

Tutors' Quick Guide to Grading

September 2023

Applicable to new students registering from 1 August 2024

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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 training or development on the Grading Scheme.

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

The guide summarises QAA's *Grading Scheme 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 handbook, as indicated by the references given throughout this document. In particular, tutors will need to have a copy of Section B, which contains full details of the grading standards.

All parts of the *Grading Scheme Handbook* are available from the [Access to HE resources](#) page of the QAA website.

3 What are the key features of the Grading Scheme?

(See Section A)

- 45 credits are achieved at Level 3 from graded academic units and the remaining 15 credits are achieved at Level 2 or Level 3 from units which are ungraded.
- A student's work must reach the standard needed to pass (that is, all the learning outcomes of a unit must be achieved) in order for credit to be awarded and before it can be considered for grading.
- Within each unit, there must be only one formal opportunity for the assessment of each learning outcome, irrespective of the number of assessment pieces. In other words, each learning outcome must only be assessed once within a unit, irrespective of how many pieces of assessment there are.
- The grades available are Pass, Merit or Distinction.
- There are three grading standards:
 - Grading Standard 1: Knowledge and Understanding
 - Grading Standard 2: Subject Specific Skills
 - Grading Standard 3: Transferable Skills

(Refer to Section B of the Grading Scheme Handbook for full details about how these are used for grading units.)

Each of the three grading standards includes a set of more detailed component items which describe types of performance associated with the standard (see Section B). For each component there are parallel statements at Merit and Distinction, which describe increasingly demanding standards of achievement. (The Distinction grade does not introduce new or 'higher level' capabilities or skills compared with Merit.) When tutors use the standards for the grading of a particular unit, they select the most appropriate sub-components of the standards. In the case of Grading Standard 3 (Transferable Skills), tutors also choose **at least two out of the three components**, before selecting the relevant sub-components.

This allows the generic framework to be tailored to the specific nature of different subjects.

- All three grading standards are used with every graded unit and across every assignment within a graded unit.
- In units with more than one assignment, it is not permissible to award a grade to each assignment; grading takes place at the level of the unit only.
- In units with more than one assignment, it is not permissible to use individual assignments to grade individual grading standards (for example, assignment 1 cannot be used to grade only Knowledge and Understanding, with assignment 2 used to grade both Subject Specific Skills and Transferable Skills).
- The choice of sub-components at unit level is normally made during the construction of the unit assessment plan and should be appropriate to cover the range of individual assignments. Therefore, the sub-components are not assigned when a unit is validated.
- Only when all assignments for an individual unit are assessed and the tutor has determined that the student has met all the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria for all unit assignments (and therefore has passed the unit) will grading of the unit take place. Grades for individual assignments must not be awarded.
- A grade indicator for each grading standard is awarded at Pass, Merit or Distinction. The tutor will review all assignments associated with the individual unit and determine if the student has demonstrated the standard for the grades of Merit or Distinction or whether the outcome remains as a Pass.
- The tutor must record in writing their justification for the grade indicator awarded for each grading standard.
- The tutor reviews the three grade indicators that have been awarded for the unit and determines the overall grade for the unit, using a standard method, which is detailed in Annex C2, Table 1. The overall grade is a recommendation to the Awards Board, where it will be considered and confirmed by the Board.
- For Grading Standard 3 (Transferable Skills), there is a choice of three components with a requirement that a minimum of two components are to be selected for all graded units (irrespective of size of unit) and that all three components must be used at least once in the grading of units across the Diploma. AVAs will need to have processes in place, at the level of the student, to ensure that all three components have been utilised.
- The *Grading Scheme Handbook* provides a full specification of the quality requirements that relate to each stage of the grading process. A summary overview of the process and the requirements at each stage is provided on page 8.

4 How is the Grading Scheme used in assessment?

(See Sections B and C)

There are five **steps** that you, as a tutor, should take to grade student work.

