



# Guidance on conditions of assessment for coursework

This document provides guidance for teachers and lecturers.

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# Purpose

This document is for teachers and lecturers delivering National Courses, and aims to provide clarification and exemplification on acceptable conduct during coursework assessments.

The following subheadings have been included in the National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher course specification documents to provide additional clarity:

- ◆ time
- ◆ resources
- ◆ reasonable assistance
- ◆ supervision, control and authentication
- ◆ volume

# Introduction

This document provides strengthened guidance for teachers and lecturers on the conditions of assessment used by SQA to ensure the validity, reliability and fairness of its coursework assessments.

To ensure equity and fairness for all candidates, it is essential that the specified conditions are consistently applied in all centres. This ensures that reliable assessment decisions are made in centres delivering National Courses, and that the standard and credibility of the qualifications are maintained.

The subject-specific documentation, eg the course specification and the coursework assessment task, will provide detailed instructions about the assessment conditions which must be applied to each qualification at each level. **These documents must be consulted as this will provide the specific conditions for assessment that must be applied to each subject, at each level.**

The individual needs of learners should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment methods or considering alternative evidence. Coursework assessments have been designed to ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to assessment. Assessments have been designed to promote equal opportunities while maintaining the integrity of the qualification.

Guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled learners and/or those with additional support needs is available on the Assessment Arrangements web page: [www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/14977.html](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/14977.html).

Centres are expected to advise candidates on coursework assessment before controlled coursework assessment work begins. This may include:

- ◆ sources of information
- ◆ relevance of materials from learning and teaching
- ◆ structure of the response
- ◆ techniques of data collection
- ◆ techniques of data presentation
- ◆ skills of analysis and evaluation
- ◆ health and safety considerations

# Conditions of assessment

## Time and volume

It is the centre's responsibility to inform candidates about the time involved in an assessment, eg start and finish dates, and the maximum time allowed.

Assessment method	Time and volume
Assignment Project Case study Practical activity	<p>For assessment methods that require the preparation of materials, setting up of equipment, gathering of information etc and where it is not possible to distinguish between preparation for assessment and actual assessment, then <b>eight hours</b> should be taken as a notional guide to the time needed for preparation.</p> <p>The eight hours should include time for any final stage of assessment, such as a write-up or production of a final product.</p> <p>Subject-specific documentation will indicate when a timed write-up is required, and the time permitted for this.</p> <p>The appropriate assessment time and word count will vary from subject to subject depending on what is being assessed. It is likely to increase from level to level, and reflect time allocations and marking weightings.</p> <p>If a word count is specified, candidates will be instructed to record their word count (excluding footnotes, references or appendices). Exceeding the word count specified in the subject-specific documentation will incur a penalty.</p>
Portfolio	<p>Portfolios will be produced by candidates over a period of time.</p> <p>The material to be pulled together could include artefacts/folder of work done in class/process skills checklists, oral responses/audio/film evidence.</p> <p>Once candidates have submitted their evidence, this must not be changed by either the teacher or candidate.</p> <p>In some subjects, the nature of the skills to be assessed will mean that it is necessary to specify the amount of evidence required by indicating a page limit. This will also help manage quantity and portability of evidence.</p> <p>In some instances, a word count will apply. Teachers and lecturers must ensure they have checked the subject-specific documentation since exceeding the specified word count will incur a penalty.</p>

Assessment method	Time and volume
Performance	<p>At all levels, performances are likely to be short, and specified in minimum and maximum minutes.</p> <p>Performance may include planning and preparation stages and will usually also include a requirement for reflection/evaluation.</p> <p>Should a performance require preparation time which cannot be separated out from teaching and learning activities, eight hours' notional time can be allowed for preparation and assessment activity.</p>

**Teachers and lecturers must make clear to candidates that when the word count exceeds the maximum by more than 10% a penalty will be applied.**

## Resources

Candidates may have access to differing levels of resources during their coursework assessment. Subject-specific documentation includes information on the permitted resources.

Subject-specific documents list three levels of resource access:

### Free access to resources (open book)

In many of the assessment methods for coursework, an 'open book' approach to resources should be taken at some stages of the assessment. It is likely to be the case during planning and preparation stages that prepare candidates for any final write-up, practical activity, performance etc. In a minority of coursework assessments, candidates are permitted access to open resources throughout their assessment.

### Access to defined resources

In some subjects, candidates may have access to materials other than the assessment instrument itself. Examples of such permitted materials might include a dictionary or prepared notes, such as a Resource Sheet. ***These must never contain a pre-prepared write-up.***

Subject-specific documentation provides details of permitted materials; this should include the type (eg book, notes, tables), the amount (eg 200 words of notes, two textbooks) and any more specific information on the materials (eg a French dictionary).

