

[MUSIC PLAYING]

KAREN:

I'd like to welcome my next guest, Klaus-Dieter. Thank you for coming along. You're from a completely different area to Peter of the university, and you're in the languages department. But today we're going to talk about this whole very challenging issue of when you get your TMA back in the cycle. I was at a tutorial on Saturday, and some of the students said, I just can't move on with the next one until I've had my marks back.

And I said, well I'm not giving them-- no, I don't-- but some of the tutors hadn't returned the work yet because it was just on the borderline of the 10-day turnaround period. But the assignments were completely different, and I wasn't quite sure why there was such a mental barrier. Is this something that you've heard a lot from students, about moving from one task to the next?

SUBJECT:

Yeah. I think-- and I think we all recognise that in other aspects as well. You finish on one task, and you kind of want to have some external validation, how well have you done. And it may be difficult to go on to the next one. But in a way, if you look at your whole life as a student, as maybe a parent, somebody at work, it might help that people actually do manage to get on with their other life. It's just that block, I can't do more studying until I find out more about that TMA.

There may be a notion that the TMA and the result I get is the culmination of the point that I've reached up until that moment. And I would like to offer a different perspective in the sense that it is only a step in the cycle of learning. And the feedback that you get-- that's the mark, but also the comments from your tutor-- is actually very, very important to close that loop and then move on to the next step. So it's sort of cyclic learning.

And unfortunately, the way-- we're a big university, and there are lots of students and tutors involved and processes. We just can't do it as quickly as we would want, and as I'm sure students would like to have their results back. So we kind of have to live a little bit that you might be engaged in several cycles of learning, even across different modules. And that's a skill of being an independent learner, and also function later or while you are in your job, in that sort of parallel fashion.

KAREN:

Yeah, absolutely. There's a lot going on. And I think you're right, you know. There are techniques that can make that easier to bracket certain things and identify what's going on. But it is a skill and a challenge. Right. So we've got some widgets here for you I'd like you to fill in, please. How did you respond to your last TMA grade? So if you could let us know which option there applies to you.

What are three words best sum up your response to your last TMA? So those of you-- the majority of whom have recently done a TMA, what three words sum it up? If you can only think of one or two, you just put a full stop on the others because the form won't send until you've put three things in there.

The next question is how does your TMA score impact on your next TMA? So how important is that grade in terms of impact? That could be your motivation, your time you put into something. It could mean something else. And you can put comments in the chat as well. So on that Likert scale, how much does that score impact on your next TMA?

And did your tutor understand your work? Sometimes it's very easy when you're looking at the learning outcomes, and you're looking at your assignments, to say yes, of course, I've answered this question. I've gone into a lot of detail. I've described this. What do you mean, I haven't done this? So do you get the sense that your tutor actually understood what you were doing?

And I guess the point that we're going to really pick up on is, do you need more clarity? And how can you actually take on board more clarity, by either talking to your tutor or thinking deeply about what you've actually been doing, or talking to other students? So how can you actually get a sense of perspective about the extent to which you actually met that task, and somebody else was able to understand what you were delivering in relation to that task?

OK. So we've talked about getting the feedback back. And there's this very emotional time where, like you say, you look at the grade. You might think, oh, that's dreadful. And people will either have done better or worse than they thought they might. I wonder as well if people can put in the chat how often you think, oh yeah, this was a this assignment. This was a 72, or this was a 64, whatever.

Do people actually sit down and think, this is a-- in this sort of bracket, that's what I'm expecting. Or do they just think, it was brilliant. If I don't get a first, that's it. So what are your thoughts then, Klaus-Dieter, on this whole idea about grades and proportion and grade, and

sort of the usefulness, I guess, of thinking about how much time and resource you've had to put into something, and therefore what sort of output you should have?

SUBJECT:

We're kind of trained to deal in grades, and research has kind of shown that even where people try to be just focused on feedback and comments, that grades were the kind of thing that mattered. And indeed, giving grades and feedback seems to be the best way forward. The question really is, so what does a number represent? 63, 59, 88.

We've seen in the earlier session, you could put it into boxes, let's say 1 to 20, 20 to 40. What does it mean to you to be in a box? I don't think it's a very useful information. I guess a lot of what people probably want to do is to compare. So how did I do compared to somebody else? And again, you know, this might seem like a useful piece of information, but I don't really know what I could learn from-- you and I, let's say we do a course.

