

Policy Identifier: Guidelines on Writing and Marking Examination Papers & Assignments

Policy Title:	Guidelines on Writing and Marking Examination Papers & Assignments
Description:	The purpose of the guidelines are to advise Course Leaders on how to formulate examination papers and assignments and how marking should be undertaken.
Author (Position):	Vice President (Academic Affairs) and Registrar
Version:	2
Approved By:	MIE Governing Body
Policy Re-approval Date:	June 2023
Date of Next Policy Review:	June 2027 (or as necessary)

Guidelines on Writing and Marking Examination Papers & Assignments

1 Writing an Examination Paper

1.1 The purpose of the guidelines are to advise Course Leaders on how to formulate examination papers and assignments and how marking should be undertaken.

The guidelines are for lecturers, Course Leaders and Marino Institute of Education (MIE) staff who are charged with writing and marking examination papers and assignments.

1.2 Essay Questions Content

1.2.1 The content of the question(s) needs to be linked to the learning outcomes of the module to assess students' competence in the subject area to be assessed.

1.2.2 Aligning the curriculum, the intended aims, learning outcomes, the teaching methods and resources and the assessment tasks and criteria for evaluating them promotes students' learning and creates transparency within the assessment process.

1.2.3 The content of the questions must have been addressed before students sit the exam.

1.2.4 If a quotation is used in the question, it should generally be from an existing, identified source rather than one that is made up by the examiner.

1.3 Question Phrasing

1.3.1 When a question is clearly stated, it is easier for students to answer and for examiners to mark. For example, "Compare Marx and Nietzsche in their analysis of the underlying problems of nineteenth century European Society" is considered to be better than "Discuss Karl Marx's philosophy."

(<https://www.uky.edu/Ag/CLD/CETL/files/f09workshop/IU%20How%20to%20write%20better%20tests.pdf>).

1.3.2 The task for students needs to be clear (i.e. whether students are being asked to evaluate, compare etc.).

1.3.3 The wording of the question needs to be clear and unambiguous.

1.3.4 The question needs to be free of grammatical and punctuation errors.

1.3.5 Every examination paper or assignment specification needs to be reviewed by the Head of Department or Course Leader before being submitted to the [Registrar's Office](#) or given to students.

1.3.6 Check that potentially relative terms such as “old” (21 years, 50 years, 70 years or 90 years) or “recent” (last week, last year, last century) are specified if necessary.

1.3.7 Numbering parts of a question helps students keep track of the parts, though it can also lead to an attitude of “filling in the box” (Haviland & Clark, 1992, p. 52).

1.4 Number of Questions

1.4.1 The content of questions to be answered on the exam paper is to be commensurate with the time available to answer them.

1.4.2 Where a choice is given, the level of challenge should be equivalent across the questions.

1.4.3 Balance should be made between having a limited choice between questions on one hand and having too many questions on the other, whereby students spend a long time choosing which questions to answer.

1.4.4 Questions should reflect the broad learning outcomes of the module, and not focus on obscure aspects to ‘catch students out’.

1.5 Short Questions: Ensure that they are sufficiently challenging for the level of the programme.

1.6 Open Book Examinations

If an examination is to be Open Book, details of the books permitted and any other details should be provided to the [Registrar's Office](#) in good time. Should this necessitate additional checking, additional assistance may be sought.

2 Marking Examination Papers

2.1 Rubric/Marking Criteria

2.1.1 A distinction is made between general criteria and marking criteria.

- i. The general criteria should be communicated to students in advance of the examination e.g. they might be included on the module outline.
- ii. The marking criteria should be available to students on script viewing day.

- iii. The marking criteria for the question need to be clear.
- iv. The marking criteria for the examination need to be sufficiently detailed so that a person with similar expertise could grade the exam if the lecturer were unavailable.

