

HOW IS COURSEWORK MARKED?



Many people assume that because Creative and Professional Writing is an 'artistic subject' judgement of coursework must be subjective and personal, based on the individual taste of the marking tutor. In fact this is very far from the case.

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An Undergraduate Grading Scheme

Most universities have a very well developed and clear set of marking criteria by which all coursework is assessed. At the top end of the range the criteria are generally very similar to the publishable standard of work expected by agents, editors and publishers.

In general this subject is interested in effective writing, the student's awareness of what they were aiming at, and their understanding of how close they came to achieving it. In addition to things like rhyme, rhythm, diction, and form, in Creative and Professional Writing marks may be awarded / deducted for presentation, expression, accuracy, layout, spelling, grammar, syntax, paragraphing, footnoting, bibliography, drafting, revision and editing. In commenting on coursework, tutors may also discuss, consider or refer to the following:

Control of language	This refers to editing and revision, punctuation, spelling, grammar, syntax, the use of adjectives, adverbs and cliché.
Observation	This refers to the principle of showing not telling, and to details which may render a scene, character or state of feeling vivid and clear to the reader / listener.
Structure	This refers to the appropriate organisation of the text, the needs of the genre, the needs of the reader and economy of form.
Voice	This refers to the detailed control of narrative voice, dialogue, register, tone and precision of effect.
Presentation	This refers to the look of the work on the page, layout, margins, spacing, paragraphing, footnoting, references, bibliography.

These marking guidelines were drafted through discussion with University of Derby Creative and Professional Writing staff in March 1998 and formed the basis of a discussion paper at the Sheffield Hallam Conference, 'Creative and Professional Writing and Professionalism' in October 2001.

The guidelines list the general characteristics associated with undergraduate work, marking grades and the degree classification they might lead to: it can be mapped onto any university grade scheme. The exact percentage-banding may vary slightly from university to university, but most university undergraduate grading schemes award marks on a scale of 0-100 with the pass mark set at 40.

First Class - Excellent

- ◆ Outstanding, exceptionally high standard, trivial defects: A+
- ◆ Excellent in most respects, very minor defects: A
- ◆ Very good to excellent, a few minor defects: A-

Notebooks, Introductions, Process Analysis

Special signs of excellence; unusual clarity; excellence of presentation; mastery of course material; clear and abundant personal and professional insight; originality of argument. An evaluation that demonstrates fully and concisely technical and imaginative abilities and understanding with a full exploration of the drafting, redrafting and editing process shown in a thorough process analysis and full engagement with the criteria of the module.

Creative Work

Work considered approaching publishable standard, possibly worthy of consideration for publication. Presentation is of near professional standard. Highly original in form, style or content. Full control and selection of language and idiom; originality and editorial ability in usage and shaping language at all times. Full control and use of observed detail, exploring possibilities and economies of creative structures. Full control of narrative voice and dialogue; awareness of demands of tone and register. Demonstrates all the qualities of the categories listed here, but to the highest possible standard.

Upper Second Class - A Good Pass

- ◆ Very good standard, some minor defects: B+
- ◆ Generally very good, but with some defects: B
- ◆ Good to very good, but with some notable defects: B-

Notebooks, Introductions, Process Analysis

A rich and well developed argument with clearly stated and well-argued conclusions, showing the ability to range over appropriate areas of the course; acuteness of analysis, intelligent challenges to the material of the course; abundance of varied evidence intelligently applied, clear evidence of personal and professional insight and ability to create and develop an argument. A satisfactory exploration of the drafting and redrafting processes (though this may not be thorough), and a clear engagement with the criteria of assessment.

Creative Work

Clearly above average in creative capacity and technical skill: overall control of language, evidence of editing and selectivity of language. Appropriate, justifiable and

original use of language, e.g., coining new words, using the vernacular, plundering specialist vocabularies, regional dialects and accent, unusual juxta-positioning of familiar words, ability to create sound patterns and effective images. Experimentation with complex structure and form; use of creative possibilities of economies and particular forms and structures; effective use of observed detail; strong skills in narrative voice, awareness of the demands of tone and register, control of idiom where necessary; effective description, characterisation, dialogue; creation of multiple layers of meaning. There is evidence of precise crafting. In poetry the ability to create effective rhythms, use effective and appropriate rhyme, metre or syllabic technique.

Lower Second Class - A Clear Pass

- ◆ Good to creditable work, but with a few notable defects: C+
- ◆ Good, generally sound, but a number of notable defects: C
- ◆ Satisfactory to good: C-

Notebooks, Introductions, Process Analysis

This is considered work marshalling some of the pros and cons of the course with well-chosen evidence and examples. The higher levels of this grade range require the candidate to produce some sort of verdict on the material of the course, and some evidence of personal and professional insight. Partial exploration of the redrafting and editing processes; commentary may be limited to description. Process Introductions lack precision in analysis and expression, but show some awareness of their relationship to the creative work under discussion. Engagement with the assessment criteria is partial, but evidence of awareness of the most significant aspects of technical competence and imaginative qualities.

