Interactive cover sheets

Interactive cover sheets (ICS)[1] are like the submission cover sheets some students hand in with their coursework, but with added interactivity. This takes the form of prompts and spaces for students to analyse their own strengths and areas for development, and to identify areas where they would like feedback. This dialogue with assessors is key to negotiating the meaning both of assessment guidance and written feedback[2]. Research by the Equality Challenge Unit[3] found that black and minority ethnic (BME) students sought dialogue to understand what tutors are looking for, and therefore to have confidence in marking. The report recommends that institutions consider ways to 'strengthen conversations with students about study expectations, standards, performance criteria, assessment and feedback'. Likewise, for international students, tutor-student dialogue is key to understanding the expectations of UK assessment[4]. ICSs are suitable for most coursework where feedback is given, and have also been used for exams.
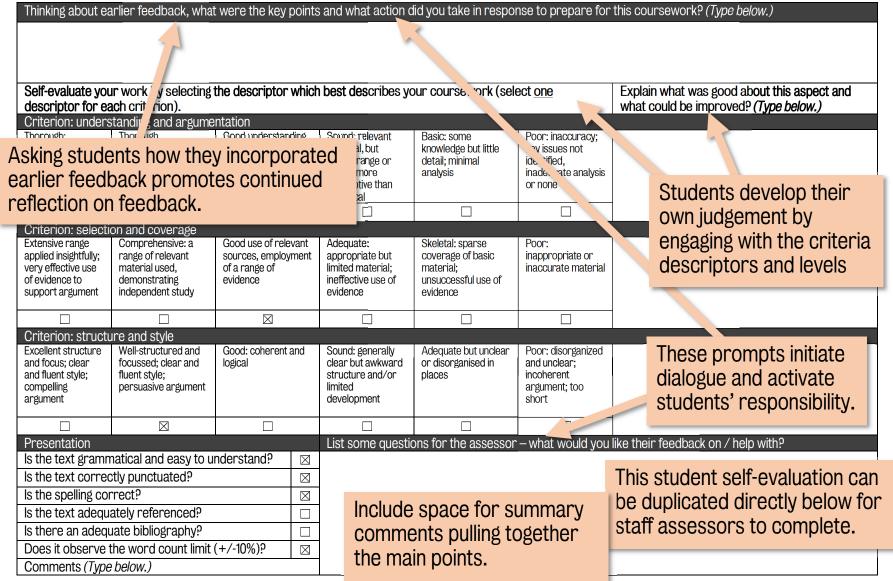

Figure 1- example of how an interactive coversheet might be implemented

Callout annotations on figure:
- Asking students how they incorporated earlier feedback promotes continued reflection on feedback.
- Students develop their own judgement by engaging with the criteria descriptors and levels
- These prompts initiate dialogue and activate students' responsibility.
- This student self-evaluation can be duplicated directly below for staff assessors to complete.
- Include space for summary comments pulling together the main points.

Benefits	Good to know
Fosters the kind of dialogue between teachers and students which is viewed as key to good feedback practice[5].	To avoid the ICS becoming a tick box exercise for students, explain the educational rationale. Consider making feedback conditional on their engagement.
Approaching feedback as a process (rather than transmissively as a product or event) develops students' judgement and control over the process, and so reduces dependency on assessors[6].	Approach the ICS itself as a feedback exercise – do not grade students' self-evaluations. To promote engagement, consider making completion worth a small percentage of the assignment.
The intention is that students take more notice of feedback they specifically request, and that it can better inform their understanding of the goals and standards of their subject discipline[7].	To guide students' attention to the most important aspects of the work, provide the criteria on the ICS. If the ICS is too open students may misprioritise their attention.
ICSs can promote consistent feedback across several markers.	If students need support to identify their own weaknesses and strengths, consider a guided marking activity, or making comments on a draft.
ICS is a sustainable approach to feedback which scales up to larger cohorts[8].	Encourage students to self-monitor by drafting the open responses of the ICS as they prepare their work.

[1] Bloxham, Sue, and Liz Campbell. 2010. "Generating Dialogue in Assessment Feedback: Exploring the Use of Interactive Cover Sheets." Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 35 (3): 291–300. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602931003650045.

[2] Bloxham, Sue, and Amanda West. 2007. "Learning to Write in Higher Education: Students' Perceptions of an Intervention in Developing Understanding of Assessment Criteria." Teaching in Higher Education 12 (1): 77–89. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510601102180.

[3] Equality Challenge Unit, and Higher Education Funding Council for England. 2008. "Ethnicity, Gender and Degree Attainment: Final Report." https://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/ethnicity-gender-and-degree-attainment-report/.

[4] Caruana, Viv, and Nicola Spurling. 2007. "The Internationalisation of UK Higher Education: A Review of Selected Material. Project Report." Higher Education Academy.

[5] Carless, David, Diane Salter, Min Yang, and Joy Lam. 2011. "Developing Sustainable Feedback Practices." Studies in Higher Education 36 (4): 395–407. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075071003642449.

[6] Baxter Magolda, Marcia B. 2004. Making Their Own Way Narratives for Transforming Higher Education to Promote Self-Development. Virginia: Stylus Publishing, LLC. https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Z90M3rlRxbgC&oi=fnd&pg=PA3&dq=baxter+magolda&ots=L9XXgNXwVq&sig=zfe3VmVauclF7F6ddgnAhcVTUZM#v=onepage&q=baxter%20magolda&f=false.

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[8] Carless, David, Diane Salter, Min Yang, and Joy Lam. 2011. "Developing Sustainable Feedback Practices." Studies in Higher Education 36 (4): 395–407. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075071003642449.