

# Understanding Assessment

A guide for  
International Students

## Assessment criteria

Assessment criteria are the standards that your work will be judged against. They describe what you need to do to achieve a certain grade or mark. They are usually based on the learning outcomes of the module, which are the skills and knowledge that you should acquire by the end of the module. Assessment criteria can usually be found in the module handbook or on the online learning platform.

## Assessment briefs

Assessment briefs are the instructions that tell you what you need to do for a specific assessment task, such as an essay, a report, a presentation, etc. They usually include the purpose, the format, the word limit, the deadline, the marking criteria and any other relevant information. You should read the assessment brief carefully and follow it closely.

## Assessment rubrics

Assessment rubrics are tools that help you and your markers to evaluate your work according to the assessment criteria. They usually consist of a table or a grid that shows the different levels of performance for each criterion, and the corresponding marks or grades. Assessment rubrics can help you to understand what is expected of you, how to improve your work, and how your work is marked.

## Marking schemes

Marking schemes are similar to assessment rubrics, but they are more specific and detailed. They provide clear guidance on how to award marks or grades for each criterion and each level of performance. Marking schemes can help to ensure consistency and fairness in marking.

Here are some steps you can take to understand these assessment items and use them effectively in the assessment process:



**1** Before you start working on an assessment task, read the assessment brief and the assessment criteria carefully. Make sure you understand what you need to do, what the purpose and format of the task are, and how it will be marked.



**2** If possible, look at some examples of previous work that have been marked using the same assessment criteria and rubric. This can help you to see what a good or a bad performance looks like, and what feedback you can expect.



**3** Use the assessment rubric as a guide when you plan, draft and revise your work. Check if your work meets the requirements for each criterion and each level of performance. Try to identify your strengths and weaknesses and seek feedback from your peers or tutors if needed.



**4** If your assessment uses a marking scheme, you can use it to plan your revision, map your notes to discussion points, allocate yourself marks and check if you have met the requirements for each aspect of the assessment. You can also use it to identify your strengths and weaknesses and seek feedback from your peers or tutors if needed.



**5** After you submit your work, review the feedback and the marks or grades that you receive. Compare your work with the assessment rubric and the marking scheme and see where you did well or poorly. Learn from your mistakes and successes and use them to improve your future work.

If you find you don't understand the language used in these assessment documents, or what is expected of you, here are some places you can seek help:

### Study Support.

Many UK universities offer workshops, tutorials, online resources and feedback to help you prepare for your studies and assessments. You can also access other services, such as the library, the learning development centre, the international office or the student union, for more support.

### English Language support.

Some universities offer in-sessional or pre-sessional English courses to help you practice and improve you improve the English you use for academic purposes.

### Glossaries of Academic Terms.

A glossary is a list of terms and phrases that are commonly used in assessment and academic writing, with their definitions and examples. You can use this glossary to learn the meaning of words like analyse, evaluate, compare, contrast, etc., and how to use them in your work. You can also find explanations of different types of assessment tasks, such as essays, reports, presentations, etc., and how to structure them. You can find some examples of English language glossaries online, or you can ask your tutors or classmates for recommendations.

## What is an assessment rubric?

A rubric is a tool used by teachers and markers to evaluate and mark your work, whether it's a working draft or the final submission of an assignment. Rubrics outline a clear and organized set of criteria, which helps you, your teacher and the markers understand what is required and how your work will be evaluated.

## Why do we use assessment rubrics?

Rubrics are designed to provide transparency and clarity about the expectations for your work. They help eliminate subjectivity in grading by outlining specific criteria and descriptors. By using a rubric, you can better understand what you need to do to meet the expectations and earn a higher grade.

## Features of assessment rubrics



### Criteria

A rubric consists of specific criteria or standards that define what is expected in your work. These criteria can include things like content knowledge, organization, clarity, creativity, critical thinking, and so on.



### Points or Levels

Rubrics often show how points are assigned to each criterion. They may use a 0-100 or stepped (52, 55, 58; 62, 65, 68, etc.) scale. In UK Higher Education, a grade of 70% or above is considered exceptional academic performance.

Analytic rubrics also show how the points for each criterion can be assigned across a range of levels, e.g., First class/Exceptional; Upper merit/Strong performance; Merit/Good performance; Third/Adequate performance; Fail/Insufficient.



### Descriptors

Within each level of performance, there are descriptors that further explain what it means to meet that level. For example, if one of the criteria is "Organization," the descriptor for an excellent level might say something like, "Ideas are logically and clearly structured with smooth transitions between paragraphs."

## Three types of assessment rubric...

Analytic Rubric	Holistic Rubric	Marking Scheme
Breaks down criteria into specific components	Evaluates overall performance as a whole	Assigns specific marks based on predetermined criteria
Assesses multiple skills or criteria individually	Provides a single score or rating for the entire assignment	Evaluates the inclusion of specific concepts or knowledge
Provides detailed performance descriptors across multiple levels for each component	Considers the assignment as a cohesive piece of work	May allocate marks for the application of a process or method
Allows for targeted improvement and specific feedback	Offers a broader perspective on performance	Provides a clear and predefined framework for marking
Helps in identifying strengths and areas for improvement	Focuses on the overall quality and impact of the work	Ensures consistency in marking across different answers

## 10 ways to use assessment rubrics

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### Understand the language of the criteria and descriptors

Dictionaries and translators may not convey the exact meaning of terms used in an assessment rubric in a way that aligns with how they are used in a specific discipline, module or by your teachers. Ask your teacher, discuss with classmates or consult academic resources for guidance. Your teacher may facilitate a discussion or provide additional explanations and tips to understand the assignment and expectations.

