

Part C: Grade descriptors

This part of the implementation handbook details the seven grade descriptors that are the basis of grading decisions made on Access to HE courses. Separate guidance explains how grade descriptors are selected and used at course level.

1 Understanding of the subject

Rules for this descriptor

This descriptor provides the opportunity to recognise the extent to which a student has acquired the knowledge relevant to the given unit. Knowledge includes fact, theories, models, perspectives, practices and conventions.

There is no grade descriptor for 'Pass'. Students achieve a Pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit.


Merit	Distinction
<p>Using this descriptor Any choice of components (one or more) from the list a to c</p>	<p>Using this descriptor Any choice of components (one or more) from the list a to c</p>
<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a demonstrates a very good grasp of the relevant knowledge base b is generally informed by the major conventions and practices of the area of study c demonstrates very good understanding of the different perspectives or approaches associated with the area of study. 	<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a demonstrates an excellent grasp of the relevant knowledge base b is consistently informed by the major conventions and practices of the area of study c demonstrates excellent understanding of the different perspectives or approaches associated with the area of study.

2 Application of knowledge

Rules for this descriptor

This descriptor provides the opportunity to recognise a student's ability to apply the knowledge that they have acquired. This may be in a wide variety of ways, such as essays, projects, experiments or case studies. This ability is distinct from the student's demonstration of the acquisition of knowledge and the actual structure and presentation of the work.

There is no grade descriptor for 'Pass'. Students achieve a Pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit.

Merit	Distinction
<p>Using this descriptor Any choice of the listed items (one or more) from a, with either b and/or any of the bullet points (one or more) from c</p>	<p>Using this descriptor Any choice of the listed items (one or more) from a, with either b and/or any of the bullet points (one or more) from c</p>
<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>a makes use of relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ideas ● facts ● theories ● perspectives ● models ● concepts <p>with either</p> <p>b breadth or depth that goes beyond the minimum required to Pass</p> <p>and/or</p> <p>c very good levels of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● consistency ● precision ● accuracy ● insight ● analysis ● synthesis ● creativity 	<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>a makes use of relevant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ideas ● facts ● theories ● perspectives ● models ● concepts <p>with both</p> <p>b breadth and depth</p> <p>and/or</p> <p>c excellent levels of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● consistency ● precision ● accuracy ● insight ● analysis ● synthesis ● creativity 


3 Application of skills

Rules for this descriptor

This descriptor provides the opportunity to recognise a student's ability to apply the skills that they have acquired. The term 'skills' can be defined in relation to the content of the unit. It can refer to the intellectual, technical or practical skills students need in their work, such as editing skills in media, laboratory techniques in science, vocal techniques in drama.

However, skills associated with the general researching, finding and use of new information, and general literacy skills, are most appropriately dealt with through grade descriptors 4 and 5, which address these essential skills for Access to HE students in more detail.

There is no grade descriptor for 'Pass'. Students achieve a Pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit.

Merit	Distinction
<p>Using this descriptor a and/or b with any choice (one or more) of the listed items</p> <p>Where a and b are both used, the skills, techniques or methods applied in b must be those selected in a</p>	<p>Using this descriptor a and/or b with any choice (one or more) of the listed items</p> <p>Where a and b are both used, the skills, techniques or methods applied in b must be those selected in a</p>
<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>a generally selects appropriate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● skills ● techniques ● methods <p>b applies appropriate (selected or given)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● skills ● techniques ● methods <p>with very good levels of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● confidence ● consistency ● creativity ● innovation ● precision ● accuracy ● efficiency 	<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>a consistently selects appropriate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● skills ● techniques ● methods <p>b applies appropriate (selected or given)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● skills ● techniques ● methods <p>with excellent levels of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● confidence ● consistency ● creativity ● innovation ● precision ● accuracy ● efficiency 

4 Use of information

Rules for this descriptor

This descriptor provides the opportunity to recognise a student's ability to work with new information. They may search for and identify this information for themselves, or it may be provided for them by others at any stage in the course of a piece of work. It describes a number of the skills associated with research and the effective use of information, and is therefore a more appropriate and detailed descriptor for this activity than the less defined coverage of grade descriptor 3, Application of skills.

