

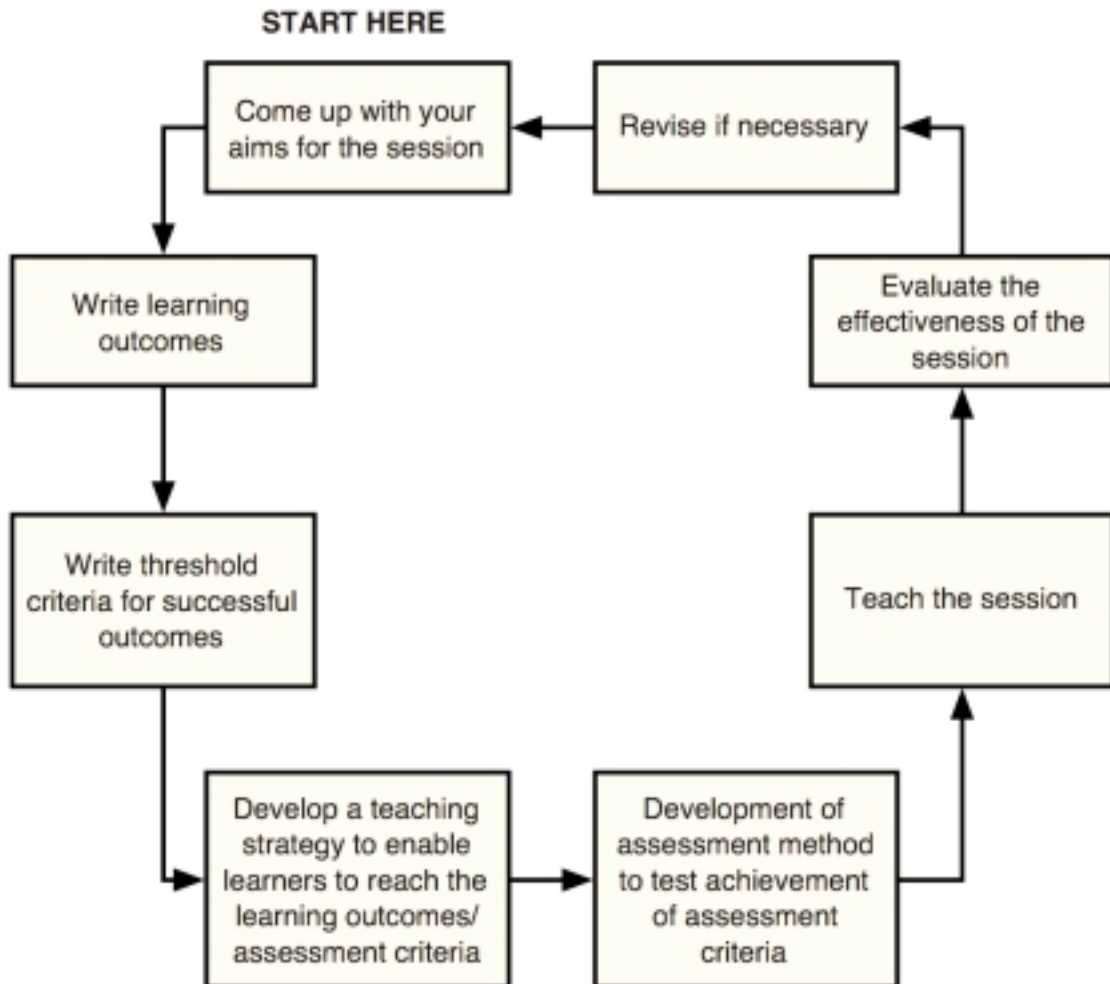
Planning Your Teaching

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Planning Your Teaching

1. PLANNING YOUR TEACHING

The process of planning a teaching session follows a cyclical pattern, as in the diagram below. Even if the session is never repeated, there should be a period of evaluation and reflection, which can feed back into your teaching, your students' learning, and the whole team's delivery of this and other modules.



It is this process (which is a lot simpler than it looks!) we will be following throughout this section.

Note that the same process can be used to plan whole courses – if you are in a position where you need to plan a series of teaching sessions that together make a coherent course or section of a module, refer to the notes at the end of this section for guidance.

