UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH

Postgraduate Categorical Marking Scale and Assessment Description

Effective from 1st September 2025

Classification	Additional Description for Distinction Level only	Categorical Marking Scale	Detailed Assessment Description
Postgraduate - Level 7			
Distinction	Outstanding	100 Upper 95 Middle 92 Lower	**Learning Outcome:** Exceptional in all aspects, substantially exceeding expectations for this level. The work is of such a high standard that it could contribute meaningfully to the academic or professional field, showing an understanding that is at the forefront of the discipline. **Assessment Criteria:** Inclusion of multiple elements beyond those required, demonstrating a mastery of the subject and an ability to engage with advanced concepts in an innovative way. Work that is typically characterised by evidence of the following: ● Exceptional level of knowledge and understanding of complex, cutting-edge issues, theories, and principles at the forefront of the discipline. ● Extensive and original independent thought, demonstrating deep and innovative critical engagement with the subject matter. ● Exceptional synthesis of ideas, critically challenging conventional views or existing knowledge with fresh perspectives or approaches that significantly extend current understanding.

			- Clear evidence of significant contribution to the field or discipline, through novel insights or well-substantiated propositions that have the potential for publication. - Exceptionally well-structured and coherent argumentation, clearly demonstrating a deep understanding of the complexity of the topic and presenting it in a highly accessible manner. - Extensive use of a wide range of sources, incorporating both foundational and highly specialized materials to support arguments, accurately referenced and deeply integrated into the work. - The work's quality is at a level that is publishable or could meet professional standards for dissemination or implementation, potentially pushing the boundaries of the field. - Excellent communication with clear, concise, and accurate expression that enhances the understanding of complex ideas

Distinction	Publishable/ Professional standard	88 Upper	**Learning Outcome:** Outstanding in most/all aspects, substantially exceeding expectations for this level.
		85 Middle	**Assessment Criteria:** Underpinned by originality and/or novel ideas in thinking and a strong critical appreciation of the topic. No improvement could reasonably be expected.
		82 Lower	Work that is typically characterised by evidence of the following: • An outstanding level of knowledge and understanding of complex issues, key concepts and principles at the forefront of the discipline • Outstanding awareness of subject and/or practice • Outstanding evidence of original, independent and critical thought • A strong, well-structured argument that is convincing and well supported by an outstanding range of sources and/or evidence • Pushes the boundaries of existing knowledge • Evidence of extensive and discriminating reading/use of source material, accurately used in support of the work • Clearly structured, robust and persuasive arguments, lucidly written, uses clear and accurate expression

Distinction	Meets distinction criteria	78 Upper	**Learning Outcome:** Excellent quality, exceeding expectations for this level in many aspects. **Assessment Criteria:** Inclusion of elements beyond those required.
		75 Middle	
		72 Lower	Work that is typically characterised by evidence of the following: • A very good level to excellent of knowledge and understanding of complex issues, key concepts and principles at the forefront of the discipline • A very good to excellent awareness of subject and/or practice • Evidence of original, independent, and critical thought • A strong, well-structured argument that is convincing and well-supported by a wide range of sources and/or evidence • Explores the boundaries of existing knowledge • Evidence of extensive and discriminating reading/use of source material, accurately used in support of the work • Clearly structured, robust and persuasive arguments, lucidly written, uses clear and accurate expression
Merit Classification		68 Upper	**Learning Outcome**: Meets all the intended learning outcomes and exceeds the threshold expectations for this level in several of them. **Assessment Criteria**: Complete with no important omissions.
		65 Middle	Work that is typically characterised by evidence of the following:

		62 Lower	• A good or very good level of knowledge and understanding of key concepts and principles • Good or very good awareness of subject and/or practice • Able to describe and use a range of major concepts, theories and methodologies in a good or very good level of detail • Strong arguments which offer good analysis of key issues • Use of a broad/wide range of sources and/or evidence to support work • May contain some minor errors and/or minor areas for improvement • • Clearly structured, robust and persuasive arguments, lucidly written, uses clear and accurate expression
Pass Classification		58 Upper	**Learning Outcome:** Meets all the intended learning outcomes for this level. **Assessment Criteria:** Addresses the question/assignment. Some omissions.
		55 Middle	Work that is typically characterised by evidence of the following:

		52 Lower	- A reasonable level of knowledge and understanding of key concepts and principles - Sufficient awareness of subject and/or practice - Able to describe and use a range of major concepts, theories and methodologies - Some critical judgement offered - Arguments offer some analysis of key issues, but they may lack coherence and / or supporting evidence - Evidence of familiarity with the key sources and/or evidence but may contain questionable interpretation of critical materials - May contain some errors and/or areas for improvement - Organisation and clarity of writing are of sufficient standard for the reader to engage easily - Needs some improvement in one or more areas

Fail		48	**Learning Outcome:** Meets some of the intended learning outcomes
		45	**Assessment Criteria:** Addresses some aspects of question/assignment, but with some important omissions. Needs improvements before meeting pass threshold at PgT level.
		42	Unsatisfactory work that is typically characterised by evidence of the following: • A limited level of knowledge and understanding of a restricted range of issues. Poorly conceived and poorly directed to the question/task • Shows some understanding of empirical or theoretical issues but is not able to develop them further • Some evidence of argument but contains irrelevant or unrelated elements. Arguments may be superficial/shallow • Some familiarity with basic reading material but little evidence of the use of sources and/or evidence, or over reliance on very basic resources • Likely to contain repetition, inconsistencies and/or some major errors • Organisation and clarity of writing may be limited, but will be sufficient for the reader to engage with most aspects of the work • Needs some improvement before meeting pass threshold at PGT level

Fail		38	**Learning Outcome:** Fails to meet most or all of the intended learning outcomes and is inadequate for this level. **Assessment Criteria:** Fails to address much of the question/assignment. Lots of omissions. Unsatisfactory work that is typically characterised by evidence of the following: • A very limited level of knowledge and understanding of a restricted range of issues. Poorly conceived and poorly directed to the question/task • Limited understanding of empirical or theoretical issues but is not able to develop them further • Limited evidence of argument and/or contains irrelevant or unrelated elements. • Limited familiarity with basic reading materials and little evidence of the use of sources and/or evidence, or over reliance on very basic resources • Likely to contain repetition, inconsistencies and/or some major errors • Organisation and clarity of writing may be limited, but will be sufficient for the reader to engage with most aspects of the work • Needs significant improvement to meet pass threshold at PGT level
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Non-submission or no adequate attempt		0	No submission, wrong answer, token submission (e.g. student number/date)