MA Marking Criteria at a glance

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Class** | **Percentage**  **Range** | **Broad**  **Descriptor** | **Descriptive equivalent** |
| Distinction | 80 + | Outstanding | The below + outstanding in originality in ideas and/or argument, with exceptionally high level of conceptual ability and scholarship. Work in this range will be of publishable potential. |
| Distinction | 70-79 | Excellent | The below + evidence of critical understanding and engagement with relevant material, and of insights and independence of thought. |
| Merit | 60-69 | Good to very good | The below + analytically and theoretically clear, demonstrating a very good marshalling of relevant information. Clearly structured with good use of conclusion, though there may be some errors or flaws in the argument. Capacity of doing a PhD. |
| Pass | 50-59 | Passable to satisfactory | Interesting answer that is descriptively strong but with a level of analysis that is not as developed or coherent as the range above. Demonstration of some reflection on theoretical and empirical material, and use of knowledge is fairly good. Some factual errors, theoretical inconsistencies. |
| Marginal Fail | 40-49 | Inadequate | Anything less than the above, but some engagement with the question or topic. Displays inconsistencies in argument, unsubstantiated assertions, and/or patchy acquaintance with literature. Likely to include significant errors, omissions, misunderstandings. Marks in this range may be condoned. |
| Fail | 39 and less | Poor fail | Anything less than the above, with the essay or dissertation being inadequate in every respect, with pronounced errors and misunderstandings. Marks in this range may not be condoned. |

Marking Criteria in detail

Students will receive the written comments prepared by internal assessors on individual pieces of coursework, together with a percentage mark. These are provisional marks which will be moderated by an external examiner and require ratification by the Board of Examiners. The information below gives guidance on the general criteria used to assess submitted work. Specific assessment criteria relating to individual modules will be explained by the module tutor.

These guidelines are intended to spell out the criteria that are used to assess written work (usually essays and dissertations). Other assignments might have different criteria and learning outcomes and should be specified by the module convenor.

The criteria below show the features we expect to see in work of a given mark or grade. To achieve a given grade, students do not have to have met all the criteria listed; however, they must have demonstrated a preponderance of those qualities in their work. Although modes of assessment vary (essays, dissertations, other forms of written output) the principles by which markers arrive at their judgements remain the same. Below is a list of aspects of students’ work which may be taken into account during assessment, as appropriate:

• Relevance of material in the essay to the title of the assignment.

• Relevance to the content of the module.

• Understanding of issues or problems under discussion.

• Knowledge and understanding of relevant readings.

• Critical discussion of relevant readings.

• Use of suitable data.

• Clarity and depth in the analysis of theory, data and issues under discussion.

• Coherence of argument.

• Clarity and relevance of introduction and conclusion.

• Clarity and precision of expression.

• Use of appropriate and consistent conventions for referring to other people’s work.

• Clarity of presentation (layout, including use of paragraphs and tables, for example).

• Clarity of writing including grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence construction.

• Compliance with published regulations on the completion of assessed work by the coursework deadline.

**Criteria for the award of marks**

**At a glance**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Class** | **Percentage**  **Range** | **Broad**  **Descriptor** | **Descriptive equivalent (usually for essays and dissertations** |
| Distinction | 80 + | Outstanding | The below + outstanding in originality in ideas and/or argument, with exceptionally high level of conceptual ability and scholarship. Work in this range will be of publishable potential. |
| Distinction | 70-79 | Excellent | The below + evidence of critical understanding and engagement with relevant material, and of insights and independence of thought. |
| Merit | 60-69 | Good to very good | The below + analytically and theoretically clear, demonstrating a very good marshalling of relevant information. Clearly structured with good use of conclusion, though there may be some errors or flaws in the argument. Capacity of doing a PhD. |
| Pass | 50-59 | Passable to satisfactory | Interesting answer that is descriptively strong but with a level of analysis that is not as developed or coherent as the range above. Demonstration of some reflection on theoretical and empirical material, and use of knowledge is fairly good. Some factual errors, theoretical inconsistencies. |
| Marginal Fail | 40-49 | Inadequate | Anything less than the above, but some engagement with the question or topic. Displays inconsistencies in argument, unsubstantiated assertions, and/or patchy acquaintance with literature. Likely to include significant errors, omissions, misunderstandings. Marks in this range may be condoned. |
| Fail | 39 and less | Poor fail | Anything less than the above, with the essay or dissertation being inadequate in every respect, with pronounced errors and misunderstandings. Marks in this range may not be condoned. |