1.1. WHY PLAN?

As we saw from the examples in the first section, every teaching and learning session requires a plan of some sort. The basic building blocks of any plan are 'aims' and 'outcomes'¹.

AIM	An aim is a purpose - it may be something like "to get students discussing each other's work critically" or "to introduce students to the ways in which colour theory can be applied to graphic design".
OUTCOME	An outcome is something that students will be able to do, know or understand by the end of the session or soon after.

Sometimes you will be given specific aims and outcomes for a session, and perhaps even a plan, but for now we will assume that you've been given a fairly vague aim of "just look at their work and check they're doing okay" - hopefully this is not something that happens often!

"IS IT MY JOB TO PLAN?"

Most part-time tutors are paid not only for the hours they teach, but also for preparation, assessment, and post-teaching administration (evaluation, completing tutorial forms etc). The formula is *sometimes* given as 2:1 – for every two hours of teaching there is an hour of preparation, admin or assessment, and this is included in your hourly rate. So a contract for five hours' teaching includes 2.5 hours of other work (making a full standard day of 7.5 hours). Check the situation at your institution before signing on the dotted line if you are worried.

Most people will argue that teaching is only enjoyable and, more importantly, useful, if the teacher is responsible for what they teach. So while some of the groundwork of preparation may be done for you, it is in your interests as a professional to take on as much as possible. There is no pleasure to be gained from simply going in, talking to some students about their work, and then going home – there has to be a purpose, and planning is about creating that purpose.

¹Outcomes are sometimes referred to as objectives but the meaning is the same. Here, we will use the word 'outcome'.

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TIP

ALTHOUGH WE ARE ONLY USING THE GRID TO PLAN ONE SESSION YOU WILL FIND IT MOST USEFUL TO USE IT TO PLAN A WHOLE SEQUENCE OF SESSIONS FIRST IN ROUGH OUTLINE FORM. THEN YOU CAN START USING IT TO FILL IN DETAIL ABOUT INDIVIDUAL SESSIONS.

"BUT IT TAKES TIME . . ."

Actually, planning saves time. It's a crude analogy, but if you've ever painted a room you will know that professionals tell you the surfaces must be clean and smooth, and that means getting busy with sugar soap, sandpaper and masking tape. Those of us who dispense with that advice find that while on the surface our walls look well-covered, the truth is that it is very patchy, smudged and will need a new coat very soon.

In the same way, an hour invested in planning is more likely to produce a tutorial that actually achieves something and prevents you having to go over some bits again later – usually when a student collars you in the corridor as you're trying to go home...

2. USING A PLANNING GRID

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A useful tool during this process is a planning grid like the one below. Throughout this section, we will fill in this grid to show you how it works. When you've done this a couple of times, you should find it not only quite easy, but also stimulating. Course teams who have used this grid to rethink entire courses have found it really makes them think about why they are doing certain things, and how they could be done better. Not bad for a few blank boxes and lines!

THE PLANNING GRID

AIMS	• •			
OUTCOME	THRESHOLD PERFORMANCE	TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES	FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT	SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT
1				
2				
3				

WHERE AM I?

For a session to work, both you and (especially) the students need to understand where it fits in to the grand scheme of things. If a session is deemed unimportant, students will weigh up their options and often decide not to come along when they could be getting on with their project or earning money in a part-time job. For students who depend on part-time work, or who have to pay for childcare, or who have to travel in at great expense, these decisions are important and it is rarely a sign of a lack of commitment if they do not come. For this reason, it is important that students are given as much information beforehand about what a session is for, and how it will develop their skills, knowledge and understanding.

It is important for you as well, of course, because the job of teacher is far more rewarding if you understand how what you are doing fits into everything else. For part-time teachers, perhaps contributing only

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to one session a week, a lack of context can be demoralising. It is also obvious to students - particularly if, with the best will in the world, you start to contradict other tutors or take several steps back from where they got to in your absence.

So before you accept any teaching ensure you understand precisely what your role is, where your sessions fit into the course and as much detail as you can about the aims and outcomes of each session.

All this should be worked out long before the module starts, of course, and the rest of this section assumes that you are planning at least three to four weeks ahead.