Step 1

For each unit, decide how to use the sub-components of the grading standards - that is, across the assignment or assignments for the unit. For Grading Standard 3 (Transferable Skills), you should also check which components (a, b, c) are being used as well as the sub-components.

To do this, you need to review the unit's assessment plan. The plan may be based on one or more assignments, and must 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. Within the assessment plan, there must be only one formal opportunity for the assessment of each learning outcome.

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

- you use all three grading standards in the grading of that unit
- where you use more than one assignment to assess a unit, you allocate the assigned sub-components of each of the grading standards appropriately across the assignments; you may use the assigned sub-components more than once in a unit, but you do not have to use all of them in all assignments
- for Grading Standard 3 (Transferable Skills), you must use a minimum of two out of the three components for each unit, but need to ensure that all three components are used across the assessment of the Diploma
- for Grading Standard 3 (Transferable Skills), whichever **components** you use for the unit, these must be applied across all the assignments for that unit, but you are able to tailor the choice of sub-components to individual assignments.

You must choose which sub-components of the grading standards are most appropriate for the subject of the assessment, following the rules about using the sub-components that are given with the details of each grading standard (see Section B). The sub-components available to you describe different aspects of performance associated with different subjects, so you should consider your choice of sub-components carefully, including, if there is more than one assignment, which sub-components to use for each assignment (remembering that different components from the same grading standard may be used for different assignments).

Step 2

Incorporate information about grading into assignment information.

Assignment briefs must provide all the information that students need, so that they know what they have to do to meet the standard defined by the grading standards and the selected sub-components.

Your assignment briefs therefore need to include, in whatever way is appropriate:

- the grading standard sub-components you have applied and, for Grading Standard 3, the components and sub-components you have applied, and, as appropriate, what they mean for student work in relation to the particular assignment
- for individual assignments in multi-part assignment units, space for your feedback to the student about their achievement of the assessment criteria and learning outcomes; this should be specific feedback that will help a student improve their performance in future work
- at the unit level, space for your feedback to the student - both about their 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.

Step 3

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

Assess student work in the normal way, making sure that you have confirmed that the student has achieved all the learning outcomes and assessment criteria covered by the particular assignment before you consider the work for grading (if the unit is assessed by one single assignment) or wait until all assignments have been successfully completed before considering all the work for grading (if there are multiple assignments for the unit).

When grading student work, make sure that you:

- refer to the guidance given in Section B of the *Grading Scheme Handbook* if you are uncertain about how to interpret the language in a grading standard
- use your professional judgement to make decisions about grade indicators, assessing the extent to which either the Merit or Distinction statements used for each grading standard best describe the standard of work presented by the student; your decisions must be based only on this, and must not be influenced by any other aspect of the work
- give a Pass grade indicator where you judge that the learning outcomes for the assignment have been met, but the work does not achieve the standard required for Merit or Distinction
- record your grading decisions as grade indicators for each of the three grading standards, which together will create a profile of grades for a complete unit; the overall grade for the unit will be determined using the median of the three grade indicators - a copy of Annex C2 from Section C of the *Grading Scheme Handbook* which provides all the permutations possible to determine the unit grade is included at the end of this document for ease of reference
- record the grade indicators only as Pass, Merit or Distinction (you must never use combined or intermediate grades, such as Pass/Merit or Merit+)
- only use Pass, Merit or Distinction when marking; the use of numerical marks is not permitted on QAA-recognised Access to HE Diplomas
- do not provide grade indicators to students for individual units until all assignments for a unit are successfully completed.

Step 4

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. Your feedback should:

- make it clear to students how your judgements about their work relate to the grading requirements by ensuring that you incorporate the language of the grading standards (although if this relationship was clear in the assignment information, it does not have to be repeated here)
- be consistent with the level of difficulty described by the grading standards (for example, do not say work which has been graded mainly at Merit is excellent)
- contribute to a student's continuing development, by identifying what the student could have done, and therefore might do in the future, to improve their performance.

