

Marking, moderation, and feedback – how it works

One of the things that concerns students is how their work is marked and how they should interpret the feedback they get with their grade. This guide describes how we go about ensuring marking is as fair and consistent as possible and explains how to make the most of the feedback you get.

Marking Teams

To make sure that you receive prompt feedback on your work, an assignment is usually marked by several people, each taking a random subset of the whole assignment. It takes between 30 minutes and an hour to mark and provide feedback on an assignment, depending on its length. With as many as 300 students on some modules, it would be impossible for a single marker to mark all students' work. Markers can usually mark no more than 60 students' work, so there may be a team of five or six people sharing the marking between them. This can still be a full-time job for two whole weeks, for all of them.

Pre-marking moderation

We carry out pre-marking moderation to ensure that all markers are as consistent as possible in how they award grades. Pre-marking moderation involves the Lead Marker (who set the assignment) and the marking team each marking a randomly-selected subset of coursework, with full feedback and with guidance provided by the member of staff who set the question. Marking is undertaken with the Marking Criteria (as published in the handbook) in mind, and some assignment specific guidelines written by the Lead Marker. The team then meet to discuss how they marked the scripts and what they highlighted in feedback. The Lead Marker can determine whether the criteria applied by each marker are consistent and adjust these if necessary and ensure that grades are fair. Meeting like this allows the team to agree collectively on a common approach to marking the scripts. The markers then continue to mark the rest of the scripts that they have been allocated.

Statistical Moderation

Following marking the marks from all markers are subject to statistical moderation. This means that the module leader checks that all markers have marked consistently so that no marker is harder or more lenient than any other. Markers are randomly assigned scripts too so that, over the year, students will have their work marked by several markers. Grades and your degree average definitely do not depend on the marker you are allocated to.

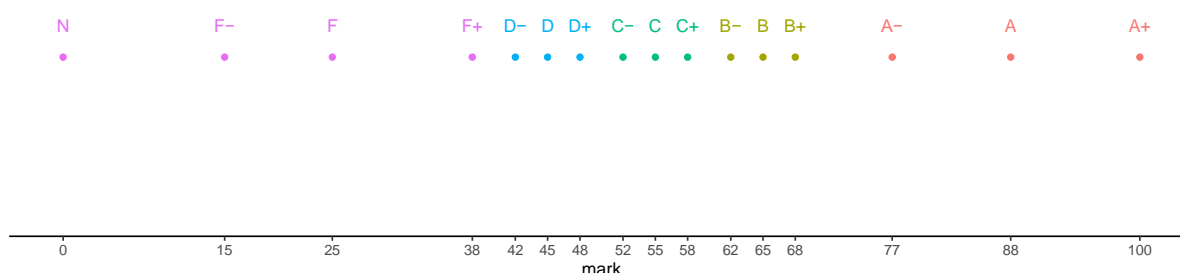
Marking Scheme

Unlike A-level marking, we do not award marks for work that includes particular points or phrases. The grade awarded is holistic in that **it reflects the entire assignment**. That means that no particular item, such as an argument or theory or piece of evidence, has an overwhelming effect on the mark. Instead it is the overall sum of these elements, plus how the assignment is put together, that determine a grade that best represents the overall quality of the submission. You do not lose a set number of marks for making minor mistakes with grammar or referencing, although poor writing or referencing throughout the work will lead the marker to award a lower overall grade.

We use a categorical marking scale, with A grades reflecting excellently structured arguments that present the appropriate material clearly and accurately; B grades reflecting good accurate work that

follows the taught content closely; C grades reflecting more descriptive work that may have superfluous or missing detail; D grades reflecting work that demonstrates understanding but also contains errors and omissions. All of these grades mean that the student has met the learning objectives of the module. If they have not done so, they will receive an F grade.

Within these five broad categories, work can receive a + if it is particularly good and almost in the higher category, or a – if it is not as good as others within the category. These fifteen categorical grades are converted into a numerical mark on a 100 point scale to be combined with other marks, and this is what you will see on your transcript. The conversion table is in the handbook, but you should note that it is not linear – the A grades are stretched out higher and the F grades stretched out lower than the B, C and D grades:



It is important to remember that we do not add up individual marks and then convert it into a letter; we award a letter and then convert it into the numerical mark. The larger distances between the A grades does not make them harder to achieve, but it does make them worth more. To get a first class mark on an exam with two questions, you need an average of 70 or above, so A- & B, or A & C-, or A+ & D- all get a First overall.

