

Making good use of exemplars

This short summary arises from the project ‘Exploring the Use of Exemplars’ conducted at the University of Hong Kong with a grant from the University Teaching and Learning Quality Committee.

The essence of good use of exemplars is that students enter into dialogue with peers and teachers so as to develop an enhanced sense of assessment expectations and deeper appreciation of the nature of quality which they can subsequently apply to their own work. Through these processes, students are identifying and applying criteria to samples. The implementation of exemplars is context-specific but we offer some possible implementation steps which also permit flexible adaptations. A key principle is to promote student ownership so as to reduce the risk that students may merely regard an exemplar as a model to be imitated.

Step 1. Students study relevant assessment task guidelines and brainstorm key criteria or develop a self-generated rubric.

Step 2. Students develop a draft response to the assessment task or do part of a task (as applicable).

Step 3. Students are exposed to two or three exemplars and study them independently.

Step 4. Students share their evaluations of their exemplars with peers in a pair or a small group applying their own criteria and/or teacher generated criteria.

Step 5. The teacher leads a dialogue to surface student perceptions about the exemplars and builds on them to clarify and elaborate key qualities of the exemplars.

Step 6. Students reflect on what they have learnt from analyzing the exemplars and plan how they can use this learning to enhance their own work.

Managing an effective dialogue (Step 5) is generally the most complex and important stage. Our analysis suggests that a productive teacher-orchestrated exemplars dialogue:

- Prioritizes elicitation of student opinions and airing of divergent viewpoints;
- Privileges student thinking and reasoning about the exemplars;
- Develops linkages between peer talk and whole-class discussion;
- Evidences some development of student views;
- Scaffolds key qualities of the exemplars.

Key reading:

Carless, D., and K. K. H. Chan. 2016. “Managing Dialogic Use of Exemplars.” *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*.

<http://davidcarless.edu.hku.hk/wp-content/uploads/Managing-dialogic-use-of-exemplars.pdf>