Creative Work

The average demonstrating a range of creative and technical skills, but with limited originality in the use of language, development of individual style, application of structural devices and development of ideas. Partial control of language, some evidence of originality or selectivity in language and editing of the text. Partial or incomplete use of observed detail; competent but inconsistent observation. Partial or inconsistent control of structure, control of narrative, voice and dialogue. Occasional awareness of the demands of tone, register and idiom. Work has creative elements and a degree of critical awareness and technical competence, but is flawed in presentation or demonstrates only limited control and professional and creative self-awareness.

Third Class – A Bare Pass

- ◆ Satisfactory standard, but with a number of significant shortcomings: D+
- ◆ Satisfactory in most respects, but a number of significant shortcomings: D
- ◆ Satisfactory. Minimum pass: on the borderline, a number of significant shortcomings: D-

Notebooks, Introductions, Process Analysis

Some signs of use of relevant evidence and course materials to tackle key questions, even though treatment may be one sided and/or scanty, little evidence of personal and professional insight. There is a limited exploration of the processes of writing and drafting. Process Analysis may be cursory and descriptive rather than analytical.

Creative Work

Basic crafting and creative skills, but inadequately expressed, limited in presentation, limited in communicative ability and range - e.g. depth of meaning, layers of complexity, complexity of structure, precision of style and expression, limited inventiveness or flair in use of language and development of ideas. There is limited control of structure or narrative voice. Limited control of language; substantial reliance on cliché; limited awareness of the demands of tone, register and idiom low level of selectivity; little evidence of editing of language; Inappropriate dialogue. Work has not been thoroughly redrafted; poorly edited, mistakes in spelling, grammar and punctuation. Poor, limited and inconsistent observational skills.

Fail

- ◆ Unsatisfactory, some significant / serious shortcomings: Fail
- ◆ Very poor standard, but some relevant information: Fail

Notebooks, Introductions, Process Analysis

Vagueness, basic errors, poor presentation, general lack of understanding, perplexity about the course, the materials or the module requirements. Scant evidence of personal and professional insight. No evidence of exploration of the process of redrafting and editing. Inadequate in terms of length, engagement with the module. Little or no engagement with the criteria of assessment.

Creative Work

Shows some evidence of creativity and elementary technical crafting, but is marred by poor spelling and/or grammar, poor editing, poor presentation, insufficient attention to structure. Poor communicative abilities; little or no control of language; dependence on cliché and generalities. Errors of spelling, grammar and expression inhibit communication. No evidence of observation; no evidence of control over structures and form no evidence of control of voice or dialogue.

Z – Zero – Nothing of Merit

Rudimentary discussion, bare awareness of module requirements, few relevant statements, irrelevant content, incoherent notes, little reference to the module or to discussions and work of the module. No evidence of personal or professional insight. Important elements of coursework are missing. Too little written work, or too little

evidence of participation in the module. Answers have little or no relevance, no attempt to offer anything relevant; no attempt to answer. Creative work does not meet course requirements, fails to consider course subject matter. Fails to demonstrate creative or critical ability, or demonstrates only limited creative or critical ability. Work is largely incomprehensible. Student ignores set course work or fails to offer a component of written work.

Summary

Most students of Creative and Professional Writing are interested in seeing their work published. The main underlying reasons for not getting published are identical to the main reason for under-performance in university study - simply that the student / new writer did not pay sufficient attention to the fundamentals. The following five common basic mistakes apply equally to coursework and to submissions for publication.

- ♦ **Poor research of the market.** Not paying attention to the market or to a publisher's submission guidelines is the most common mistake new authors make. In publishing new writers often submit their work to inappropriate publishers, or they simply do not read the publisher's requirements. At University and in publication this mistake includes not meeting the word count specified, submitting prose when poetry was required, submitting journalism instead of writing for children etc. Always read your instructions very carefully and submit only the work specified.
- ♦ **Not following the Style Sheet.** Not paying attention to the publisher's Style Sheet – for example, including ignoring the layout or word-count - is another common mistake for new authors. It is also a common failing at university too. Read the publisher's Style Sheet or the University Style Guide very carefully, and then follow it to the letter.
- ♦ **Ignoring experienced advice.** There is a lot of great information out there – on the web, in books and articles, on TV and radio, in University courses - written by people who are involved in, or who have been through, the submission process. Publishers, authors, agents, editors, writer's groups, lecturers in Creative and Professional Writing... and they all say the same things. Remember, if you keep hearing the same advice from people with experience, it is probably because that advice is accurate. And yes, it applies to you...
- ♦ **Poorly presented manuscripts.** For publishers finding and editing a new book is hard work, a serious investment of time and money: they are not interested in genius when it is buried in an incoherent, un-grammatical text with poor control of language, spelling and punctuation or perhaps even lacking important sections of the text. Work like that will not succeed – not in the world of publishing and not at university either.
- ♦ **Lack of dedication.** To be a writer you should have some talent, and you should apply that talent. But you must be very determined and you must carry forward what you learn into each new piece of work. Filling in finance forms, checking submission guidelines, researching the market, following Style Sheets, meeting

deadlines, dealing with editors, pitching and presenting, and endlessly editing and re-submitting manuscripts can be tedious. These things are not what writers prefer to do, but as a professional writer you will need to do them all. It is much the same at university. For each new module, engage even with the parts you do not find so interesting. Remember knowledge is cumulative: it is about carrying forward what you learn to the next module and to your next piece of writing.

Often success is not about brilliance, but about the persistent application of whatever talent you have. If you really want to succeed, that is how it works...