Curtin University

Guidelines for Interpreting eVALUate Teaching Evaluation Reports (TERs)

These guidelines are designed to assist Teachers to use their eVALUate results to improve teaching.

As well as viewing your Teaching Evaluation Report (TER) online, you will be able to save the report as a pdf file (which can be viewed using Adobe Reader) to your computer. Take time to review and interpret your eVALUate TER in a holistic manner, considering both the quantitative and qualitative feedback (see section on Interpreting the eVALUate Teaching Evaluation Report).

This TER is confidential to you. The TERs are only available when there is more than one student enrolled in a unit and where there are at least two student responses for that teacher within that unit (to preserve student anonymity).

It can sometimes be very challenging for teachers to receive student feedback which is less complimentary, but all feedback should be seen in perspective. The purpose of student feedback is to improve the quality of teaching and learning from everyone’s point of view – students and teachers - and this may require help from colleagues. It can be helpful to discuss feedback, ideas or suggestions for improvement with other staff. In this way you are likely to obtain a richer range of options. Staff from the Office of Assessment, Teaching and Learning are available for assistance with managing the feedback process or development of teaching strategies for groups or individual staff (see contacts at the end of these guidelines). For pastoral support, contact the University Counselling and Health Services (x7850 on the Bentley campus).

Interpreting the eVALUate Teaching Evaluation Report

1. Descriptive Statistics

The teacher’s name, teacher’s staff ID, unit name and unit number are provided to identify the person owning the TER. The number of students who submitted a teaching evaluation survey (indicated by ‘n’), and the number of student enrolments in the unit as a whole (indicated by ‘N’) are included in the report.

2. Response Rates

It is important to compare the number of student responses (n) to the number of students in the unit that you actually teach. Check the ‘n’ for each question since students may not answer every item (this is provided with the frequency distribution graph for questions 1 to 7). Frequency distributions are rounded to the nearest whole number. Note that because it is impossible to know how many students any one teacher actually teaches within a unit, it is not possible for the eVALUate system to calculate a response rate.

3. Interpreting the quantitative items

Each quantitative item is listed in the report, along with a frequency distribution of the students’ responses. The data are expressed as the percentage of students who chose strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree or unable to judge in response to each item.

1. Note the distribution patterns of the responses to each question. Narrow distribution patterns indicate a commonly held perception about the item amongst your students; widely spread patterns indicate that there is a wider range of perceptions.
2. Note the Item Agreement (percentage). The percentages of students who agree or strongly agree with each statement are summed to provide a numerical value. When interpreting this number, it is important to recognise that a value can be obtained in two ways for example:

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{Strongly Agree} & + & \text{Agree} & = & \text{Item Agreement} \\
20 & + & 50 & = & 70 \\
50 & + & 20 & = & 70 \\
\end{array}
\]

To differentiate between how many students strongly agree or agree, you need to return to the frequency distribution.

Excellent results will demonstrate a higher percentage agreement for strongly agree versus agree. The aim is to strive for as many students rating the item in the “strongly agree” category as possible. Review the items and identify:
- items which scored well/had the highest percentage agreement,
- items which did not score as well or had the lowest percentage agreement,
- items with less than 70% agreement.

4. Interpreting the qualitative items

There are two qualitative items which are reported separately. Open-ended questions on the teaching evaluation survey instrument can help to clarify statistical data and provide suggestions for teaching improvement. Initially, the comments may appear to be a collection of random, unconnected statements. Organising student comments by themes that are most meaningful to you (e.g. communication, teaching, and feedback) will highlight common points and provide important insights into the students’ perceptions about your teaching.

Try to identify information or themes which explain the positive results, and those areas which require improvement. It is important to determine the positive aspects of your teaching and the reasons for these. Check whether the comments provide further information about any items where student’s rating were less favourable, and determine what may be done to improve students perceptions of your teaching.

Compare student comments with the quantitative feedback as they may provide information about the ratings on the forced-choice responses, and the extent to which they support the quantitative feedback or identify discrepancies.

Positive and Negative Comments

It is helpful to determine the proportion of negative to positive comments for interpretative purposes. This will assist you in determining if the comments are representative of the entire class or a small minority of students. Comments that reflect positively on teaching effectiveness can usually be considered genuine. Students do not usually write positive comments unless they mean them. As student anonymity is assured in the eVALUate system, students may write negative and unconstructive comments. Keep in mind that pressures unrelated to your teaching may underlie some of these comments. Abusive and unprofessional comments should be disregarded (although this is not always easy).

