

# **What is the effect of introducing checklists for self-assessment?**

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### **Group 2H**

#### ***Rationale***

It is important for learners to be able to self-evaluate and monitor their own progress. Self-evaluation is becoming an ever more popular strategy and form of assessment within the Scottish educational system. The Cox Report (1989) states that learning should, 'enable pupils to exercise more conscious and critical control over the writing processes. Self-evaluation is a highly sought-after skill as it demonstrates a level of higher order thinking and allows learners to take responsibility for their own learning, as oppose to becoming passive victims of circumstance. This coincides with the Scottish Government Educational Framework, which intends to ensure pupils develop "skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work" (Scottish Government 2009, p.8).

Knowing what is expected from writing is vital when learning to write, at any level, as underpinned by Moss (2009) who emphasises the importance of, 'models for writing.' The Scottish Qualifications Authority stipulates that National 5 English courses 'provide learners with the opportunity to analyse and evaluate texts in the contexts of literature, language and media, to develop an understanding of the complexities of language, and to develop analytical thinking and understanding of the impact of language' (SQA, 2019). This, in turn, requires pupils to understand the parameters in which they must abide so to exhibit their understanding of texts and contexts of literature and language. Understanding and working with models also allows pupils' a secure basis when displaying their analytical thinking.

The critical essay component in English commonly accounts for the most loss of marks under examined conditions (SQA Course Report, 2018). Understanding what is desired from this commonly misunderstood area is vital for fulfilling learner's potentials and success. By clearing away common misunderstandings pupils are given a fairer chance of attaining. By allowing pupils to experience first-hand, the marking process, the stipulation and expectations become ingrained in their mind as a form of learned behaviour (Pavlov, 1960). It therefore seemed appropriate to investigate what effects introducing an objective viewing of criteria on meeting the specification for national certificate standards.

#### ***Aims***

To evaluate the impact of setting an objective observation of the Nationalised standards in order to:

- The aim of this enquiry is to develop a checklist which can be used by children to support them in effective self and peer assessment with regards to National 5 critical essay component.
- The aim of this enquiry is to develop a deeper understanding of certification standards that will manifest itself in attainment of literacy tasks.

#### ***Methodology***

A Secondary Three class (29 pupils), with a range of additional support needs, was chosen for their close proximity to leaving the 'Broad General Education' curriculum and entering into the senior phase.

#### **Prior to Enquiry**

Students received feedback from completed piece of work, critical essay on 'Animal Farm', which was marked using the National 5 critical essay guidelines. Pupils were given written feedback and a completed marking grid in order for them to correlate the comments received on their essay, identified strengths and areas for development, to the corresponding SQA standards. It is to be noted that a similar exercise is carried out within departments, as moderation exercises. These improve the understanding of staff, with regards to the nuanced standards of a certificate critical response. It was agreed that a similar task could be seen to be 'mutually beneficial' to students embarking on their first certification exams.

### **Week 1**

Pupils and teacher engaged in group discussion regarding standards and their understanding of them. The class held a moderated open discussion and highlighted several areas in which their understanding of phrasing and terminology was lacking. Teacher led discussion and exemplars were distributed in order to question the areas they found difficult and the first SQA exemplar was distributed. The students were then divided into groups and pairs, resulting in 14 groups being formed. A National 5 level essay, marked and graded with feedback by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, was distributed to the class. The essay focused on the question they had answered previously and using the same text. After talking through the essay, the groups were asked to highlight each section of the marking grid in which they felt the essay lay. Pupils were then shown the actual grade and official feedback.

### **Week 2**

Pupils, in different groups, were given another SQA marked essay. The essay was that of a genre they had not studied, non-fiction, yet was a response to the previous week's question and their own completed essay. A self-made PowerPoint, highlighting a critical essay checklist which was based on the SQA marking criteria, was shown and the marking process of the essay was broken down. Marked essays were obtained from the SQA website and highlighted, not only the marks received, but also the comments and rationale behind them. First, pupils decided upon the broadly banned essay categories, that separate A grade from B grade etc. Pupils then decided upon what exact mark within the broadly banned category the essay achieved. The final stage was the identification of key strengths and areas for development, three of each. The use of a critical response, using the same questions, helped them consolidate their knowledge of ascertaining the marks. This time added commentary of key strengths and areas for development were included. After taking feedback of marks the pupils then shared their rationale behind their awards.

### **Week 3**

Pupils, in different groups, were given another SQA essay. This essay contained not only a different genre of text, but also a different question. The text was that of a popular film. The class held a moderated discussion on the difference in analytical topics. For instance, the usual critical essay topics of 'setting', 'characterisation' etc. were replaced with 'camera angles', 'lighting', 'soundtrack' etc. The class, in pairs, then read the essay and delivered marks and adequate feedback.

### **Week 4**

Pupils, again in different groups, were given a final SQA essay. This one was seen to be the most complex. It was both on a different text with another different question. The text was that of a play and they discussed the essay in their groups, immediately marking it using the same process as prior. The marks and feedback were then delivered.