And you, let's say you do brilliantly, 99, Karen, and I do just 44. What am I going to learn from that? It would be much more useful if I then said, can I see your feedback? What did your tutor write about the things that worked well for you? And maybe I can learn something from that. And in that sense, if you can draw on fellow students, on drawing their feedback and learn from that, that's OK.

But I think the most important part is really dealing with your own feedback first. And I think that's where a lot of things-- a lot of the time, people don't do themselves justice. So I can imagine-- and I've asked some students, so what do you do? And I almost suspected, you quickly open the envelope or you open-- like it used to be, you open an email, look at it. Take in the number. Maybe take in a couple of words.

And then emotions come up. Disappointment, anger, joy, whatever it is. And then maybe it's the point when you first put a kettle on, make a cup of tea, and just give yourself a little bit of time to just allow those emotions to sit with you. Because they are there for a reason, and why don't welcome them.

And then you go back and look at the details. And I think a key point that we all need to-- and Peter pointed it out-- assignments are written to test learning outcomes. They don't test the person. So the mark is not a reflection of who you are as a person. It is just a reflection of where you are in your learning journey within a particular context within a particular task, and in whatever circumstances you are at the moment.

And you know, the session was sort of built dealing with TMAs, with feedback. And I think in the title already, we set ourselves up to look at it from a positive negative perspective. Dealing is something that we often use in sort of a negative context, dealing with anger, dealing with maybe trauma, or just dealing with a sick child, or something-- you need to do something that is not optimal. And then you end up thinking of positive feedback and negative feedback. We do that all the time.

There is potentially another way of looking at feedback, and that might help with those emotions as well. And if I could, I would just sit somewhere else to just represent that perspective. If we say the feedback gives us information about our learning, it will help us with our learning. And it gives us something to feel good about. Those two elements.

So the learning part could be, OK, it tells me things that went well. So I can use those in future assignments. Or it tells me where there's room for improvement, and I get some very, very detailed feedback from my tutor, which is brilliant. So those parts help me with my learning. And if you want-- this is all positive.

And then the second part is feedback to make you feel well. I think this is important. We should allow ourselves to receive that too. So if you get a high mark and you get wonderful, glowing comments from your tutor, of course, you're not going to have a bad time, I think.

If you didn't go so well, they're still probably-- there might be a comment saying like, I see you've really worked hard. And that could be a positive statement in the sense of, yes, I have really worked hard. And my tutor has noticed it. Or a tutor might say, I can see an improvement from the last TMA. And again, the journey to the end of the module might still be a long one.

But you could take that. It's a step that has worked. And that could make you feel- that could help you maybe, if you like, deal with some of the emotions that came up. And I would suggest, let's not call it dealing with feedback, receiving feedback. Just letting it all come and make the best of it, whatever you do with it.

KAREN:

Absolutely. It's such a good point. We asked our audience what words sort of come to mind. Things like, wow, confused, relieved, happy, brilliant, satisfied, inspired, disappointed. So there's a real range of things, Klaus-Dieter, that are coming up with people in terms of their TMAs. Overwhelmingly, I think it's a lot more positive.

But we also asked them-- and I'd like to show this on screen-- how did you respond to your last TMA grade. So let's see how that's moved. So a large proportion, 41%, had said relief. And that's followed by delight at 29%. 18% anger and confusion, and 12% disappointment. So like you say, there is this very emotional reaction to something in the short term.

We've also seen that a lot of the students here are level one or two. And something that I've noticed with students that at the end of-- or just beginning level two, is that they might suddenly say, well I was doing really well until now, and now I'm doing something more complex. Or they might say, why are my marks have that-- why have they gone down so much? Because the tasks get a lot more difficult.

And like you're saying, people do need to consider the task and everything in isolation, because it's not a reflection of how good you are, or even, like you say, how good your academic abilities are developing. It's about the extent to which you met that particular task. But we also asked people about the TMA scores impacting on the next TMA. And a large proportion are saying it really, really does impact very, very much indeed in terms of what they're doing. So it can be a real hindrance.