2.2 Feedback Slips/Forms

2.2.1 It is recommended that marks and feedback on essays, assignments, oral presentations and performance assessments are given on feedback slips/forms rather than directly on the piece of work¹. The feedback slip can be removed if a paper needs to be marked by a second examiner. Furthermore, students can be given a copy of the slip when they attend for script viewing.

2.2.2 Lecturers can create their own feedback slips or they can choose from one of the seven existing templates that are on Moodle. All feedback slips will record either the student's seat number or examination number. All examination scripts are anonymised.

2.2.3 Annotations to essays and assignments are acceptable.

2.2.4 The mark(s) achieved by the student should be written on the piece of work in pen rather than in pencil.

2.3 Other

When marking essay questions, it may help ensure a consistent standard in marking if all number 1 questions are marked together, then all the number 2 questions and so on.

2.4 Second Marking

Second marking (which is not blind marking) is the second part of the marking process.

- i. Second marking applies to failing and borderline fail scripts.
- ii. Second marking is to review the professional opinion of the primary marker and needs to be informed by that mark.
- iii. Annotations made by a second marker should be done in a different colour. All the feedback is available to the students when they attend the college on script viewing day.
- iv. Following the second marking process, where a mark is in dispute, in the first instance resolution should be sought through discussion between the first and

¹ See [Assessment Handbook](#)

second marker. Should the disagreement be still not resolved, a third opinion will be sought. Where the disagreement is still unresolved, the External Examiner's opinion will be consulted.

- v. Second markers will initial or sign papers when they read them. They may also make a brief comment stating why they agree or disagree with the original mark.

Bachelor in Education (B.Ed.), Bachelor in Science (B.Sc.), and Professional Master of Education (PME) dissertations are all blind second-marked. In other words, each dissertation is marked twice by examiners who do not know what mark the other examiner has awarded.

3 Writing and Submitting Assignments

Writing assignments and supporting students:

- 3.1 Ensure that the assignment assesses competency in the subject area – not just a skill such as essay writing
- 3.2 Subdivide into components the requirements of the assignments and clearly name these (use bullet points)
- 3.3 Provide a rubric (not just criteria) in advance of the assignment
- 3.4 Give some input on the rubric/criteria either face-to-face or via podcasts on Moodle.
Using Moodle saves lecturing time and avoids misinformation/misunderstanding.

4 Responsibility

The overall responsibility for this policy lies with the Registrar & Vice President of Academic Affairs.

5 Related Documents

- 5.1 [Re-check/Re-Mark of Assessments Procedure](#)
- 5.2 [Code of Practice for Students with Disabilities](#)
- 5.3 [Assessment Handbook](#)
- 5.4 [Guidelines for External Examiners on European General Data Protection Regulation 2018](#)

Appendix 1: Digital Submission of Assignments

Digital submission of assignments allows for:

- i. Comparison of submissions across years
- ii. Comments to be added in the text
- iii. Reduction of work-load in filling in separate feedback sheets (entire script could be returned to the student with comments attached)
- iv. Some detection of plagiarism
- v. Saving paper
- vi. Saving time of admin staff who would collect hard copy assignments.
- vii. Disadvantages of digital submission of assignments include
 - a. Spending hours at a screen marking scripts
 - b. The extra burden of work in collating the digital assignments
 - c. The effort to print out all the work (which is the case for some subjects on some courses)
 - d. Not allowing anonymity but could allow blind marking when an assignment - without comments - is forwarded to the second marker.

If a lecturer wishes students to submit electronically, Moodle 2.0 can prove useful. The piece can be stamped digitally as proof of submission. In some cases, the lecturer requests students to also submit a hard copy.