Step 5

Determine and record the final grade for the unit (see Section C).

As assessed work for each unit is successfully completed and graded, you should record grade indicators in a way that creates a unit profile. In creating a unit profile, all grading standards, and therefore grade indicators, have equal value (that is, you must not attach a weighting to any of the three grading standards).

Once a unit grade profile is complete, establish the final grade for the unit by reviewing all the grade indicators in the profile, ordering them from Pass to Distinction, and identifying the mid-point grade. A copy of Annex C2 from Section C of the *Grading Scheme Handbook which provides all the permutations possible to determine the unit grade* is included at the end of this document for ease of reference.

Your reasons for the judgement about the final unit grade must be clearly recorded and provided to students.

5 How many times can work be submitted for assessment and grading?

(See Sections C and E)

If a student's work meets all the learning outcomes covered by an assignment, you should grade it in the usual way, and it is not eligible for resubmission.

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

- give feedback to the student about why the learning outcome(s) have not been achieved, but not provide information specific to potential grades. (The purpose of resubmission is to provide the opportunity for a student to meet the learning outcomes, so that the work will be eligible as evidence for grading of the unit; it is not an

opportunity for students to amend work to achieve a higher grade)

- identify the most appropriate type of resubmission, taking into account the particular learning outcomes in which the original work was inadequate
- 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)
- set the earliest possible deadline for resubmission (taking into account the amount of work needed) with the student, so that, wherever possible, all resubmissions are completed and assessed before the Awards Board
- 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 to be used as evidence for grading the unit.

If the work does not achieve Pass at this second attempt, a further opportunity is only possible if the matter is referred to the Awards Board for approval. There are specific requirements associated with the process of referral which you must observe.

6 Can a student submit a draft assignment?

(See Section C)

Yes, but only for specific assignments where you have decided that it is appropriate for students to have the opportunity to submit a draft for comment, and this must be made clear to all students in advance. Any feedback on a draft that you provide for students can only be general guidance about the work in relation to the assessment criteria. Your feedback must not provide information about how the student could improve the work to achieve a particular grade, or grades.

7 Is student work that is submitted late eligible for grading?

(See Section C)

If you have agreed a deferred submission date with a student because their situation satisfies the criteria for mitigating circumstances, the work can be put forward as evidence for grading of the unit. If the work is late under any other circumstance, you may assess it, but it is not eligible as evidence for grading of the unit and the whole unit will be capped at a Pass.

8 Can a student appeal a grade?

(See Section C)

There is a procedure for representations which applies when a student asks for unconfirmed grade indicators to be reconsidered, after work has been graded but prior to moderation. (Please refer to Section C, Annex C5.)

9 How is grading moderated?

(See Section D)

Both the process of grading and the final grades awarded are subject to internal and external moderation. As a tutor, you will find it helpful to keep in mind what external moderators will be looking for, as detailed in the following paragraphs:

The external moderator will want to be confident that you, as a tutor:

- are applying all three grading standards equally to a unit and across all assignments within a unit
- are working to clearly defined unit assessment plans that facilitate the appropriate and valid use of the grading standards to assess student performance
- provide clear information to students about the demands of the assignments that you set for them
- provide helpful feedback to students in relation to grades given
- conduct the process of grading in assessment consistently and accurately, and that this generates grades which are reliable and valid
- choose sub-components from the grading standards which are relevant and valid (and in the case of Grading Standard 3, choose appropriate components and sub-components)
- use forms of assessment that are consistent with the requirements of the Access to HE Diploma and credit specifications, and QAA's grading guidance, and, in particular, that you:
 - make grading decisions with reference only to the grading standard sub-components assigned to the unit
 - grade student performance in accordance with the published requirements, using only Pass, Merit and Distinction grades, and no other form of grading
 - determine unit grades using the process described in the assessment regulations.

