

**[C115/SQP220]**

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Advanced Higher  
English  
Principles of Marking

NATIONAL  
QUALIFICATIONS

# PRINCIPLES OF MARKING

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide teachers and lecturers with some indication of the approach taken to the external assessment of the performance of candidates presented for Advanced Higher English.

It should be noted that the document does **not** comprise **detailed marking instructions**—specific, for example, in their reference to each of the questions (or even to each of the sections) in the accompanying specimen examination paper.

Rather, the document outlines

- the principles upon which markers base their judgements of candidates' responses to questions in the examination paper;
- the framework of numerically weighted category descriptions based on the published Advanced Higher Arrangements that informs markers' decisions.

## 2. The decision to use category descriptions

Teachers and lecturers will be familiar with the use of category descriptions from their experience of assessing the work of candidates at other levels.

The decision to continue to use category descriptions as the principal means of assessing candidate performance in Advanced Higher English is informed partly by the advantage to be gained from continuing with an already familiar system and partly by other considerations. Such a system, for example:

- offers **validity** and **reliability** through assessment procedures of proven **fairness** and **robustness**
- puts in place one means of facilitating **articulation of standards** between “old” and “new” curricular frameworks
- requires **holistic assessment** that rewards the actual attainment of each candidate within each assessment component by allocating each response to the category that best describes its overall quality
- allows for **refinement of assessment** by requiring the placing of each response at a particular point within the limited range of marks available for each category
- contributes to **consistency of assessment** by requiring repeated application of familiar and agreed statements of differentiated standards
- facilitates **standardisation of assessment** by providing clear evidence of degrees of severity or leniency of marker response and interpretation.

### 3. The decision to use numerically weighted category descriptions

The decision to use numbers rather than grades in external assessment has been taken

- to allow for the refinement of assessment judgements about the quality of each candidate response within each assessment component
- to facilitate the aggregation of assessment judgements in a form that fairly represents the overall attainment of each candidate across components
- to reveal the range and pattern of the performance of the total candidature in a way that enables final judgements to be made about appropriate threshold scores and mark ranges in the determination of final grade awards.

The three components of assessment at Advanced Higher (with their respective weightings) are

- a mandatory dissertation (40%)
- a mandatory response to an examination question on literary study (30%)
- a response to a second examination question **or** submission of a folio (30%).

In order to correlate with these weightings, it was decided to adopt a 40-point scale for the assessment of the dissertation and a 30-point scale for the assessment of each of the other two components.

#### 4. The construction of category descriptions

The starting point for the construction of category descriptions is the information on performance criteria and indicators of excellence for the various assessment components for Advanced Higher English published in the Arrangements document.

In all components, there is a clear consistency of statement in relation to both performance criteria and indicators of excellence.

The extracts presented below, in which key features of required performance are emboldened, illustrate this consistency. Virtually identical statements are made about characteristic performance criteria and indicators of excellence for each of the assessment components—although it should be noted that the criterion of Expression does not apply to the assessment of Textual Analysis and that criteria different from those presented below apply to the assessment of Creative Writing.

<b>GRADE C</b> <b>Performance Criteria</b>	<b>GRADE A</b> <b>Indicators of Excellence</b> <i>At least 4 bullet points from at least two categories.</i>
<p><b>Understanding</b> The response takes a <b>relevant</b> and <b>thoughtful</b> approach to the prescribed task and demonstrates <b>secure</b> understanding of key elements . . .</p> <p><b>Analysis</b> The response makes <b>relevant</b> and <b>thoughtful</b> . . . comment and demonstrates <b>secure</b> handling . . .</p> <p><b>Evaluation</b> Judgements made are <b>relevant, thoughtful</b> and <b>securely based</b> on detailed evidence . . .</p> <p><b>Expression</b> Structure, style and language, including the use of appropriate critical/analytical terminology, are consistently <b>accurate</b> and <b>effective</b> in developing a <b>relevant</b> argument.</p>	<p><b>Understanding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A <b>thorough exploration</b> is made of the implications of the prescribed task.</li> <li>• <b>Sustained insight</b> is revealed into key elements . . .</li> </ul> <p><b>Analysis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A <b>full</b> and <b>satisfying</b> range of . . . comment is offered.</li> <li>• Literary/linguistic techniques . . . are handled with <b>skill</b> and <b>precision</b>.</li> </ul> <p><b>Evaluation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Perceptive</b> and <b>incisive</b> judgements are made.</li> <li>• Deployment of evidence . . . is <b>skilful</b> and <b>precise</b>.</li> </ul> <p><b>Expression</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure, style and language, including the use of appropriate critical/analytical terminology, are <b>skilfully deployed</b> to develop a <b>pertinent</b> and <b>sharply focused</b> argument.</li> </ul>

The words that best strike the note that is characteristic of **competence of performance** (equivalent to Grade C) at Advanced Higher level are:

- relevant
- thoughtful
- secure
- consistent
- accurate
- effective.

