

A Guide to The Grading Standards

Version 1.1 – 1 August 2024



learning your way

Introduction

The Three Grading Standards apply to all new students registered on Access to HE Diplomas from 1 August 2024. This guide provides an outline of the grading standards and how they might be used, as well as considerations when selecting and applying the components and subcomponents when assessing student assessments.

The content and wording of the Grading Standards must not be changed other than selecting the relevant subcomponents, and the appropriate components and subcomponents in the case of Grading Standard 3.

Each standard includes a set of more detailed component items which describe the types of performance expected within that standard.

When designing assignment briefs and assessing student work, select the most appropriate sub-components for each standard for the subject area and assessment method. Consideration of the unit assessment criteria for guidance on the knowledge and skills required within the unit will help support how to apply the Grading Standards correctly.

Care must be taken to ensure the evidence produced by the student demonstrates the achievement of the allocated Grading Standards and their components/sub-components.

All three grading standards are used with every graded unit and across every assignment within a graded unit. In units with more than one assignment:

- Grades for each assignment must not be awarded; grading only occurs at unit level.
- Individual assessments cannot be graded per grading standard. For example, assignment one cannot be used to only grade grading standard 1 and assignment two used to grade 2 and 3.

Only when all assignments for an individual unit are assessed, and the student has met all Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria for the unit will grading of the unit take place.

Section B of the [Grading Scheme Handbook](#) outlines the three Grading Standards and how they are used.

Grading Standard 1: Knowledge and Understanding

Using this standard

Utilise both components. For component (b) for 3 credit units, select a minimum of 2 and maximum of 4 of the most relevant sub-components; for 6 and 9-credit units, select a minimum of 2 and maximum of 6 . Choices must be consistent across merit and distinction.	
Merit The student, student's work or performance:	Distinction The student, student's work or performance:
<p>a. generally demonstrates the ability to apply knowledge appropriately in a given context showing breadth OR depth of knowledge in responding to the demands of the unit,</p> <p>with</p> <p>b. a very good understanding and use of (choose from):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facts • concepts • theories • models • methods • perspectives • ideas • principles • practices • procedures 	<p>a. consistently demonstrates the ability to apply knowledge appropriately in a given context showing breadth OR depth of knowledge in responding to the demands of the unit,</p> <p>with</p> <p>b. an excellent understanding and use of (choose from):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facts • concepts • theories • models • methods • perspectives • ideas • principles • practices • procedures
There is no grading standard for pass. Students achieve a pass by meeting the requirements of the learning outcomes of a unit.	

Interpreting the standard

Grading standard 1 has two components (a and b), both of which must be applied to every graded unit. Depending on whether a 3- 6- or 9-credit unit is being used, as well as the subject area and method of assessment, the number of subcomponents to select for component 'b' will be determined. A minimum of two must be chosen, and remember, whichever are selected for merit must also be selected for distinction.

There is no need to pre-select breadth or depth for either merit or distinction. This will provide flexibility to enable students to demonstrate one or the other or both in their response to the brief's requirements.

When interpreting 'understanding' as required in component 'b', students should produce evidence to demonstrate how they have applied their knowledge appropriately to the activities within the assessment.

Grading Standard 2: Subject Specific Skills

Using this standard

For all units irrespective of size, select a minimum of 2 and maximum of 4 of the most relevant sub-components in (b). Choices must be consistent across merit and distinction.	
Merit The student, student's work or performance:	Distinction The student, student's work or performance:
a. generally demonstrates an ability in selecting and using skills as required by the unit, with b. very good levels of (choose from): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accuracy • precision • efficiency • creativity • innovation • reasoning • insight • focus • interpretation 	a. consistently demonstrates an ability in selecting and using skills as required by the unit, with b. excellent levels of (choose from): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accuracy • precision • efficiency • creativity • innovation • reasoning • insight • focus • interpretation
There is no grading standard for pass. Students achieve a pass by meeting the requirements of the learning outcomes of a unit.	

