

A Guide to Access to HE Grading

The specific requirements for the use of the grading model are highlighted in the QAA Grading Handbooks (Sections B & C).

QAA Grading Scheme Handbook Sections B and C

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/access-to-he/access-to-he-resources/access-to-he-grading-scheme>

What you need to know:

1. The Three Grading Standards (see QAA Grading Booklet B)

You should ALWAYS use ALL grading standards when assessing a piece of work. The three grading standards:

- Grading Standard 1: Knowledge and Understanding
- Grading Standard 2: Subject Specific Skills
- Grading Standard 3: Transferable Skills

All three grading standards must be used with every graded unit and across every assignment within a graded unit. For Grading Standard 3, a minimum of two of the three components must be chosen for each unit, and all three components must be used across the assessment of a Diploma.

Only when all assignments for an individual unit are assessed and all Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria for the unit have been met can grading take place.

2. Should I use every component and subcomponent within individual grading standards?

Each standard includes a set of component and subcomponent items which describe the types of performance expected within that standard.

Within the rules of the grading standard, select the most appropriate components and sub-components for the subject area and assessment method.

Whichever is selected for merit must also be chosen for distinction.

For all units irrespective of size, select a minimum of 2 and maximum of 4 of the most relevant sub-components in (b). Choices must be consistent across merit and distinction.	
Merit	Distinction
The student, student's work or performance:	The student, student's work or performance:
a. generally demonstrates an ability in selecting and using skills as required by the unit,	a. consistently demonstrates an ability in selecting and using skills as required by the unit,
with	with
b. very good levels of (choose from):	b. excellent levels of (choose from):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accuracy • precision • efficiency • creativity • innovation • reasoning • insight • focus • interpretation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accuracy • precision • efficiency • creativity • innovation • reasoning • insight • focus • interpretation
There is no grading standard for pass. Students achieve a pass by meeting the requirements of the learning outcomes of a unit.	

3. Can I inform learners about what I expect from a merit or distinction piece of work?

Yes absolutely. Additional guidance can help explain what would constitute a very good/excellent performance in a particular assessment. A student needs to know what is required to meet the expectations defined by the grading standards and selected subcomponents and the evidence they need to produce.

In providing grading information, tutors must not:

- embed the language of the grading standard components or sub-components within the task details of assignments
- change the grading standards in any way (other than through the selection or omission of individual components or sub-components for the assignment), nor attempt to rewrite them as grading criteria
- reword or change the punctuation of the components or sub-components from that of the current version provided by QAA
- provide step-by-step directions which may reduce the level of challenge of the assignment or expectations of autonomous working that are appropriate for study at pre-higher education level.

4. How do I grade the learner's work? (See QAA Booklet C)

Do not award an overall grade for an assignment. Only whole units attract an overall grade.

Grading can only occur once all unit assessments have been completed and all learning outcomes and assessment criteria across the unit have been achieved. Grading can not take place for individual assignments.

Decide, for each of the grading standards, whether the standard of a student's performance is better described by the distinction (D) or merit (M) statements or whether the work does not reach the standard described by the statement for either distinction (D) or merit (M) and therefore is at pass (P) standard.

When grading student work:

- Check that the student has met all assessment criteria and learning outcomes for the unit. Grading cannot take place where work is incomplete or learning outcomes have not yet been assessed.
- Read the Quick Guide on Submission, Resubmission and Referral for incomplete work.
- Refer to the QAA guidance given in Section B of the Grading Scheme Handbook for guidance on how to interpret the language in a grading standard
- Use professional judgement to make decisions about grade indicators, assessing the extent to which either the merit or distinction statements best describe the standard of work presented
- Give a Pass grade indicator where the learning outcomes for the unit have been met, but the work does not achieve the standard required for merit or distinction.

5. Can I give numerical marks and establish a grade from these?

No. Numerical marking is not permitted to award a grade. See the separate guidance on using the grading standards for units with fixed response assessments.

6. How do I get an overall grade for the unit?

A grade indicator (P, M or D) is given for each of the three grading standards. Grade indicators can only be P, M or D; no intermediate or modified grade indicators can be given.

Whether a unit has been assessed using a single or multiple assignments, grades should be recorded once for each grading standard for a unit. Together, these indicators create the unit grade profile. Each grade indicator has an equal value in the unit grade profile, and all are considered when determining the unit grade.

The final grade for the unit is calculated by establishing the midpoint of grades in the unit grade profile. This midpoint is apparent when all grade indicators in the unit grade profile are recorded sequentially from lowest to highest. Some examples are given below.

Unit Grade Profiles			Unit Grade
P	P	M	P
P	P	D	P
P	M	M	M
P	M	D	M
P	D	D	D
M	D	D	D

7. What are the common errors in grading?

To ensure that students receive the correct grade, remember the following:

- Award a grade profile to the WHOLE unit, not an individual assignment or every individual AC
- Use the guidance in Section 6 above to find the overall grade for a unit. Do not allocate a numerical value to grades achieved and then 'calculate' an overall grade
- Award an overall grade to a UNIT and not to individual assessments.
- Only grade when all assessment criteria and learning outcomes for the whole unit have been met
- Work submitted after the deadline, with no extension granted, and the learning outcomes and assessment criteria have been met, grade indicators for each grading standard must be capped at pass. For units with multiple assignments, if one assignment is submitted late, grade indicators for the whole unit are capped at pass.

Contact Details

If you are unsure or have a specific query, please email the support team at access@gatewayqualifications.org.uk.