

## Finding your way through the essay criteria: a guide

### FAIL MARKS

As you would expect, these marks indicate that you have not fully appreciated or understood the demands of the task. To improve:

- Re-read and write a synopsis of the primary text. Avoid obvious blunders like:
  - Getting the names of the characters wrong (or misspelling them)
  - Getting the order of events wrong
- Ring the critical terms that you have misused in your essay. Ask your tutor to explain
- Follow up your tutor's suggestions for approachable secondary reading
- Read a simple guide to context / history (something like the Cambridge Introductions series or the Oxford Reference series). Avoid obvious blunders like:
  - Getting the date of publication wrong
  - Getting periodisation wrong (Renaissance, Classical, Romantic, etc...)
- If your answer was short-weight, why did you run out of ideas? Discuss with your tutor
- Check the study skills guides to referencing here: \*\*\*\*Make sure you know to write a bibliography. Marks are being lost needlessly here.
- Practise punctuation, grammar and syntax. Take a look at the Study Skills Moodle for more information.

### 3RD-CLASS MARKS

You've tried to engage with the text but there is a significant amount of misunderstanding and you struggle with essay-writing technique. Follow the advice above. To improve your critical and analytical vocabulary, try reading arts reviews (cinema, literature, theatre, music...)

### 2:2 MARKS

#### 52

Your engagement with primary source(s) is now fuller but you struggle to articulate your ideas in an organised way, and you still make factual / practical errors. Your understanding of how to make best use of secondary sources is still insecure.

Use the advice above. To improve, focus particularly on:

- Ironing out any errors in your bibliography and references. This is the most straightforward way to improve your performance. If you're stuck, ask your tutor.
- Learning to analyse rather than describe. Use the Point Evidence Explain format for organising paragraphs, where
  - Point = idea / mini thesis
  - Evidence = example from primary source
  - Explain = your interpretation (bring in a secondary source argument to add depth here)
- Using good secondary sources: before you write your next essay, check out your reading with your tutor.

**55**

You are more confident in your use of the primary source(s) but you still make mistakes. Check your understanding by reading a simple secondary source. All of the text (context, chronology, characters, plot) must be understood correctly for your marks to go up.

Once your reading is more confident, note down similar examples / features together so that you can give an overview of key approaches / ideas in your writing. This will make your essay more analytical.

**58**

You succeed in handling primary and secondary material better (by drawing your ideas from several secondary sources and relating them to the primary text, and by showing a more firm grasp of the primary material). To improve you need to eliminate basic errors as set out above. You also need to work on your writing style. Always begin major paragraphs with an idea / argument rather than an example / description. Are you setting out the direction of your argument in your introduction?

## **2:1 MARKS**

**62**

You've crossed the threshold into 2:1 because you are now striving to draw ideas from several secondary sources, to relate these more accurately to the primary text, and to assess the primary text more systematically. Note the word 'synthesise' comes in here: this means that you are able to identify particular features in the primary work (style, characterisation, narrative, formal techniques, etc...), find several examples of these, and talk knowledgeably about how these devices are used across the work(s), rather than describing particular examples. Your writing could be crisper in places. Work particularly on sentence construction and punctuation.

**65**

You do all of the above, but you are more confident in your handling of primary and secondary material. This includes making good choices about which secondary material is most relevant to your argument. You have a stronger command of critical English and so can convey your ideas more clearly.

**68**

Now you are able to think more imaginatively about the question posed and to raise more complex questions in relation to it. This shows itself in your choice of secondary material and primary examples. Whereas at 65 a good essay might be a little too strongly shaped by ideas from critics, at 68 you begin to examine critical opinions more critically.

## **FIRST-CLASS WORK**

You've crossed the threshold into first because you do all of the above, but the minor errors that may persist at 2:1 have disappeared. You have found your own critical voice, and you are able to write fluidly and sensitively about your material. In your preparation for writing, you have used secondary sources to prompt the flow of ideas, but you have then gone back to the primary material to critically appraise their relevance. At the top end of first class you pick out subtle nuances and features and use these to shape an original response to critical views. You ensure your knowledge of context is detailed and robust so that you are able to speak with authority on the material you are analysing.