

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 feedback². Research by the Equality Challenge Unit³ 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 assessment⁴. ICSs are suitable for most coursework where feedback is given, and have also been used for exams.

Thinking about earlier feedback, what were the key points and what action did you take in response to prepare for this coursework? (Type below.)

Self-evaluate your work by selecting the descriptor which best describes your coursework (select one descriptor for each criterion). Explain what was good about this aspect and what could be improved? (Type below.)

Criterion: understanding and argumentation					
Thorough: thorough, detailed, but range or more extensive than other	Thorough	Good understanding	Sound: relevant material, but range or more extensive than other	Basic: some knowledge but little detail; minimal analysis	Poor: inaccuracy; many issues not identified, inadequate analysis or none
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Criterion: selection and coverage					
Extensive range applied insightfully; very effective use of evidence to support argument	Comprehensive: a range of relevant material used, demonstrating independent study	Good use of relevant sources, employment of a range of evidence	Adequate: appropriate but limited material; ineffective use of evidence	Skeletal: sparse coverage of basic material; unsuccessful use of evidence	Poor: inappropriate or inaccurate material
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Criterion: structure and style					
Excellent structure and focus; clear and fluent style; compelling argument	Well-structured and focussed; clear and fluent style; persuasive argument	Good: coherent and logical	Sound: generally clear but awkward structure and/or limited development	Adequate but unclear or disorganised in places	Poor: disorganised and unclear; incoherent argument; too short
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Presentation		List some questions for the assessor – what would you like their feedback on / help with?
Is the text grammatical and easy to understand?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Is the text correctly punctuated?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Is the spelling correct?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Is the text adequately referenced?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is there an adequate bibliography?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Does it observe the word count limit (+/-10%)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Comments (Type below.)		

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.

Include space for summary comments pulling together the main points.

This student self-evaluation can be duplicated directly below for staff assessors to complete.

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

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=Z90M3rIRxbgC&oi=fnd&pg=PA3&dq=baxter+magolda&ots=L9XXgNXwVq&sig=zfe3VmVauclF7F6ddgnAhcVTUZM#v=onepage&q=baxter%20magolda&f=false>.

⁷ O'Donovan, Berry, Margaret Price, and Chris Rust. 2008. "Developing Student Understanding of Assessment Standards: A Nested Hierarchy of Approaches." *Teaching in Higher Education* 13 (2): 205–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510801923344>.

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>.