

Symbol Marking - Secondary

By Alex Fairlamb

When my school introduced the symbol marking code, the department head had made sure that the codes were simple to understand and were really clear with what they were referring to, and she directed us to use them often to get the pupils used to them. The codes were introduced across the department, and this therefore ensured consistency of use, which enabled both teachers and pupils to begin to understand them quicker.

A few examples of our codes are: P: point, Ev: evidence, Ex: explanation.

When we introduced the codes, it was important to model their use for the pupils and we marked a series of modelled answers on the board together. I used the “I do, we do, you do” approach and I was able to show my pupils how they should expect to see them presented in their work and what this meant they needed to do as an action.

On a practitioner level, I find the marking code effective as it helps me to provide meaningful feedback to my pupils. I find they understand the code quickly and can begin to action feedback immediately. It has also had a positive impact on my workload as it is quicker to denote where success and areas for improvement are by using the symbols, rather than having to write lengthy prose. This saves me time and I can therefore invest *that* time into planning improvement tasks or planning for their next lesson where the pupils will actually have the opportunity to incorporate those improvements. I also find that when we are looking at work as a department, the marking code enables standardisation. I use the same codes as the other teachers, and it makes cross referencing across the department quick and effective. We are able to look at a student's work, see where the teacher has identified where they think a criteria has or has not been met and then we can check through it. Alternatively, during blind standardisation, when we all have clean copies of the same script, we can then discuss it and if there is disagreement about the mark the question should be awarded, that's when we can query why one person thinks there is sufficient evidence or not by using the symbols to zoom in on those areas in question.

My use of the marking code isn't only kept for marking after the lesson, I also use it during my lessons to support with live marking. I circulate the room and use the marking codes to assess pieces of work and provide areas for improvement instantly. The pupils can then respond immediately, and I can support them with that where necessary.

I find that the pupils have responded well to the codes, it has empowered and encouraged them to take responsibility for their own learning as well as providing them with a tool that can reassure them as they write their answers. For example, they can abbreviate PEE in the margin as they write.

The codes have also supported my classes to effectively self/peer assess as pupils are then able to plan, review and assess their own progress. This is powerful for when completing tasks and in preparation for examinations. I won't be in the exam with them, so the symbols help them to self-mark and correct where necessary, supporting them to understand and internalise what a good answer looks like.

