

## Tutors' quick guide to grading

### 1 Who is the guide for?

This practical guide is for anyone working as a tutor on an Access to HE Diploma course. It explains the key features of the method used for grading the Access to HE Diploma. It will serve as a quick introduction for tutors who are new to Access to HE, and provide a reminder for those who have already had some staff training or development on the grading system.

### 2 Does this guide provide all the information a tutor needs about grading?

The guide summarises QAA's *Grades and the Access to HE Diploma: implementation handbook (Grading implementation handbook)*. Although it covers most of the essential, practical information that tutors need in order to include grading in their assessment of Access to HE units, for more detailed guidance, tutors should refer to the relevant parts of the full *Grading implementation handbook*, as indicated by the references given here. In particular, tutors will need to have a copy of Part C, which contains full details of the grade descriptors. All parts of the Grading implementation handbook can be downloaded from the Access to HE website ([www.accesstohe.ac.uk/avas](http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/avas)).

### 3 What are the key features of the grading framework? (refer to Part B)

- All level 3 units are graded. Level 2 units are not graded.
- The grades available are Pass, Merit or Distinction.
- There are seven grade descriptors. Refer to Part C of the *Grading implementation handbook* for full details about how these are used for grading all units:
  - 1 Understanding of the subject
  - 2 Application of knowledge
  - 3 Application of skills
  - 4 Use of information
  - 5 Communication and presentation
  - 6 Autonomy/Independence
  - 7 Quality.
- Appropriate combinations of grade descriptors have been assigned to all existing units by Access Validating Agencies (AVAs), and will be assigned to new units when they are validated. This information is part of the unit specification.
- Grade descriptor 7 (Quality) is used for all units.
- The grade descriptors, in appropriate combinations, can be used with units in **all subjects** and can be used with **any of the assessment methods** that tutors commonly use.
- The grade descriptors contain statements that describe the standard of performance at Merit and Distinction. The learning outcomes of the unit define the standard for Pass.
- A student's work must reach the standard needed to Pass (that is, all the learning outcomes must be achieved) before it can be considered for grading.
- Each grade descriptor is made up of a set of related 'components'. These components describe different aspects of the performance associated with a descriptor for both Merit and Distinction. Tutors decide which components to use from the descriptors assigned to a unit.
- The grading process generates a grade indicator for each of the grade descriptors used in each assignment, on the basis of which a decision about the final grade for a unit is made. Each unit is given an overall grade in this way: assignments are not given overall grades.

## 4 How is the grading framework used in assessment? (refer to Part E)

There are **six steps** tutors should take to incorporate grading.

### Step 1

**Check that you know what grade descriptors have been assigned to the unit.**

Access to HE programme coordinators or leaders will have this information, or will be able to obtain it from the AVA. (It should be included in all current versions of the unit specification.)

### Step 2

**For each unit, decide how to use the grade descriptors and grade components in the assessment plan (that is, all the separate assignments) for the unit.**

To do this, you need to review the unit's assessment plan. It may be based on one or more assignments, and should ensure that there are opportunities for students to achieve all the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the unit by completing the assignment(s) to the standard required. Each learning outcome is assessed formally only once in a unit.

There are a few rules about how this step works. You need to make sure that:

- **all** the grade descriptors **assigned to** a unit **are used** in the grading of that unit
- where more than one assignment is used, the assigned grade descriptors are allocated appropriately **across** the assignments. Remember that grade descriptors may be used more than once in a unit, but do not all have to be used in all assignments (see example A, below)
- grade descriptor 7 (Quality) is used for **all assignments**.

Grade descriptor	Assignment 1	Assignment 2
1	✓	✓
2		✓
5		✓
7	✓	✓

**Example A: unit grading plan for a unit using grade descriptors 1, 2, 5 and 7.**

Then choose which components of the grade descriptors are most appropriate for the subject of the unit and the assessment method, following the rules about using the components that are given with the details of each grade descriptor (see Part C). The components available reflect different emphases on types of performance associated with different subjects, so you should consider your choice of components carefully.

### Step 3

**Incorporate information about grading into assignment information.**

Assignment briefs should provide all the information that students need so that they know what they have to do to meet the standard defined by the grade descriptors and grade components. Assignment briefs therefore need to include, in whatever way is appropriate:

- the grade descriptors and grade components being applied and, as appropriate, what they mean for student work in relation to the particular assignment
- space for feedback to the student both about the achievement of the assessment criteria and learning outcomes and their performance in relation to grading. This should be specific feedback that will help a student improve their performance in future work.

Don't forget to make sure that your assessment plan and assignment information are internally moderated.

