

School of Social Sciences Grade Descriptor Framework

Note: This document is based on the University's Framework for the Design and Use of Grade Descriptors.

Well-written grade descriptors are essential tools in helping students to understand the marks that they have been awarded and why they have been awarded them. They also help inform what students need to do in order to achieve higher marks in future assessment. The language used in grade descriptors therefore needs to be clear, consistent, helpful and unambiguous.

Grade descriptors, along with intended learning outcomes and formal and informal feedback, are cornerstones in helping to articulate students' learning and progression and are also helpful to external stakeholders such as potential employers. An assessment, and its intended learning outcomes, should therefore be designed and written with grade descriptors in mind and, in turn, the language and terminology used in grade descriptors should be consistent with that used in any feedback given to a student on their performance.

The University is *encouraging* all those who set and mark assessments to use a consistent set of adjectives in their grade descriptors. The School of Social Sciences' guidance to colleagues is that the following words should be used for the appropriate 10 mark bands at each phase of study. However it is noted that long form descriptors will be the most useful for students and markers. Furthermore, the *actual feedback given to students* is the most direct channel through which students can improve their work, understanding and grades.

Mark Band	PGT Descriptor	UG Descriptor
90-100	Exceptional	Exceptional
80-89	Outstanding	Outstanding
70-79	Excellent	Excellent
60-69	Very Good	Very Good
50-59	Good	Good
40-49	Insufficient	Sufficient
30-39	Poor	Insufficient
20-29	Inadequate	Inadequate
10-19	Severely Inadequate	Severely Inadequate
0-9	Profoundly Inadequate	Profoundly Inadequate

Note: the difference in adjectives between phase of study is due to the different pass marks.

Long-form descriptions of work which falls into these bands must be provided to students. An *example* for UG-level work is given at the end of this document however Departments may choose to adapt this for their particular discipline and will almost certainly want to adapt them for particular types of assessment (e.g.

quantitative/projects/wikis/blogs etc.) within their discipline. Where amended or adapted the descriptors must:

- provide a separate description for each 10 mark band;
- where appropriate, use the adjectives in the table above.

In addition, good long-form grade descriptors are expected to:

- cover all aspects of performance, both areas of strength and of development;
- indicate, where relevant, how performance and achievement in subsequent assessments might be improved;
- reflect relevant intended learning outcomes;
- cover skills and capabilities, both generic and professional;
- cover content knowledge;
- help students to understand and contextualise any feedback received.

Example Long Form Grade Descriptors (UG)

Very High First Class (90-100)

Such answers are **exceptional** and *fully* answer the question demonstrating the attainment of all learning objectives and in adherence to all guidelines. The answer will be expected to show an exceptional level of achievement with respect to the following criteria:

- insight and depth of understanding of the material;
- the exercise of critical judgement along with clarity of analysis and of expression;
- knowledge of the relevant literature.

High First Class (80-89)

Such answers are **outstanding** and provide a *near-full* and well-structured answer to the question and can be expected to indicate an outstanding level of achievement of all of the following qualities:

- insight and depth of understanding of the material;
- the exercise of critical judgement along with clarity of analysis and of expression;
- good knowledge of the relevant literature.

First Class (70-79)

Such answers are **excellent** and provide a *largely-full* and well-structured answer to the question and can be expected to indicate excellence in *some or most of* the following qualities:

- insight and depth of understanding of the material;
- the exercise of critical judgement along with clarity of analysis and of expression;
- knowledge of the relevant literature.

Upper-second Class (60-69)

Such answers are **very good** and provide a generally well-structured answer to the question and can be expected to indicate *some of* the following qualities:

- a good or very good understanding of the material;
- clarity of analysis, of argument and of expression;
- a demonstrable grasp of the relevant literature.

Lower-second Class (50-59)

Such answers are **good** and provide a clear answer to the question. They can be expected to show *most of* the following features:

- a firm understanding of the material;
- clarity of analysis and argument, albeit limited in extent;
- some awareness of the relevant literature.

Note: What distinguishes a high Lower-second Class from a low Upper-second Class is greater extent of understanding of material and clarity of analysis and argument, as well as at least some selective knowledge of the relevant literature, not mere awareness of its existence.

Third Class (40-49)

Such answers are **sufficient** and demonstrate a *rudimentary* understanding of the issues and offer *only partial* answers to the question. They can be expected to show some of the following features:

- sparse coverage of the material with several key elements missing;
- unsupported assertions and a lack of clear analysis or argument;
- important errors and inaccuracies.

Fail (30-39)

Such answers are **insufficient** and, while showing some awareness of the area, fail to deal with the question in a way that suggest more than a fragmented and shallow acquaintance with the subject. They are often error-prone, lacking in coherence, structure and evidence of independent thought.

Bad Fail (20-29)

Such answers are **inadequate** and fail to demonstrate the ability to engage with the question. They demonstrate only the most basic awareness of the area and may contain errors. They will be almost completely lacking in coherence, structure and evidence of independent thought.

Very Bad Fail (10-19)

Such answers are **severely inadequate** and exhibit an almost complete lack of engagement with the area or question.

Extremely Bad Fail (0-9)

Such answers are **profoundly inadequate** and exhibit a complete lack of engagement with the area or question.