

The use of annotations in examination marking: opening a window into markers' minds

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Abstract

Research by Murphy (1979) found that marks and comments on scripts affect the judgements made by Senior Examiners when they are reviewing marking. In reference to this work Laming (2004) concludes that 'When the original marks are left on [the script] the examiner undertaking the re-marking can see what choice the original examiner made and takes that choice into account' (p. 201).

Annotations may potentially fulfil more than an accountability function and could even form part of the decision making process in marking *per se*, not just the reviewing process. There appears to be little research in the public domain that has focussed on the use and purpose of annotations in GCSE marking. This study seeks to investigate the following questions:

- What function do annotations serve?
- What functions do examiners intend them to serve?
- To what extent do annotations conform to conventions and to what extent are they idiosyncratic to individual markers?
- Are the conventions explicit, (e.g. guidance in mark schemes), or have they just evolved?
- Do different subject areas have different conventions for annotation use?
- Does the act of annotating sometimes help to structure a marker's decision making process?

Across subjects a small number of scripts were analysed to survey which annotations are subject specific and which are more general. A small number of examiners at different levels of responsibility marked the same GCSE Mathematics and Business Studies scripts as one another. The marking was analysed to identify whether there were any patterns in the use of annotations. Retrospective individual interviews about the marking were used to inform the analysis of the annotations and to explore some of the questions raised above.

Understanding the purpose of annotation use may help inform the preparation of markers to use annotations and any future developments in marking and reviewing marking.

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