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MARKING ESSAYS

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MARKING ESSAYS

As a teacher, “we aspire to treat students fairly and equally, and we often pride ourselves on our scholarly and instructional objectivity – our focus is the work, not the individual who completed the work. Unfortunately, despite our aims of objectivity and fairness, our humanity sometimes gets in the way”.

- *The Teaching Professor, June/July 1998, p. 4*



PRIOR EXPERIENCE

- ⦿ Has anyone had experience grading papers, either as a TA or as a marker?
- ⦿ Has anyone ever had a paper marked?
- ⦿ Think back to your experiences as a student...
 - ⦿ Did you ever feel that your own papers were marked poorly or unfairly? Why?
 - ⦿ What would you like to avoid doing as a marker?
 - ⦿ Any examples of useful or useless feedback that you received?

SAMPLE PAPER

- ③ “Life in the Sixties: The Hippie Culture” (on page 24 of your handout)
- ③ Use your own conceptions of grading

GRADE DISTRIBUTION AT MCMASTER

A+ (12)	90-100%	C (5)	63-66%
A (11)	85-89%	C- (4)	60-62%
A- (10)	80-84%	D+ (3)	57-59%
B+ (9)	77-79%	D (2)	53-56%
B (8)	73-76%	D- (1)	50-52%
B- (7)	70-72%	F (0)	0-49%
C+ (6)	67-69%		(Failure)



THE MARKING EXPERIENCE

- ① Did you all take the same approach, or different approaches?
- ① What are the biggest strengths and weaknesses of the paper?
- ① How does the writing style affect the evaluation?
 - ① E.g. If the spelling/grammar was perfect, would you have given them a better grade?
- ① How could the student's next paper be better?



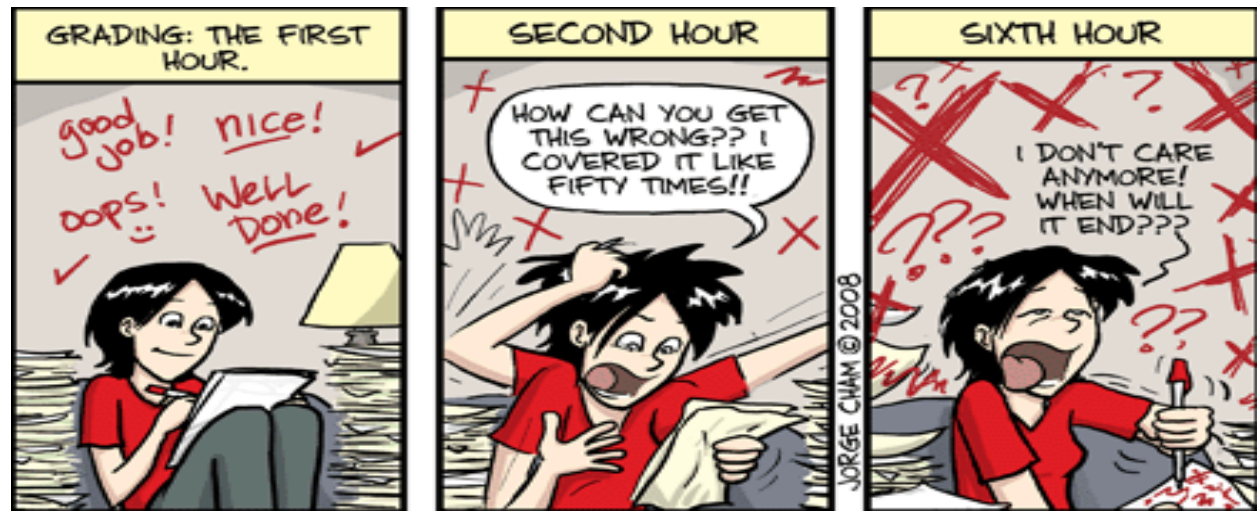
GRADE DISTRIBUTION

- ⊙ Why are the marks so varied?
 - ⊙ Different expectations between disciplines?
 - ⊙ We need to clarify criteria – all I said was “mark this”
- ⊙ How could we reduce the subjectivity we have?

