

SELCS ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR ESSAYS

Introduction

The mark awarded to an essay is based on the overall quality of the piece of work. Specific percentages are not assigned to the three criteria (Structure and argument; Knowledge; Presentation and scholarly apparatus), and an essay does not need to fulfil all the requirements for a particular class band in order to be awarded a mark in that band. Weaknesses can be balanced out by strengths. Essays that fulfil all or almost all of the criteria for a particular class band will be awarded a mark in upper half of the range, while work that meets most of the criteria and does not fall far short in others will be awarded a mark in the lower half. In applying these criteria, where appropriate, markers will be mindful of the level of the module (First, Intermediate or Advanced), with greater emphasis being placed on independent research and breadth of knowledge in advanced modules. Where students are permitted to write in a language other than English but given no extra credit for doing so, the expectations with regard to style, register and grammatical accuracy will be as stated for English.

A: First Class 70-80%

Essays that fulfil almost all of the criteria below will be awarded a mark in the range 75-80%; essays that meet most of the criteria and do not fall far short in others will be awarded a mark of 70-74%.

Structure and argument

- Engages closely with the question throughout, showing an understanding of its wider implications.
- The structure of the essay is elegant and allows the development of a coherent argument.
- Appropriate evidence is integrated into the argument, in a concise, relevant manner, and a reasoned, convincing conclusion is reached.
- The answer achieves an appropriate balance between detailed analysis of particular examples and broader discussion of the topic, moving confidently from the general to the particular and *vice versa*.

Knowledge

- The answer demonstrates in-depth reading and critical engagement with relevant primary and secondary materials.
- The answer displays a significant amount of independent thinking, reading and research.
- Where required, the answer shows an awareness of the broader context of the topic under discussion.

Presentation and scholarly apparatus

- Essay is written in grammatically correct English and in a mature style appropriate to academic writing.
- Text and scholarly apparatus contain few if any type errors.
- Referencing is accurate, thorough and consistent, following any specific requirements for the module.
- The bibliography is extensive, relevant and follows standard bibliographical conventions; where appropriate it includes some material in the foreign language.
- Most if not all items in the bibliography have left traces and are referenced in the essay.

Marks above 80%

Marks above 80% are awarded to work that fulfils all the criteria for 70-80% and can also be deemed to be of a standard significantly above that expected of an undergraduate at that stage of their university career. Work in this category in advanced modules should be, at least in part, of MA or (to achieve the very highest marks) of publishable quality.

B: Upper Second Class

60-69%

Essays that fulfil almost all of the criteria below will be awarded a mark in the range 65-69%; essays that meet most of the criteria and do not fall far short in others will be awarded a mark of 60-64%.

Structure and argument

- Engages well with the question and demonstrates some understanding of its wider implications.
- The structure of the essay is clear and allows the development of a coherent argument. But especially towards the lower end of the range there may be some unevenness in the quality of the argument.
- Appropriate evidence is deployed and a reasoned conclusion is reached. But towards the lower end of the range, the essay may not bring out the full significance of the evidence.
- The answer achieves a reasonable balance between detailed analysis of particular examples and broader discussion of the topic, but may on occasion struggle to move meaningfully between the two.

Knowledge

- The answer gives evidence of critical engagement with relevant primary and secondary materials.
- The answer displays some independent thinking, reading and research, especially towards the higher end of the range.
- Knowledge of the topic may be slightly uneven, lacking either breadth or depth.

Presentation and scholarly apparatus

- Essay is written in grammatically correct English, although there may be some errors and stylistic lapses.
- Text and scholarly apparatus contain relatively few type errors.
- Referencing is generally accurate, thorough and consistent, following any specific requirements for the module, although there may be some lapses.
- The bibliography is large, mostly relevant and follows standard bibliographical conventions with few lapses; where appropriate, it includes a small amount of material in the foreign language.
- There may be a few inconsistencies between referencing and bibliography, or items in the bibliography that have not left traces in the essay.

C: Lower Second Class
50-59%

Essays that fulfil almost all of the criteria below will be awarded a mark in the range 55-59%; essays that meet most of the criteria and do not fall far short in others will be awarded a mark of 50-54%.