But I'd like to pick up on this point that you'd made about the TMAs and looking at them in isolation about a task. Because it's very easy once you start studying to view grades as a trajectory and think, well I started at this. I want to do better next time. Or I got this mark, so I'm doing worse. What is your take on this idea of how we view grades as a trajectory?

SUBJECT:

It depends a little bit on the module that you're doing. So if all the assignments are of a similar nature, then you might be forgiven in saying, OK, there's a trajectory, and I'm going up or down or whichever way. But as Peter said earlier, if every TMA is written within a context-- and even if the type of TMA is the same, in any subject or field there'll be areas that you are more engaged with it or more suited to you than others. And it would be quite natural to do better in those that resonate more with you.

In my area, languages, for example, we often alternate written and spoken assignments. And that's just for some people, one speaks more than the other. And it would be very, very hard to then say, OK, I've done really well in my written, and maybe I didn't do so well in the spoken. I'm going downwards. No, it's just a different assignment.

And I think the key is that you-- once you've had your cup of tea, you sit down and really look very detailed at the instructions and really make-- there's a lot of reflection involved here. So

make your own notes. What is it exactly that's been said here? There will probably be areas where you're not quite sure. I think that would be the time when you go back to your tutor, or maybe you talk to fellow students who might have got a similar response.

But then also, you can then actually make a plan of OK, what am I going to do with this feedback. How can I turn that into something very useful for my learning? Reflection is a key skill. So you need to have that time. And as I said, it's part of the cycle of learning. But you can reflect until the cows come home if there's no action that follows it.

And in a way, your tutor might give you some hints of what you could do. The action, however, must come from you. And that's where you then can start planning action. And by being active about addressing previous feedback, it may help to actually deal with working alongside on the other part of the course in the sense that you're not inactive.

This is not something that's hanging over you. No, you're actually taking steps one at a time. It's part of your plan, just like the studying every week is part of your plan. That might help to mediate this kind of dissonance sometimes between studying and getting the result from a previous TMA some time in your studies during the week.

KAREN:

No, absolutely. Now, Jonquil is going to do the next session on the sort of time after we've sat down to work on the feedback. So if we could sort of move back a bit just to think about this immediate thing, because you've raised a lot of good points. And some I wanted to pick up on. This idea about getting clarification. And also, picking up on some of the good points. Because like you say, there often are good points.

And it's very easy to dismiss those. We're naturally inclined to think, how can I get better? How can I improve? But like you say, this good feedback is very important. So first, could I ask about making sense of that in the immediate sort of space? Because after your tutor's marked it, it's very fresh in their mind, and you're also working on something else. So how might students most appropriately get some clarification if something's really unclear, or they don't understand why you've written that?

SUBJECT:

I think if you engage-- if you have that half an hour and really engage with the feedback, and our tutors write really, really extensive feedback, a lot of them. There's a lot of rich material. But it takes a bit of time to think it through, make sense of it. And if you can turn it into your own notes, then I think that marks part of the understanding.

And if you can't, then there may be an issue here. And students mention confusion as one of the emotions. Then that would be the one maybe to contact your tutor about. But I think just going back to them-- I don't understand it. That wouldn't do justice to the tutor actually spending quite a lot of time writing and thinking the feedback through.

It's far more useful if you try to work it through, and if there's a pocket of information that you don't understand, then you can have a very targeted conversation that will help you more. And I think that that's sort of key for being clear about what the feedback actually told you. And then the next step, of course, is taking action.

KAREN: So you could almost start processing some of this. And I guess once you start actually saying what is the problem, and start writing it-- say you start drafting an email to your tutor, for example, or trying to clarify really what the problems are. It might be that you've worked through some of those aspects just by trying to articulate them.

SUBJECT: Yep. And that might be-- it might work for some people, and maybe you do write that email, and you start with OK, I'm getting all this, A, B, C, D, E. I'm getting it all. But you mention it. So your tutor also knows, OK, that certainly landed. But I'm not getting F and whatever the next letter of the alphabet is. And then the tutor has a chance to really, from an informed position, to really hone in on that particular area that you're not sure about.

KAREN: Yes. And it might be that then you could have a conversation, and they could explain it. Because it's very difficult sometimes without track changing something to maybe say you've gone into too much detail or too little, and sometimes that can be difficult for students to actually get a sense of what should be removed and what shouldn't be. HJ and Evaghn, how does resonate in people at home?