Appendix 2 Examination Style Guide

Font	Verdana
Font Size	12
Line Spacing	1.5
Text	Align Text Left
Page Numbers	Every page of the examination paper should be numbered at the bottom centre of page e.g. 1 of 4
Date Format	Date Month, Year e.g. 17 December, 2013
Time Format	09:30 – 10:30 or 14:00 – 16:00 (i.e. use 24-hour clock)
Duration Format	Hour, minutes. E.g. 1 hour, 20 minutes.
Instructions	To be entered on cover page
Marking Scheme	Marks awarded for each question must be specified except where all questions carry equal marks in which case a sentence to this effect on cover page will suffice.
Question Format.	If a question over runs to the next page, start the question, if possible, on a new page.

Appendix 3 General Grading Criteria

Grading Criteria

These grade descriptions are intended to provide guidelines for the marking of coursework and examinations in the B.Ed., B.Sc. and PME-Primary programmes. They are not to be taken as rigid prescriptions, but as general indications of the qualities that are looked for at each level of classification. Markers should exercise their discretion in applying these guidelines and should not expect every criterion to be fulfilled in all cases for a particular grade to be awarded. For example, some criteria may be more applicable to coursework than to examination answers.

I – First class (70-100%)

First class work represents an excellent to outstanding performance. A first class piece of work shows positive characteristics such as:

- Answers the question clearly and comprehensively, in a focused way
- Has an excellent structure and organisation
- Demonstrates characteristics such as insight, imagination, originality and creativity
- Demonstrates the ability to integrate information
- Exhibits sound critical thinking.
- Exhibits independence of judgement
- Clearly explains relevant theory and cites relevant evidence
- Contains reasoned argument and comes to a logical conclusion
- Gives evidence of wide relevant reading
- Includes a sufficient number of appropriate examples
- Demonstrates a clear comprehension of the subject
- Demonstrates the ability to apply learning to new situations and to solve problems
- Is lucid and well written
- Lacks errors of any significant kind

All pieces of First class work may not have all of the characteristics above, but all such work will have a few, if any, negative characteristics.

What differentiates a first class piece of work from one awarded an upper second is a greater lucidity, a greater independence of judgement, a greater depth of insight and degree of originality, more evidence of an ability to integrate material, and evidence of a greater breadth of reading and research in the first that is not present in the upper second.

II.1 – Upper second class (60-69%)

Work at upper second class level displays a sound and clear understanding of the subject and demonstrates a good grasp of a wide range of the standard literature and/or methods and techniques of the subject. An Upper Second class piece of work shows positive characteristics such as:

- Answers the question clearly and fully
- Has a good structure and organisation
- Shows evidence of a very good understanding of the topic
- Shows clear evidence of relevant reading and research
- Clearly explains relevant theory and cites relevant evidence
- Contains reasoned argument and comes to a logical conclusion
- Includes highly relevant ideas
- Uses relevant examples
- Demonstrates the ability to apply learning to new situations and to solve problems
- Is well written
- Lacks errors of any significant kind

An Upper Second class piece of work usually has few negative characteristics, but may be limited in the sense that it:

- Could demonstrate more in the way of insight, imagination, originality or creativity

- Does not answer the question in as fully and comprehensive a manner as would be possible
- Could demonstrate more ability to integrate information
- Could exhibit more critical thinking
- Could exhibit more independence of thought

II.2 – Lower second class (50-59%)

Work at Lower Second class level displays knowledge of the standard material and approaches of the subject and a familiarity with much of the standard literature and/or methods. Work at Lower Second class level will tend to possess some or all of the following positive characteristics:

- Attempts to answer the question
- Shows evidence of a basic to good understanding of the topic
- Shows evidence of some relevant reading or research
- Includes some relevant ideas
- Includes some relevant examples

Work at Lower Second class level will tend to possess some or all of the following negative characteristics:

- The attempt to answer the question may not be completely successful
- Does not contain a sufficiently well-structured argument
- Does not offer sufficient evidence to justify assertions
- Does not include sufficient relevant examples
- The style of writing could be improved
- May contain some minor errors

What differentiates a lower second class piece of work from one awarded a Third Class grade is the greater success of the lower second in answering the question, together with the possession of more relevant information, a more coherent argument and an improved

structure, although neither the answer to the question nor the structure may be incapable of improvement.

