



Faculty of Humanities Reduced Scale Stepped Marking FAQs for Staff

1. What is reduced scale stepped marking?

Marking that uses a restricted number of marks with the 0-100% range.

2. What are the fixed percentage points on the reduced scale stepped marking scale?

See Appendix 1 (UG) and Appendix 2 (PGT).

3. Why has reduced scale stepped marking been introduced?

Student feedback suggests that students are not sure about the difference between different percentage marks (e.g. what the difference is between a piece of work that is graded at 66% and one that is graded at 68%). They often comment on their perception of inconsistency between markers.

This view reinforces research that suggests that a scale of 0-100 presents an unrealistic degree of accuracy in the marking process because it is difficult/impossible to devise marking schemes that differentiate to 1% accuracy. Pedagogic research recommends the adoption of grading scales with a smaller number of points.

Reduced scale stepped marking should simplify the marking process by requiring markers only to make a judgement of high/medium/low within each class and then to assign the appropriate mark. This should improve consistency across markers. In turn, it should support student learning by adding greater clarity to outcomes. For example, a student whose work is awarded 62% will know that the mark represents a low 2.1/low Merit. The feedback provided should then support student learning in achieving a higher mark in the next assignment.

Reduced scale stepped marking is also intended to allow excellence to be appropriately rewarded. Although we currently have a notional 0-100 scale, in practice, some disciplines only award marks in the range of 35-75. This is unfair to our students, who are competing against others in highly competitive, interdisciplinary and global job markets, or who are competing against such students for postgraduate funding.

The failure to use marks at the top end of the marking scale has meant that exceptional or outstanding work is often awarded a mark in the low 70s and is therefore not clearly distinguishable from work that has marginally achieved a first-class mark. Markers are encouraged to reward the best quality work. For example, work which is judged to be a lower-range First/Distinction should be awarded 72, 75 or 78, and work deemed exceptional or outstanding should be awarded a mark in the upper First/Distinction zone. Similarly, markers should make use of the full range of marks at the lower end of the scale, thus ensuring that marks reflect the quality of the work presented.

4. Is reduced scale stepped marking used elsewhere?

Yes. Reduced scale marking is used in a number of other institutions in the UK and elsewhere. Scales used in other countries are often significantly less granular than those used in the new scheme in Manchester (for example, Harvard used 12 bands: A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, E).

5. Have students been consulted on the proposed changes?

Student views were collected through focus groups in 2014 (see Appendix 3), when the proposed changes in the marking scheme were first suggested. Subsequently, student union representatives on HTLC sought feedback from students on assessment and the possible introduction of reduced scale stepped marking in March 2016. On both occasions, students were generally supportive of the proposed changes. Further student views will be sought in the end of year review of the new marking scheme.

6. Will reduced scale stepped marking result in grade inflation?

No. There is no intention that this marking scheme will result in grade inflation. It is, however, intended to encourage colleagues to use the full mark range at the top and the bottom of the scale. All marks will continue to be moderated in line with the current policy and the expectation that average course unit marks fall within the 60-70% range.

7. When should the reduced scale stepped marking scale be used?

Reduced scale stepped marking should be used where a scale of 0-100% would normally be used when marking an individual summative component (e.g. essay-based assessments, examination answers, presentations, etc.).

Assessed work which is quantitative (e.g. numerical or multiple-choice tests) or where there are 'right or wrong' answers can still be marked using the 0-100% scale, since the full range of marks (including 100%) is demonstrably available and the highest marks are achievable by the best students.

There may be some other exceptions where reduced scale stepped marking is not appropriate, such as language tests and exam papers with small numbers of marks for each question.

Course units which are subject to professional statutory regulatory body (PSRB) requirements should be marked in line with the requirements of the PSRB.

8. How do I mark using the reduced scale stepped marking scale?

The process for marking is as follows:

For each component of assessment (e.g. a coursework essay, dissertation or a question in an exam paper):

- first decide on the class (e.g. First, 2.1, 2.2 etc.);
- next, assign the component of assessment to a point within the class (e.g. lower range First, mid-range 2.2) by considering the grade descriptors;
- then, determine the fixed percentage point to be awarded (e.g. 82, 85, 88, etc.).

9. How are the final marks for a course unit determined?

If the course unit is assessed by one component of assessment only (e.g. an essay or dissertation), the fixed percentage point becomes the overall course unit mark. If the course unit is assessed by more than one component of assessment, the fixed percentage points for each component should be averaged (according to the course unit weightings) to produce the overall unit mark. As the overall

course unit mark is calculated by averaging the fixed percentage-point marks, it does not need to be one of the fixed percentage points on the scale.