READING THE MODULE DESCRIPTOR

The first thing you need to do is check where students are expected to be in terms of their understanding and skills. You can get a good idea about this by looking at the module or course descriptor² in the course handbook. There you will find a set of aims and outcomes for the module as a whole - these are the things students are supposed to be able to do by the end of the *module*, rather than the end of your session. This is important because a session at the start of a module should not expect students to have the same level of understanding as one at the end, and earlier sessions should be aimed at developing the outcomes, later ones at mastering them.

It is important that your teaching focuses on these aims and outcomes as it is the outcomes that are being assessed.

For example, an aim of a design module might be:

❖ **TO LOOK AT HOW DESIGNERS WORK IN INDUSTRY**

(Aims can be quite general like this, although often they are more specific)

From the aims, the outcomes are devised. These are far more specific than the aims, and are an indicator of three things:

- 1 WHAT WILL BE ASSESSED
- 2 THE QUALITY EXPECTED FOR A PASS
- 3 HOW IT WILL BE DEMONSTRATED

More about these three things later.

² We will use the word module for the most part, though not all courses use modules.

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Based on the aim above, one of the module outcomes might be:

- ❖ **BY THE END OF THIS MODULE STUDENTS WILL UNDERSTAND THE PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP OF CLIENT, DESIGNER AND AUDIENCE THROUGH VERBAL AND WRITTEN EXPRESSION.**

In discussions with the course or module leader you might decide that this is an outcome you would like your session to develop, so you can use this as the basis of planning your tutorial. We will use the aim and outcome described here for the rest of our example.

3. WRITING AIMS

To repeat (because *everybody* gets confused about the difference between an aim and an outcome!) an aim can be thought of as 'why'. Why are you delivering this module? Why are you delivering this session at this point in the module? Why is it important? Asking, and answering, this sort of question will help you devise aims.

Remember that one of the module aims we have looked at was "to look at how designers work in industry". Through discussion with the course or module leader you might decide that this aim is a perfect one for your tutorial. Alternatively, you might want to be more specific, even down to a choice of case study. It may be worthwhile to develop an understanding of how the relationships under discussion have changed over the past twenty years, or to look at a particular case study, or branch of design. Another thing to bear in mind is the link between theory and practice. Is there a way you can connect together things students may have been covering elsewhere, or can you connect together strands of modules they studied in the past, or prepare them for ones they will study later?

Some examples of session aims, then, might be:

- ❖ **TO DISCUSS THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN FOR SAFEWAY SUPERMARKETS, AND THE USE OF AUDIENCE FEEDBACK IN CLIENT PRESENTATIONS**

- ❖ **TO SHOW HOW CONSUMER TRENDS HAVE CHANGED THE 'POWER' OF THE FASHION DESIGNER SINCE 1970**

- ❖ **TO LINK SOCIAL THEORY TO THE DESIGN PROCESS**

Remember: the aims of each session should be planned out long before the module is delivered to give yourself time to prepare, to ensure students know beforehand what a session is for, and to ensure that each session contributes to the overall module scheme.

The three aims above could form the basis of an ambitious session, but you will probably find it easier if each session has one main aim. Secondary aims might be things like "to check on progress and identify any specific tutorial needs".

These can be added to the planning grid:

AIMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● TO DISCUSS THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN FOR SAFEWAY SUPERMARKETS, AND THE USE OF AUDIENCE FEEDBACK IN CLIENT PRESENTATIONS ● TO CHECK ON PROGRESS AND IDENTIFY ANY SPECIFIC TUTORIAL NEEDS 			
OUTCOME	THRESHOLD PERFORMANCE	TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES	FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT	SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT
1				
2				
3				

Don't forget another important factor: time! The session we are planning is scheduled to last two hours with a fifteen minute break. Using a good rule of thumb (that fifteen minute breaks actually last half an hour) that means we have to plan a 90-minute session.

THE PLANNING GRID WITH THE SESSION AIMS FILLED IN

4. WRITING OUTCOMES

Writing learning outcomes is an art in itself. There is a great deal of controversy about the role of learning outcomes in education, with opponents criticising them for being too formulaic, or restricting learning.

But learning outcomes offer a guide, like scaffolding, around which learning is structured. Like real scaffolding, the same basic shape does not restrict the creativity of the building that it supports, but does at least ensure stability and that certain things are included. And that is a good way to think of learning outcomes – a list of the things you want to be certain will happen.

