Comment banks and academic integrity

Comment banks, when used as part of a teaching and learning strategy and aligned with assessment criteria and unit learning outcomes, can be used to support students to write with academic integrity. As such, by providing feedback and feedforward indicating how students can improve their writing, comment banks become part of a coordinated, proactive approach to academic integrity.

When students are appropriately supported in their academic writing, they should feel more confident that they are able to meet the expectations of both the required genre and academic conventions, such as referencing and use of evidence. As a result, they will be less likely to (a) inadvertently fail to provide adequate attribution to the sources they use, and (b) resort to dishonest means of passing an assessment.

Study Smart QuickMark sets

The Library Academic Literacies team has produced a set of academic writing comments for feedback and feed-forward, particularly for formative assessment. The tone is positive and educational, and the comments point students to ways they can improve their work, including directing students to relevant resources available on the Study Smart website.

There are three Study Smart QuickMark sets available for use in Grademark: Expression and Presentation; Organisation and Structure; and Research and Referencing. The comments can serve as a starting point for developing custom QuickMark sets aligned to the marking criteria for each assignment, with the tone and alignment of the comments serving as a model. Ideally, comments should be reviewed by Unit Coordinators, and particular comments selected and adapted for specific assessments. Before marking begins, the teaching team should have the opportunity to discuss the comment bank in order to ensure a common interpretation of the comments, how to apply them, and how many to use.

Implementing comment banks as part of a teaching and learning strategy

Comment banks should be used in conjunction with carefully devised rubrics that align with the assessment criteria and unit learning outcomes.

See overleaf for principles of effective feedback and feedforward, benefits of comment banks, and tips and warnings for using comment banks. There are also references for further reading.
### Principles
Effective feedback & feedforward...

- requires shared understanding among teaching team (Griffin et al, 2016)
- requires knowledge about academic writing (Griffin et al, 2016).
- requires motivation to scaffold students’ acquisition of academic writing skills (Griffin et al, 2016).
- requires skills in assessment design (Griffin et al, 2016).
- closes the gap between areas of deficiency and expected performance (Griffin et al, 2016).
- must specify what needs improvement, and tell the student how to go about improvement (Griffin et al, 2016).
- takes into account the achievement level of the student in relation to the assignment (Griffin et al, 2016).
- requires an holistic review of a student’s writing to identify two or three areas for improvement (Griffin et al, 2016).
- helps students learn to manage their own learning process (Espasa & Meneses, 2010).

### Benefits
Comment banks...

- promote consistency and clarity across markers.
- make high volume marking more manageable.
- allow consistency via ‘stem’ of comment, and personalisation to the relationship between tutor and student through customisation.

### Tips
for effective use of comment banks

- See comment banks as one tool among tools and strategies to provide feedback & feedforward.
- Ensure comments selected for an assignment align with ULOs and assessment criteria.
- Use comments according to students' experience levels.
- Familiarise yourself with available comments before starting to mark.
- Include concrete ways a student can improve (e.g. links to resources).
- Create a dialogue with the student, e.g. ‘A valuable tip I can give you is...’ instead of ‘You should not...’. (Griffin et al, 2016)
- Suggest more effective ways students can express their learning.
- Discuss comments with the teaching team to ensure consistent interpretation & application.

### Warnings
about comment banks

- Comments used inaccurately, not matching the specific area for improvement, may lead to confusion.
- Avoid overwhelming students with feedback; focus on the most important areas for improvement (Griffin, 2016).
- Recognise that comments from the comment bank are static texts unless further details are added, and they may not be transparent to students (Mahboob & Devrim, 2011).

### References