In addition to the practice of individual tutors, the process of external moderation is required to ensure that at course level:

- the use of grades is reliable, and that where there is a comparable standard of performance on comparable types of assessed work by different students, the same grade is recommended
- assessment plans and practice, including assignment briefs and feedback on assessment and grades to students, are internally moderated according to the agreed model of internal moderation
- records relating to grades are properly maintained
- lead moderators (or equivalent) are involved in standardisation (see Section D) and are present at, and are full members of, the Awards Board (see Section E).

10 From assessment to awards: A summary of the grading process

Planning and carrying out assessment (Section C)

- a Tutors develop unit assessment plans that indicate how learning outcomes, and the components and sub-components of the grading standards will be applied across the assessment and grading of the unit. These plans are internally verified. Tutors also prepare information for students for each assignment about which components and sub-components of the grading standards will be used and how grading will be applied.
- b Tutors assess student work, in accordance with the assessment plan and guidelines on good practice in assessment provided by the AVA. If the learning outcomes for all the assignments for an individual unit have been achieved, the unit is graded.
- c If any of the learning outcomes covered by the assignment have not been achieved, there is one opportunity for resubmission. Resubmissions and their reassessment must be managed in accordance with the resubmission process outlined in the assessment regulations (see Section C). Successful resubmissions are eligible for grading.
- d Summative feedback on the assessment of a unit is provided to students, including feedback about their performance in relation to the relevant grading standards.
- e Formative feedback and feedforward on individual assignments is provided to students where a unit is assessed by more than one assignment (see Section C).
- f Establish unit grade.

Moderation of assessment (Section D)

- g Providers/Centres apply their internal moderation procedures (as approved by the AVA) to tutors' assessment judgements.
- h Samples of assessed units are externally moderated, following the AVA's moderation requirements (see Section D).
- i The course team records its recommendations for each student in respect of the award of credits and grades (for each unit) and the award of Access to HE Diplomas. (This normally involves the completion of standard AVA documentation.)

Confirmation and certification of achievement (Section E)

- j The Awards Board is convened, constituted and conducted to meet the AVA's specification, and in line with QAA's requirements (see Section E).
- k The Awards Board deliberates on the recommendations made, and approves the award of credits, grades and Access to HE Diplomas to students who have met the relevant requirements.
- l The Awards Board also makes decisions about referrals and special cases (see Sections C and E).
- m The AVA checks the documentation received from the Awards Board and issues Access to HE Diplomas and transcripts of achievement to students.

Annex C2: Unit grade profiles and unit grades

Once the unit grade profile has been determined using each of the three grading standards, the overall unit grade can be determined using Table 1 below. The grades in the table are placed in order, from lowest to highest. The three columns are not associated with any specific grading standard (column one, for example, is not indicative of Grading Standard 1).

Using the table below, a student who has been awarded, for example, two Pass grade indicators and one Distinction indicator, irrespective of which grading standard each of these indicators is attached to, will be awarded a unit grade of Pass; a student who has been awarded, for example, two Distinction grade indicators and one Pass indicator, irrespective of which grading standard each of these indicators is attached to, will be awarded a unit grade of Distinction.

Table 1: Calculating unit grades from unit grade profiles

Unit grade profiles			Unit grade
P	P	P	P
P	P	M	P
P	P	D	P
P	M	M	M
P	M	D	M
M	M	M	M
M	M	D	M
P	D	D	D
M	D	D	D
D	D	D	D

This Tutors' Quick Guide to the Grading Scheme replaces the equivalent document published in September 2020. It applies to all new students registering on Diplomas from 1 August 2024. The Access to HE Diploma Specification has also been updated to apply to all new students registering on Diplomas from 1 August 2024.

For students registered before 1 August 2024, please visit www.qaa.ac.uk/access-to-he for details of *The Access to Higher Education Diploma Specification, January 2020* and *The Grading Scheme, September 2020*.

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