**DETAILS**

**80 + (Distinction)**

A piece of written work in the 80 + signals that it is a piece of outstanding quality, requiring an exceptionally high level of conceptual ability (for Master’s level work) and an extremely thorough and conscientious approach to study. Work in this range will be of publishable quality and undoubtedly demonstrate the capacity to proceed to a higher research degree. It is distinguished by:

**Argument**

* A very clearly expressed and convincing argument which is used to develop a highly coherent, original and logical framework within which to answer the question or address the topic.
* A thorough grounding of the above in existing theory and research
* A reasoned conclusion fully supported by the foregoing material.
* A capacity to relate the theoretical and empirical material consistently to the conceptual framework.
* Substantial evidence of independent research.
* The absence of irrelevant or extraneous material.

**Understanding**

• A thorough understanding of the topic and its implications.

• A very clear and consistent focus on the issues raised by the question/topic.

* Insightful understanding of theoretical literature, including the ability to identify points upon which to build as well as grasp and limitations

• An insightful argument showing strong signs of originality in ideas, argument and/or empirical research.

**Style**

• Excellent grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence construction.

• Thorough and consistent use of conventions in referring to other people’s work.

**Marks within this classification may vary due to–**

• An original capacity to develop arguments, ideas

* the extent to which empirical research has been conducted (in the case of dissertations)

• The depth and sophistication of the conceptual argument.

• The level of command of the theoretical and research literature.

**70 - 79 (Distinction)**

A piece of written work in the 70-79 range is one of exceptional quality, requiring a high level of conceptual ability and a thorough and conscientious approach to study. Work in this range will clearly demonstrate the capacity to proceed to a higher research degree. It is distinguished by:

**Argument**

* A clearly expressed and convincing argument which is used to develop a coherent and logical framework within which to answer the question or address the topic, and which is well grounded in existing theory and research, leading to a reasoned conclusion fully supported by the foregoing material.
* A capacity to relate consistently the theoretical and empirical material to the conceptual framework.
* Strong evidence of independent research.
* The absence of irrelevant or extraneous material.

**Understanding**

• A thorough understanding of the topic and its implications.

• A clear and consistent focus on the issues raised by the question/topic.

• An insightful argument showing signs of originality in ideas, argument and/or empirical research.

**Style**

• Good to very good grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence construction.

• Thorough and consistent use of conventions of referring to other people’s work.

**Marks within this classification may vary due to–**

• An original capacity to develop arguments beyond those available in the literature.

• The depth and sophistication of the conceptual argument.

• The level of command of the theoretical and research literature.

**60-69 (Merit)**

A piece of written work of a good to very good standard requiring clarity of thought and expression. It will display an ability to handle the relevant literature in an analytical manner. It will be more than a good description of the various theories and/or studies relevant to the question – it will demonstrate a marshalling of relevant information by means of analysis and interpretation. It will not necessarily have a watertight argument, but it will be clearly structured and its conclusions will not take the reader by surprise. Such a piece of work will generally show less independence of thought and mastery of detail that is required for a Distinction (mark of 70 or over). There may be some errors or misjudgements with regard to issues which are not central to the argument. Work in this range will normally demonstrate the capacity to proceed to a higher research degree.

It is distinguished by:

**Argument**

• A logical, coherent framework within which to answer the question or address the topic.

• An ability to organise the data in a way that provides a clear and logical answer to, or discussion of, the question/topic.

• A clearly expressed theme or argument developed from a critical consideration of relevant literature.

**Understanding**

• A good understanding of the topic and its implications.

• A good to very good familiarity with the relevant literature and empirical data.

