Is a B the same B in every classroom?

A 30-minute consistency check for principals and school leaders

By **Stuart Cooke**, ex-classroom teacher and co-founder of TeachersAI

Why this matters for principals

At WAPPA in September we showed principals three things: saving teachers time, getting feedback back to students faster, and moderation. Moderation is what principals wanted to talk about most.

That makes sense when you look at who each of the three helps most.

TIME BACK

The teacher

Fewer late nights and weekends lost to admin.

FASTER FEEDBACK

The student

Feedback arrives while the learning is still live.

CONSISTENT GRADES

The school

Grades go home on the school's reports, and parent questions come to the school.

Most schools already moderate, usually late in the term, under time pressure, with two or three samples per class. This check is a smaller, earlier version you can run in a staff meeting slot, and it needs no software.

Six signs your grades might not match

- [ ] The same task produces very different grade spreads from one class to the next.
- [ ] Moderation meetings are mostly spent debating individual pieces of work, with little time on what the criteria mean.
- [ ] Experienced staff "know an A when they see one", but it is unclear to all staff what makes a B into an A.
- [ ] The rubric uses words like *sound*, *detailed* or *thorough* instead of concrete examples that are clear and easy to measure.
- [ ] A parent has queried why their child's grade differs from a similar piece of work in another class.
- [ ] New staff take a year or more to learn to grade "the way we do it here".

> If two or more of these apply, run the check on the next page at a staff meeting.

Why the check has a step 5

When I was teaching Year 5, the three of us teaching Year 5 were asked to moderate. We took two pieces of work from each class, because there was never time to do more. It worked well. We were a good team, with plenty of jokes and back and forth, and nobody took offence if someone had missed something.

The trouble came afterwards. Moderation took up the afternoon, and by the time I got back to my own room it was time to head home to more work, or my own kids. Applying what we'd agreed to the rest of my class happened the next day, or a week or two later, hoping I was still on the same page. Sometimes it didn't happen at all. Looking back, our rubric was also too standardised and not explicit enough.

The check

Before you start (5 minutes, one leader)

- Pick one task every class in a year level completed this term. Same task, same rubric.
- Ask each teacher for three pieces: one they'd call high, one middle, one low.
- Cover the student names, remove the grades and number the pieces.
- Pair up two teachers who teach different classes.



1 **Grade it blind** — 10 min

Each teacher grades every piece against the rubric on their own. No talking yet.

2 **Lay them side by side** — 5 min

Put both grades next to each piece. Circle any piece where the two of you differ by a grade or more.

3 **Find the line** — 10 min

For each circled piece, find the rubric line where you split. Discuss the wording of that line and agree on a concrete example: what does "detailed" mean for this task?

4 **Write one change** — 5 min

Add an example, sharpen a descriptor, or write down what makes the difference between one grade and the next. Put it in the rubric before the task is set again.

5 **Take it back to your own class** — Within 2 days

Each teacher applies what was agreed to the rest of their class's work within two days, while the discussion is still fresh. Book that time in the diary before the meeting ends.

Ground rules that keep it safe for staff

- **The focus is the rubric.** Nothing from the session goes upward or into anyone's review.
- **Blind both ways.** No student names on the work, no teacher names on the circled pieces.
- **No grades are changed in the room.** Each teacher keeps the call on their own class.
- **Share the rubric changes with staff.** Individual grade differences stay in the room.

Reading what you find

WHAT YOU SEE	WHAT IT USUALLY MEANS	TRY THIS NEXT
Most splits on one criterion	That criterion can be read more than one way	Rewrite it with a concrete example of each level
Splits everywhere	The task is too open for the rubric	Tighten the success criteria before the next class sets it
Splits only at the top end	There is no concrete example of what "excellent" looks like	Add one annotated top-end sample
No splits	Good news	Run it on a harder task, or another learning area next term

Record sheet

TASK _____ YEAR LEVEL _____ DATE _____

#	CLASS	TEACHER 1	TEACHER 2	SPLIT?	RUBRIC LINE WHERE YOU SPLIT
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					

The one change we're making to the rubric

In my experience, when grades don't match, the cause is usually the rubric rather than the students or the teachers.

Where AI fits

Everything on these pages works with paper and a staffroom table. Where AI can help is the first read: applying the same rubric the same way to every piece in a year level, so you can see where the criteria are being read differently, and why, before the task goes out again.

The AI provides evidence for the teacher to use, and the teacher still makes every call.

Want the editable version?

Get it free at **teachersai.app/check**. Want to see this check run across a whole year level? Email **stuart@teachersai.app**.

Stuart Cooke taught for more than 15 years before co-founding TeachersAI in Perth. Less admin, more teaching, and the teacher is always in control.

Useful WA resource: SCSA's Judging Standards support materials include annotated work samples intended to support internal moderation (SCSA extranet login required).