Art History Grade Descriptors

This guide indicates broadly the qualitative judgements implied by the various grades which may be awarded. A more precise evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of individual essays will be provided in examiners’ comments. Evaluation is made with due consideration of the different standards likely to be achieved by students in junior and senior intermediate (2nd year) and advanced (3rd year) units.

85%+ (High Distinction)

*Work of exceptional standard.*
- Work demonstrates initiative and originality in research, analysis and argumentation;
- presents innovative, insightful interpretations of specific works of art, architecture, film and/or other media, which are used throughout to demonstrate points being made;
- effectively integrates visual analysis and critical engagement with scholarly debates to develop a rich and thorough analysis of its object(s) of study;
- indicates awareness of complexities and qualifications in argumentation;
- demonstrates careful thought about the critical, historical and/or theoretical context;
- provides evidence of wide-ranging reading;
- is properly referenced and well-presented;
- writing is clear, fluent, and persuasive.

A High Distinction is distinguished from a Distinction by the depth and sophistication of visual analysis deployed, and by the evidence of independent, critical thinking. Work which is awarded a mark of over 90% in senior level units of study will often contain some publishable or potentially publishable elements.

75-84% (Distinction)

*Work of a superior standard.*
- Work demonstrates an intelligent understanding of, and individual engagement with, material;
- visual analysis is well developed and harnessed to the argument, with thoughtful, detailed visual exposition of specific works used to demonstrate points;
- addresses an issue and presents a well-argued, coherent case;
- demonstrates careful thought about the critical, historical and/or theoretical context;
- demonstrates an independent and critical attitude to readings;
- written work is properly referenced and well presented, with a clear structure and coherent overall argument;
- writing is characterized by individuality, clarity, and independent insight.

A Distinction is distinguished from a High Credit chiefly by the quality of its analysis of the works of art under discussion, and by its level of critical understanding and intellectual enquiry.
70-74% (High Credit)

Highly competent work, demonstrating clear capacity to complete Honours successfully. This level of work is considered “above average”.

- Work provides evidence of independent reading and thinking about relevant works of art and their contexts;
- demonstrates capacity to undertake close analysis of works of art and develop with independent observations;
- demonstrates a sound grasp of subject matter and a good appreciation of key issues and contexts;
- shows understanding of relevant critical and theoretical considerations and of the conceptual issues raised;
- avoids summary;
- indicates an intelligent attempt at a critical or theoretical argument;
- is clearly and effectively written;
- is well-referenced.

A High Credit is distinguished from a Low Credit chiefly by the extent of independent analysis of works of art, and by some obvious attempt to interpret the outcome of close analysis.

65-69% (Low Credit)

Very competent work though not necessarily of the standard to complete Honours.

- The work shows some understanding of relevant critical and theoretical considerations and of the conceptual issues raised by a unit of study;
- demonstrates some independent reading and thinking about key works of art and their contexts;
- uses close critical analysis;
- avoids summary;
- attempts a critical or theoretical argument;
- is clearly and effectively written;
- is adequately referenced.

A Low Credit is distinguished from a High Pass by the degree of independent discussion of works of art, the clarity of the writing and the extent to which it attempts a more general critical and/or theoretical argument.

58-64% (High Pass)

Work of a good, satisfactory standard.

- Work demonstrates a broad and reasonably accurate command of the subject matter and some sense of its broader significance;
- demonstrates a genuine attempt at independent reading and thinking about works of art;
- generally avoids summary, paraphrase or unsubstantiated assertion;
- arguments may contain some oversimplification or superficiality;
- may sometimes present quotation for illustrative purposes merely, but does also present the outcome of some critical analysis;
- is adequately expressed;
- is adequately referenced.
50-57% (Pass)

*Work of an acceptable standard.*
- Work provides evidence of having read and thought about relevant works of art and issues;
- attempts a coherent argument though there may be ellipses in argumentation;
- discussion of works of art tends towards description rather than analysis;
- insufficient preparation for a visual test may be indicated by missed or incorrect identifications, lack of familiarity with periods, styles, key critical issues
- may paraphrase fairly extensively;
- tends to use quotation for illustrative purposes only;
- may tend towards generality in answering a question;
- may present simplistic comment or unsubstantiated assertions;
- is adequately expressed though there may be some weaknesses in this area;
- may contain some referencing errors.

Below 50% (Fail)

*Work not of an acceptable standard.*

Work may fail for any of the following reasons:
- little or no analysis of works of art; in a visual test, an inability to correctly identify works, periods and styles; serious mistakes in identification, indicating lack of understanding of the material taught;
- minimal research;
- irrelevance of content;
- unacceptable levels of paraphrasing;
- excessive use of quotation for illustrative purposes only, without any attempt at analysis;
- excessive level of generality in answering a question;
- sloppy, inconsistent presentation;
- inappropriate or obscure expression;
- incoherent general structure;
- inadequate referencing;
- late submission of work without extension.