At this level, **excellence** (equivalent to Grade A) is indicated by words such as:

- thorough
- sustained
- insight
- full
- satisfying
- perceptive
- incisive
- skilful
- precise
- pertinent
- sharply focused.

It may be relatively straightforward to find qualitative words that will differentiate—for each criterion—between candidate work that is competent (Grade C) and candidate work that is excellent (Grade A). It is clearly more difficult to find qualitative words to describe the range of performance (Grade B) that may lie between these two well-defined points.

The Arrangements document recognises this difficulty by noting: “Where the overall quality of a piece of work goes beyond the performance criteria for Grade C, but falls short of Grade A, it will attain Grade B. In this case, it may show only **one or two** of the A characteristics or it may show **three or more** of the indicators of excellence without reaching A quality for any”.

In response to this flexibility, the following external assessment framework of four “pass” categories and two “fail” categories has been adopted for the grading of candidate performance in each of the Advanced Higher English assessment components:

- Category 1 Excellent**—well aligned with a significant number of the published indicators of excellence.
- Category 2 Still signs of excellence**—but not quite so well aligned with (or aligned with fewer of) the published indicators of excellence.
- Category 3 More than competent**—in some significant ways beyond some of the published performance criteria.
- Category 4 Competent**—in overall quality firmly anchored to the published performance criteria.
- Category 5 Less than competent**—in some significant ways not quite achieving all of the published performance criteria.
- Category 6 Incompetent**—well below Advanced Higher level as required by the published performance criteria.

A 30–point scale (corresponding to a weighting of 30% in the final award) has been adopted for the assessment of the components that are assessed by external examination. It applies to these (briefly described) six categories as follows:

<p><b>CATEGORY 1</b> 27–30</p>	<p><b>Excellent</b>—well aligned with a significant number of the published indicators of excellence: thorough exploration and sustained insight; full, satisfying comment and skilful handling of technique; perceptiveness/incisiveness and skilful use of evidence; a sharply focused argument.</p>
<p><b>CATEGORY 2</b> 23–26</p>	<p><b>Still signs of excellence</b>—but not quite so well aligned with (or aligned with fewer of) the published indicators of excellence: not quite so thorough or sustained; not quite so full or satisfying or skilful; not quite so sharply focused.</p>
<p><b>CATEGORY 3</b> 19–22</p>	<p><b>More than competent</b>—in some significant ways beyond some of the published performance criteria: glimmers of insight or perceptiveness or incisiveness; occasionally satisfying critical comment; occasionally skilful deployment of evidence in support of argument.</p>
<p><b>CATEGORY 4</b> 15–18</p>	<p><b>Competent</b>—in overall quality firmly anchored to the published performance criteria: relevant and thoughtful and secure in understanding; secure and consistent; accurate and effective.</p>
<p><b>CATEGORY 5</b> 10–14</p>	<p><b>Less than competent</b>—in some significant ways not quite achieving all of the published performance criteria: some weakness in relevance or thoughtfulness or security of understanding or accuracy or consistency or range or effectiveness of critical/analytical comment in the development of argument.</p>
<p><b>CATEGORY 6</b> 00–09</p>	<p><b>Incompetent</b>—well below Advanced Higher level as required by the published performance criteria: deficient in (probably) more than one of— relevance, thoughtfulness, security of understanding, accuracy, consistency, effectiveness in the development of argument.</p>

## 5. Fully described categories

The following (fully described) categories are founded on the published performance criteria and indicators of excellence. They should be used as the basic “map” by which markers arrive at the category and the numerical mark within that category which best represents the attainment of each candidate.

### CATEGORY 1

**Marks: 27–30**

**Excellent**—well aligned with a significant number of the published indicators of excellence.

#### **Understanding**

- A thorough exploration is made of the implications of the prescribed task
- Sustained insight is revealed into key elements, central concerns and significant details of the texts or of the linguistic or media field of study.

#### **Analysis**

- A full and satisfying range of critical/analytical comment is offered.
- Literary, linguistic or media concepts, techniques, forms, usages are handled with skill and precision.

#### **Evaluation**

- Perceptive and incisive judgements are made.
- Deployment of evidence from texts, sources or contexts is skilful and precise.

#### **Expression**

- Structure, style and language, including the use of appropriate critical/analytical terminology, are skilfully deployed to develop a pertinent and sharply focused argument.

### CATEGORY 2

**Marks: 23–26**

**Still signs of excellence**—but not quite so well aligned with (or aligned with fewer of) the published indicators of excellence.

#### **Understanding**

As for Category 1, but

- the implications of the prescribed task are not quite so thoroughly explored
- insight is not quite so well sustained.

#### **Analysis**

As for Category 1, but

- the range of critical/analytical comment is not quite so full or satisfying
- relevant techniques, concepts, forms, usages are not handled with quite the same level of skill or precision.

