



A Guide to Grade Descriptors

Grade Descriptor 1: Understanding of the Subject

Using this descriptor

Choose one or more of the components (choices must be consistent across merit and distinction).	
Merit	Distinction
<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. demonstrates a very good grasp of the relevant knowledge base b. is generally informed by the major conventions and practices of the area of study c. demonstrates very good understanding of the different perspectives or approaches associated with the area of study 	<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. demonstrates an excellent grasp of the relevant knowledge base b. is consistently informed by the major conventions and practices of the area of study c. demonstrates excellent understanding of the different perspectives or approaches associated with the area of study.
There is no grade descriptor for pass. Students achieve a pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit.	

Grade Descriptor 1: For this Grade Descriptor, the minimum choice is ONE of the components, which must match across Merit and Distinction. For example, if you select 'a' for Merit, then you must select 'a' for Distinction. Look carefully at the three components (a, b and c) and select the one or more that is most relevant to the assignment set.

For example: if the assignment requires an understanding of different perspectives or approaches or in a given subject area, then it could be appropriate to select component 'c'. Remember that this will then need to match across both Merit and Distinction. The way Grade Descriptor 1 is presented and worded in such an assignment brief could look like this:

Merit	Distinction
<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. demonstrates very good understanding of the different perspectives or approaches associated with the area of study 	<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. demonstrates excellent understanding of the different perspectives or approaches associated with the area of study.

PLEASE NOTE: The wording of the Grade Descriptor should not be altered in any way. It is perfectly acceptable to reproduce the wording of the selected component/s exactly as it appears in the Grade Descriptor table above. It is not acceptable to add, for example, exactly which perspectives or approaches should be included. However, if desired, the wording can be 'amplified' to contextualise it – for example, 'demonstrates very good understanding of the different perspectives or approaches associated with theories of leadership and management'. This rule with regard to wording applies across all seven Grade Descriptors.

Grade Descriptor 2: Application of Knowledge

Using this descriptor

<p>Choose one or more of the items in a, with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • either b • and/or one or more of the items in c (choices must be consistent across merit and distinction). 	
Merit	Distinction
<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>a. makes use of relevant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ideas • facts • theories • perspectives • models • concepts <p>with either</p> <p>b. breadth or depth that goes beyond the minimum required to Pass</p> <p>and/or</p> <p>c. very good levels of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consistency • precision • accuracy • insight • analysis • synthesis • creativity 	<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>a. makes use of relevant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ideas • facts • theories • perspectives • models • concepts <p>with both</p> <p>b. breadth and depth</p> <p>and/or</p> <p>c. excellent levels of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consistency • precision • accuracy • insight • analysis • synthesis • creativity
<p>There is no grade descriptor for pass. Students achieve a pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit.</p>	

Grade Descriptor 2: The use of this Grade Descriptor is slightly more complex than for Grade Descriptor 1. The requirement here is to use component 'a' across Merit and Distinction, selecting one or more of the bullet-pointed items or elements from the list for 'a'. These also need to match across Merit and Distinction.

It is then necessary to select either component 'b' or 'c' – or both if desired. Component 'b' has no items to select from, while component 'c' has bullet-pointed items to select from, as with component 'a'. Again, the selected components and elements must match across Merit and Distinction.

As with Grade Descriptor 1, the components and elements selected should be those which are most appropriate to the assignment.

An example of how Grade Descriptor 2 could be used in assessment of an essay examining a set of ideas, theories and perspectives (remember, this is just an example) is as follows:

Merit	Distinction
<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>a. makes use of relevant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ideas • theories • perspectives <p>with either</p> <p>b. breadth or depth that goes beyond the minimum required to Pass</p>	<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>a. makes use of relevant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ideas • theories • perspectives <p>with both</p> <p>b. breadth and depth</p>

Grade Descriptor 3: Application of Skills

Using this descriptor

<p>Choose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one or more of the items in a <p>and/or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one or more of the items in b, with any of the items in c <p>(Choices must be consistent across merit and distinction: where a and b are both used, the skills, techniques or methods applied in b must be those also selected in a.)</p>	
Merit	Distinction
<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>a. generally selects appropriate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skills • techniques • methods <p>and/or</p> <p>b. applies appropriate (selected or given)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skills • techniques • methods <p>with</p> <p>c. very good levels of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confidence • consistency • creativity • innovation • precision • accuracy • efficiency 	<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>a. consistently selects appropriate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skills • techniques • methods <p>and/or</p> <p>b. applies appropriate (selected or given)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skills • techniques • methods <p>with</p> <p>c. excellent levels of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confidence • consistency • creativity • innovation • precision • accuracy • efficiency
<p>There is no grade descriptor for pass. Students achieve a pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit.</p>	

Grade Descriptor 3: By looking at the examples given for how Grade Descriptors 1 and 2 can be used, it is easy to see how this Grade Descriptor should be made relevant to the assignment.

The box at the top of the table above functions as it does in every Grade Descriptor – it gives the rules for selecting components and items across Merit and Distinction. It is worth bearing in mind – and obvious when looking at this Grade Descriptor, that simply selecting all components and items as above is not time-saving! It will ultimately make assessment very difficult as there will be many components and items to grade against. In addition, some of these are very likely to be inappropriate for the assignment set – and so create confusion for learners and difficulty for assessors. Selecting **ONLY** the most appropriate items from each component will help make the grading process clear and well-defined for all those involved.