For example, a course unit is assessed by a single exam with the paper made up of three questions (equally weighted). The questions have been awarded marks within the 2.1 class with the following fixed percentage points: 62, 65 and 65. The average of 62, 65 and 65 is 64; 64% is therefore the overall course unit mark.

If the course unit is assessed partly by exam and partly by essay, the overall mark is calculated by averaging (with appropriate weighting) the fixed percentage points for each question to produce the mark for the exam paper (as in the example above), and then averaging (with appropriate weighting) the mark for the exam and the fixed percentage point for the essay. The overall course unit result will be the mathematical average and does not need to be one of the fixed percentage points on the scale.

10. What is the impact of a late submission penalty on the mark awarded using the reduced scale stepped marking scale?

If a student submits a piece of coursework late (without an approved extension) it will be subject to a penalty in accordance with the University's [Late Submission Policy](#). The coursework should be marked as normal and the penalty applied once the fixed percentage point from the reduced scale stepped marking scale has been determined. The final mark, after deducting the penalty, does not need to be one of the fixed percentage points on the scale.

11. How does moderation work with the reduced scale stepped marking?

The role of the moderator is to sample marked assessment to ensure that the marking is appropriate, regardless of the scale being used (reduced scale stepped marking, 0-100%, pass/fail).

12. What happens if a student wants to challenge a mark?

Appeals relating to matters of academic judgement are not permitted. Should a student wish to challenge a mark, academic decision (e.g. approval to progress) or classification result this may only be made on the basis of:

- circumstances affecting the student's performance of which, for a credible and compelling reason, the Examination Board or equivalent body may not have been made aware when the decision was taken and which might have had a material effect on the decision;
- procedural irregularity;
- evidence of prejudice or bias or lack of proper assessment on the part of one or more of the examiners;
- that the supervision or training of the student in respect of research for a dissertation or thesis or equivalent work was unsatisfactory to the point that his or her performance was seriously affected.

Appendix 1: Undergraduate reduced scale stepped marking points

Range / Class	Fixed %	School / discipline grade descriptor (to be inserted)
Upper-range First	100	
	95	
	92	
Mid-range First	88	
	85	
	82	
Lower-range First	78	
	75	
	72	
Upper-range 2.1	68	
Mid-range 2.1	65	
Lower-range 2.1	62	
Upper-range 2.2	58	
Mid-range 2.2	55	
Lower-range 2.2	52	
Upper-range Third	48	
Mid-range Third	45	
Lower-range Third	42	
Compensatory Fail	38	
	35	
	32	
Fail	28	
	25	
	22	
Fail	15	
Fail	5	
Fail	0	

Appendix 2: Postgraduate Taught reduced scale stepped marking points

Range / Class	%	School / discipline grade descriptor (to be inserted)
High Distinction	100	
	95	
	92	
Mid- range Distinction	88	
	85	
	82	
Lower-range Distinction	78	
	75	
	72	
Merit	68	
	65	
	62	
Pass	58	
	55	
	52	
Compensatory Fail	48	
	45	
	42	
Fail	38	
	35	
	32	
Fail	28	
	25	
	15	
	5	
	0	

Appendix 3: Student comments on reduced scale stepped marking

'Having read the proposals for a change in the marking scheme in Humanities, I believe that it is a good idea to split the marking up into smaller chunks so that feedback is easier to understand and work on' (English Literature, year 2).

'I think these changes are a really good idea, at the moment the disparity between the gap of ten marks between a 2:2 and a 2:1 and the gap of 30 marks between a first and 100 marks is pretty incomprehensible. Also the difference between getting a 66 or 67 for example is completely inexplicable' (English Literature, year 2).

'I've had a look at the marking scheme and I believe it would make a positive change by removing confusion especially around the broad 2.1 classification. I also think it would facilitate linkages with other marking systems so that students who wish to see their marks' equivalent in other country can do so with ease. I also think it will be much easier to calculate degree classifications' (Geography, year 2).

'I think it could be really good... I reckon one of the main problems with the current marking system is that people are just looking to get to that magic 60 (or 70 in some cases) and the difference between 62 and 67 for a student is so irrelevant but between 59 and 60 is massive. I think the [new] grading system would have potential to make progress more achievable for students and with proper feedback, improvement could be much easier. However, this is not going to be achieved by transposing the current 1st, 2:1 etc system onto the [new] grades. ...If they wanted to be brave and change the system so that it was clearer that would be great because at the moment within humanities the difference between 55 and 70 can sometimes seem to be who is marking it and what mood they are in. (That said I have had a few great lecturers who mark really well.)' (History, year 3).

'I am so thrilled that there is finally a proposal for a new marking scheme. Firstly, I think the proposed scheme would be beneficial for both lecturers and students. I am in my final year of university, where marks seriously count, so it is even more frustrating when lecturers cannot tell me why I was rewarded a certain mark' (Modern Languages, year 3).