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Guidance

How GCSE and A Level marking works

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Applies to England

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Exam boards (also known as awarding organisations) are responsible for marking GCSE, AS and A Level exams. Ofqual oversees the process as the qualifications regulator to make sure marking is accurate and consistent across exam boards and from year to year.

Who marks students' work?

All written exams are marked by examiners recruited and paid by exam boards. Most examiners are current or former teachers, and on average have 20 years' teaching

experience and 10 years' experience of being an examiner.

All marking is completely anonymous. The examiner has no idea who the student is, which school they're from, or anything else about them.

Examiners are trained to mark using a mark scheme, which sets out how marks should be awarded. Before marking begins, each examiner must demonstrate they can mark a sample of real student answers to the required standard.

Non-exam assessments – such as coursework – can be marked by teachers in the student's school or college, by an examiner who visits the school, or sent directly to the exam board.

Where teachers mark their own students' work, all teachers in the school must mark to the same standard. The exam board will then check a sample of that marking to make sure it is in line with schools across the country. This is called moderation. If marking is found to be too strict or too generous, marks will be adjusted.

Teachers conducting and marking non-exam assessments should follow the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) instructions for GCSEs, AS and A Levels, and the instructions set by their exam board.

How exam boards check marking quality

During the marking period, exam boards use quality checks to make sure marking is accurate and consistent. The approach depends on whether scripts are marked on paper or on-screen.

On-screen marking

When marking is done on a computer, most exam boards use a method called seeding. Before marking starts, senior examiners pick out a selection of student responses and agree what mark each one should receive. These “seeds” are then mixed in at random with the real marking, without the examiner knowing. If an examiner gives a very different mark to one of these test responses, they may be paused or stopped from marking while they are retrained and checked before being allowed to continue marking. Their previous marking may also be checked and

corrected if needed.

Paper-based marking

When scripts are marked on paper, examiners send samples of their marking to a more senior examiner for checking. If the marking does not meet the agreed standard, the examiner may be stopped from marking and their scripts given to someone else.

Further information

For more detail on how a specific exam board quality assures its marking, visit their website or contact them directly.

For information on reviews of marking, visit our Review of marking for GCSE, AS and A Level results [Review of marking for GCSE, AS and A Level results - GOV.UK](#) page.

For information on how grades and grade boundaries are set, see Ofqual's [Understanding grading: toolkit for schools and colleges](#).

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