III – Third class (40-49%)

Work at Third Class level contains evidence of study of the appropriate material and displays a level of presentation at least minimally commensurate with the award of an honours degree, but it often reflects only a limited familiarity with the standard literature and/or methods of the subject. Work at Third class level may possess some or all of the following positive characteristics:

- Attempts to answer the question
- Shows modest evidence of understanding of the topic
- Shows modest evidence of relevant reading or research
- Includes a few relevant ideas
- May include some relevant examples

Work at Third Class level may possess some or all of the following negative characteristics:

- The attempt to answer the question may not be very successful
- Does not contain a sufficiently well-structured argument
- Does not offer sufficient relevant examples
- Contains one or more important errors

What differentiates a third class piece of work from one that fails is that a third comprises an attempt to answer the question informed by some relevant information and without any major error, while a fail either does not contain an adequate attempt to answer the question, or does not contain sufficient relevant information, or contains at least one significant error.

Fail – (0-39%)

The 'fail' grade is sometimes broken down into two bands: F1 and F2. An answer at the F1 level (30-39%) represents a failure to adequately answer the question, but the possession of at least some relevant information. The failure to provide an appropriate answer may be

due to a misunderstanding of the question, or to one or more of the following deficiencies: it may contain only a small amount of relevant information, the material itself may have been misunderstood, the answer may be poorly or incoherently presented, or the answer may not relate to the question asked. An answer at the F2 level (0-29%) normally contains no or only the most minimal amount of information relating to the question, or may demonstrate a complete misunderstanding of the question, or a misunderstanding of the material relevant to its answer such as to render the answer meaningless. It is also possible for an otherwise good piece of work to be awarded a Fail grade because it fails to answer the question posed. The absence of positive characteristics could also result from the fact that the answer is very short (e.g., when a student runs out of time in an examination and writes very little). Work awarded a Fail grade tends to possess some or all of the following characteristics:

- Represents a failure to answer the question (though may be an answer to a different question)
- Shows no or only a little evidence of understanding of the topic
- Shows no or only very little evidence of relevant reading or research
- Includes no or very few relevant ideas
- Does not contain a structured argument
- Does not offer evidence to justify assertions
- Does not include relevant examples
- Contains multiple or major errors

Appendix 4 Guideline Criteria for Marking Inquiry Based Learning Assignment

Organisation: [15%]

Grade/Mark	Descriptor	Comments/Evidence Questions to consider
1	The argument/case provided is clearly articulated and evidence is provided in support. Planning and structure of the argument/case are excellent. Layout is extremely clear and coherent. Excellent ability to integrate information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is inquiry defined (own/others' definitions) and connected to teaching and learning?</i> • <i>Is the connection made between inquiry definition/learning and inquiry cycles?</i> • <i>Is the rationale for selection of inquiry cycles articulated?</i> • <i>Are the difference/similarities between models summarized?</i> • <i>Are the connections: between philosophy, inquiry, and curriculum identified?</i> • <i>Are there connections between models (Part A) and the plan for teaching?</i> • <i>Is there an overall planning tool/format?</i>
2.1	The argument/case is very well laid out. Evidence is provided in support of the argument/case. Demonstrates very good ability to integrate information.	
2.2	The argument/case of the assignment are good. Evidence is provided in support if the argument/case. The student shows good ability to integrate information.	
3	The student has outlined the argument/case in a satisfactory way. There may be errors in planning. There may be a lack of evidence in support of the argument/case. The student may demonstrate a weakness in integrating information.	
F	The student does not clearly outline the argument/case. There are significant weaknesses in overall planning. There is no evidence provided to support the argument/case. The student is unable to integrate information.	