### **Post Enquiry**

For the duration of this enquiry, pupils were also studying their final text in the BGE. They were completing their final critical essay on a National 5 level question that had appeared in Week 1 of the enquiry. Pupils completed essays were photocopied and handed back to them, with no marks or comments. Using their knowledge previously gained, they went about marking their essays using the standardised marking grids. They awarded themselves a grade, and thus a mark out of twenty, plus three key strengths and three areas for development. The

teacher then marked their essays in their jotters, where the photocopy was originally taken from, and compared their assumptions with their actual grades.

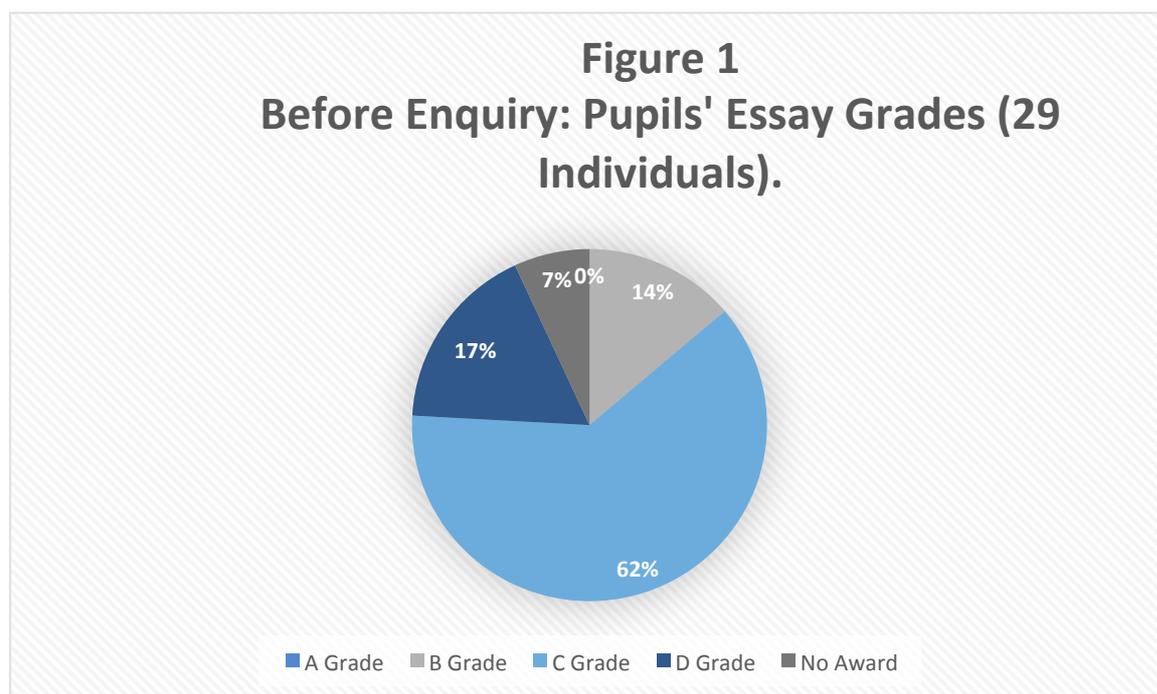
### **Findings**

The results of the introduction of criteria driven evaluation were as follows and can be demonstrated by quantitative and qualitative data: To begin with, prior to the inclusion of this criteria and standardisation the results of the pupil attainment were evenly distributed across the lower end of the National 5 standards (Figure 1). Evidently, the majority of their marks formed in, and around, the 'C' to 'D' category for attainment. Pupils felt that their understanding of feedback was weak and, whilst the desire was there, they did not have a concrete knowledge of how to improve.

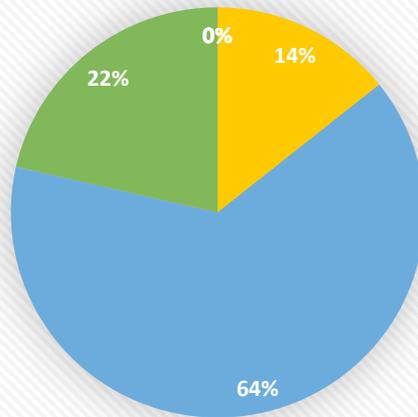
With the commencement of the first week of enquiry, the students attempted to mark and provide feedback to an essay of the same calibre (both question and text). The majority of the class struggled with the 'holistic' marking scheme and, as a result, found that nearly a third were four marks off the actual grade. Four marks may not appear, at least of the surface, a lot but this numerical knowledge could be the difference between a pass or a fail, a D or a C, or a B and an A (Figure 2). With the second collection of data (Figure 3) student's accuracy increased from a majority of 64% of four marks off to 50% with four marks off. By the third data collection the student's accuracy was improving drastically, despite the added complication of selecting unknown questions and different texts (Figure 4). The third data collection found that despite the majority of students still straddling the 'three marks' off, showed a much higher percentage attaining 'one mark off' or 'two marks off', which was not evident beforehand. By the final week of the enquiry, the students had a growing familiarity and had a heightened element of discussion regarding the standards. The results were a dramatic increase (Figure 5) with the majority of the class, 65%, either on the grade the SQA awarded or one mark off. The student's previous reticence to contribute to class discussion of standards also vastly improved with a sizable number of students contributing accurate feedback, in line with the official SQA statement.