Grade Descriptor 4: Use of Information

Using this descriptor

Choose one or more components from the list a to f (choices must be consistent across merit and distinction.)	
Merit	Distinction
<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>a. identifies new information from sources which are generally appropriate</p> <p>b. makes some use of new information</p> <p>c. generally appraises the relevance and value of new information accurately</p> <p>d. shows a very good grasp of the meaning and significance of new information</p> <p>e. generally combines or synthesises information with outcomes that are accurate and appropriate</p> <p>In practice-based/practical work:</p> <p>f. is informed by research that draws on a range of sources and resources that goes beyond the minimum required to Pass</p>	<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>a. identifies new information from sources which are consistently appropriate</p> <p>b. makes extensive use of new information</p> <p>c. consistently appraises the relevance and value of new information accurately</p> <p>d. shows an excellent grasp of the meaning and significance of new information</p> <p>e. consistently combines or synthesises information with outcomes that are accurate, appropriate and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • succinct • innovative • creative <p>In practice-based/practical work:</p> <p>f. is informed by research that draws on an extensive range of sources and resources</p>
There is no grade descriptor for pass. Students achieve a pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit.	

Grade Descriptor 4: In the case of this Grade Descriptor, it is easy to see how component 'f' is relevant only to practice-based or practical work. This emphasises the importance of making sure selections are as relevant to the assignment as possible.

Grade Descriptor 5: Communication and Presentation

Using this descriptor

Choose one or more of the listed items (choices must be consistent across merit and distinction.)	
Merit	Distinction
<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>shows very good command of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • format • structure • use of images • language (including technical or specialist language) • syntax • register • spelling • punctuation • referencing 	<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>shows excellent command of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • format • structure • use of images • language (including technical or specialist language) • syntax • register • spelling • punctuation • referencing
There is no grade descriptor for pass. Students achieve a pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit.	

Grade Descriptor 5: There is just one component to this Grade Descriptor, with a list of items to choose from. Remember, it is essential that items match across Merit and Distinction – i.e. if structure and use of images are selected for Merit, then structure and use of images must also be selected for Distinction.

Again, it is important to consider what the demands of the assignment are, and which items are most suited for use in grading learners' work effectively.

Grade Descriptor 6: Autonomy and/or Independence

Using this descriptor

Choose one or more components from the list a to e (choices must be consistent across merit and distinction.)	
Merit	Distinction
<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. makes generally sound judgements about how to complete work b. in most cases takes opportunities to initiate appropriate actions c. specifies problems for completing work and promptly seeks clarification and/or guidance d. responds promptly and effectively to guidance e. demonstrates very good time management 	<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. makes consistently sound judgements about how to complete work b. nearly always takes opportunities to initiate appropriate actions c. specifies problems for completing work and independently generates and pursues solutions d. works effectively with a high level of independence e. demonstrates excellent time management
There is no grade descriptor for pass. Students achieve a pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit.	

Grade Descriptor 6: For this Grade Descriptor there are five components to choose from (a to e) and one or more can be chosen. The wording of some of the components in this Grade Descriptor is quite different in Merit and Distinction, but it is important to remember that if, for example, 'c' is specified for Merit, then 'c' must be selected for Distinction – and that the wording must be reproduced in the assignment exactly as it is in the table above.

Grade Descriptor 7: Quality

Using this descriptor

Choose one or more components from the list a to c (choices must be consistent across merit and distinction.)	
Merit	Distinction
<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>a. is structured in a way that is generally logical and fluent</p> <p>b. puts forward arguments or ideas which are generally unambiguous but which are in a minor way limited or incomplete</p> <p>c. taken as a whole, demonstrates a very good response to the demands of the brief/assignment</p>	<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>a. is structured in a way that is consistently logical and fluent</p> <p>b. puts forward arguments or ideas which are consistently unambiguous and cogent</p> <p>c. taken as a whole, demonstrates an excellent response to the demands of the brief/assignment</p>
There is no grade descriptor for pass. Students achieve a pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit.	

Grade Descriptor 7: This is the Grade Descriptor that is used in EVERY assignment. The rules for selecting components are outlined in the box at the top of the table, as for all the other Grade Descriptors.

PLEASE NOTE: Grade Descriptor 7 must be used in every assignment, no matter how many assignments there are in a single unit. In this respect, Grade Descriptor 7 differs from all the other Grade Descriptors.

If, for example, a unit specifies the use of GD1, GD4 and GD7 – and the unit is assessed via two separate assignments, it might be that GD1 is used in Assignment 1, but not in Assignment 2, where GD4 is used. However, GD7 must be used in both assignments.

This is because Grade Descriptor 7 is used to grade the quality of the work the learner produces for every assignment and, in cases of split grade profiles, is the deciding Grade Descriptor. In applying this Grade Descriptor, it is important to consider, for example, aspects including the word count specified in the assignment brief, and how well the learner has completed the work within that boundary – and in relation to whichever component above has been selected.

When selecting components and items for any of the Grade Descriptors, it should be remembered that learners will place great reliance upon the guidance given in the wording of the Grade Descriptors in assignment briefs. Taking the time to choose these well when writing assignment briefs is essential in creating assessments that can be effectively and accurately graded – and help give learners the greatest opportunity to achieve their maximum potential.

If you are still unsure or have a specific query, please contact the support team by emailing quality@gatewayqualifications.org.uk.