Structure and argument

- Displays some understanding of the question but may not grasp its wider implications.
- The structure of the essay is not entirely clear and may be clumsy, thereby impeding the development of a coherent argument, although some sections may be quite convincing.
- The text tends towards description rather than analysis. Evidence is deployed without sufficient critical reflection on its significance and may not be entirely relevant to the question.
- Ideas tend to be stated rather than developed; the conclusion may be unconvincing in light of what has preceded it.

Knowledge

- The text gives evidence of some knowledge of relevant material but there may be significant gaps and an appropriate balance between primary and secondary materials is not achieved.
- The knowledge displayed is not entirely relevant to the question; especially towards the bottom of the range, there may be some factual inaccuracies.
- Displays an uncritical and unanalytical approach to source material.

Presentation and scholarly apparatus

- Essay is mostly written in acceptable English, although it may be clumsy in places, with frequent grammatical and stylistic lapses.
- Text and scholarly apparatus are marred by type errors.
- Referencing is uneven in quality.
- The bibliography contains significant gaps and/or irrelevant material. Little or no secondary material in the foreign language has been consulted, and online sources may be uncritically and/or extensively used.
- There are inconsistencies between referencing and bibliography.

D: Third Class
40-49%

Essays that fulfil almost all of the criteria below will be awarded a mark in the range 45-49%; essays that meet most of the criteria and do not fall far short in others will be awarded a mark of 40-44%.

Structure and argument

- Displays little understanding of the question and writes around it somewhat indiscriminately.
- The essay has a rudimentary structure but it is underdeveloped and may be followed only in a haphazard manner.
- The text is primarily descriptive rather than analytical and may be very repetitive; evidence is deployed without critical reflection on its significance or relevance.
- Ideas tend to be baldly stated; the conclusion may be unconvincing in light of what has preceded it.
- The essay may be slightly shorter than the required length.

Knowledge

- The text displays a basic knowledge of the topic but there is little evidence of detailed reading; the balance between primary and secondary materials may be completely inappropriate.
- The knowledge displayed is frequently irrelevant to the question and reveals serious misunderstandings.
- Source material is thin and treated in a wholly uncritical manner.

Presentation and scholarly apparatus

- English is competent only at a rather basic level, with possible interference from other languages, and problems of expression may impede the development of a coherent argument.
- Text and scholarly apparatus are marred by frequent type errors.
- Referencing is haphazard and of consistently poor quality.
- The bibliography is very thin and may consist primarily of online sources; there is no evidence of engagement with secondary material in the foreign language.
- There are many inconsistencies between referencing and bibliography.

E: Referral band (in Years 1 and 2 only)

35-39%

Structure and argument

- Displays a very limited understanding of the question and in many places writes indiscriminately around it.
- The essay has only glimpses of an orderly structure.
- The text is descriptive and very repetitive; there is no reasoned conclusion.
- Ideas are baldly stated; there is little evidence given.
- The essay may be considerably shorter than the required length.

Knowledge

- The text displays only general acquaintance with the topic and may suggest complete ignorance of key aspects.
- The knowledge displayed is frequently irrelevant to the question and contains glaring inaccuracies.
- Source material is very thin and treated in a wholly uncritical manner.

Presentation and scholarly apparatus

- Displays only basic mastery of formal written English, possibly with extensive interference from other languages that may impede understanding.
- Text and scholarly apparatus are carelessly presented and littered with type errors.
- Referencing is extremely haphazard and completely disregards conventions.
- The bibliography is practically non-existent.
- The relationship between referencing and bibliography has been almost completely misunderstood or ignored.

F: Fail
0-34%

Structure and argument

- Displays no real understanding of the question.
- The essay has no coherent argument and only rare hints of an orderly structure.
- A small amount of descriptive material is provided, and is likely to be very repetitive.
- The essay may be far shorter than the required length.

Knowledge

- The text displays only very general acquaintance with the topic and may betray complete ignorance of many key aspects.
- The knowledge displayed is frequently irrelevant to the question and contains glaring inaccuracies, some involving fundamental aspects of the topic.
- Source material is for the most part missing.

Presentation and scholarly apparatus

- The level of written English is very poor indeed, possibly with substantial interference from other languages, and may severely impede understanding.
- Text and scholarly apparatus are carelessly presented and may be littered with type errors.
- Referencing is extremely haphazard and completely disregards conventions.
- The bibliography is practically non-existent.
- The relationship between referencing and bibliography has been almost completely misunderstood or ignored.