Discussing first coursework assignment feedback/assessment experiences with your students: questions and activities

The following are adapted from materials developed with several departments. Where possible, they have been ‘neutralised’ to allow for a range of assessment types, but they may still need some work in order to adapt them to certain tasks and activities.

General questions about producing the first assignment (to help set the scene for later questions)

These might be helpful in clarifying both expectations and initial experiences of HE study more generally too.

1) How did you find writing your first assignment for your degree?

2) How did this assignment compare with the kinds of assignments you had to do for A-level/school/college? (E.g. levels of teacher direction, time required to do the task, types of reading required, opportunities to submit drafts for feedback and improvement, using references and being mindful of plagiarism.)

3) How did the sources you were using to research this piece of work compare with those you had used before university? How did you get on with these?

4) How far did your experience of producing this assignment correspond with what you were expecting to have to do before coming to university?

Specific questions/activities around the marks and feedback received

1) What mark did you expect to receive for this assignment and how did this compare with mark you actually received? (A further chance to clarify what marks at university actually signify, given that this often differs markedly – excuse the pun! - from school or college.)

2) Now you’ve had a chance to look at the feedback, are there any particular comments you would like further clarity on or would like to discuss further? (Alternative questions if a more ‘direct’ approach is necessary: ‘If you had to summarise in your own words what the feedback suggests about what was effective and what you should look to improve in future, what would you say?’; ‘I notice a comment here concerning [X]. Can you tell me a bit more about what you understand by this, and how you might address it in future assignments?’; ‘The feedback suggests you need to take a more ‘critical’ approach. What do you think this is getting at?’; ‘The criteria on the marking sheet refers to…[Y] What is your understanding of what this refers to? How might you go about ensuring you meet this criteria more effectively in future?’)
3) If you had to draw up an action plan for your next assignment, what does the feedback suggest you need to: a) make sure you continue doing; b) think about doing differently next time?

4) Are there any further points you would like to discuss/questions you would like to raise with regards to your feedback and/or what we’re looking for when we mark essays?

**Exploring the coursework process in greater detail: some additional questions.**

Much of this may well already have come up in the discussions around the previous questions.

1) Can you describe to me how you went about producing this assignment – from the moment you read the question to when you decided it was ready to hand in? *(this question can open up issues such as: how they interpreted and made sense of the question/title; any initial planning they undertook; how they managed the research – including how they managed their time and other priorities; at what stage they began the writing and why; how they went about drafting, writing editing, checking for instances of potential plagiarism etc.)*

2) How did you go about locating relevant information and academic sources for the essay?

3) What about the time you spent reading and researching your essay? Did you feel this was right or do you think you need to adjust how much time you spend in future?

4) When you were reading a source (e.g. book chapter or journal article) how do you go about selecting relevant material (e.g. from a book chapter or a journal article)? *(They may also have notes to hand that you can ask them to explain to you)*

5) How did you plan your assignment, including narrowing down the content and deciding on what to include and not include, and why? *(Once again, they may have copies of essay plans/draft outlines to hand)*

6) How did your assignment’s structure take shape? How did you decide what structure to use? *(These questions are best discussed with direct reference to the essay itself)*

7) How did you find the process of referring to the work of others to support your own points and arguments? *(A chance to explore how far the student understands how this works at this level, with reference to examples from the essay itself)*

8) What, in your view, makes for an effective introduction and conclusion to an assignment? How far did you achieve this in your own essay? *(A chance to explore how far the student understands how this works at this level, with reference to examples from the essay itself)*