HJ: I think we had a little chat earlier, asked people about what they expect out of their marks. And Jeanette said, at first she wanted a first for everything. But it did sort of change as she went along, and she sort of learned how to place her expectations. And we were talking about how I do it as well. When I've got marks, whatever band they're in, if I see an improvement, that's always a good thing. We were having a little chat about that, so that's very good.

EVAGHN: Yeah. there's also some stuff in there about people getting their grades back and maybe not getting marked for things that they should have got, or getting marked wrong and saying, well I thought I did what I was supposed to. So I think Klaus makes a good point about when you get feedback, talking to your tutor. But it might also be a point to talk before the assignment and

get maybe a bit of feed forward, for want of a better word.

KAREN: It's a very good point.

SUBJECT: I asked a colleague of mine, Maria Fernandez Toro. And she made a very, very, very important point. You could be your own feedback giver, if you like. That would be like a real sense of, I'm taking my fate in my own hands. So if you get a TMA, you look at not just at the learning outcomes that are being tested. You also look at the marking scheme. And then on the basis of thinking about that, you write your TMA. And then you use the marking scheme, and you mark yourself.

KAREN: Yes.

SUBJECT: Of course, that means you have to finish your TMA just maybe a day before the deadline. But that could be a way of really submitting something that you've really fully thought through. And that might help also with understanding the feedback when it comes back to you. There's all sorts of courses-- some courses have peer assessment.

And I personally think it's a brilliant way of engaging with the task of being a tutor with evaluating somebody else's work. And you always learn from that. So on the introductory course in languages, we have one sort of peer assessment in there. And Maria tells me 25% took part in it. And it's a shame because when you look at the forum discussion that happened as a result of the peer assessment, there was a lot of learning in there. Maybe other people read those forum contributions as well.

But I don't think anything can beat just getting stuck in there and doing it yourself. It's very easy to label reflection self-assessment or any reflective activity as not so essential. I'd rather read another text, or I do another task. Reflection is a key part of the learning. And you really miss out on it if you don't engage with it. And these kind of peer assessments are really ways where you can actually look at other people's stuff--

KAREN: Yeah, which is brilliant.

SUBJECT: And see how would I mark that if I was a tutor. And that will already carry a lot of learning.

KAREN: Yeah, absolutely. I was talking to some students on the weekend, and one of them said yes, I thought you'd spot that. So she-- one paragraph was a lot weaker than the others, and she said, I thought you would. And I said, that's absolutely brilliant, because if you can spot the

areas of weakness, you don't have to do something about them.

But it allows you to sort of, I guess, merge your expectations about where your grades might fall and also know, if you had more time. Because no one is expecting perfection, are they? It's about knowing where you might do things if you could. Just so that as a reflective learner, you're becoming more in tune with your own processes.

SUBJECT: I just heard that last week. If you already know about the areas where you can improve, and even have an idea of how you could improve, then I would not be worried about you at all. It's only when you kind of have no idea where you are, and what might be needed to get better grades, to get better feedback. That's really when a bit more work is required.

KAREN: Absolutely. I'm going to leave all the stuff about confusion to Jonquil's session, which is coming up next. Because I wanted to ask you about this idea which we were talking about earlier, which is when you've got these waiting for feedback and another task, or maybe completely unrelated tasks, and taking some feedback from one thing to another. Do you have any motivational techniques or ideas about how students might manage that space, where they've had something and they need to be working on something else, and they don't feel able to start? Or they feel so demotivated that they aren't then able to progress.

SUBJECT: There are a number of steps that you can take. And what I would say is, as you go through studying modules with us, try and find the kind of motivational tricks, tips, devices that work best for you. Because there's tonnes of research out there. But in the end, of course, it really depends on what you make of it and what works best for you.

So my first still would be, this is not about you. This is about an assignment. And it was about an assignment in the past. Now you're working on something different. There may be some commonalities between the two assignments. And by all means, engage with the feedback. But if you're already dealing with the old feedback by having taken some action, you can say this is already-- I'm working on it. I don't have to worry about it. There could be, of course, the let's say motivational chart or something. Just gather all the positive feedback that you've heard so far. Put that all on a piece of paper or stick it--

KAREN: That's a lovely idea.

