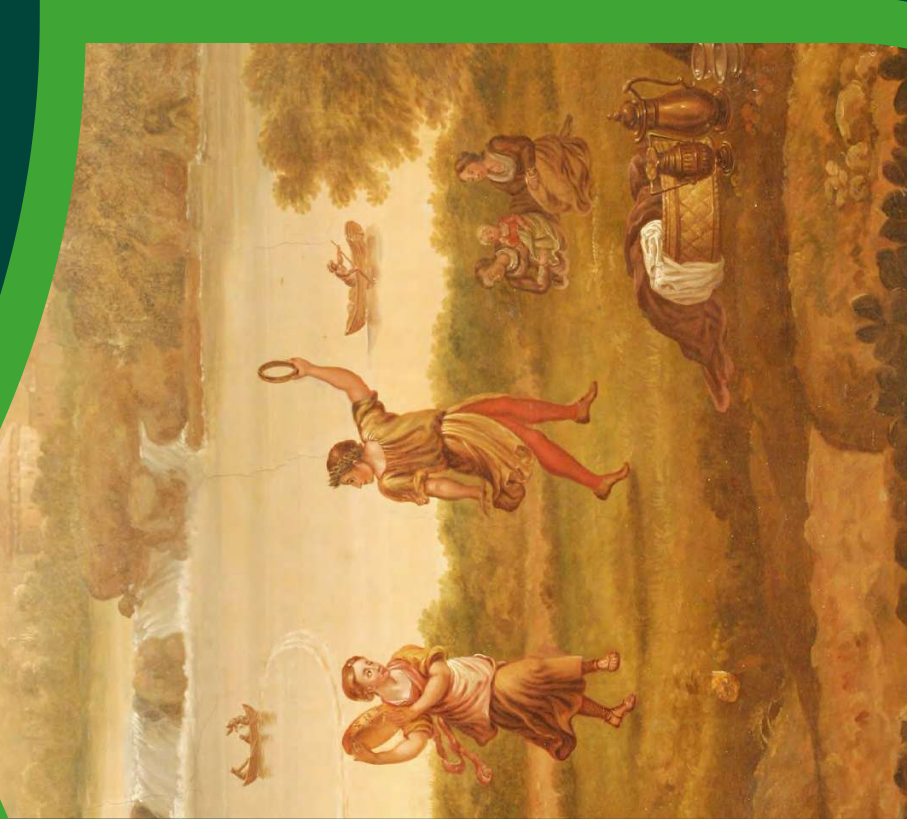




Ollscoil na hÉireann
National University of Ireland

NUI Grade Descriptors 2025





NUI Grade Descriptors 2025

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Version 2

Front cover inset image from NUI's murals (c.1820).
Read more about the murals in our digital booklet:
https://www.nui.ie/mural_paintings/mural_paintings.html.

Contents

1	Explanatory Note	6
	Terminology	6
2	The 2026 NUI Grade Descriptors	7



1 Explanatory Note

The grade descriptors below are offered as indicators applicable to undergraduate programmes at Levels 7 and 8 of the [National Framework of Qualifications](#). These descriptors are high-level, and it is acknowledged that adaptation may be required for particular programmes. The NUI Grade Descriptors will be available on the NUI Website, for use and adaption by NUI federation member institutions. It is requested that, where possible, member institutions share their adapted versions with NUI so that common trends and developments can be tracked over time.

The grade descriptors (as adapted, wherever appropriate) should be shared with learners to facilitate enhanced learning and assessment. Learners engaging with the descriptors should be aware that they apply to learner's **work** and not to learners themselves. Learners should also be aware that examiners may use adapted versions of these grade descriptors, subject-level rubrics/marketing schemes or institutional marks and standards documents to guide their marking.

Terminology

The grade descriptors are applicable to a broad range of disciplines and subjects with diverse assessment types and tools. The descriptors below refer to **'work'**, which should be interpreted broadly to include any form of work submitted for the purposes of summative assessment counting towards a grade. This includes but is not limited to essays; examination scripts; presentations; practical and clinical demonstrations; performance pieces; portfolios; simulation-based tasks; and art/craft pieces.

The generic term **'assessment brief'** refers to the different formats of assessment tasks used across the disciplines, including but not limited to essay questions, MCQs, lab tests, portfolio briefs, and oral, written or performance-based proficiency tests.

2 The 2026 NUI Grade Descriptors

GRADE	Marks Range %	GRADE DESCRIPTORS
1st CLASS HONS	90-100	Exceptional work, engaging profoundly, systematically and comprehensively with the assessment brief, brilliantly demonstrating • an exceptional master of the subject, demonstrating the competencies and learning outcomes expected by that subject at the highest level • an exceptional ability to organise, analyse and express ideas and arguments in an original, sophisticated and discriminating manner using a range of formats • an exceptional capacity for critical thinking/analysis, where appropriate to the subject • the display of penetrative insight, originality and creativity.
	80-89	Exemplary work engaging deeply and systematically with the assessment brief, with consistently impressive demonstration of • a comprehensive mastery of the subject, demonstrating the competencies and learning outcomes expected by that subject • reflecting deep and broad knowledge and critical insight as well as extensive reading/research • an exceptional ability to organise, analyse and present arguments fluently and lucidly with a high level of critical analysis using a range of formats • a highly developed capacity for original, creative, logical and/or critical thinking
	70-79	Excellent work , engaging closely and systematically with the assessment brief, with consistently strong evidence of • a comprehensive mastery of the subject matter or required competencies and learning outcomes expected by that subject • excellent ability to organise, analyse and express arguments fluently and lucidly with a high level of critical analysis using a range of formats • a highly developed capacity for original, creative, logical and/or critical thinking.