The final examination was the self-assessment of their own essays with the knowledge of standards they had acquired. Students were assessed by their own grading against the teachers SQA formatted grades (Figure 6). The consequence was a drastic improvement in self-evaluation, more than half the students correctly ascertained their grade and developed a greater understanding of their key strengths and areas for development. As a final consequence, the overall calibre of their essays vastly improved, as they were written concurrently through the enquiry. The overall grades (Figure 7) showed a dramatic increase with the majority of students attaining marks in the 'A' to 'B' category.

### **Appendices**



**Figure 2**  
**First Data Collection (14 Pairs)**

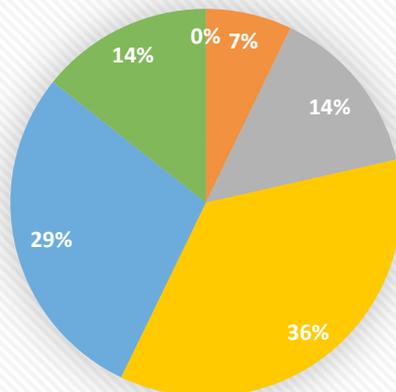


■ On Grade ■ 1 Mark Off ■ 2 Marks Off ■ 3 Marks Off ■ 4 Marks Off ■ 4+ Marks Off

**Figure 3**  
**Second Data Collection (14 Pairs)**

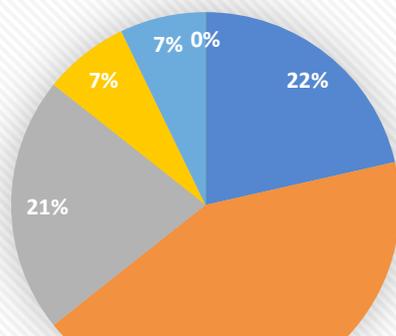


**Figure 4**  
**Third Data Collection (14 Pairs)**

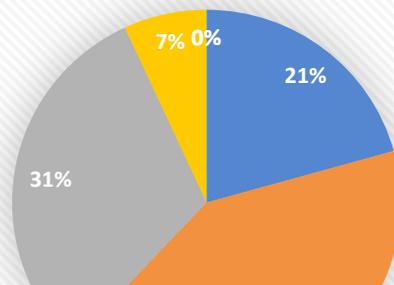


■ On Grade ■ 1 Mark Off ■ 2 Marks Off ■ 3 Marks Off ■ 4 Marks Off ■ 4+ Marks Off

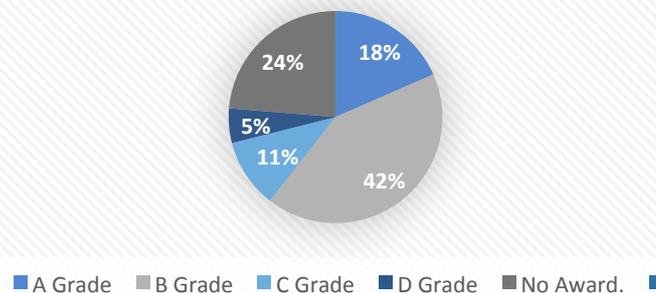
**Figure 5**  
**Fourth Data Collection (14 Pairs)**



**Figure 6**  
**Pupils' Grading For Own Essay (Second Essay)**



**Figure 7**  
**After Enquiry: Pupils' Essay Grades**



Pupils reported that they had misunderstood the parameters for the categorisation and grading structure of the critical essay component of the National 5 course prior to the enquiry. When questioned, students said they did not understand the parameters of a 'good' critical essay due to the fact that explanation of criteria was lacking. Following the enquiry, the overall increase in grades were evident, but, the structure of modelling and planning essays 'in class' may not reflect their abilities to perform under timed conditions. The timed essay under exam conditions will be the next stage for the students', but their grasp of the criteria is evidently solid, and the understanding of criteria has also made the critical essay appear, to them, 'less formidable'

### ***Implications for Future Practice***

National standards for certificate level assessment is set with some stringent criteria, which pupils are expected to meet in order to attain. It, therefore, seems logical to expect that, pupils who are aware of these criteria are more likely to attain. Utilising reinforcement strategies to develop and maintain a more stable and developed understanding of the criteria allows them to become more in tune with the marking rationale of assessment. Before this enquiry pupils

were aware of good essay writing by demonstrating appropriate forms and structure. However, simply telling pupils what was expected of them did not always ensure criteria was met in their work. By allowing pupils to actively engage with the marking process and by taking a holistic look at essays, grades and the rationale of marking, pupils became more assertive in their knowledge of essay writing. Following this enquiry, Development of to build the foundations of essay writing around the criteria, allowing pupils to assess the work of others, as well as the rationale of markers, so they can become more contentious and autonomous when assuring their own success. The continuation of using checklists in the classroom will be evident in how I will approach the critical responses within the classroom.

### ***Bibliography***

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