Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Grade Descriptors for Postgraduate Coursework in Arts and Social Sciences

These grade descriptors apply to all postgraduate assessments, coursework as well as dissertations.

These descriptors are broad indices. They are not intended to replace departmental statements on marking criteria, which should be made available to students in accordance with Academic Board guidelines on standards-referenced assessment, and should include detailed, discipline-specific grade descriptors.

The Grade Descriptors

85-100: High Distinction

Work that demonstrates a high or very high level of proficiency in the methodologies, subject matter, and modes of expression and argumentation appropriate to the field or fields studied, and demonstrates the potential to undertake a research degree.

In many fields of the humanities and social sciences, a mark in this range can indicate thorough and possibly innovative research; wide and deep reading of the relevant scholarly literature; and a high level of problem-solving capacity and/or skill in interpreting data, documentary evidence, fieldwork, literary texts, or works of art.

In work written in a language other than English, a mark in this range indicates an excellent level of grammatical accuracy, syntactical sophistication, and nuance in use of vocabulary and register.

75-84: Distinction

Work that demonstrates a generally sound to very good knowledge of the methodologies, subject matter, and modes of expression and argumentation appropriate to the field or fields studied.

In many fields of the humanities and social sciences, a mark in this range can indicate solid research; a firm grasp of the relevant scholarly literature; and competent problem-solving and/or interpretations of data, documentary evidence, fieldwork, literary texts, or works of art. However, work in this range may also show evidence of a higher level of independent thought combined with some significant lapses in research or expression.

In work written in a language other than English, a mark in this range indicates a high standard of grammatical accuracy with few mistakes and only very rare basic errors, with vocabulary and syntax varied and expression highly coherent and well structured.

65-74: Credit

Work that demonstrates an acceptable but limited performance in the methodologies, subjects, and/or languages studied.

In many fields of the humanities and social sciences, a mark in this range can indicate an adequate general knowledge of the subject from the reading of both primary material and secondary
literature, straightforward argumentation, and clear expression. A mark in this range may also reflect a superior performance in one or more of these areas combined with serious lapses in others.

In work written in a language other than English, a mark in this range indicates a good standard of grammatical accuracy, albeit with some mistakes, including occasional basic ones; the work shows a good grasp of complex sentence structures and an appropriately varied vocabulary.

**50-64: Pass**

Work which may be only barely above the standard of undergraduate work in the field studied. A mark in the 50-59 range indicates a basic but limited understanding of the methodologies and subject matter of the field or fields studied, and skills in problem-solving, argumentation and expression that are only just adequate for postgraduate-level study and research. A mark in the 60-64 range may sometimes reflect work that is more than adequate in some of these respects but shows significant deficiencies in others.

**Below 50%: Fail**

Work that does not meet the basic standards for postgraduate work in the field studied. A mark in this range indicates an inadequate understanding of the methodologies and subject matter of the field or fields studied, and significant deficiencies in argument and expression.

Endorsed by Faculty Board 17 October 2011