A learning outcome should consist of three things:

- 1 A VERB DENOTING THE LEVEL OF SKILL OR UNDERSTANDING
- 2 THE THING YOU WANT THE STUDENTS TO BE ABLE TO DO
- 3 AN INDICATION OF THE LEVEL TO WHICH YOU WANT THEM TO DO IT

For example, the following is not a learning outcome:

- STUDENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE BAUHAUS

While this is a good learning outcome for a first year module:

- STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO LIST THE MAIN PHILOSOPHIES OF THE BAUHAUS MOVEMENT AND OUTLINE IN WRITING THE WAYS IN WHICH THE MOVEMENT ATTEMPTED TO ACHIEVE THEM

The second version indicates the level of understanding (listing is a good introductory level appropriate to first year students, while outlining denotes something a little more detailed but not as much as you might expect a third year student to be able to do). It also outlines quite clearly what exactly you want them to do (listing might be verbal, but the outline is written).

Because writing good learning outcomes can be so difficult, it is easier to break the process down into stages, and the planning grid allows you to do that. For the first step, simply consider the verb.

Looking a little deeper: The importance of verbs

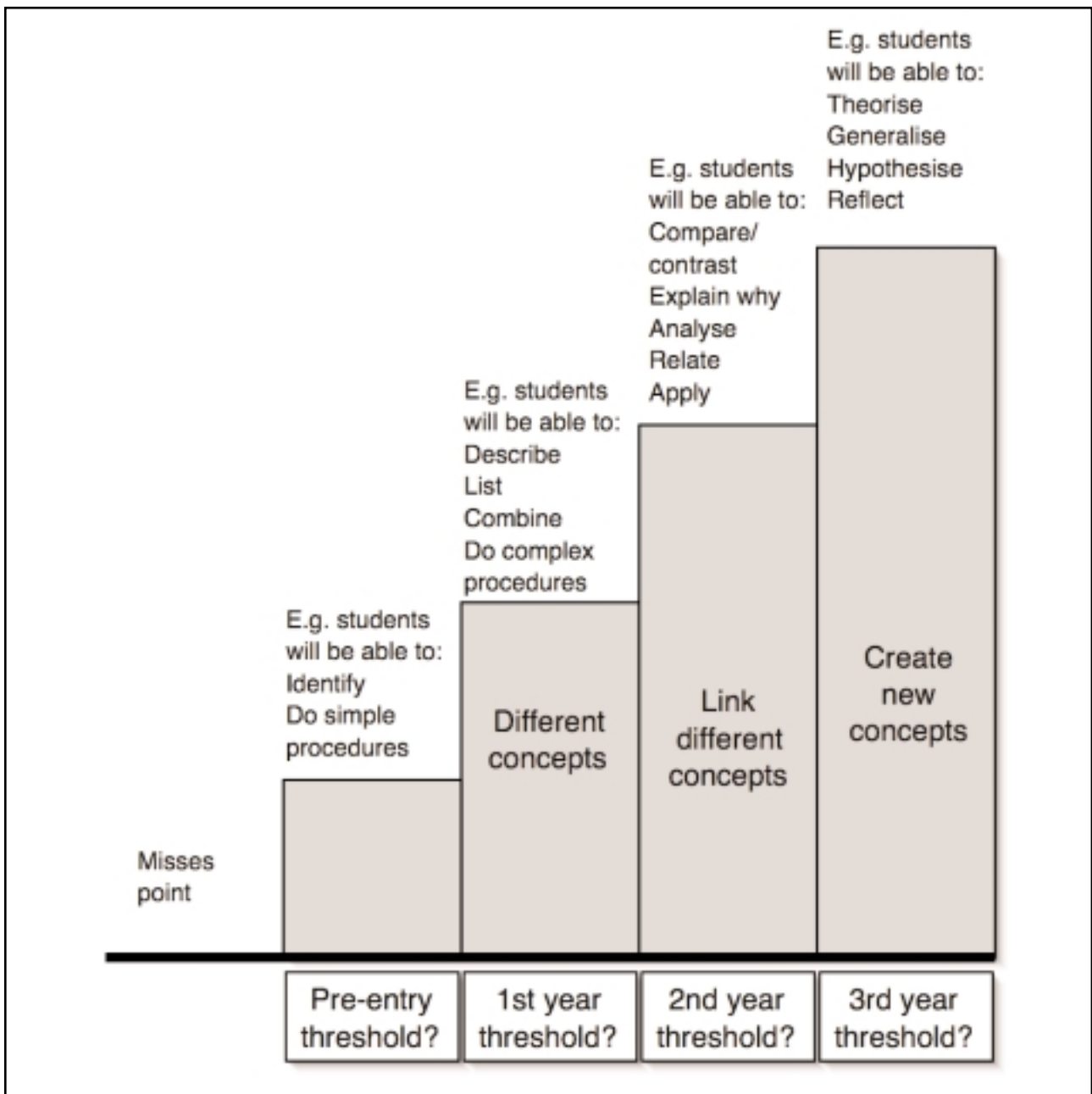
It may seem a little strange to place so much emphasis on verbs, but in fact a verb denotes a great deal about the depth of learning you expect the students to be able to achieve and demonstrate.