Interpreting the standard

Grading standard 2 also comprises two components (a and b), both of which must be applied to every graded unit. Consideration should be given to the number of subcomponents to select for component b, depending on the subject area and method of assessment. A minimum of two and a maximum of four must be chosen no matter the credit size of the unit, and whichever is selected for merit must also be chosen for distinction.

It is essential to determine the skills required to meet the expectations of the unit's learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The evidence a student produces must demonstrate their subject-specific skills in terms of how they approach the assessment requirements and whether those subject-specific skills are generally or consistently applied.

Grading Standard: Transferable Skills

Using this standard

<p>There are 3 components for this grading standard; (a), (b) and (c). A minimum of 2 components must be selected for all graded units (irrespective of size of unit). All 3 components must be used at least once across the assessment of the Diploma Components (a) and (b) each have a set of sub-components. Select a minimum of 2 and maximum of 4 of the most relevant sub-components for both (a) and (b).</p>	
<p>Merit The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>a. demonstrates very good communication and/or presentation skills evidenced by the use and/or selection of (choose from):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • format • structure • grammar • syntax • spelling and punctuation • imagery • artefacts • digital software • number • metrics • paralanguage <p>b. demonstrates autonomy and/or independence evidenced by a very good ability to (choose from):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plan, organise and complete work • respond appropriately to supervision • conduct independent research • manage time • collaborate with others • take responsibility for own contributions • reflect on own performance <p>c. generally adheres to academic and/or professional conventions in use of technical/specialist language and/or format in responding to the instructions set out in the assignment brief (see below for examples).</p>	<p>Distinction The student, student's work or performance:</p> <p>a. demonstrates excellent communication and/or presentation skills evidenced by the use and/or selection of (choose from):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • format • structure • grammar • syntax • spelling and punctuation • imagery • artefacts • digital software • number • metrics • paralanguage <p>b. demonstrates autonomy and/or independence evidenced by an excellent ability to (choose from):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plan, organise and complete work • respond appropriately to supervision • conduct independent research • manage time • collaborate with others • take responsibility for own contributions • reflect on own performance <p>c. consistently adheres to academic and/or professional conventions in use of technical/specialist language and/or format in responding to the instructions set out in the assignment brief (see below for examples).</p>
<p>There is no grading standard for pass. Students achieve a pass by meeting the requirements of the learning outcomes of a unit.</p>	

Interpreting the standard

Grading Standard 3 (Transferable Skills) has three components (a, b and c). At least two components (a, b and c) must be applied to every graded unit. In addition, all three components (a, b and c) must be used at least once across the delivery of the Diploma.

For component 'a', select a minimum of two and a maximum of four bullet points, irrespective of the credit size of the unit. Any contextualisation and additional guidance must clarify what the expectation is of the student and the evidence to produce. Presentation skills within component 'a' should not be limited to a standup presentation, it covers a range of presentation types given by the bullet points. Select the most appropriate bullet points for the subject area and assessment method.

Component 'b' comprises multiple options exploring autonomy and/or independence and the selection of a minimum of two and a maximum of four bullet points. When selecting sub-components, the type of evidence a student is expected to produce must be clear to prove the attainment of the subcomponent. Evidence cannot be implicit or assumed just because another task has been completed. A student must be able to prove they have met the requirements of the subcomponent.

Component 'b' would seem most relevant for a student undertaking an extended piece of research that requires planning, organisation and independent research. This component would not be appropriate for use where an assessment does not directly evidence the activities within it.

Component 'c' comprises multiple options, therefore, consideration of what is being assessed and what is expected of students is essential.

Contextualising the grading standards

Assignment briefs must provide all the information a student needs to know what is required to meet the expectations defined by the grading standards and the selected sub-components. The additional guidance ensures complete transparency of how the student will be graded and helps with understanding the differences between a merit grade and a distinction grade.

When selecting components and subcomponents for any of the grading standards, it should be remembered that students will rely significantly on the grading standards' wording and the guidance given in assignment briefs. Taking the time to choose these well when writing assignment briefs is essential in creating assessments that can be effectively and accurately graded – and help give students the greatest opportunity to achieve their maximum potential.

If you are unsure or have a specific query, please email the support team at access@gatewayqualifications.org.uk.