Research skills of this nature are regarded as particularly important for students aspiring to progress to HE in certain disciplines (for example, social science) but may not be appropriate to all disciplines.

There is no grade descriptor for 'Pass'. Students achieve a Pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit.


Merit	Distinction
<p>Using this descriptor Any choice of components (one or more) from the list a to f</p>	<p>Using this descriptor Any choice of components (one or more) from the list a to f</p>
<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a identifies new information from sources which are generally appropriate b makes some use of additional information c generally appraises the relevance and value of new information accurately d shows a very good grasp of the meaning and significance of new information e generally combines or synthesises information with outcomes that are accurate and appropriate <p>In practice-based/practical work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> f is informed by research that draws on a range of sources and resources that goes beyond the minimum required for the work 	<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a identifies new information from sources which are consistently appropriate b makes extensive use of additional information c consistently appraises the relevance and value of new information accurately d shows an excellent grasp of the meaning and significance of new information e consistently combines or synthesises information with outcomes that are accurate, appropriate and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● succinct ● innovative ● creative <p>In practice-based/practical work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> f is informed by research that draws on an extensive range of sources and resources

5 Communication and presentation

Rules for this descriptor

This descriptor provides the opportunity to recognise a student's ability to structure and present their work in ways that aid the effective communication of their thinking and the reader's and viewer's ability to understand it. It includes all forms of presentation: written, visual, and oral.

There is no grade descriptor for 'Pass'. Students achieve a Pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit.

Merit	Distinction
<p>Using this descriptor Any choice (one or more) of the listed items</p>	<p>Using this descriptor Any choice (one or more) of the listed items</p>
<p>The student, student's work or performance: shows very good command of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● format ● structure ● use of images ● language (including technical or specialist language) ● syntax ● register ● spelling ● punctuation ● referencing 	<p>The student, student's work or performance: shows excellent command of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● format ● structure ● use of images ● language (including technical or specialist language) ● syntax ● register ● spelling ● punctuation ● referencing 

6 Autonomy and/or Independence

Rules for this descriptor

This descriptor provides the opportunity to recognise a student's ability to take responsibility for how they carry out their work.

There is no grade descriptor for 'Pass'. Students achieve a Pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit.

Merit	Distinction
<p>Using this descriptor Any choice of components (one or more) from the list a to e</p>	<p>Using this descriptor Any choice of components (one or more) from the list a to e</p>
<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a makes generally sound judgements about how to complete work b in most cases takes opportunities to initiate appropriate actions c specifies problems for completing work and promptly seeks clarification and/or guidance d responds promptly and effectively to guidance e demonstrates very good time-management 	<p>The student, student's work or performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a makes consistently sound judgements about how to complete work b nearly always takes opportunities to initiate appropriate actions c specifies problems for completing work and independently generates and pursues solutions d works effectively with a high level of independence e demonstrates excellent time-management

7 Quality

Rules for this descriptor

This descriptor is used in all units. It is deliberately of a different nature and character compared with other descriptors, as it allows for a tutor to make a holistic judgement about a student's work, reflecting the quality of the totality of that work in a way that the grades awarded against individual descriptors may not entirely achieve.

There is no grade descriptor for 'Pass'. Students achieve a Pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit.

Merit	Distinction
Using this descriptor Any choice of components (one or more) from the list a to c	Using this descriptor Any choice of components (one or more) from the list a to c
The student, student's work or performance: a is structured in a way that is generally logical and fluent b contains some ambiguities or limitations in the expression of arguments or ideas c taken as a whole, demonstrates a very good response to the demands of the brief/assignment	The student, student's work or performance: a is structured in a way that is consistently logical and fluent b arguments and ideas are unambiguous and cogent c taken as a whole, demonstrates an excellent response to the demands of the brief/assignment

Further information

Full details of the Access to HE grading scheme, and all associated guidance documents for AVAs, course providers and HE admissions staff, are available on the Access to HE website (www.accesstohe.ac.uk)



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