2

### Analyse the criteria

Break down each criterion and consider the skills and competencies required to meet them. Think about the underlying knowledge, abilities, and behaviours that would be necessary to achieve each level of performance and you how you might evidence them. Write down each skill or competency and the criteria or descriptors that relate to it.

Create a list of the skills and competencies you identified. Look for patterns and connections between different parts of the rubric. These key skills and competencies represent the overarching abilities you need to employ in your work. This inventory will help you visualize and organize the specific areas you need to focus on.

3

### Create a roadmap to meet the criteria and seek learning opportunities

Look for learning opportunities that align with your identified skills and competencies. This could include attending workshops, taking relevant courses, participating in extracurricular activities, or seeking guidance from teachers and academic support officers.

4

### Self-Reflection

Reflect on your own proficiency in each skill or competency on your inventory. Assess your current level of competence and reflect on your strengths and areas for improvement. Be honest with yourself and identify areas where you may need to develop or enhance your skills.

5

### Self-Assessment

You can use a rubric to evaluate your own work before submitting it. This helps you identify areas where you excel and areas where you need improvement, allowing you to make necessary revisions and improve your work.

6

### Ask questions

You may want to know how to achieve a good grade; there are often many ways to do that which makes this big question a difficult one for teachers to answer. Can you ask questions about the criteria and use your skills inventory to understand how you might progress through the levels of performance?

7

### Communication

Rubrics facilitate effective communication between you and your teacher. By using a common framework, both of you can discuss your work in a more objective and constructive manner.

8

### Understand feedback

It also allows you to understand the feedback provided by your teacher and see how it aligns with the criteria outlined in the rubric.

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### A Guide for Improvement

Rubrics help you identify specific areas where you can focus your efforts to enhance your skills and meet the desired learning outcomes. By referring to the rubric, you can understand what steps you need to take to improve your work in future assignments

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### Identify Skills to Practice

The skills and competencies you identified in the rubric will likely appear in other assessments. Regularly practice the skills and competencies you have identified. Apply them in various assignments, projects, or real-life scenarios. Think about when and in which assignments you have applied them before.

# Common Assessment Challenges

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The differences between your previous educational experiences and the UK system can sometimes pose challenges which make it difficult to understand assessment criteria and deliver on expectations. In this guide, we'll outline common hurdles you may encounter and provide tips to overcome them, ensuring your success in your assessments...

## Emphasizing Critical Thinking and Originality:



If you're accustomed to memorizing facts and reproducing them, you might find it challenging to demonstrate critical thinking, originality, and creativity in your assessments. In the UK, assessments often require you to showcase these skills. Remember to use your own words and avoid plagiarism by citing your sources properly. Engage with the subject matter, analyze it from different angles, and express your unique perspective.

## Writing Long and Detailed Essays or Reports:



In some educational systems, shorter answers or multiple-choice questions are the norm. However, in the UK, you'll often encounter assignments like lengthy essays or reports that demand a clear structure, logical arguments, and supporting evidence. Adhering to word limits and format requirements can also be crucial. To excel in these assessments, develop your writing skills, craft well-organized arguments, and substantiate your points with relevant examples and references.

## Familiarizing Yourself with Different Assignment Formats:



The UK higher education system offers a diverse range of assignment types, such as essays, reports, presentations, and portfolios. If you're accustomed to a lecture-based or exam-oriented approach, adjusting your presentation and writing style might be challenging. Take the time to understand the specific requirements of each assignment type, adapt your skills accordingly, and seek guidance from your professors or academic support services when needed.

## Adapting Writing Style and Referencing:



Some educational systems have strict rules and guidelines for writing and referencing. However, in the UK, you're expected to adapt your style and approach based on the purpose, audience, and discipline of your assessments. Familiarize yourself with different referencing systems or conventions used in your field of study. Pay attention to the expectations of your academic department and seek clarity if you have any doubts.

## Developing Your Own Voice and Perspective:



In contrast to education systems where teachers or authorities are the sole source of knowledge, UK assessments encourage you to develop your own voice, position, and perspective. You may be asked to challenge, question, or evaluate the views and arguments of others. Embrace this opportunity for intellectual growth, delve deeper into the subject matter, and formulate thoughtful responses that showcase your individuality.

## Demonstrating Understanding and Application:



If your previous education focused heavily on content knowledge and factual recall, you might find it challenging to demonstrate your understanding and application of concepts, theories, models, or frameworks relevant to your discipline. To excel in these assessments, delve beyond rote memorization and actively engage with the subject matter. Connect theoretical concepts to real-world examples, demonstrate critical thinking, and showcase your creativity and innovation.

## Grading System and Degree Classification:



The UK grading system may differ from what you're accustomed to, leading to confusion about the meaning and implications of your grades. Terms such as distinction, merit, pass, fail, and others used to classify degrees may be unfamiliar. Remember that grades are just one aspect of your academic journey. Seek clarification from your professors or academic advisors to understand your progress and don't let grades discourage you. Focus on continuous improvement and personal growth.

## Interpreting Feedback and Using it for Improvement:



If you're used to receiving grades or marks based on percentages or numerical scales, adapting to feedback provided through rubrics or schemes using descriptive words or letters may be challenging. Embrace feedback as a valuable tool for growth. Take the time to understand the feedback, identify areas for improvement, and use it to refine your skills and enhance your future assessments.

Remember to reach out to your professors, academic advisors, or support services whenever you need assistance. Your international background brings a unique perspective to your studies, so embrace the opportunities for personal and academic growth that lie ahead.