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Take a look at the diagram below:

A HIERARCHY OF VERBS ADAPTED FROM BIGGS³

³ Biggs, 1999



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We will discuss the concept of "thresholds" later, but the basic idea is this – we want our students to develop, and the best way to explain that development is to differentiate between what we want them to be able to do eventually, and what we want them to be able to do along the way. The threshold at one level becomes a fail at the next and so on – our job is to help students climb up the steps and not slip back.

Using this principle, the learning outcome "Students should be able to list the main philosophies of the Bauhaus movement and outline in writing the ways in which the movement attempted to achieve them," is fine for first years. For second years it might become "Explain why the founders of the Bauhaus movement set up their school and analyse the long-term effects of their efforts". At third year, it would become "Reflect on the legacy of the Bauhaus movement in terms of modern design and design education". Each level includes the one before it, so students can't just leap to the top but have to demonstrate a clear progression from basic understanding to the creation of new understanding. (For a fuller, and better, description of this principle, see John Biggs, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*, 1999.)

THE PLANNING GRID WITH THE LEARNING OUTCOMES ADDED

In the grid below we have added learning outcomes that fulfil the first of the three criteria above. The others are added later.

AIMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● TO DISCUSS THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN FOR SAFEWAY SUPERMARKETS, AND THE USE OF AUDIENCE FEEDBACK IN CLIENT PRESENTATIONS ● TO CHECK ON PROGRESS AND IDENTIFY ANY SPECIFIC TUTORIAL NEEDS
OUTCOME	
BY THE END OF THE SESSION, STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO:	
1	Outline the process of commissioning a campaign
2	Use qualitative and quantitative methods to test concepts
3	Evaluate a case study and identify key incidents
4	Plan further study and support needs

If you look at the outcomes here you can look at the verbs to check that you are on the right track in terms of level (discussed in more detail in the next section). Here we have students:

- ❖ **OUTLINING A PROCESS**
- ❖ **TESTING RESEARCH CONCEPTS**
- ❖ **EVALUATING A CASE STUDY**
- ❖ **IDENTIFYING KEY INCIDENTS**
- ❖ **PLANNING FURTHER STUDY**

All highly appropriate to this level of study. Now we need to connect these verbs to levels of performance.

4.1. THRESHOLDS OF PERFORMANCE

The threshold of performance is the base level to which you expect students to be able to perform. You could think of it as setting the 'pass' criteria though for a session it is more of a formative evaluation, and may simply be a way of you checking to see if the session has worked. If not, then you can build remedial plans into the next session.

(This section also relates to the content of the section Teaching at the Right Level.)

What is a 'pass'?

A common mistake made by many tutors is setting the pass level too high. The idea of a pass is to set a baseline, not an ideal. The reason is simple – ideally we want all our students to be outstanding, but measuring them against this ideal sets the majority up for failure. The idea is not to set the bar too high and worry when a number of students fail to reach it, but instead to build steps that students can climb up. Some will only climb as high as the first step, others will excel. But being too ambitious sets students up to fail right from the start, even though they may have up to three years to achieve the standards you ultimately want them to achieve.

A 'pass' then is a threshold measurement. Anything the student achieves beyond that is an added bonus. Achieving a pass is not a bad result, and 'average' is not a bad word.

