

# NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND: Grade Descriptors



## GRADE DESCRIPTORS, AS PROPOSED BY THE NUI SENATE

### Explanatory Note:

The Grade Descriptors below are offered as indicative descriptors. It is accepted that these indicative descriptors are particularly appropriate for examinations based on essay-type questions but may be found less suitable for examinations in subjects where there are detailed marking schemes. The Senate recommends that these Grade Descriptors be circulated to all Faculties.

GRADE	Marks Range %	GRADE DESCRIPTORS
1 <sup>st</sup> CLASS HONS	90-100	<p><u>Supreme</u> performance, engaging profoundly, systematically and comprehensively with question set, brilliantly demonstrating</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a superlative mastery of the subject matter, richly supported by evidence and citation, reflecting deep and broad knowledge and understanding as well as extensive reading</li> <li>• an outstanding ability to organise, analyse and express ideas and arguments in an original, sophisticated and discriminating manner</li> <li>• an optimal capacity for critical analysis</li> <li>• the display of rare penetrative insight, originality and creativity</li> </ul>
	80-89	<p><u>Exceptional</u> performance, engaging deeply and systematically with the question set, with consistently impressive demonstration of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a comprehensive mastery of the subject matter; amply supported by evidence and citation,</li> <li>• reflecting deep and broad knowledge and critical insight as well as extensive reading</li> <li>• an exceptional ability to organise, analyse and present arguments fluently and lucidly with a high level of critical analysis</li> <li>• a highly-developed capacity for original, creative and logical thinking;</li> </ul>
	70 -79	<p><u>Excellent</u> performance, engaging closely and systematically with the question set, with consistently strong evidence of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a comprehensive mastery of the subject matter, ably supported by evidence and relevant citation</li> <li>• excellent ability to organise, analyse and express arguments fluently and lucidly with a high level of critical analysis</li> <li>• a highly-developed capacity for original, creative and logical thinking</li> </ul>
2 <sup>nd</sup> CLASS HONS (Grade 1)	60-69	<p><u>Very Good</u> performance, engaging substantially with the question set, demonstrating strong grasp of the subject matter, well supported by evidence and relevant citation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• well-developed capacity to analyse issues, organise material, present arguments clearly and cogently</li> <li>• some original insights and capacity for creative and logical thinking</li> </ul>

GRADE	Marks Range %	GRADE DESCRIPTORS
2 <sup>nd</sup> CLASS HONS (Grade 2)	50-59	<p><u>Good</u> performance - intellectually competent answer (i.e. factually sound) with evidence of a reasonable familiarity with the relevant literature and techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• acceptable grasp of the subject material</li> <li>• ideas stated rather than developed and insufficiently supported by evidence and relevant citation</li> <li>• writing of sufficient quality to convey meaning but some lack of fluency and command of suitable vocabulary</li> <li>• omission of parts of the subject in question or the appearance of several minor errors</li> <li>• average critical awareness and analytical qualities</li> <li>• limited evidence of capacity for original and logical thinking</li> </ul>
3 <sup>rd</sup> CLASS HONS  (where awarded)	45-49	<p><u>Satisfactory</u> performance – intellectually adequate answer with evidence of some familiarity with the relevant literature and techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• basic grasp of subject matter, but somewhat lacking in focus and structure</li> <li>• main points covered in answer, but lacking detail</li> <li>• some effort to engage, but only a basic understanding of the topic portrayed</li> <li>• some development of argument</li> <li>• only some critical awareness displayed</li> <li>• no evidence or relevant citation included in answer</li> <li>• appearance of several minor errors or one major error</li> <li>• lacking evidence of capacity for original and logical thinking</li> </ul>
PASS	45-49  (where 3 <sup>rd</sup> Class Honours NOT awarded)	<p><u>Satisfactory</u> performance – intellectually adequate answer with evidence of some familiarity with the relevant literature and techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• basic grasp of subject matter, but somewhat lacking in focus and structure</li> <li>• main points covered in answer, but lacking detail</li> <li>• some effort to engage, but only a basic understanding of the topic portrayed</li> <li>• some development of argument</li> <li>• only some critical awareness displayed</li> <li>• no evidence or relevant citation supplied</li> <li>• appearance of several minor errors or one major error</li> <li>• lacking evidence of capacity for original and logical thinking</li> </ul>
	40–44	<p><u>Acceptable</u> performance – intellectually adequate answer with limited familiarity with the relevant literature and techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• basic grasp of subject matter but limited focus on question asked</li> </ul> <p><b>unclear presentation of argument, random layout, with some omissions or inaccuracies in answer</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• argument insufficiently developed</li> <li>• no evidence or relevant citation supplied</li> <li>• appearance of one major error and minor errors</li> <li>• inclusion of unsubstantiated statements and/or irrelevant material</li> <li>• descriptive rather than argumentative or analytical answer presented</li> <li>• an attempt to solve moderately difficult problems related to the subject material and an attempt to examine the material in a critical and analytical manner only partially successful</li> <li>• an incomplete or rushed answer e.g. the use of bullet points through part / all of answer</li> </ul>
FAIL (*)	35-39	<p><u>Unacceptable</u> performance, with either</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- insufficient understanding of the question displayed</li> <li>- failure to address the question resulting in a largely irrelevant answer</li> <li>- a display of some knowledge of material relative to the question posed, but with very serious omissions / errors and/or major inaccuracies included in answer</li> <li>- or answer left somewhat incomplete for lack of time</li> </ul> <p><u>Also:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• limited understanding of question displayed</li> <li>• a random layout / underdeveloped structure - not planned sufficiently</li> <li>• poor analytical skills, with an absence of argument</li> <li>• random and undisciplined development - limited structure</li> <li>• lack of clarity, poor spelling</li> <li>• material of marginal relevance predominating</li> </ul> <p><i>See note on 'Pass by Compensation' below</i></p>

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FAIL	<35	<p><b><u>Wholly unacceptable performance, with</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- deficient understanding of the question displayed</li> <li>- complete failure to address the question resulting in an irrelevant answer</li> <li>- inadequate knowledge displayed relative to the question posed</li> <li>- or answer left incomplete for lack of time</li> </ul> <p>Also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• very poor analytical skills, with an absence of argument</li> <li>• random and undisciplined development –poorly structured answer</li> <li>• confused expression, poor spelling</li> <li>• irrelevant material predominating</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Note on Fail * - 'Pass by Compensation'</u></b></p> <p>Traditionally, under Marks and Standards, provision has been made for a student failing in one or more subjects in an examination, to pass the examination by compensation, where he/she has double the deficiency of marks available in another subject or in other subjects. It is recommended that provision for 'pass by compensation' be continued, in accordance with such conditions as may be set out in Marks and Standards by Faculties. The application of the provision should be facilitated by the above descriptions with particular reference to the Descriptor for the *Fail (35-39) Marks Band.</p>		