AVOIDING BIAS

What are the factors that influence us when we're marking?

- ◎ Poor writing skills (spelling & grammar!)
- ◎ Lack of neatness
- ◎ Excessive length of assignments
- ◎ Previous performance
- ◎ Personal biases




TIPS FOR INCREASING CONSISTENCY AND REDUCING SUBJECTIVITY

- ⦿ Set realistic expectations (not just for your students, but also for yourself!)
- ⦿ Have clearly stated objectives
- ⦿ Have scoring guidelines or rubrics
- ⦿ Meet with other markers
- ⦿ Read and grade one question or topic at a time
- ⦿ Take a break from marking
- ⦿ Score blind or read twice
- ⦿ Policy for irrelevant answers

TIPS FOR INCREASING EFFICIENCY

- ⦿ Experience – you will get faster and more efficient as you go
- ⦿ Mark similar questions together
- ⦿ Set clear expectations and objectives (for yourself, and for your students!)
- ⦿ Constantly review the guidelines or rubrics
- ⦿ Find *your* optimal time to mark
- ⦿ Focus your feedback – don't write a novel!

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- ⦿ Mark only a sample of spelling and grammar errors
 - ⦿ Use abbreviations (e.g. awk for awkward)
 - ⦿ Type your comments on the computer
 - ⦿ Promote good essays – have a grammar lesson, show an example of a good paper, etc.



FEEDBACK

- ◎ Things to think about when providing feedback:
 - 1) What are the most important things that I should be commenting on?
 - 2) How will the student interpret the comment?

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- © What are some comments we could write on the hippie culture paper?

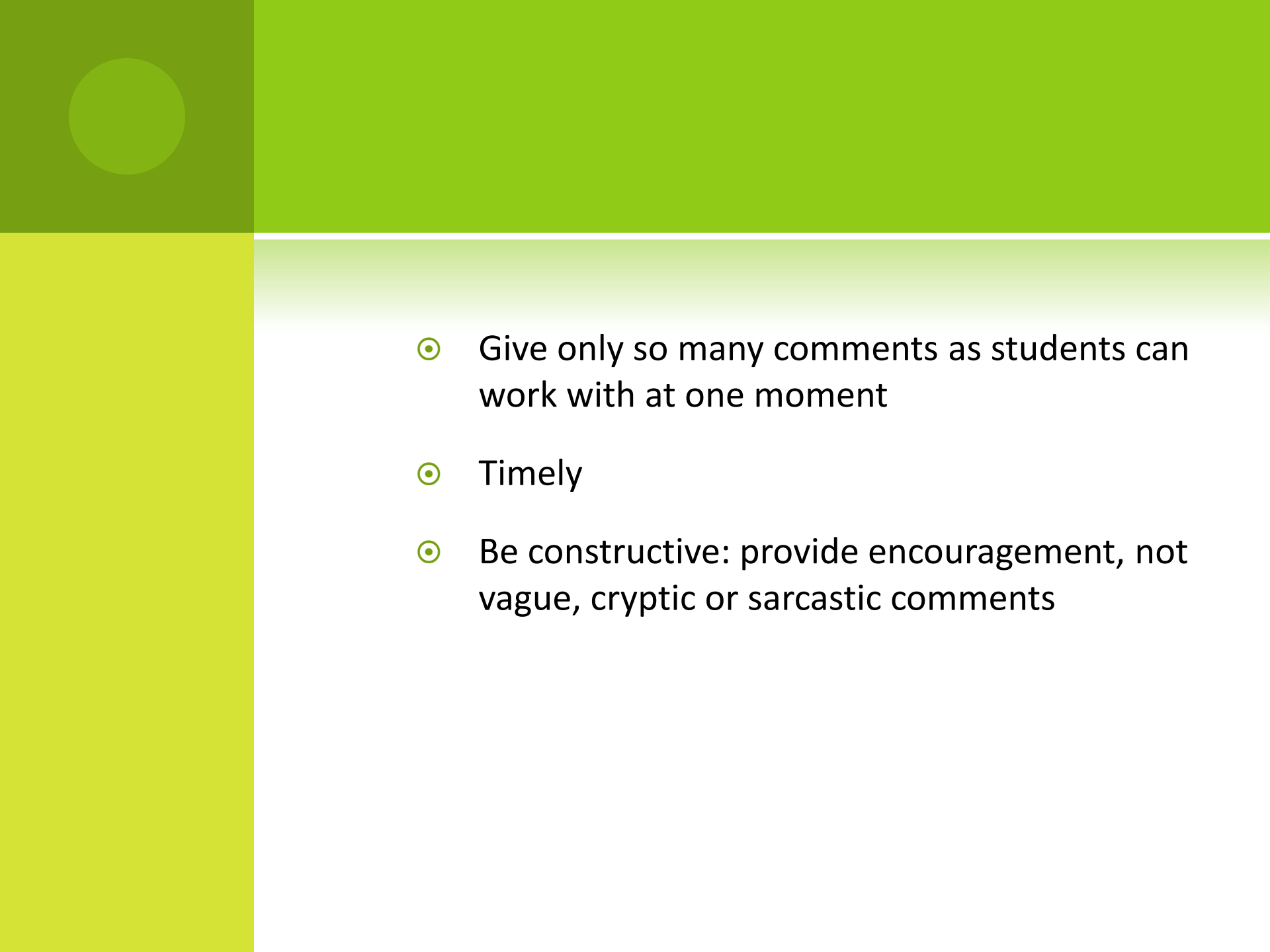
“This is a very interesting topic. This paper addresses most of the significant problems faced by this counter-culture during the time – well done! However, there are some problems with the paper. There are spelling and grammar issues throughout the essay, and problems with the logic and structure (please see my comments within the paper for examples and corrections).