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One way of looking at it is this:

Distinction (A)	EXCELLENT – well beyond expectations <i>at this level</i> . What we would hope all our students could do in an ideal world.
Merit (B/C)	GOOD – above what is expected <i>at this level</i>
Pass (D)	What students should reasonably be able to do <i>at this level</i>
Refer (E)	Some more work needed – opportunity to improve should be given
Fail (F)	Lots more work needed – possibly irredeemable

THRESHOLD DESCRIPTORS

Of course, you need to check on your own institution's guidelines and work within those.

In determining the threshold for what you want your students to achieve, you need to consider the level they are working at.

Getting the level right - progression

Put simply, if a student on the first year of a course achieves a pass on a module, then the following year demonstrates the same level of ability, it will be a fail.

Looked at another way, an A-grade performance in year one may be a B/C grade in year two and a D/E performance in year three.

All higher education courses in England and Wales are meant to conform to a national set of guidelines called level descriptors (see also section Teaching at the Right Level). These outline in generic terms the level of performance students should be achieving by the time they leave a particular level and progress to the next. If you are interested in reading more on this, some references are given at the end of the section.

GETTING THE LEVEL WRONG

Mike is a part-time tutor one day a week. The rest of the week he is a senior partner in a web design agency. He takes a group of students at the start of their second year for a technical component of a module in web design looking at the development of user interfaces. He quickly realises that the students have never done this sort of thing before and is disappointed in their first attempts. Over the course of the module there is some improvement, but none of the work is of commercial quality. He gives bare passes to most of the students and fails the others, telling them that they would never get a job in industry with that quality of work.

Of course, in his last judgement, Mike may be correct – but you probably spotted that while it might be an appropriate thing to say to an employee after a few months' experience in his company, it was an inappropriate evaluation to make of a student just starting the second year of an undergraduate programme. The module is probably a level two module, but the students are starting out with level one (or lower) understanding and experience. His first session should have been designed to judge students' knowledge and understanding as they enter the module, and his tutorials should have been planned to help them progress to a predetermined exit point (the pass criteria for the module) or better.

Mike, as well intentioned as he is, is being impatient, ignoring the fact that the students have another two years before they even begin looking for jobs in industry, and that it is okay to produce work that would be substandard at postgraduate level. That's a concept that a lot of people have difficulty with.

You need to aim your teaching, and your judgment of students' learning, at the right level.

USING THE CORRECT LANGUAGE TO JUDGE PERFORMANCE

Just as you should never grade a student based on the performance they should be achieving in the future, so you should **never refer to degree classifications (1st, 2:1, 2:2, 3rd) as grades**. Only *graduates* can receive classifications. It's a mistake to tell a first year student who got an A that they have received a 'first' because, as we've discussed, an A in first year is most likely a fail at the end of the third year. A first year student who thinks they are heading for a first with their current level of performance will be in for a shock. A classification is a level of award and is only relevant as a measure of an honours degree.

AIMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● TO DISCUSS THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN FOR SAFEWAY SUPERMARKETS, AND THE USE OF AUDIENCE FEEDBACK IN CLIENT PRESENTATIONS ● TO CHECK ON PROGRESS AND IDENTIFY ANY SPECIFIC TUTORIAL NEEDS 	
OUTCOME BY THE END OF THE SESSION, STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO:	THRESHOLD PERFORMANCE	
1 Outline the process of commissioning a campaign	Devise through discussion a flow chart showing the basic process and identifying key players and factors	
2 Use qualitative and quantitative methods to test concepts	Understand the difference between quantitative and qualitative research Carry out a small focus group Conduct a simple survey	
3 Evaluate a case study and identify key incidents	Contribute usefully to a discussion Write a short (500 word) report with a partner	
4 Plan further study and support needs	Write a plan for the coming week to carry out the set tasks. Submit a copy to me along with areas where they think they will need help	

THE PLANNING GRID WITH PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTORS

This tool can also be used for adjusting modules to a different level. For example, imagine it is decided to move this module into the second year. It isn't simply a case of changing the dates, but changing the level requirements too. What might the threshold criteria be in this case?

REFERENCES

BIGGS, J. (1999)
Teaching for Quality Learning at University
 SRHE/Open University Press, Buckingham