



Brushing up on assessment

# Moderation of assessment judgements

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One of  
ten guides for  
school practitioners  
and those looking  
to brush up on  
their assessment  
knowledge

**Moderation can be described as a dialogue between two or more teachers, and between teachers and other professionals. The aim is to make judgements about what pupils understand, know or can do, and how consistently they can demonstrate these capabilities.**

Moderation ranges from informal activities (for example, a discussion with a teaching assistant about an interesting observation of a pupil's work) to a formal external process (e.g. local authority moderators reviewing teacher judgements). Moderation partners may include colleagues within your school, teachers from other schools (e.g. from a local school network or academy chain), or local authority advisors and moderators.

This guide explores the moderation process for primary schools in more detail, including statutory requirements and guidance on good practice.

## Why use moderation?

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Moderation is used to ensure that teachers are making consistent judgements about standards, so that assessment judgements made for any one pupil are accurate, fair and comparable with those made for all other pupils. The aim is that a piece of work can be seen as providing evidence of the particular standard, regardless of who is doing the assessing. The 'standard' may be in the form of a performance descriptor (as in England's national curriculum teacher assessment frameworks) but it could also be marking criteria if the work derives from an assessment task or an assessment of how well the learning objective has been met.

Moderation is essential to the integrity of teacher assessment judgements, ensuring that all those accessing assessment judgements, be it teachers, pupils, parents, local authorities or inspectors, can have confidence in the information and use it effectively. Achieving comparability involves teachers and other education professionals working together, supported by any external moderation activities organised by the local authority or multi-academy trust (MAT).

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## Moderation of statutory teacher assessment judgements

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### In England

Primary headteachers in England must ensure that teacher assessment is conducted in line with the guidance in the **Assessment and Reporting Arrangements** published annually in October by the Standards and Testing Agency (STA). Statutory teacher assessment judgements must be made at the end of key stage 1 in reading, writing, mathematics and science, and key stage 2 in writing and science.

#### **BE AWARE:**

Changes made to the 2018/19 key stage 1 teacher assessment frameworks in reading, mathematics and science mean that judgements made using the revised version will not be directly comparable to those made using the previous version. This also applies to science at key stage 2.

The teacher assessment frameworks (and the pre-key stage standards for SEND pupils), which are closely aligned to the national curriculum, are designed to support teachers in making effective and consistent assessments of pupils' attainment at the end of each key stage. These frameworks should provide the starting point for moderating teacher assessment judgements. Around a quarter of schools in England will have their assessment judgements externally moderated by staff from a local authority.

## In Wales

In Wales, headteachers must also ensure that robust internal standardisation and moderation procedures are in place to support accurate and consistent teacher assessment across a range of subjects. These include English, Welsh or Welsh second language, mathematics and science at key stages 2 and 3, and all non-core subjects at key stage 3 only. Teachers are required to produce pupil portfolios to exemplify performance. In addition, a representative from each school must participate in annual cluster moderation of a sample of pupil portfolios in core subjects for key stages 2 and 3. This meeting is overseen by the regional consortium and a report is sent the local authority. Furthermore, a nationally consistent approach is ensured by an external verification of a random sample of portfolios.

### Moderation of non-statutory teacher assessment judgements

For pupils not at the end of a key stage, non-statutory teacher assessment judgements will still need to be made and moderated using the programme of study requirements for the appropriate year group(s)/key stage as a guide.

## Managing the moderation process

Moderation, like assessment, may be more manageable if it is viewed as an ongoing process throughout the year rather than something that is only carried out occasionally or at the end of a school year.

The dialogue that accompanies the moderation process can be of vital importance in that it can lead to a better understanding of the underlying standards. Before agreeing a judgement, spend time explaining to colleagues the developments evidenced in the pupils' work, the context in which the work was produced (independently, in a group, at home, etc.) and the progress made. With your colleagues and other moderation partners, agree which terms, or sliding scale of terms, you will use (rarely, generally/usually, frequently/mainly, etc.) and what these terms mean. This will help you to apply them consistently.

You don't need extensive collections of pupils' work to have a useful moderation discussion but you will need sufficient evidence to help you to understand and internalise the criteria for the expected standard, and to aid discussions with other teachers and professionals involved in the moderation process. It may be helpful to bring marked work representing the expected standard in each subject / area of learning (and, where relevant, work below and beyond the expected standard as well).

Exemplification materials provided by the STA (which include examples illustrating how a standard might be met) can be used to support your judgements and to aid moderation discussions. In the long term, though, you may find it more meaningful to use work you have assessed and moderated yourself. When collecting such examples, use detailed annotations to indicate



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the assessment criteria for which they provide evidence and the context in which they were developed.

## Dos and don'ts of moderation

- X *Don't make it personal.*** Moderation should focus on the work being assessed and the standard, not the teachers who are making or have made the assessments or in fact the children who have produced the work. Moderation is not an exercise in judging teachers' competence, nor in seeing who has the 'highest standards'.
- X *Don't include too many pieces of work in the moderation exercise.*** While this may seem a way of ensuring thoroughness it can actually result in a superficial exercise when teachers have insufficient time to scrutinise the work presented.
- ✓ *Do ensure that the standard that the work is being assessed against is clear and explicit.*** An effective moderation process will involve frequent reference back to the standard. While any exemplification materials are useful and should be referred to, they are not the standard the work is being moderated against – as their name suggests, they exemplify it.
- ✓ *Do be clear about the basis of the moderation.*** Is there a minimum standard which the piece or pieces should meet? Does this require a 'best fit' approach where teachers need to identify the standard most closely aligned to the work? Are there some elements of the standard that are necessary to achieve the standard and others that are typical of work at the standard but not present in every case?
- ✓ *Do ensure that there is some context provided for each piece of work being assessed.*** This should make clear the level of support available to the pupil: Was the work done independently? What level of support was provided when the task was introduced? Was the pupil aware of the learning objectives? Is it the result of several drafts after feedback? The work should be dated so that moderators can compare earlier and later work where appropriate.

## Good practice

It can be extremely instructive and beneficial to be involved in moderation activities outside of your own year group or key stage. Such activities can help you gain a better understanding of how pupils develop over time.

Moderation takes time and effort but can be very profitable and can feed into reviewing objectives and improving marking quality. For subject coordinators, moderation activities across a number of year groups can reveal strengths and weaknesses that may give rise to whole-school curriculum or assessment focuses. Wherever possible it is important and valuable to carry out cross-curricular moderation. For example, writing should be assessed across all areas of the curriculum – not just on the basis of written work in literacy / English.



## Ideas to consider:

- 💡 Build links with other local primary schools or with schools similar to yours further afield.
- 💡 Explore opportunities with local secondary schools for moderation activities (e.g. sharing portfolios of KS2 and KS3 work).
- 💡 Use cross-phase and cross-year group moderation within your school to ensure consistency of assessment judgements.
- 💡 Develop 'transition' work extending from the summer term into the autumn term, which involve two or more teachers discussing and assessing several pieces of work.
- 💡 Use a system such as 'NOFAN' (Never, Occasionally, Frequently, Always, Naturally) or low/weak, secure, high/strong categories to indicate the extent to which a pupil demonstrates knowledge or skills in a particular area. These categories can aid moderation of work and transition, minimising the risk of pupils appearing to go backwards.
- 💡 Pick a contentious sample of work to stimulate debate about what counts as evidence, what is sufficient evidence, and why.
- 💡 Share and discuss other types of evidence (not just written evidence), such as photographs, audio recordings, video, etc.

## Found this useful?

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