Please see me if you have any questions, or need further clarification on any of my comments. Also, if you need references for a writing style guide, I can provide you with that information.”

PROVIDING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK


- ◉ Coach them: don't judge them
- ◉ Consider your audience
- ◉ Be specific (show examples)
- ◉ Process and future directed



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- ⦿ Give only so many comments as students can work with at one moment
 - ⦿ Timely
 - ⦿ Be constructive: provide encouragement, not vague, cryptic or sarcastic comments

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ⦿ Don't agonize! There is no perfect grading or scoring system – these are essays, not multiple choice questions. Grading guidelines, or rubrics, are meant to set guidelines; they will not produce infallible results.
- ⦿ Balance: provide students with examples of the paper's strength's and weaknesses, as well as both general and specific comments (overall impression and attention to detail)
- ⦿ Give clear directions to the students before they write their paper

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- ⦿ Offer to meet with students to talk about their papers and provide them with clear direction, or offer to look over one paragraph/section/page prior to final submission
 - ⦿ Write encouraging comments on all work – good or bad. Avoid sarcasm about bad work – the bad grade will make the student feel bad enough. Instead, explain where it has gone wrong, and give clear directions about how it can be put right.
 - ⦿ Be prepared to discuss the grade and marking with the student (but only after they have had time to consider the comments!)

SOME DO'S AND DON'TS

DO	DON'T
DO provide comments that link the grade received to the scoring criteria	DON'T cover the students paper with red ink (or any colour!)
DO provide comments on all aspects of the assignment, not just specific content	DON'T circle every spelling, grammatical, mechanical, or formatting error
DO provide a rationale for scoring criteria	DON'T grade the student, grade the paper!
DO focus on 2-3 improvements which are the highest priority for this student	DON'T forget that you were once in their position
DO make as many positive comments as negative comments	
DO check your marking for reliability or potential bias	
DO develop explicit scoring criteria	

FINAL THOUGHTS...

