

Guidelines for assessment of papers in Modern Languages Finals

(Confirmed for 2009 - this version replaces all previous ones)

General guidelines

Examiners will use the full scale of marks (including from less than 29% to greater than 80%). All scripts will be double-marked independently, and may be re-read or third-read. While it is important to arrive at a sense of the value of the entire script, examiners will assess each answer on its merits.

Failure to comply with rubrics, incomplete answers, missing answers, and poor English, will be penalised.

Plagiarism is regarded as a serious offence, which is penalised by reference to the Proctors, who have powers to instruct examiners to disregard one piece of work, or one whole paper, to exclude the candidate from classification, or to expel from the University.

General guidelines on literary/linguistic essays

Essays will be assessed on their relevance to the question attempted, on their structure, on the appropriateness of the illustrative material used and, where possible, on their originality. Candidates are advised to pay close attention to the structure of their answers: if the question specifically requires “discussion”, one-sided answers will be penalised. Answers may show either in-depth knowledge, or breadth of reference, or both. In papers IV to XIII, evidence of knowledge of critical issues will be expected. Arguments should be supported by illustration, but lengthy quotation from texts may not be appropriate. Length of essay is not necessarily a virtue.

General guidelines on oral examination

In the spoken language, fluency, comprehension and accuracy are equally important. Credit will be given to appropriateness of register, range of vocabulary and structures, and to effective presentation of arguments. Use of geographical language variants will not be penalised, but excessive use of slang may be taken as evidence of insensitivity to register.

Unseen translation into English

This exercise tests accuracy of comprehension, knowledge of vocabulary and structures, sensitivity to register, and flair for finding appropriate equivalents in English. The marking scheme is not purely negative, but seeks to reward original or more ambitious solutions.

Numerical Mark	Class	Comprehension	English
Greater than or equal to 80	I	Excellent performance; few and minor problems of comprehension; subtleties of text, including ambiguity, conveyed.	Gives impression that text was conceived in English.
70-79	I	Very good performance. No serious problems of comprehension. Shows resourcefulness in overcoming problems and producing persuasive version.	Sensitivity to register; good stylistic manipulation of English. Written in natural and idiomatic English, non-standard English rendered appropriately.
60-69	Iii	Full comprehension of a fair range of vocabulary and structures; plausible attempts to overcome problems.	Passage reads clearly and convincingly on the whole; some infelicities.
50-59	Iiii	General comprehension of a fair range of vocabulary and structures, but with significant gaps; fails to cope with much of the more difficult vocabulary. A decent attempt to work round basic gaps should earn a <i>high</i> Iiii.	Tends towards awkward and literal English; little attempt to find valid English equivalents. Little sensitivity to register. Occasional meaningless renderings should earn <i>low</i> Iiii.
40-49	III	Patchy comprehension of original; but difficulty even with common words and structures.	Awkward, literal English; gaps.
30-39	Pass	Gives impression of largely misunderstanding the passage.	Only some of the passage rendered comprehensibly.
Less than or equal to 29	Fail	Almost totally misunderstands the passage.	Totally inadequate English.

Essay in the Language

This exercise is assessed on both content and language. Normally these will be weighted in equal proportions, since expression and content mutually influence each other. However, examiners may decide to vary this weighting depending on the nature of the question attempted or on particular features of style.