Teachers and lecturers must check subject-specific documentation to identify the resources which are permitted in their subject.

## Closed-book conditions

Under closed-book conditions, no materials other than the assessment instrument are available to candidates. (However, the assessment instrument may contain, for example, a vocabulary list or a data sheet.)

**Markers will continue to highlight to SQA any instances where they suspect the assessment conditions have not been applied.**

## Reasonable assistance

Centres must ensure that candidates receive assistance that is in line with the examples provided below.

The term 'reasonable assistance' is used to try to balance the need for support with the need to avoid giving too much assistance. Teachers and lecturers **must be careful that the integrity of the assessment is not compromised**. Centres **must not** provide model answers or writing frames specific to the task (such as outlines, paragraph headings or section headings) unless the subject-specific documentation states otherwise.

Type of reasonable assistance	Examples
Selection of a task or topic	Assessor input and advice on the selection of a task/topic is appropriate before the candidate actually embarks on the task, unless the requirements state that the candidate has to select the task/topic without assistance.  Once work on the assessment has begun, the candidate must be working autonomously.
Advice on alternative sources	If resources for an assessment are unavailable, it may be appropriate for the assessor to discuss a series of options on alternative sources.  <i>Example: a candidate is conducting an investigation and has attempted to find a secondary source in the centre's learning resource centre, but the source is not available. In this case the assessor could discuss with the candidate a series of options on alternative ways of sourcing these documents, eg specialist internet searches, or alternative sources to the documents.</i>
Clarification	Clarification may be sought by candidates because of the wording of a brief or specification. The assessor could discuss the parameters of what would be acceptable. For example, a brief or specification may instruct the candidate to investigate a 'local employer'. A candidate may ask for clarification of 'local'. Normally, this should be clear from the assessment task but, if it is not, the assessor could discuss the parameters of what would be acceptable.

Type of reasonable assistance	Examples
	It may be that in cases where one candidate needs clarification, this could be extended to the whole class group.
Drawing out or teasing out points without leading candidates	This is broad guidance which lies somewhere between clarification and exploring options. Candidates sometimes get stuck at a particular part of a task. In such cases, an assessor could assist by raising other questions that make the candidates think about the original problem, therefore giving them the opportunity to answer their own questions without supplying the actual answers.
Exploring options with a candidate	<p><i>Example: a candidate is working on a practical activity and is faced with more than one possible solution to a problem. The assessor could offer the candidate the opportunity to discuss each option available and the pros and cons of each, and then ask the candidate to decide on a solution based on the discussion.</i></p> <p>In this way the assessor is not telling the candidate what to do but is facilitating the thought process to enable the candidate to work towards an appropriate choice.</p>
Asking candidates to re-read or check something previously taught	<p><i>Example: a candidate is working on a case study, which involves analysing and interpreting and making decisions on the information given. The candidate is having difficulty analysing the information in the case study. The assessor may refer the candidate back to a previous part of the learning programme which covered relevant material or skills that would help in the analysis.</i></p> <p>This would not be appropriate where the assessment takes place under a high degree of supervision and control.</p>
Arranging introductions, access, proof of identity	<p>Centre staff may need to set up initial contacts to provide access for a candidate to a workplace experience visit, a particular group etc.</p> <p><i>Example: a candidate carrying out a practical assignment may need access to a workplace environment. It may be that because of health and safety requirements, the initial approach can only be made by the teacher or lecturer. They may have to set up the initial contact but thereafter all arrangements are made by the candidate, for instance when they are attending and what they will do if this is part of the assessment or considered an important part of the learning experience.</i></p>
Arranging access to facilities, workshops,	Candidates may need access to specific facilities or specialist equipment within the centre, such as access to a science laboratory.

Type of reasonable assistance	Examples
specialist equipment	This may have to be arranged by the teacher or lecturer.
Appropriate supervision	<p>It may be the case that for health and safety reasons or similar, the teacher or lecturer may need to be present when a particular room or piece of equipment is being used.</p> <p>This does not mean that the teacher or lecturer should interfere or offer guidance on the on-going work the candidate is undertaking, unless intervention is required to prevent injury or to prevent damage to equipment or resources.</p>

Teachers and lecturers must understand the term 'reasonable assistance', and must ensure that the correct assessment conditions are applied.

If any candidates require more than what is deemed to be 'reasonable assistance', they may not be ready for assessment or it may be that they have been entered for the wrong level of qualification.

## Supervision, control and authentication

All assessment practices must be in line with SQA's general guidelines and policies on authentication, (see SQA's [Guide to Assessment](#) and [Authenticating learners' work – good practice advice](#)). Teachers and lecturers also need to be clear on the specific conditions of assessment for their relevant National Course.

### Supervision

Centres must ensure that candidates understand what they need to do to comply with the instructions for controlled assessments.

