

**MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF ANCIENT CLASSICS**

**MARK DESCRIPTORS AND MARKING GRIDS  
(for students at all levels)**

The Department of Ancient Classics uses a set of qualitative descriptors as a general guide in assessing coursework essays and essay questions in examinations. These are not applied mechanistically, as different essay topics require different kinds of analysis and every essay is unique; but the descriptors will give you a good general idea of what is expected within each class band. You should note too that, although the descriptors apply to all years of study, account is taken of the student's year of study when an essay is marked. So, for example, what qualifies as 'excellent' in an essay in a first-year module would not necessarily qualify as 'excellent' in an essay in a third-year module. This is a reflection of the successively higher standards that are expected of students as they progress through their degree course and develop their critical abilities.

In the case of work done at the MA level, the descriptors are supplemented by a shorter discursive document.

When coursework essays are returned to students, a completed marking grid is attached to each essay, with written comments. You should note that the grid is intended to give general indications of quality, rather than precise judgements, across a range of categories.

**1. MARK DESCRIPTORS**

***First Class (1H) (70+)***

A typical essay in this band will demonstrate, as a minimum, a creative and engaged approach to the question, and, in the higher reaches, a measure of original thought. The material will be very clearly and cogently organized, with a well-conceived overall structure and a logical flow both between and within paragraphs. Argumentation will be very tight, with arguments following on seamlessly from one another, all inferences valid and justified, and all major claims supported with reference to evidence. It will be apparent that the key issues at stake have been thoroughly comprehended. There will be a very high degree of relevance, with no or (at worst) very few observations which do not contribute to answering the question. There will be no serious factual errors. The essay will draw on an impressive range of both primary and secondary material, as required and/or appropriate, and the author will show great skill and judgement in the selection and effective deployment of that material in the discussion.

**90** A *remarkable and exceptional* performance, which would be very difficult or impossible to better given the circumstances in which the essay was written, and showing all or most of the following virtues:

- A very high level of originality and creativity
- Outstanding organization of material with no irrelevancies
- Outstanding argumentation and critical analysis
- Profound understanding of subject-matter
- Mastery of both primary material and secondary work

- 80** An *outstanding* performance, difficult to criticize, which would be difficult to better given the circumstances in which the essay was written, and showing most of the following virtues:
- A high level of originality and/or creativity
  - Outstanding organization of material with no irrelevancies
  - Excellent argumentation and critical analysis
  - Thorough understanding of subject-matter
  - Excellent knowledge of both primary material and secondary work
- 75** An *excellent* performance, showing many of the following virtues:
- Originality and/or creativity
  - Excellent organization of material with little or no irrelevancy
  - Excellent argumentation and critical analysis
  - Thorough understanding of subject-matter
  - Excellent knowledge of both primary material and secondary work
- 70** An *excellent* performance, showing a good range of the following virtues:
- Originality and/or creativity
  - Excellent organization of material
  - Excellent argumentation and critical analysis
  - Very good understanding of subject-matter
  - Very good knowledge of primary material and secondary work

***Second Class, Grade 1 (2H1) (60-69)***

A typical essay in this band will be clearly and cogently organized, with a well-conceived overall structure and a logical flow both between and within paragraphs. Argumentation will be tight, with most arguments following on from one another, most inferences valid and justified, and most major claims supported with reference to evidence. It will be apparent that the key issues at stake have been mostly comprehended, although a small number of minor misconceptions may be evident. There will be a high degree of relevance, with the bulk of what is written clearly of value in answering the question. There will be few serious factual errors. The essay will draw on a good range of both primary and secondary material, as required and/or appropriate, and the author will show a good degree of skill and judgement in the selection and effective deployment of that material in the discussion.

- 68** A *very good* performance, with:
- Very good organization of material
  - Very good argumentation and critical analysis
  - Very good understanding of subject-matter
  - Good knowledge of primary material and secondary work
- 65** A *very good* performance, with:
- Very good or good organization of material
  - Very good or good argumentation and critical analysis
  - Very good or good understanding of subject-matter
  - Any two of the above to be ‘very good’
  - Good knowledge of primary material and secondary work

- 62** A *good* performance, with:
- Good organization of material
  - Good argumentation and critical analysis
  - Good understanding of subject-matter
  - Good knowledge of primary material and secondary work
  - Relative weakness in any one of the above to be condoned

***Second Class, Grade 2 (2H2) (50-59)***

A typical essay in this band will indicate that a reasonable attempt has been made at clear and cogent organization, and show some evidence that the author has thought about the shaping of the argument. There will be a perceptible overall structure, with a certain degree of logical flow both between and within paragraphs. Argumentation will be convincing in parts, with some arguments following on from one another, some inferences valid and justified, and at least some claims supported with reference to evidence. It will be apparent that the key issues at stake have been mostly comprehended at a general level, although a number of misconceptions may be evident. Most of what is written will be of value in answering the question, though irrelevant material may sometimes mar the flow. The essay will be mostly factually correct, though errors may not infrequently occur. The essay will display a fair knowledge of both primary and secondary material, as required and/or appropriate, and the author will show a certain, if limited, degree of skill and judgement in the selection and effective deployment of that material in the discussion.