#### **Evaluation**

As for Category 1, but

- judgements made are not quite so perceptive or incisive
- deployment of evidence is not quite so skilful or precise.

#### **Expression**

As for Category 1, but

- structure, style and language are not quite so skilfully deployed or argument quite so sharply focused.

**CATEGORY 3****Marks: 19–22**

**More than competent**—in some significant ways beyond some of the published performance criteria.

**Understanding**

As for Category 4, but

- with glimmers of—awareness of implications or thoroughness or insight.

**Analysis**

As for Category 4, but

- with glimmers of—fullness or skill or precision of critical/analytical comment.

**Evaluation**

As for Category 4, but

- with glimmers of—preceptiveness or incisiveness or skilful deployment of evidence.

**Expression**

As for Category 4, but

- with glimmers of—skilful deployment of language in the development of argument.

**CATEGORY 4****Marks: 15–18**

**Competent**—in overall quality firmly anchored to the published performance criteria.

**Understanding**

- The response takes a relevant and thoughtful approach to the prescribed task and demonstrates secure understanding of key elements, central concerns and significant details of the texts or of the linguistic or media field of study.

**Analysis**

- The response makes relevant and thoughtful critical/analytical comment and demonstrates secure handling of literary, linguistic or media concepts, techniques, forms, usages.

**Evaluation**

- Judgements made are relevant, thoughtful and securely based on detailed evidence drawn from texts, sources or contexts.

**Expression**

- Structure, style and language, including the use of appropriate critical/analytical terminology, are consistently accurate and effective in developing a relevant argument.

**CATEGORY 5****Marks: 10–14**

**Less than competent**—in some significant ways not quite achieving all of the published performance criteria.

**Understanding**

As for Category 4, but

- with some weakness in—relevance or thoughtfulness or security of understanding of key elements, central concerns, significant details.

**Analysis**

As for Category 4, but

- with some weakness in—relevance or thoughtfulness or accuracy or range of critical/analytical comment.

**Evaluation**

As for Category 4, but

- with some weakness in—relevance or thoughtfulness or substantiation of judgements made.

**Expression**

As for Category 4, but

- with some weakness in—accuracy and effectiveness of structure or style or language or critical/analytical terminology in the development of argument.

**CATEGORY 6****Marks: 00–09**

**Incompetent**—well below Advanced Higher level as required by the published performance criteria.

**Understanding**

- The response is deficient in—relevance or thoughtfulness or security of understanding of key elements, central concerns, significant details.

**Analysis**

- The response is deficient in—relevance or thoughtfulness or accuracy or range of critical/analytical comment.

**Evaluation**

- The response is deficient in—relevance or thoughtfulness or substantiation of judgements made.

**Expression**

- The response is deficient in—accuracy and effectiveness of structure or style or language or critical/analytical terminology in the development of argument.

**N.B.** It should be noted that, in the category descriptions provided, where performance in one category is described as “significantly” different from performance in an adjacent category, this may be demonstrated by:

- marginally stronger or weaker performance **in a range of aspects**
- or**
- very much stronger or weaker performance **in one or two aspects.**

## 6. Using the category descriptions

Several factors should be taken into account before assigning a particular numerical mark within a category.

- (a) Categories are not grades. Although derived from the performance criteria for Grade C and the indicators of excellence for Grade A, the six categories are designed primarily to assist with the placing of each candidate response at an appropriate point on a continuum of achievement. Assumptions about final grades or association of final grades with particular categories should not be allowed to get in the way of objective assessment.
- (b) The expectation is that the vast majority of candidates will already have demonstrated in unit assessment a level of competence that has merited achievement of the unit outcome. Markers should begin, therefore, with the expectation that each response will meet, at least, the requirements of category 4. While there may be some responses that for various reasons fail to demonstrate the level of competence required by category 4, the likelihood is that they will prove characteristic of category 5—and it is hoped that no response will be so incompetent as to require assignment to category 6.
- (c) For each category, a range of marks is available within which markers may refine their assessments, for example within a mark or so at the upper end, the middle or the lower end of the category. The marks range within each category should prove sufficiently generous to allow markers scope for fair and justifiable discrimination. Markers are encouraged to make full use of the ranges of marks available to them.
- (d) Mixed profiles of attainment will occur. Normally, these will represent variations within the range of performance that is characteristic of a particular category. In some instances, however, performance may be so uneven as to require markers to weigh up strengths and weaknesses of performance that extend across categories. Markers are reminded that their assessment should at all times be **holistic**—assigning each response to the category (and to the numerical point within the category) that best describes its overall achievement. In instances where there is genuine doubt as to whether a response should be placed at the lower end of a higher category or at the upper end of a lower category (and only in such instances), candidates should be given the benefit of the doubt, and their responses awarded the lowest mark in the higher category.

[END OF PRINCIPLES OF MARKING]