There are two levels of supervision and control specified in the subject-specific documentation.

#### Under a high degree of supervision and control

- ◆ the use of resources is tightly prescribed
- ◆ all candidates are within direct sight of the teacher or lecturer throughout the session(s)
- ◆ display materials which might provide assistance are removed or covered
- ◆ there is no access to email, the internet or mobile phones
- ◆ candidates complete their work independently
- ◆ interaction with other candidates does not occur
- ◆ no assistance of any description is provided

### **Under some supervision and control**

- ◆ candidates do not need to be directly supervised at all times
- ◆ the use of resources, including the internet, is not tightly prescribed
- ◆ the work an individual candidate submits for assessment is their own
- ◆ teachers and lecturers can provide reasonable assistance, as detailed above

If the candidate is likely to have contact with professionals outwith the centre, the teacher or lecturer must make it clear what role they can take in supporting and/or authenticating the candidate's work.

### **Authentication procedures**

Teachers and lecturers should be sufficiently familiar with the candidate's general standard to judge whether the piece of work submitted is within their capabilities.

Each candidate **must** sign a declaration to confirm that the work they submit for final assessment is their own unaided work (see example provided in *Your National Qualifications*).

### **Involvement of parents and carers**

Centres should make parents and carers aware of their responsibility in ensuring a fair and reliable assessment.

For example, parents and carers could encourage the candidate to spend time on their coursework and to think about it as early as possible. They could discuss the planning and timing of the work.

Teachers and lecturers could encourage parents and carers to provide the candidate with access to resource materials and discuss the coursework with them. However, they must be made aware that they must not give direct advice on what should or should not be included.

### **Group work**

Group work provides many positive benefits to candidates by promoting collaborative working practices balanced with opportunities for individual, independent and autonomous contributions to the work of the group.

However, it is important that teachers and lecturers are clear that they need to be able to make an accurate assessment of each individual candidate's contribution to the work of the group. Candidates must actively participate in group activity, and teachers and lecturers must ensure that any evidence from that activity is the candidate's own.

### **Definition of plagiarism and collusion**

SQA defines plagiarism as:

**Plagiarism**      'Failing to acknowledge sources properly and/or submitting another person's work as if it were your own.'

**Collusion** 'Copying work from another candidate and/or working collaboratively with other candidates on an individual task'.

### **Examples of plagiarism**

- ◆ Buying an essay from an internet site (also known as an 'essay bank' or a 'paper mill').
- ◆ Getting someone else to do the work for them.
- ◆ Giving false information about a source used in coursework.
- ◆ Copying and pasting from the internet without citing the source.
- ◆ Copying directly from a textbook without citing the source.
- ◆ Copying sections from a friend.
- ◆ Omitting quotation marks from quotations.
- ◆ Paraphrasing without including reference to the source of the paraphrase.
- ◆ Using generative Artificial Intelligence tools to create an output (text, image, video, audio, code) that is then submitted as a candidate's own work.

The most effective way to help candidates avoid being accused of plagiarism is to spend as much time as possible discussing the issue (including the risks and pitfalls), and by teaching basic writing and research skills. This shouldn't be a one-off lesson, but should be an on-going and iterative development.

Teachers must also be aware of what would constitute malpractice in their own centre, as outlined below.

## **Malpractice**

Malpractice is a serious matter. In the first instance any concerns around malpractice should be highlighted to your line manager.

### **Candidate malpractice**

Candidate malpractice means any type of malpractice by a candidate that threatens the integrity of an examination or assessment.

The following are examples of candidate malpractice, but you should be vigilant to other instances of suspected malpractice that may undermine the integrity of qualifications. Examples could include:

- ◆ collusion with others when an assessment must be completed by individual candidates
- ◆ prohibited items — physical possession of prohibited materials (including mobile phones, electronic devices and handwritten notes etc) during a controlled assessment
- ◆ copying from another candidate (including using ICT to do so) and/or working collaboratively with other candidates on an individual task
- ◆ plagiarism — failure to acknowledge sources properly and/or the submission of another person's work as if it were the candidate's own

### **Centre malpractice**

Centre malpractice means any type of malpractice by a centre, or someone acting on its behalf (for example an assessor), which threatens the integrity of an examination or

assessment. Failure to apply specified SQA assessment conditions in assessments, such as limits on resources or time available to candidates to complete their assessments, would be considered to be centre malpractice.

SQA reserves the right to consider other instances of suspected centre malpractice which may undermine the integrity of our qualifications.

### **Further information**

The procedures for dealing with incidents of candidate malpractice in examinations and centre malpractice can be found in *Malpractice: Information for centres*:

[www.sqa.org.uk/informationforcentres](http://www.sqa.org.uk/informationforcentres) .