Policy Identifier: Guidelines on Writing and Marking Examination Papers & Assignments

Analysis/Synthesis: [40%]

Grade/Mark	Descriptor	Comments/Evidence Questions to consider
1	The student demonstrates excellent comprehension of key elements and issues and the ability to think critically is clearly apparent. Independent judgement, reasoned arguments and logical conclusions are consistently demonstrated. The student shows insight, imagination and creativity, with some evidence of original thinking. Relevant theory is very clearly explained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Are the stages and features of the models described?</i> • <i>Are connections made to the philosophical underpinnings of the models of inquiry?</i> • <i>Are the roles of the teacher/students in the models articulated</i> • <i>Are the commonalities and differences between models summarized?</i> • <i>Is IBL and the nature of inquiry critiqued and the alignment/non-alignment with Aistear/PSC examined?</i> • <i>Are argument[s] supported with references?</i> • <i>Is the synthesis of ideas supported with evidence/logical argument?</i>
2.1	The student demonstrates very good comprehension of key elements and issues, with the ability to think critically apparent at times. Independent judgement, reasoned arguments and logical conclusions are demonstrated at times. The student shows some evidence of insight, imagination and creativity. Relevant theory is clearly explained.	
2.2	The student demonstrates good comprehension of key elements and issues. Some critical thinking in evidence but this could be stronger. Reasoned arguments and logical conclusions are sometimes demonstrated. Insight, imagination and creativity could be stronger. Relevant theory is competently explained.	
3	The student demonstrates satisfactory comprehension of key elements and issues. There is an absence of critical thinking. Arguments and conclusions could be further developed. There is generally an absence of insight, imagination and creativity. Relevant theory is satisfactorily explained.	
F	The student demonstrates unsatisfactory comprehension of key elements and issues. There is a clear absence of critical thinking. Arguments and conclusions are weak. There is no evidence of insight, imagination or creativity. Relevant theory is unsatisfactorily explained.	

Policy Identifier: Guidelines on Writing and Marking Examination Papers & Assignments

Application: [15%]

Grade/Mark	Descriptor	Comments Questions to consider
1	The student demonstrates excellent ability to apply learning to their own practice. Excellent problem-solving skills are demonstrated with very strong application of theory to practice. Excellent examples are included. Demonstrates ability to critically reflect on practice in a consistent manner throughout.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is the background and context described?</i> <p><i>Is the plan:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>structured and appropriate to the students?</i> • <i>framed by conceptual understandings and key questions?</i> • <i>designed around a topic which is engaging, relevant and challenging to the particular learners?</i> <p><i>Does the plan:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>incorporate one/more inquiry cycles into the learning engagements?</i> • <i>demonstrate understanding of IBL?</i> • <i>demonstrate how challenges which arise were overcome and incorporated into learning?</i> • <i>provide insights into teacher's learning and speculates on alternative approaches?</i> • <i>document reflection on own and the children's learning?</i>
2.1	The student demonstrates very good ability to apply learning to their own practice. Very good problem-solving skills are demonstrated with strong application of theory to practice. Very good examples are included. Demonstrates ability to critically reflect on practice.	
2.2	The student demonstrates good ability to apply learning to their own practice. Good problem-solving skills are demonstrated with competent application of theory to practice. Good examples are included. Some ability to critically reflect on practice is in evidence but this is not consistent throughout the essay.	
3	The student demonstrates satisfactory ability to apply learning to their own practice. Satisfactory problem-solving skills are demonstrated with limited application of theory to practice. A limited number of examples are included. The ability to critically reflect on practice is somewhat in evidence.	
F	The student demonstrates unsatisfactory ability to apply learning to their own practice. Problem-solving skills are not demonstrated. There is an absence of application of theory to practice. The ability to critically reflect on practice is not demonstrated.	