Penalties

All work is marked on its merits, and markers do not apply any penalties during marking. If a submission has not met the guidelines then penalties may be applied *after* marking. This means that your feedback will reflect the mark you would have received, if the work had met the guidelines. Penalties to reduce your mark are only applied if work is not submitted in the correct format, or if it exceeds the page limits specified. In the case of late submissions, the penalties are applied by the Faculty after the school has marked your work, and we have no control over this: the original mark will be capped at 40 if the work was up to 24 hours late (even if you began to upload it before the deadline, but the upload finished after it); you will receive a zero if it was more than 24 hours late. If an academic offence, such as plagiarism or collusion, is suspected, your work will not be returned until the academic offences procedure has been applied. This involves a committee of academics from other schools reviewing your work, and can take some time.

Remarking

Students cannot ask for work to be re-marked simply because they question the marker's academic judgement, or are disappointed with their mark. If a *clerical* error (such as entering an incorrect grade, or entering a zero for non-submission when work was submitted) has been made then the mark can be corrected provided we are made aware of the problem before marks are confirmed at the assessment panel which takes place at the end of the academic year. If you have a question about a grade you have been awarded, in the first instance contact the module leader to discuss it (e.g. during their office hours). It would be helpful to bring a copy of the work and feedback you have received, and to highlight any areas of concern. In most cases the module leader will be able to

explain the mark awarded or, where an error has occurred, correct the mark immediately. You can also ask your personal tutor to look over your work, although they may have less knowledge of any particular assignment and will only be able to comment on general aspects of your work.

External Examiners

Finally, once all marking for the semester has been completed, examples of our marking and feedback are assessed by **External Examiners**. These are experts in psychology from other universities who are employed to act as a quality check on our procedures and how they are applied. External examination ensures that we at Plymouth are in line with other universities and that each assessed element of each of our modules is marked to a high standard. If they do not agree, then they can ask for all marks on a module to be changed, which is why we refer to marks as 'provisional' until the award board has met and confirmed our standards at the end of the academic year.

With these marking and feedback quality controls in place you can feel assured that your work is treated fairly and that you have many options available for improving it as you go through your degree.

Making the most of feedback

The coursework coversheets include a section in which you can write your reflections on your own work. Explain to the marker which aspects of your work you particularly want to get feedback on. Are you worried about your essay structure? Are you unsure about how you have set out results? Do you think you've strongly addressed the question? Tell the marker, so that they can address these questions in their feedback. Have a look at the grading criteria included in the stage handbook. Think about your work and how it corresponds to those criteria. Think too about any previous feedback you have had and whether you have taken heed of it in the writing of the work you are to submit.

You will receive three main types of feedback. The **general comments** on the coversheet are designed to give a brief, and holistic, summary of the strong and weak points of your work, and why it has received the grade that it has. These general comments reflect the specific notes and highlights in the text where an example has been highlighted. Please read the general comments with the specific annotations in mind, and vice versa, so that you can identify some of the elements that have contributed to the overall assessment and grade.

Annotations within your work are designed to highlight some specific examples. They are **not** exhaustive, which means that sometimes one instance of a particular aspect (such as good referencing) may be highlighted while another is not. The feedback you get within your script (i.e. the annotations and highlights of particular parts) is there to help you identify **SOME INSTANCES** of the things that the marker has identified as relevant to your mark. Your entire assignment is relevant, but there is no point highlighting all of it. Instead the markers must summarise their overall impression in the feedback at the front of your report, and in the grade awarded, and highlight **SOME** instances of errors, things that could be done differently to address an overall shortcoming or things that were done well. Two markers could mark your report and choose the same grade but choose different examples of things throughout the text to highlight, or different aspects to focus on in their summary feedback. This does not mean that they are marking 'inconsistently' but they are picking out different aspects of your work to give you feedback on.

Just because something is highlighted in your report and something similar is not highlighted in your friend's report, there is no reason to think that these differences in specific feedback are responsible for the differences in mark. The mark is determined holistically. The annotations are representative examples.

After all marking has been completed, the Lead Marker will provide a **generic feedback** document on the DLE which gives an overall summary of the quality of the work submitted by students, aspects that were done well and common mistakes or weaknesses. This document will also include a distribution of marks awarded across the whole assignment, so you can put your own mark into context.

Together these three forms of feedback are designed to help you understand how your mark was arrived at and some things you could keep in mind (both general and specific) when you write your next piece of work.

There is a fourth type of feedback that is also available to you. If you find that feedback notes are unclear, or you would like further clarification of them then you can meet the module leader to discuss your essay. To do this you should email them or drop in during their office hours. The module leader may be able to clarify for you directly how your mark was arrived at, or they may refer you on to the member of staff who set the question who could help you understand how the grade reflects the OVERALL quality of your work.

Remember too that the Teaching and Research Associates (TARAs) hold office hours in the Link building in which you can drop in to get further, one-to-one feedback to improve your future work.