Numerical Mark	Class	Content/Argument	Language
Greater than or equal to 80	I	Sophisticated and challenging approach to topic, and excellent background knowledge, where appropriate; clearly structured and illustrated.	Use of vocabulary and structures generally near-native; elegance of style.
70-79	I	Thoughtful and original approach; brings in wide range of relevant material; very well structured and illustrated, persuasively argued.	Excellent range of structures; relatively few errors of grammar; errors of vocabulary limited to <i>recherché</i> areas.
60-69	Iii	Competent discussion of the topic; good background knowledge; some originality of approach; clear, well-structured argument, drawing on a good range of well-chosen material. At the lower level, ideas, while relevant, will be more of a mundane survey; at the higher level, arguments will be more resourceful.	Secure handling of syntax and vocabulary in most contexts; ability to manipulate style. A script whose irrelevance or lack of organisation may merit a Iiii mark may be raised to this class by evidence of originality or ingenuity in language.
50-59	Iiii	Basic ideas, and a limited survey of the subject; attempts to answer the question and shows some knowledge of the topic; inadequate structure, and illustration not always to the point. The lower range will show a tendency to padding; better scripts should show some ability to synthesise ideas.	More limited vocabulary and syntax; lacks adventurousness. Tends to resort to English syntax and structures. Little ability to manipulate style. A script whose content or language may merit a Iii mark may be lowered to this class if it is too short.
40-49	III	The underlying argument is discernible, but the candidate fails to address issues in title; poor structure, with much irrelevance, padding and inappropriate illustration.	Weak vocabulary and poor grammar greatly inhibit presentation of ideas. Underlying English syntax and structures are apparent.
30-39	Pass	The ideas presented lack coordination, direction and relevance.	Limited awareness of basic grammar; vocabulary too slight to tackle analysis at this level.
Less than or equal to 29	Fail	Completely fails to demonstrate knowledge of the subject under discussion or to make any valid response to it.	Wholly inadequate grammar and vocabulary.

Prose Composition

Numerical Mark	Class	Grammar & Structures	Vocabulary	Other
Greater than or equal to 80	I	Outstanding work; natural and idiomatic in style; few grammatical errors.	Wide-ranging, precise and appropriate in the vast majority of contexts.	Developed sense of nuance;
70-79	I	Relatively few errors, with confident use of complex structures.	Shows relatively few vocabulary gaps; without evidently imprecise or inappropriate choices of wording.	Good sense of nuance.
60-69	Iii	Basic structures generally mastered with only occasional errors; ability to match most structures appropriately to register.	Vocabulary adequate for most purposes, though with some gaps; limited use of evidently imprecise or inappropriate choices of wording.	Some flashes of skill may raise a Iii script into this class.
50-59	Iii	Structures adequate but limited; some basic errors.	Vocabulary deficient in less usual contexts; frequent imprecise or inappropriate choices of wording.	Oversimplification of the original which may obscure the sense.
40-49	III	Some grammatical knowledge, but frequent basic errors.	Some communication achieved, but hampered by lack of vocabulary; gaps, or invented words; gaps or invented words, or extensive use of imprecise or inappropriate choices of wording.	Lack of awareness of linguistic problems involved.
30-39	Pass	Limited awareness of basic grammatical functions.	Vocabulary inadequate for translation at this level.	
Less than or equal to 29	Fail	Seriously inadequate knowledge of grammar.	Difficulty in communicating even the simplest ideas.	

Essays in Literature/Linguistic Papers

Numerical Marks	Class	Criteria	Notes
Greater than or equal to 80	I	Work which is outstanding both in the range and command of the material and in the analysis brought to bear. The answer engages closely with the question, and shows originality of approach .	Various criteria may apply, either singly or in combination: some First-Class answers may show highly sophisticated or incisive argument; others may contain a wealth of relevant information; others may show an original approach to the subject. The answer is not necessarily lengthy.
70-79	I	Work which displays some sophistication of argument, an excellent range of relevant knowledge, pertinent analysis and occasional originality.	
60-69	Iii	Work showing good understanding of the question and of relevant material, organised in a clearly-argued and well-illustrated manner. At the lower end essays may show a competent survey of received ideas.	An essay with First-Class quality but blurred focus may fall into this class. Similarly an answer whose lack of organisation or relevance may merit a Iiii mark may be raised to this class if it shows some flashes of First-Class inspiration.
50-59	Iiii	Work which, though competent, is lacking in focus, organisation or breadth of reference. Essays may show lack of judgement, lack of relevance, and may contain inappropriately recycled or “prepared” material. The presentation may also be clumsy.	An essay, which would otherwise merit a Iii mark may fall into this class if it is rushed, unfinished or badly organised. Essays which give a good answer to the wrong question may also fall into this class.
40-49	III	Work which shows some knowledge of the subject but lacks understanding and breadth of reference. The essay may have missed the point of the question, be too short, contain irrelevant material, or fail to respect the rubric.	
30-39	Pass	Material which superficially addresses the question, but is largely irrelevant.	
Less than or equal to 29	Fail	Almost totally irrelevant and superficial work, which shows no understanding of the material.	