

Marking Criteria – Undergraduate Courses

The awarding of a mark to a particular piece of qualitative work, such as an essay, is necessarily a matter of judgement. Such judgement has a subjective component, but it is not entirely or merely subjective. Judgement about marks is inter-subjectively formed by teachers as a consequence of co-marking and double marking with a wide range of colleagues. They also bear in mind criteria about what kind of work falls into a particular class. The exact mark within that class will depend on how well or otherwise a particular essay performs within its range.

81% or more - Outstanding work that is at the upper limit of performance.

70 - 80% - The normal range for first class work. A first class essay shows a clear command of material, arguments and sources. It will show a clear understanding of underlying principles and a use of those principles in answering the question. If it is in an empirically oriented subject it will show control of empirical material, sound use of that material, its relation to appropriate theoretical and conceptual frameworks and development of argument. If it is in a theoretical subject it will show control of theoretical material, sound use of that material and development of argument. Where appropriate it will utilise empirical material to illustrate theoretical points. The essay will show independence of judgement.

60 - 69% - Upper second class work. An upper second class essay shows a good knowledge of material, arguments and original and secondary sources. If it is in an empirically oriented subject it will show some relation between that material and appropriate theoretical and conceptual frameworks. If it is in a theoretical subject it will show some grasp of principles and development of argument. Where appropriate it will utilise empirical material. The essay will make a clear point or points and show some critical acumen.

50 - 59% - Lower second class work. A lower second class essay shows a basic, clear and generally correct knowledge of material, arguments and sources, particularly original sources. It will correctly summarise empirical or theoretical material, show some understanding of the material and its importance and draw reasonably appropriate conclusions.

40 - 49% - Third class work. A third class essay shows some knowledge of basic material. The use of material is only just adequate, or it might be otherwise adequate but ill judged or even mistaken in some significant way(s). There are no clear conclusions drawn from the material, none that could be drawn from the material or where drawn they are significantly flawed or irrelevant.

1 - 39% - Fail or unclassified. Marks in this range are usually given when either the use of basic material is absent, flawed, fundamentally mistaken, the essay fails to address a set or otherwise defined question or the use of language is so poor as to make the essay incomprehensible.

0% - This mark is reserved for the non-submission of due work, or it may be awarded by the Dean in cases of plagiarism.

An overall course mark of less than 20% may have severe consequences for the classification of a degree. Where this occurs, or seems likely to occur it is in your interest to see someone as soon as possible.

It is not normal practice for separate 'penalty' marks to be deducted for poor use of language and poor expression. Poor use of language, poor expression, poor punctuation and poor structure will almost certainly mean that central ideas will not be clear: any mark awarded will reflect this lack of conceptual clarity. It is a mistake to think that you can have good ideas that suffer from lack of clarity. An unclear idea is not, or not yet at least, a 'good' idea. Essays are always assessed on how they 'appear', i.e., the submitted end result of a period of work. Usually there is a positive relation between effort and outcome but that is not always the case. Marks are not awarded for effort or for good intentions as such.

The baseline for the assessment of the essay is the title. If this is provided to you by the teacher, you must follow that title as strictly and rigidly as you can. If you wish to deviate from that title, you must consult your teacher. If the request is reasonable, makes academic sense and fits in with the course many teachers will allow you to pursue an interest of your own within the set framework. In some cases, especially in final year courses, you may be asked to provide your own title for approval by the course supervisor. This task places you on your own resources. It can be surprisingly difficult and is a useful exercise in its own right, but the same principle applies as with titles given to you; once set, you must write to that title.

Criteria Guidelines for Essays

Essays: All levels

All essays should be typed, double spaced on A4 pages and all pages should be numbered. Please make sure your name, scheme, year and course code are marked clearly on the cover sheet. You should always include a bibliography and references. You can use the Harvard system of notation or conventional footnotes (for further clarification, see the Study Skills leaflet – disseminated by Dr Crowley).

Level One:

First year student essays should, at the minimum:

1. show an understanding of the basic issues raised by the questions
2. refer to the basic literature in the area (assigned texts and other sources)
3. show analytical skills including ability to synthesise material, present evidence and argue effectively

Level Two:

Second year essays should, at the minimum:

1. show an understanding of the basic issues raised by the questions, but also broader issues related to the questions.
2. refer to the basic literature in the area (assigned texts and other sources) and also to additional literature including relevant ancillary texts and articles
3. show analytical skills including ability to synthesise material, present evidence and argue effectively, but also be able to qualify arguments and defend or attack established academic positions.

Level Three

Third year essays should, at the minimum:

1. show an understanding of the basic issues raised by the questions, but also broader issues related to the questions. Students should also be able to place these issues in the broader academic literature
- 2 refer to the basic literature in the area (assigned texts and other sources) and also to additional literature including relevant ancillary texts and articles. In addition students should show evidence of independent literature searches.
- 3 show analytical skills including ability to synthesise material, present evidence and argue effectively, but also be able to qualify arguments and defend or attack established academic positions. Essays should also be placed in a theoretical framework which guides the reader through the argument