

How to Use a Marking Grid

What is a marking grid?

Many instructors include a marking grid, or matrix, with their course outlines or assignment sheets. A marking grid is a framework or table that outlines marking criteria and links it to the stated learning outcomes for the course. Some grids include numbers (often 1-5) or letter grades and others use a verbal rating. Some have a “comments” section and some do not. The following is an example of a marking grid for a course that includes extensive journaling.

Marking Grid for Journal

Criteria	Unsuccessful	Satisfactory	Strong	Outstanding	Comments
Accounts of experiences and activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not able to describe what is important about specific experiences and activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates beginning ability to describe what is important about experiences and activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates ability to describe what is important about experiences in a clear and concise manner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates ability to discern what is important about experiences and abilities and to describe this in a very clear and concise manner. 	
	1	2	3	4	
Evaluation of and reflection on experiences and activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates little or no understanding of practice issues. Does not explore any effects of interventions. Demonstrates little or no ability to evaluate self in practice. Demonstrates little or no awareness of own experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a beginning understanding of practice issues. Explores few effects of interventions. Demonstrates beginning ability to evaluate self in practice. Demonstrates some awareness of own experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates an accurate understanding of practice issues. Explores most of the possible effects of interventions. Demonstrates strong ability to evaluate self in practice. Demonstrates awareness of own experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a clear, accurate understanding of practice issues. Explores all effects of all interventions. Demonstrates exemplary ability to evaluate self in practice in depth. Demonstrates in-depth awareness of own experiences and relationship to practice. 	
	1	2	3	4	

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How should you use a marking grid?

A marking grid is a useful tool for both students and for instructors. Because the criteria for the assignment are set out in writing, with values (marks, grades, or describing words), students can structure their assignments according to the criteria. In other words, you can use the grid to guide your assignment and your instructor can use it to evaluate it.

Deconstruct the grid

The first step of your assignment should be the “deconstruction” or careful analysis of the grid. In the example, you can see that there are two stated criteria or standards for judging: (1) accounts of experiences and activities and (2) reflection on and evaluation of experiences and activities. By looking carefully at these criteria, you can see that each one has two parts: (1) accounts + activities (2) reflection on + evaluation of. This is very important; it is easy to lump the two together and not make the distinction between them. Ask yourself: “What is the difference between an experience and an activity? What is the difference between reflection and evaluation?” Address those differences directly.

Make headings based on criteria

When starting the assignment, you could make the following headings to guide your writing: Account of Experiences, Account of Activities, Reflection on Experiences and Activities, Evaluation of Experiences and Activities.

Look for the differences

Be sure to look at the differences across the range of rankings: For example, what is the difference between a “strong” and an “outstanding” ranking for the first criterion? Highlight the key words: discern, clear, all, exemplary, in depth, relationship to practice. Figure out what these words mean in the context of your course and address these meanings and issues directly. How is “discerning and describing” different from just describing? If you don’t know how they differ, you can’t very well do an outstanding job, can you? If you are not sure what a particular criterion means, make an appointment to talk to your instructor. During an appointment, you will have the undivided attention of the instructor and you can focus attention on understanding the problem.

What if your instructor does not include a marking grid?

A marking grid is a very helpful tool, but not all instructors use them or include them in their handouts. However, that should not stop you from making your own. If you are aiming to write an outstanding paper, for example, you can deconstruct the *assignment description* and develop a set of “outstanding” criteria that are linked to the stated *learning outcomes* for the course. Show this to your instructor for some input. Some generic criteria for essays is available online: *Guidelines for Good Assessment Practice* <http://www.cdlt.ucsm.ac.uk/Information/assessment.html> (see webpage for details)

- Answers question, clarifies/justifies interpretation of it, entire essay linked to question
- Presents accurate info and demonstrates knowledge and understanding of subject
- Demonstrates ability to construct a well justified argument on basis of appropriate evidence
- Has a good standard of academic writing: well structured, no errors, follows style guide re format and citations and referencing