GRADE	Marks Range %	GRADE DESCRIPTORS
2nd CLASS HONS (Grade 1)	60-69	Very Good work, engaging substantially with the assessment brief, demonstrating a strong grasp of the subject matter or required competencies, well supported by evidence and relevant citation (where appropriate). The work demonstrates: • well-developed capacity to analyse issues, organise material, present arguments clearly and cogently • some original insights and capacity for creative and logical thinking
2nd CLASS HONS (Grade 2)	50-59	Good work providing a competent response to the assessment brief (i.e. factually sound) with evidence of a reasonable familiarity with the relevant literature and techniques. The work demonstrates/features: • an acceptable grasp of the subject material or required competencies • ideas stated rather than developed and not fully supported by evidence and relevant citation (where appropriate) • writing of sufficient quality to convey meaning but some lack of fluency and command of suitable vocabulary • omission of parts of the subject in question or the appearance of several minor errors • limited critical awareness and analytical qualities • limited evidence of capacity for original and logical thinking
3rd CLASS HONS (where awarded)	45-49	Satisfactory work providing an adequate response to the assessment brief with evidence of some familiarity with the relevant literature and techniques. The work demonstrates/features: • a basic grasp of subject matter or required competences, but somewhat lacking in focus and structure • a lack of detail though the main points are covered • some effort to engage, but only a basic understanding of the topic portrayed • some development of argument • only some critical awareness • no evidence or relevant citation (where appropriate) • several minor errors or one major error • a lack of evidence of original and logical thinking

GRADE	Marks Range %	GRADE DESCRIPTORS
PASS (where 3rd Class Honours IS awarded)	40-44	Acceptable work providing an adequate response to the assessment brief with limited familiarity with the relevant literature and techniques. The work demonstrates/features: • a basic grasp of subject matter or required competencies but limited focus on the assessment brief • an unclear presentation of argument, random layout, with some omissions or inaccuracies • argument insufficiently developed • very limited evidence or relevant citation supplied • one major error and minor errors • the inclusion of unsubstantiated statements and/or irrelevant material • a descriptive rather than argumentative or analytical approach • a limited attempt to solve moderately difficult problems related to the subject material and/or a limited attempt to examine the material in a critical and analytical manner • an incomplete or rushed response to the assessment brief e.g. the use of bullet points through part / all of answer
PASS (where 3rd Class Honours NOT awarded)	45-49	Satisfactory work providing an adequate response to the assessment brief with evidence of some familiarity with the relevant literature and techniques. The work demonstrates/features: • a basic grasp of subject matter or required competences, but somewhat lacking in focus and structure • a lack of detail though the main points are covered • some effort to engage, but only a basic understanding of the topic portrayed • some development of argument • only some critical awareness • no evidence or relevant citation (where appropriate) • the appearance of several minor errors or one major error • a lack of evidence of original and logical thinking

GRADE	Marks Range %	GRADE DESCRIPTORS
PASS (where 3rd Class Honours NOT awarded)	40–44	Acceptable work providing an adequate response to the assessment brief with limited familiarity with the relevant literature and techniques. The work demonstrates/features: • a basic grasp of subject matter or required competencies but limited focus on question asked • an unclear presentation of argument, random layout, with some omissions or inaccuracies in answer • an insufficiently developed argument • very limited evidence or relevant citation supplied • the appearance of one major error and minor errors • the inclusion of unsubstantiated statements and/or irrelevant material • a descriptive rather than argumentative or analytical approach • a limited attempt to solve moderately difficult problems related to the subject material and/or a limited attempt to examine the material in a critical and analytical manner only partially successful • an incomplete or rushed response to the assessment brief e.g. the use of bullet points through part / all of answer.
FAIL*	35-39	Work does not meet some of the minimum criteria required by the assessment brief, which: • demonstrates insufficient understanding of the assessment brief displayed • mostly does not address the assessment brief resulting in largely irrelevant work • displays some knowledge of material relative to the assessment brief, but with very serious omissions / errors and/or major inaccuracies included in the work • is incomplete work • has an unclear and confusing layout / underdeveloped structure • demonstrates poor analytical skills, with an absence of argument • features random and undisciplined development - limited structure • includes significant plagiarism or reliance on questionable sources • lack of clarity • material of marginal relevance predominating. * See note on 'Pass by Compensation' below

GRADE	Marks Range %	GRADE DESCRIPTORS
FAIL*	<35	Work does not meet many or any of the minimum criteria required by the assessment brief, and may: • demonstrate insufficient understanding of the assessment brief • not address the assessment brief at all, resulting in the submission of irrelevant work • display inadequate knowledge relative to the assessment brief • be largely incomplete • demonstrate very poor analytical skills, with an absence of argument (where appropriate) • have random and undisciplined development – poorly structured work • contain confused expression, poor spelling • involve substantial plagiarism • predominantly consist of irrelevant material.

Note on Fail - Pass by Compensation

In some, but not all, NUI institutions, it is possible to 'pass by compensation'. In these institutions, provision has been made (ordinarily under Marks and Standards) for a student failing in one or more modules, to pass the subject by compensation in accordance with local policy. Where 'pass by compensation' is available, clear guidance and conditions should be set out in Marks and Standards (or equivalent) by faculties/colleges and should be agreed at an institutional level. The application of the provision for 'pass by compensation' should be facilitated by the above descriptions with particular reference to the Descriptor for the Fail* (35-39) Marks Band.



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