Policy Identifier: Guidelines on Writing and Marking Examination Papers & Assignments

Presentation: [15%]

Grade/Mark	Descriptor	Comments
1	Quality of writing is excellent. Clarity of language is consistently of a very high standard throughout. The essay is fluently and lucidly written.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is the supporting documentation annotated and explained?</i> • <i>Is the language used precise and clear?</i> • <i>Is there evidence of teaching tools and of individual/group thinking and learning?</i> • <i>Is the paper engaging?</i> • <i>Do the ideas flow?</i>
2.1	Quality of writing is very good. Clarity of language is consistently of a high standard throughout. The essay is fluently written.	
2.2	Quality of writing is good. Clarity of language is of a good standard but there may be some errors. The essay is generally fluently written.	
3	Quality of writing is satisfactory. Clarity of language is generally of a satisfactory standard with some errors. The essay lacks fluency at times.	
F	Quality of writing is unsatisfactory. Clarity of language of an unsatisfactory standard with many errors. The essay generally lacks fluency.	

Policy Identifier: Guidelines on Writing and Marking Examination Papers & Assignments

Referencing: [15%]

Grade/Mark	Descriptor	Comments
1	Use of relevant reading is excellent. Use of academic conventions is applied consistently throughout with no errors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Does the paper indicate wide and in-depth reading from module and beyond?</i> • <i>Does the paper draw on appropriate references which are accurately cited?</i> • <i>Are the planning tools and student work fully referenced?</i> • <i>Is the paper fully edited?</i>
2.1	Use of relevant reading is very good. Use of academic conventions is generally applied consistently with no errors.	
2.2	Use of relevant reading is good. Use of academic conventions is generally applied consistently but there may be some errors.	
3	Use of relevant reading is satisfactory. Use of academic conventions is inconsistent and there are some errors.	
F	Use of relevant reading is unsatisfactory. Use of academic conventions is inconsistent and there are many errors.	

Appendix 5 Guideline Criteria for Marking: Research Dissertations

MARK	FAIL	PASS	DISTINCTION
Introduction 10 marks	The student does not clearly outline the focus and/or context of the study. Links between the purpose of the study and the specialist field are weak.	The focus of the study is clearly articulated. The purpose of the study is related to the specialist field. The research context is well established.	The focus of the study is excellently articulated. The purpose of the study is very clearly related to the specialist field.
Review of Literature 25 marks	The literature is unacceptably narrow, lacks focus in terms of the research topic and omits key texts and contributors. The author fails to demonstrate understanding of relevant theory and critique of the literature.	The chosen literature is sound in terms of its relevance to the research question. The author demonstrates command of relevant theory. The paper contains good critique of the literature, with some critical evaluation of alternative positions. The literature is up-to-date and is comprehensive in terms of breadth and depth.	The literature is excellently chosen in terms of relevance to the research question. The author demonstrates an excellent command of relevant theory. He / she engages with the literature in a critical and authoritative manner. Alternative positions are critically evaluated. The literature is up-to-date and is outstanding in terms of breadth and depth.
Findings, Analysis and Discussion 30 marks	The data are presented in a confusing manner. The author fails to use the literature in critiquing the data. Conclusions are inappropriate in terms of the data presented.	The data are presented clearly and cogently. Very good use is made of the literature in order to offer critical examination of the data. A range of insightful arguments are made within the discussion and solid links are established between the conclusions and the data. Some original thinking is evident.	The author presents the data in an excellent manner. Superb use of the literature is used to critically examine the data. The author is highly insightful in terms of the arguments made within the discussion and there are excellent links between the conclusions and the data. There is evidence of original thought.
Presentation and Format 15 marks	Academic conventions are generally ignored. The dissertation is disorganised. The reference list is weak and are inaccurate or absent. Length requirements are not observed.	The author displays skilled use of academic conventions with format and structure followed consistently throughout. The dissertation is systematically organised. The author has paid attention to the accurate formation of the reference list and referencing system. Competent control of length. Some minor errors in evidence.	The author displays skilled use of academic conventions with format and structure followed superbly and consistently throughout. The dissertation is systematically and clearly organised. The author has paid excellent attention to the accurate formation of the reference list and referencing system. Competent control of length.