a beginning, a middle and an end?
- Can you write down the moral of your fable?
- Was there anything that you found particularly difficult about this task?

These questions were typed out on an A5 piece of paper which was stuck into the pupils' books. The teacher was keen to develop a more differentiated approach to using targets and she began to refine the success criteria by using three simple words:

***“must”, “should” and “could”.***

### **Task: Write a character portrait of someone you know or someone from your imagination**

#### **Success Criteria:**

- You ***must*** write a portrait of a character.
- You ***should*** use some describing words.
- You ***could*** use some interesting or very special adjectives or some similes e.g. red as a cherry.

**Now write how well you have achieved the above criteria.**

.....

**Write below any individual targets you have this week.**

.....

Individual targets were then transferred to individual target cards which the children referred to when doing any written work.

How I might adapt that approach to a class of mine:-

### *Case Study 3*

Pupils in a middle school were encouraged by their science and humanities teachers to show when they were not sure about any particular aspect of the work they were writing up. Using the code of a wavy line down the left-hand margin meant “I’m not totally confident that what I’ve put here is correct.” The teachers then used those markers as a prompt for brief written explanations. When a lot of pupils had the same doubts, the teacher used part of a lesson to clarify points for the whole class.

How I might adapt that approach to a class of mine:-

### *Case Study 4*

Pupils at Key Stage 3 in a secondary school were helped by their art and design and technology teachers to analyse specific strengths of work on display in their departments and entrance hall. Laminated labels were prepared stating key assessment criteria: e.g. texture, perspective, use of colour, angle of light, alternative solutions, real-life research, sharp evaluation criteria, stages of development ... One class looked at the display of work they had themselves just completed and chose the appropriate labels to attach to particular pieces of work. The pupils responsible for the work then composed two or three questions about the work, relating to the label, for other viewers to answer. E.g.

Questions:     How did I try to show distance or perspective in this picture?  
                  How else could I have done it?

A parallel class then viewed the display and groups took responsibility for posting up answers to the questions. E.g.

Answers:       You used the fact that things in the foreground were bigger than things  
                  in the background.  
                  Maybe you could have used light or shading.

How I might adapt that approach to a class of mine:-

### *Case Study 5*

Pupils at Key Stage 4 were helped to think about specific aspects of team-ball-games. They learned about and practised how you can use ‘triangles’ of players to advance the hockey ball, i.e. always giving the player with the ball two options for passing the ball – on either side and preferably upfield too. When they practised this in short matches, two pupils would take turns to observe and record on a chart every time they saw a player move into a ‘triangle position’ and every time they saw the ball passed towards a team-mate positioned to the side and upfield. Periodically the observers fed back credits to the players. At the end of the lesson, ideas were discussed for improving the strategy further.

How I might adapt that approach to a class of mine:-

***Key:- Involving pupils actively in reflection, commentary, targeting and planning for themselves are crucial to effective assessment and teaching.***

## CONCLUSION

Effective teaching and successful learning depend on the quality of teachers' comments and marking. When we consider teachers' comments and marking, we can ask: what does this tell us about the teaching? Are these pupils being helped to feel positive about what they have so far achieved? Do these teachers seem to value their pupils and believe in their ability to make good progress? Are these pupils learning what to aim for? Are they learning how their work will be assessed? Do these pupils play an active part in assessing their own and others' work? Are these pupils being helped to see how they can improve their performance? Are the pupils asked to respond actively to the marking and comments they receive? Are the teachers doing too much of the work, and are they likely to burn out in the process? This publication is intended to help you find constructive answers to these and similar questions.

The material presented here should help you work through the development cycle:

- looking at existing practice;
- considering assumptions and principles underlying existing practice;
- considering alternative principles and strategies;
- analysing benefits and difficulties in possible changes to current practice;
- devising and implementing new policy and practice;
- preparing for monitoring and evaluation of new policy and practice.

Here are some questions you might like to address in such a process.

### **Principles**

How do your policy and practice, or the policy and practice you advocate, compare with the principles offered here?

### **Strategies**

What advantages are there in having a consistent team or school approach? What steps can be taken to review and change practice?

### **Making changes**

How can pupils and parents be helped to understand the changes you make? How can time be set aside to monitor and evaluate the changes you make? How can arrangements be made to allow good practice to be shared?

A final reference point is provided as an appendix. It is taken from *Teacher Assessment in Action*, which is published by the the Association for Achievement and Improvement through Assessment and lists the essential components of effective marking and feedback to pupils.



***Association for Achievement and Improvement  
through Assessment***

*The Association for those with a professional interest in the  
assessment, recording and reporting of achievement*

**Marking and providing feedback to pupils**

Effective marking will:

- be consistent and in line with the overall policy on assessment, recording and reporting throughout the school;
- provide feedback to pupils about their work promptly and regularly;
- include both oral and written feedback as appropriate;
- focus the response on the learning objectives and criteria for success;
- provide pupils with opportunities to assess their own and others' work and give feedback to one another;
- ensure that pupils understand their achievements and know what they need to do next to make progress;
- use the information gained together with other information to adjust future teaching plans;
- seek reinforcement;
- depend on regularly reviewing the policy, making sure that it is understood by new members of staff so that practice continues to reflect school policy.

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