- 58** A *moderately good* performance, with:
- Good or satisfactory organization of material
  - Good or satisfactory argumentation and analysis
  - Good or satisfactory understanding of subject-matter
  - Good or satisfactory knowledge of primary material and secondary work
  - Any two of the above to be ‘good’

- 55** A *moderately good* performance, with:
- Satisfactory organization of material
  - Satisfactory argumentation and analysis
  - Satisfactory understanding of subject-matter
  - Satisfactory knowledge of primary material and secondary work

- 52** A *reasonably competent* performance, with:
- Satisfactory or fair organization of material
  - Satisfactory or fair argumentation and analysis
  - Satisfactory or fair understanding of subject-matter
  - Satisfactory or fair knowledge of primary material and secondary work
  - Any two of the above to be ‘satisfactory’

***Third Class (3H) (45-49)***

A typical essay in this band will indicate that some attempt has been made at clear and cogent organization, and show some evidence that the author has thought at least a little about the shaping of the argument, though much of the content may appear loosely or randomly strung together. An effective overall structure may be hard to discern. There will be signs of an attempt to make an argument, with a degree of justification and evidential support for

assertions, but the conclusions reached will often be superficial, weak, or invalid. The key issues at stake will have been partly comprehended at a general level, but numerous misconceptions may be evident. Some of what is written will be of value in answering the question, but the focus may be poor and there may be a substantial amount of irrelevant material. The essay will be partly factually correct, although there may be many errors. Some reference will be made to primary and secondary material, as required and/or appropriate, though this may be token in character, and the author will show only very limited skill and judgement in the selection and deployment of that material in the discussion.

- 48** A *fair* performance, with:
- Fair organization of material
  - Fair argumentation and analysis
  - Fair understanding of subject-matter
  - Fair knowledge of primary material and/or secondary work
  - Relative weakness in any one of the above to be condoned

- 45** An *adequate* performance, with:
- Fair or just adequate organization of material
  - Fair or just adequate argumentation and analysis
  - Fair or just adequate understanding of subject-matter
  - Fair or just adequate knowledge of primary material and/or secondary work
  - Any two of the above to be 'fair'

#### **Pass (40-44)**

A typical essay in this band will seek to address the question set, at least in a general way, though that answer will be barely satisfactory. The material is likely to be poorly organized, lacking in overall structure and with little logical flow within and between paragraphs. Argumentation will be minimal, with assertions rarely supported. The key issues at stake will have been very imperfectly comprehended, even at a basic level, and numerous misconceptions are likely to be evident. There may be very serious problems of relevance. The essay will include some factually correct content, but factual inaccuracies may abound. Little appropriate reference will be made to primary or secondary material, and the author will show very little skill or judgement in the selection and deployment of that material in the discussion.

- 42** A *barely adequate* performance, with some attempt made in the areas of:
- Organization of material
  - Argumentation and analysis
- and showing:
- Some understanding of subject-matter
  - Some knowledge of primary material and/or secondary work
  - But overall weak

#### **Fail (39 and below; N.B. a whole module achieving a mark below 35 cannot be passed by compensation)**

A typical essay in this band will not offer a satisfactory response to the question set. The material is likely to be very poorly organized, and to show little knowledge or understanding of the topic under discussion. Argumentation, where attempted at all, will be very weak, scarcely rising above the level of assertion. The key issues at stake will be at best very poorly comprehended. There is likely to be a great deal of irrelevance. Factual errors will abound.

Very little appropriate reference will be made to primary or secondary material, and the author will show minimal skill or judgement in the selection and deployment of that material in the discussion.

- 38** An *inadequate* performance, weak in most or all of the following areas:
- Organization of material
  - Argumentation and analysis
  - Understanding of subject-matter
  - Knowledge of primary material and secondary work
- 35** An *inadequate* performance, poor in most or all of the following areas:
- Organization of material
  - Argumentation and analysis
  - Understanding of subject-matter
  - Knowledge of primary material and secondary work
- 30** An *inadequate* performance, very weak in most or all of the following areas:
- Organization of material
  - Argumentation and analysis
  - Understanding of subject-matter
  - Knowledge of primary material and secondary work
- 20** A *hopelessly inadequate* performance, with:
- Very little knowledge and understanding of subject-matter
  - Very poor argumentation and organization
- 10** A *hopelessly inadequate* performance, with:
- Almost no knowledge and understanding of subject-matter
  - Very little written at all
- 0** A *disastrously inadequate* performance, with either:
- Nothing of any relevance at all
- or
- Answer not attempted

## **2. SUPPLEMENT TO THE MARK DESCRIPTORS IN RESPECT OF MA WORK**

MA performance is formally assessed in individual modules either by a combination of examinations and written coursework or by written coursework only (essays and other assignments, seminar report, long essay or dissertation). In assessing MA work (whether written coursework or examination essay questions), markers will typically adopt and adapt the guidelines and indicative language of the mark descriptors, bearing in mind the general principle that higher standards are expected of students at higher levels. In keeping with this, it is expected that work done at the MA level (including essays in language modules taken in common with undergraduates) will be superior to work done at undergraduate level in the following ways:

- (a) *More extensive and independent engagement with primary and secondary materials*

MA candidates are expected to read widely in both primary and secondary literature, both by following instructors' guidelines (e.g. exploring supplied bibliography) and by carrying out their own investigations. Evidence for this engagement should be recognizable in exams and especially in written coursework. The active use of

bibliography is one salient sign of such engagement: variety and quantity of reference, both within a particular body of literature (e.g. referencing not just one or two selected authorities) and from within a particular source (e.g. referring in a substantive way to chapters from throughout a book, and not just to a narrow range of pages in the introduction). Mere *quantity* of reference does not of course guarantee academic excellence, but does give a credible gauge of engagement, enterprise, and diligence—necessary qualities if students are to progress further as scholars. This criterion may be taken as a generalization of the categories ‘Knowledge of primary material’ and ‘Knowledge of secondary material’ on the relevant marking grid.

(b) *Intellectual sophistication*

In line with the formal learning objectives of each module, MA candidates should aim to familiarize themselves not only with the primary materials studied, but also with the methodological approaches, intellectual themes, and scholarly debates most relevant to them. They should begin to formulate their own critical positions in relation to each of these, and start to think about primary materials in independent, and ideally in original and creative, ways. (The latter is particularly desirable in the long essay or dissertation.) This criterion may be taken as a generalization of the categories ‘Argumentation and critical analysis’ and ‘Understanding of subject-matter’ on the marking grid.

(c) *Formal professionalism in submitted written work*

Presentation is an important aspect of written work. Therefore, MA candidates will be expected to submit written work that in its more formal aspects (bibliographical conventions and accuracy, punctuation, grammar) is of a publishable standard. Professionalism of presentation is a generic skill necessary for further academic progress, and transferable to non-academic disciplines and occupations. This criterion picks up on the categories of ‘Quality of writing’ and ‘Presentation’ on the marking grid, and is particularly relevant to the long essay and dissertation.

### 3. MARKING GRIDS

Different marking grids are used for (a) GC151/GC152 (first assignment), (b) GC151/GC152 (second assignment), and (c) all other relevant undergraduate modules in GRC, Greek, and Latin, as well as modules at the MA level. The template for each grid is given below.

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**Marking Grid for Modules GC151/GC152: First Assignment**

**Name of Lecturer:**

**Student Name/Number:**

**Assignment Title:**

**CRITERIA**

**1. Subject-matter, organization, and argumentation (60%)**

1a. Subject-matter (30%): focus on the topic/question (relevance); knowledge of primary and secondary materials; provision of relevant detail; overall understanding (grasp of concepts; insights).

1b. Organization and argumentation (30%): coherent overall structure; clear opening and concluding statements; logical flow from paragraph to paragraph and within paragraphs; ability to explain and not just to assert or narrate.

**2. References and presentation (40%)**

2a. References (20%): bibliography with at least one book and one article cited; at least one footnote provided for each; references to primary texts in appropriate format.

2b. Presentation (20%): regular margins; double-spaced; readable font; spelling; punctuation; grammar.

*Note: This grid is intended to give general indications rather than precise judgements.*

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory/ Fair	Just Adequate	Inadequate
Subject-matter						
Organization/ argumentation						
References						
Presentation						

**Comments:**

**Mark: %**

**Class:**

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**Marking Grid for GC151/GC152: Second Assignment**

**Name of Lecturer:**

**Student Name/Number:**

**Assignment Title:**

**CRITERIA**

**1. Subject-matter, organization, and argumentation (80%)**

Focus on the topic/question (relevance); knowledge of primary and secondary materials; provision of relevant detail; coherent overall structure, with clear opening and concluding statements and logical flow between and within paragraphs; ability to explain and argue a case, not just to assert or narrate.

**2. References and presentation (20%)**

Correctly presented bibliography and footnotes; spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

*Note: This grid is intended to give general indications rather than precise judgements.*

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory/ Fair	Just Adequate	Inadequate
Subject-matter						
Organization/ argumentation						
References						
Presentation						

**Comments:**

**Mark: %**

**Class:**

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**Marking Grid for Second-Year, Third-Year, and MA Essays/Assignments**

**Module Code:**

**Name of Lecturer:**

**Student Name/Number:**

**Essay/Assignment Title:**

*Note: This grid is intended to give general indications rather than precise judgements.*

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory/ Fair	Just Adequate	Inadequate
Focus on the topic (relevance)						
Organization (coherent overall structure; clear opening and concluding statements; logical flow between and within paragraphs)						
Argumentation and critical analysis (ability to make a case for a position through argument; ability to explain and not just assert or narrate)						
Understanding of subject-matter (grasp of concepts and issues central to the topic)						
Knowledge of primary material						
Knowledge of secondary material						
Quality of writing						
Presentation (formatting, footnotes, and bibliography)						

**Comments:**

**Mark: %**

**Class:**