* A good command of theory and some analytical depth.
* The avoidance of irrelevant or extraneous material.

• Evaluation of competing arguments.

• Conclusion supported by the body of the argument and evidence.

• Some evidence of independent research.

• Avoidance of unsubstantiated assertions.

**Style**

• Good grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence construction.

• Good use of conventions of referring to other people’s work

**Marks within this category may vary due to–**

• The clarity and cogency of the overall argument.

• The level of command with the relevant literature and data.

• The depth and coherence of the analysis.

**50-59 (Pass)**

A piece of written work of a passable to satisfactory standard. It will be descriptively strong. It is distinguished from the 60-69 piece by the level of analysis displayed and by the coherence with which the material is organised. There may be some significant errors, misjudgements or omissions of important details. A mark in this range would not normally demonstrate the capacity to proceed to a higher research degree. It is characterised by:

**Argument**

• An attempt to answer the question or address the topic.

• A conclusion not entirely supported by or relevant to the body of the essay.

• A failure to adequately organise an answer into a coherent whole.

**Understanding**

• A reasonable understanding of the topic and its implications.

• A level of empirical knowledge and relevant reading which demonstrates a conscientious attempt to tackle the question/topic.

• The use of some extraneous material.

• A failure to grasp at least some relevant points or address some relevant literature.

**Style**

* Adequate grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence construction.
* Referencing that is incomplete or fails to observe some conventions for referring to other people's work.

**Marks within this category may vary due to–**

• The level of empirical and theoretical knowledge displayed.

• The seriousness with which an attempt has been made to answer the question or address the topic.

• The number of major points that have been covered.

• The coherence of the essay.

• The degree of unsubstantiated assertion.

• Written style (grammar, spelling, punctuation and sentence construction).

**40- 49 (Fail - with the possibility of condonation in accordance with the Faculty regulations.)**

A piece of written work in this category shows signs of engagement with the question or topic, but has inadequacies for Master’s level work. It signals a failure to give sufficient thought to the work in hand, displaying inconsistent argument, unsubstantiated assertions, and a patchy acquaintance with the relevant literature. It may lack a convincing conclusion and it is likely to include significant errors, omissions and misunderstandings. It is characterised by:

**Argument**

• An ability to pick out some of the points required for a satisfactory argument

• A failure to order this material so as to provide an adequate answer to the question or problem addressed.

• Inadequate conclusion: it is either lacking or at odds with the rest of the essay or dissertation.

**Understanding**

* Some knowledge of appropriate empirical material.
* The use of irrelevant material.
* An inadequate familiarity with relevant literature.

**Style**

• Sub-standard grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence construction.

• Inadequate use of conventions of referring to other people’s work

**Marks within this category may vary due to–**

• The level of empirical knowledge displayed.

• The extent to which an effort has been made to answer the question or address the topic.

• Evidence of conscientious effort.

• The degree of unsubstantiated assertions.

• Written style (grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence construction).

**Marks below 40 (Fail - without possibility of condonation)**

Marks in the 30 - 39 range indicate that the piece of written work is inadequate in every respect with pronounced errors and misunderstandings. It is characterised by:

• Some empirical knowledge.

• Some evidence of study in the area concerned.

• An inability to develop any but the flimsiest answer to the question.

• Problematic conclusion.

**Low marks**

**Marks below 30 (Poor Fail)**

A mark below 30 means that the student has not given sufficient attention to study, has a lack of basic knowledge, and an inability to tackle the question or topic. It is characterised by –

• Inadequate knowledge of relevant literature.

• Inadequate understanding of relevant literature.

• No or totally flawed attempt to examine the issue(s) posed in the question.

• No or totally confused attempt to answer the question.

• Little or no structure in the presentation of argument.

• No, or irrelevant conclusion.

Marks of below 20% will be given to work demonstrating almost no knowledge or understanding of the literature and of the subject area. Any knowledge displayed will be completely misinterpreted.

Marks of below 10% will be given to work demonstrating almost complete incoherence and irrelevance.