## Step 4

### Assess and grade completed student work, and record the grades achieved.

Assess student work in the normal way, making sure that you only consider the work for grading once you have confirmed that the student has achieved all learning outcomes and assessment criteria covered by the particular assignment.

When grading student work, make sure that:

- decisions about the grades a student has achieved are based only on consideration of the grade descriptors, and not influenced by any other aspect of the work
- you use your professional judgement to make decisions about grades, assessing the extent to which either the Merit or Distinction statement for each grade descriptor best describes the standard of work presented by a student. Where the work against any grade descriptor is judged not to achieve the standard required for Merit (but the learning outcomes for the assignment have been met) the grade indicated for that descriptor is Pass
- you refer to the guidance given in Part E if you are uncertain about how to interpret the language in a grade descriptor
- grading decisions are recorded as grade indicators, which together comprise a profile of grades for a complete unit (see example B, below). Assignments are not given overall grades
- the grade indicators are recorded only as Pass, Merit or Distinction (combined or intermediate grades, such as Pass/Merit or Merit+) are not used
- numerical marks are not used except in the circumstances detailed in Part F, Annex 1, with the outcomes of the assessment recorded as one of the three grades. Grades are never given as numbers.

Grade descriptor	Assignment 1	Assignment 2
1	P	M
2		M
5		P
7	P	M

**Example B: a grade profile for one unit for one student.** (For more examples, see Part G, Annex 1)

## Step 5

### Provide feedback to students about their grades and their general performance

So that students understand the reasons for the grades given for their work, and know what to do to improve their performance, you should observe the usual principles of good practice in providing feedback, which are that feedback should:

- be prompt
- use clear language and reflect the language of the assessment criteria and grade descriptors
- contribute to a student's continuing development, by identifying what a student could have done, and therefore might do in the future, to improve their performance.

## Step 6

### Determine and record the final grade for the unit (refer to Part F)

As assessed work is successfully completed and graded, tutors should record grade indicators in a way that creates a unit profile. This might be in the same way as in example B, but could be done in other ways that are appropriate to the centre's overall systems for recording assessment decisions. In creating a unit profile, neither grade descriptors nor assignments are weighted. All grade descriptors and therefore grade indicators have equal value.

The final grade for a unit is established by reviewing all the grade indicators in the unit grade profile, ordering them from Pass to Distinction, and identifying the midpoint grade. (For example, if the grade indicators are MMDDD, the unit grade is D.) Where no midpoint grade is clear (as in example B, where the number of Ps and Ms is the same), the final decision is based on the tutor's professional judgement about the overall standard of the work presented. The grade indicator(s) given for grade descriptor 7 (Quality) is/are given particular consideration in making this judgement, as well as the details of the feedback to the student about their performance in relation to grading. Reasons for the judgement about the final unit grade should be clearly recorded and provided to students.

## 5 How many times can work be submitted for assessment and grading? (refer to Part I)

If a student's assignment **does not meet** at the first attempt one or more of the learning outcomes, the student is given one opportunity for resubmission. In these circumstances, the tutor must:

- give feedback to the student about why the learning outcomes have not been achieved (but not provide information specific to graded performance: the purpose of resubmission is only to provide the opportunity for a student to meet the learning outcomes, so that the work will be eligible for grading, **not to improve their grades**)
- identify the most appropriate type of resubmission, particularly taking into account the particular learning outcomes in which the original work was inadequate
- agree the earliest possible deadline for resubmission with the student, so that, wherever possible, all resubmissions are complete before the final awards board
- explain clearly to students the extent and type of resubmission required (this may range from the addition of small amounts of information to a full reworking of the assignment)
- use the same assessment method for the resubmitted work as for the original, unless this is impracticable or gives the student an undue advantage (for example, by repeating the original test paper).

Work resubmitted in this way, if it reaches the standard required for Pass, is eligible for grading. If the work does not achieve Pass at this second attempt, the matter may be referred to the awards board, but a further submission is only possible with the awards board's approval.

If a student's assignment **does meet** all the learning outcomes, grades are given as described and the work may not be resubmitted. (Refer to Part I for guidance about representations.)

## 6 Is student work submitted late eligible for grading? (refer to Part I)

If the student has informed the tutor and agreed a deferred submission date, or has acceptable mitigating circumstances, the work may be graded. If the work is late under any other circumstance, the work may be assessed, but it is not eligible for grading (that is, the only grade that can be given is Pass).

## 7 Can a student submit a draft assignment? (refer to Part I)

Yes, but only for specific assignments where the tutor decides that it is appropriate for students to have the opportunity to submit a draft for comment. This opportunity is made clear to all students in advance. Any feedback can only be general guidance about the work in relation to the assessment criteria, and must not include predicted grade indicators.



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