SUBJECT: Put it up. This is a bit like TLC, that you know, visual TLC. Why not? I mean, we all feel sometimes down. And if we can remind-- OK, at that stage, this person said something really

nice in relation to my studies. Why not, if that helps you. You could also re-engage with the purpose of why you're studying at all.

So what will that-- what will studying this module give me in the end? What can I do afterwards? What kind of opportunities does it open up? Will it tell me something about myself, the opportunity at work? Or like maybe a change in career. Why is it-- how does the studying link to the purpose, to my life purpose.

And that might be enough, just allowing those 10, 15 minutes to reconnect. And maybe, lastly, sometimes the day's not going your way. So if you feel a little bit down, don't force it. Just allow that emotion to happen. You sleep over it. And the next day, you might just-- it might have disappeared.

KAREN: Yeah. Do you think there's also something in this idea that so many people are passing? They might not get the grades they want, but they're actually passing. They're getting further and further to getting a degree.

SUBJECT: That's another one. I think reflect on the journey so far exactly. So maybe you are on a 60 credit module nine months, and it seems like a big step, and then you didn't get the kind of feedback you wanted. Reminders that you've already done three months. And maybe at the beginning, you didn't even know, how could I fit all the studying into my daily life. You've just managed three months.

That's quite good. Or maybe you're already halfway through your degree. OK, there's still a lot to go. But you've done quite a lot already. So looking back at what you've achieved may well help you to keep perspective and to come back to it. And it was good to have Peter's session before.

An assessment is a tiny little element of the whole learning process focused on certain learning outcomes that we want to test partly as a where are you, partly where can we help you to get better on it. And it's nowhere near-- I mean, the bigger picture is always much, much bigger than that small assessment, however bad it feels in the moment.

KAREN: I remember times in my journey when I'd been studying, and I felt really heart broken by something. And you look back, and it was so monumental at the time. But then actually with hindsight-- and the more you do, and the more exciting things you do, things change in perspective, don't they as well. And it's remiss to say it doesn't matter. And you know, it's just

go and get a master's or something. Then the degree classification doesn't count as much. So you can look at things in terms of a journey. But also, time does shift things, doesn't it?

SUBJECT:

It does. And I'm sure students who are sort of in their fourth, fifth, sixth year will probably have gained some of that perspective. I would also like to just remind students that if you study a course with us, alongside job, family, somebody you need to care for or some voluntary activity, you're already a winner. Being able to put that assignment in time is already a huge achievement. And I think you should just sit back and occasionally just enjoy the feeling that you have achieved. And maybe that also puts the result, the number that you get, in perspective.

KAREN:

No, you're so right. So many people are juggling so many things. And they think, oh, I'm a bit more scattered than everyone else. I'm less organised. But like you say, some real battles that people are often up against when they're trying to do this. And actually getting through it is amazing. People don't give themselves enough credit always, do they? Klaus-Dieter, thank you so much for coming along.

You've given us some brilliant ideas. I love the idea of writing everything you've done so well. I'm going to do that for myself so that I know what not to worry about. And then I can think, well, at least I can do x, y, and z. So I really think that's brilliant. So thank you for coming along today. And we'll see you at some future Student Hub Live events to talk about languages specific thing. Excellent.

Evaghn and HJ, before we welcome Jonquil to the studio to look at things, just let me know how everything's going and what people are saying. Are people feeling a little bit more at ease with things? Are things making sense?

HJ:

I think so, yes. I think Kate was saying that it's good to hear from a tutor's perspectives, which is really nice. And we're talking about, as Yvonne said earlier, that if there's stuff we're unsure about, about talking to our tutors. And Kate says, and I definitely agree, that OU tutors are great at being positive and wanting to help students.

And Silvia's asking if it's normal to feel nervous about TMA marks. I think that's a definite yes. I think everyone does, because we put so much into them. And I think it's just a sign of how much we care about it. That's why I always think, when I'm nervous. It's because it's something we care about. But yeah.

EVAGHN:

I was going to say, Chantelle says she's quite terrible. She has very high expectations, and she tends not to celebrate any of her achievements. She just feels relief, then panic, and then moves on. So I think what Klaus said about taking time to actually understand that what you're doing is important, and you have achieved something. And just take it home to enjoy your achievement is good. Hopefully that will make you feel better about the next one that's coming.

[MUSIC PLAYING]