

A Guide to Assessment and Grading Without Numerical Marking

What you need to know:

1. Numerical marking is not permitted in Access to HE

As numerical marking is not permitted, student work cannot attract a numerical mark for an assessment and be converted into a grade. The three grading standards must be used to assess student performance for a graded unit, no matter the subject area or method of assessment.

2. How to assess and grade work which involves answers to numerical calculations that are either right or wrong?

Where Assessment Criteria (ACs) require students to demonstrate how to carry out a specified type of calculation, providing an assessment with more than one opportunity to do that calculation is a good idea. If the student does not demonstrate that they can carry out the calculation successfully, a resubmission opportunity would be given, in line with the usual regulations.

The rules of the three grading standards should be used to select components and subcomponents relevant to the unit and method of assessment.

3. Using grading standards for fixed response assessments

Grading Standard 1: Knowledge and Understanding

Grading standard 1 has two components (a and b), both of which must be applied to a graded unit and match across merit and distinction. The number of subcomponents to select for component 'b' will be determined by whether a 3- 6- or 9-credit unit is being used. Below is an example of how the grading standard might be applied to a calculation-based unit:

Merit	Distinction
The student, student's work or performance:	The student, student's work or performance:
a. generally demonstrates the ability to apply knowledge appropriately in a given context showing breadth OR depth of knowledge in responding to the demands of the unit,	a. consistently demonstrates the ability to apply knowledge appropriately in a given context showing breadth OR depth of knowledge in responding to the demands of the unit,
with	with
b. a very good understanding and use of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concepts • methods • principles 	b. an excellent understanding and use of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concepts • methods • principles
There is no grading standard for pass. Students achieve a pass by meeting the requirements of the learning outcomes of a unit.	

Rather than using a numerical mark to determine whether the student has demonstrated a very good or excellent understanding and grasp of the relevant knowledge, the decision should be based on a more holistic view of the assessment. This could take into consideration selecting and applying the appropriate methods to explore problems, making few errors and demonstrating an understanding of the principles of the subject. Consideration of workings or whether solutions were mostly correct/accurate or all/almost all correct/accurate.

Grading and demonstration of meeting requirements must not be applied to ACs individually but to **the unit as a whole**. It is essential that this is not based on a numerical calculation written in any way on the assessment. Tutors are advised to carry out standardisation activities to help them become familiar and confident with this way of grading fixed-response assessments.

Grading Standard 2: Subject Specific Skills

The guidance at the top of the table for this grading standard gives the rules for selecting components and subcomponents across merit and distinction. When looking at this grading standard, it is worth noting that choosing all subcomponents is not time-saving. It will ultimately make assessment very difficult as there will be many subcomponents against which to grade. In addition, some of these are very likely inappropriate for the assignment set, creating confusion for students and difficulty for assessors.

Selecting **ONLY** the most appropriate subcomponents will help make the grading process clear and well-defined for everyone involved. For calculation-based units, grading standard 2 could look like this for example:

Merit The student, student's work or performance:	Distinction The student, student's work or performance:
a. generally demonstrates an ability in selecting and using skills as required by the unit, with b. very good levels of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accuracy • precision • efficiency 	a. consistently demonstrates an ability in selecting and using skills as required by the unit, with b. excellent levels of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accuracy • precision • efficiency
There is no grading standard for pass. Students achieve a pass by meeting the requirements of the learning outcomes of a unit.	

As with grading standard 1, grading here could take into account how the calculation was solved, for example, with the consideration of workings, then consider issues of efficiency, precision and accuracy – again, by **making a judgement holistically across the whole unit**, without relying upon the use of numerical marking.

Grading Standard 3: Transferable Skills

The rules at the top of grading standard 3 determine the selection of components and subcomponents. These can then be applied appropriately to the subject area and assessment method. Below is an example of how the grading standard might look for a calculation-based unit:

Merit The student, student's work or performance:	Distinction The student, student's work or performance:
a. demonstrates very good communication and/or presentation skills evidenced by the use and/or selection of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structure • syntax • imagery • number c. generally adheres to academic and/or professional conventions in use of technical/specialist language and/or format in responding to the instructions set out in the assignment brief.	a. demonstrates excellent communication and/or presentation skills evidenced by the use and/or selection of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structure • syntax • imagery • number c. consistently adheres to academic and/or professional conventions in use of technical/specialist language and/or format in responding to the instructions set out in the assignment brief.
There is no grading standard for pass. Students achieve a pass by meeting the requirements of the learning outcomes of a unit.	

As with the two previous grading standards, grading here could consider how the calculation was solved. For example, with the consideration of workings and explanations being logical and clear, showing correct mathematical syntax, the use of relevant diagrams and the presentation of the work is clear – again, by **making a judgement holistically across the whole unit**, without relying upon the use of numerical marking.

4. 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 one 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	D	M
P	D	D	D
M	D	D	D

5. 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.