Inconsistent or Contradictory Comments

Sometimes, student comments can be contradictory. These inconsistencies are often due to variations in student development and learning styles. Large introductory level classes, with students from a wide range of motivation levels, may be especially prone to these inconsistencies. There may be students who are not yet developmentally capable of accepting the challenges of your teaching. They may not be comfortable thinking independently, accepting a high degree of individual responsibility, or reasoning at higher cognitive levels. If this is the case, develop strategies to address these students at their current levels and help them to develop to the levels you consider appropriate.

Check whether the comments are consistent with the ratings for each of the items, and the extent to which there appears to be a problem. An isolated comment, which is not supported by other quantitative or qualitative data, should probably be disregarded. Alternatively, if there are problems with a particular aspect of your teaching, then it is important to find ways to improve those, and that this can only occur if information about the problem is provided.
Comments about other teachers

While it is expected that in the qualitative items, students will only comment on the teaching of the nominated teacher, a student could feasibly name and comment on a different teacher. In this case, the participating teacher (who is the only recipient of this report) is under obligation to treat comments about other staff as confidential. As students were not invited to comment on teachers other than the participating teacher, any comments about non-participating teachers should not be passed on to anyone.

Responding to the feedback

Once you have reviewed the quantitative and qualitative feedback, try to link these together and determine the reasons for positive scores/feedback and areas which might be improved.

Focus on what you think you should:
- STOP doing (what students are telling you is not working for them)
- CONTINUE doing (what students are telling you is working for them), and where appropriate
- START doing (what students are telling you will work for them).

Identify the key areas which require improvement. Where you feel comfortable, brainstorm and discuss strategies for improvement with other teachers. Sometimes there are relatively simple changes which may be made to improve the outcomes, while at other times, the issues may be more complex.

Peer observation

Consider inviting a colleague to act as a critical friend to comment on or review your teaching or to observe your teaching and provide you with supportive feedback. This might involve a peer observation of a teaching class with a fellow teacher. This may also include the evaluation of unit documentation, teaching resources, appropriateness of assessment and so on. Staff from the Office of Assessment, Teaching and Learning can provide you with guidelines on how to plan and use a peer observation activity (see contact details at the end of this document).

Using eVALUate for academic staff promotion and teaching awards

Use your eVALUate reports in applications for promotion or teaching awards. This includes your eVALUate Teaching Evaluation Report (TER), Full Unit Reports (FURs) and Unit Summary Reports (USRs), as appropriate.

Resources to Assist You

Resources are available from the Office of Assessment, Teaching and Learning as hard copy (contact Evelyn Gibbs at E.Gibbs@curtin.edu.au; x 2305) or downloadable as indicated below:
- Foundations of Learning and Teaching is a short course giving teachers practical tips for engaging students. While it is primarily intended for new and less experienced staff, all staff are welcome to enrol (see http://otl.curtin.edu.au/professional_development/index.cfm).
- Teaching and learning at Curtin is an annual publication which updates staff on all teaching and learning matters, as well as providing easily accessible tips for improving practice. The most recent version is downloadable from http://otl.curtin.edu.au/teaching_learning/downloads.cfm.
- Improving teaching and learning resources associated with eVALUate unit survey items 1 to 7 are available at https://evaluate.curtin.edu.au/staff/improve_results_resources.cfm.
Additional web resources
- The assessment website which includes good practice in assessment design, moderation policy and procedures, computer-assisted assessment, academic integrity and plagiarism policy (see http://otl.curtin.edu.au/assessment/index.cfm/
- Excellent resources on assessment feedback are *Assessing learning in Australian universities: Ideas, strategies and resources for quality in student assessment* (see http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/) and *Enhancing Student Learning Through Effective Formative Feedback* (see http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/resource_database/id353_effective_formative_feedback_juwah_etal)
- Teaching Large Classes (http://www.tedi.uq.edu.au/largeclasses/)

If you would like further help, please contact staff in the Office of Assessment, Teaching and Learning for either a personal consultation, or to arrange a meeting with your teaching team.

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