- ◎ Nobody is a perfect marker!
- ◎ Talk to your supervisor.
- ◎ Fair does not always mean nice.
- ◎ Above all else, YOU are the expert!!



GOOD LUCK!

- ① Questions or Comments?
- ① Evaluations

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DESIGNING AND USING A RUBRIC

Out-of-Class Assignment #1

DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS OCTOBER 16, 2008

**3 - 5 PAGES, PRINTED, DOUBLE-SPACED, 12-POINT TIMES NEW
ROMAN FONT**

FORMULATING YOUR RESEARCH TOPIC AND QUESTION

In your first out-of-class assignment, write a paper of a **minimum 3 pages to a maximum 5 pages, typed, double-spaced, and 12-point Times New Roman font** that describes the research topic you will choose for your final Research Proposal Assignment.

In this paper, you will identify the research question you would like to pursue. **Discuss your personal interests and/or available resources in formulating your research question. Write the question in one sentence, and give at least three reasons why it is a good research question.**

Identify the major concepts involved in your topic, and describe the theoretical and ethical implications of the research you plan to conduct.

Search the literature on the question and concepts you have identified. Refer to class discussions and readings for tips on conducting the search. **Provide a summary of your search strategy** (e.g., what databases did you use, what keywords did you try?)

At the end of your paper, include a **Works Cited list of at least 3 scholarly sources (academic journals or books in sociology)** that are relevant to your question; give complete citations in APA or ASA format. Be very selective in compiling your list. You will need to skim many more articles to **identify the 3 most important references for your research topic.**

Out-of-class Assignment #1 Sociology 3003 – Qualitative Research Methods

Student Name: _____

1. Minimum 3 pages, maximum 5 pages, formatting
2. Discuss personal interests and/or available resources in formulating your research question
3. Research question (one sentence)
4. At least three reasons why it is a good question
5. Identify the major concepts (at least one)
6. Describe the theoretical and ethical implications of the proposed research
7. Summary of your search strategy
8. Works Cited list (at least three scholarly, sociological sources)

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

	4 – Exceptional	3 – Above Average	2 – Average	1 – Below Average	0 – Inadequate	Total
Organization/ Content	Excellent organization, Exhaustive coverage of content; Demonstrates full knowledge (more than required) with explanations and elaboration.	Good organization, content of article/chapter thoroughly explained; Demonstrates clear knowledge with explanations and elaboration	Content reasonably well-organized, all major, salient points covered	Does not cover all salient points of the article/ chapter; some important points not covered	Presenter disorganized, topic not adequately covered	
Analysis of Chapter/ Article	Provides insightful and critical academic analysis of ideas and themes in article/chapter, based on course content	Provides good academic analysis of ideas and themes in article/chapter, based on course content	Provides some academic analysis of ideas and themes in article/chapter, based on course content	Limited analysis of ideas and themes in article/chapter	Little to no analysis of ideas and themes in article/chapter	
Creative Delivery	Particularly engaging presentation, creative and original delivery style	Voice and body language reveal enthusiasm & interest in issue	Voice & body language reveal some enthusiasm & interest in issue	Voice & body language reveals little enthusiasm; lacking in originality	Unenthusiastic voice & body language, monotone, bored with own presentation.	
Technical Aspects	Professional, attractive & informative handout; excellent use of audio/visual aids, well-timed presentation	Attractive & informative handout, audio/ visual aids, ends on more or less on time	Informative handout, some audio/visual aids; presentation runs slightly over or under time	Significantly over/under 25-30 minutes	no handout, audio/visual aids	
Involvement of Class Debate/ Activity	Presentation inspires high level of class involvement; Engaging activity/debate ties together content	Good class discussion of important points and issues is stimulated, i.e. well-planned activity/debate	Some class discussion of important points and issues is stimulated	Insufficient involvement, no debate/activity	No class involvement	
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