Generic Narrative Grade Descriptors for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Institutions: A Conceptualization Process

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the issues involved in the process of conceptualizing generic narrative grade descriptors. Currently, the majority of tertiary institutions in Malaysia use a grading system which describes student performance in terms of marks which are equated to a letter grade which carries a grade point and only a brief descriptor such as excellent, or fail. Clearly, this description does not give adequate information of the students’ abilities to the students themselves or other stakeholders. The issues in conceptualizing these descriptors involve firstly, defining what generic narrative grades are; secondly, how to develop them especially when a ‘top down’ approach was not feasible as imposing a grade system on an already existing program was bound to be disruptive; thirdly, what methodology to adopt in the face of a relatively new research area, and finally who should make decisions regarding the manner of instituting the descriptors. This paper shows how the careful addressing of the different issues involved in the conceptualization of the study was necessary to ensure validity and reliability. The findings would serve as guidelines for developing generic narrative grade descriptors.

Keywords: quality assurance, narrative grade descriptors, generic descriptors.
Quality assurance and institutions of higher learning

With the current emphasis on globalization and the internationalization of education, institutions of higher education in developing countries like Malaysia are faced with real challenges to remain internationally competitive and, more importantly, relevant. Quality is not an option but is mandatory for any organization aspiring to be a market leader. Quality assurance and benchmarking are instruments by which the management monitors its performance, effectiveness and efficiency in all aspects of its core activities and to meet customers’ needs. Simultaneously, it is imperative to formalize the promotion of accountability, transparency and ethical values in the governance of a university.

Quality assurance in Malaysian public universities is not a new phenomenon; tertiary institutions have always been practicing various measures, including the use of external examiners, as well as national and international peer evaluations of staff, to ensure the quality of their programs. However the rapid democratization of education within the country in the last two decades and the urgent need to be on par with other institutions of higher learning at the international level has necessitated a more formal and systematic approach towards quality assurance in tertiary institutions.

According to the Ministry of Education’s Code of Practice for quality assurance in public universities, quality assurance consists of:

‘all those planned and systematic actions (policies, strategies, attitudes, procedures and activities) necessary to provide adequate confidence that quality is being maintained and enhanced and the products and services meet the specified quality standards’ (Ministry of Education, 2004:7).

Hence in the context of higher education, quality assurance is the ‘totality of systems, resources and information devoted to maintaining and improving the quality and standards of teaching, scholarship and research as well as students’ learning experience’ (Ministry of Education, 2004:7).
A clear indicator of the country’s commitment to quality assurance is the setting up in 2001 of the Quality Assurance Division in the Ministry of Education as the national agent responsible for managing and coordinating the quality assurance system for public universities. The mission of this body is to promote confidence amongst the public that ‘the quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced’ (Ministry of Education, 2004: 7). And amongst some of the measures taken to promote public confidence is the regular conducting of ‘academic reviews to evaluate the performance of program outcomes, the quality of learning opportunities and the institutional capacity and management of standards and quality’ (Ministry of Education, 2004:8). One area under the focus of academic review is the management of student assessment processes. Testing methods drive student learning and the results of the assessment is used as the basis for conferring degrees and qualifications. Hence, student assessment is a crucial aspect of quality assurance. Therefore, it is imperative that methods of assessment are clear and support the aims of the program. The Ministry requires institutions of higher learning to provide ‘formal feedback’ to students on their performance ‘during the course in time for remediation if necessary’ (Ministry of Education, 2004:50). One of the methods of this formal feedback is to provide and document student performance in terms of narrative evaluation.

Thus, in line with the Ministry of Higher Education’s efforts to formalize quality assurance measures, the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya, in 2006, embarked on a research project to investigate the feasibility of employing generic narrative grade descriptors (GNGD) for its undergraduate program. This paper is an outcome of the study. It discusses the issues involved in the process of conceptualizing these descriptors. While highlighting the benefits of employing GNGD to ensure quality in tertiary education, the researchers take into cognizance the notion that GNGD may only be a miniscule mechanism in the larger scenario of quality assurance.

Benefits of generic narrative grade descriptors
Before examining the benefits that can be obtained from the use of generic narrative descriptors for grades, a look at the current system of grading in the local public universities is in order. Presently,
the majority of tertiary institutions, including the University of Malaya, use a grading system which describes student performance in terms of marks which are equated to a letter grade. The grade carries a grade point and only a brief one or two-word descriptor such as excellent, credit, pass, marginal pass or fail. Implicit in the use of these descriptors is the notion that they are sufficient to convey all the qualities that are expected of specific grades. It is assumed that all qualities that are equated with that letter grade are universally understood without them being explicitly stated. Clearly, this description does not give adequate information of the students’ performance and abilities to the students themselves or other stakeholders such as parents, fund providers and employers.

The benefits of employing a generic narrative grade description are manifold. In comparison to marks or single word descriptors, narrative descriptions provide more meaningful feedback for the stakeholders. Most teachers tend to return tests to students with a letter grade or a number score that merely show the number of right or wrong responses, giving absolutely no information of intrinsic interest to the student whatsoever (Brown, 1994). Brown states, ‘Grades and scores reduce a mountain of linguistic and cognitive performance data to an absurd minimum. At best they give a relative indication of a formulaic judgment of performance as compared to others in the class –which fosters competitive, not cooperative learning’ (1994: 386). In other words, a more detailed evaluation of the student’s performance will enhance beneficial washback, that is, the positive effect of testing on learning and teaching (Hughes, 2003).

Defining the numeric value of the grade in terms of knowledge, skills and performance also helps to establish employability. A case in point is the complaint to a local newspaper from a recruiter for a multinational company. He complained that although only those who had scored an ‘A’ in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Education) English language examination had been called for the interview, a mere 10%-15% were able to communicate fluently in English. The rest were stumbling and some could not even understand the questions (Rodrigues, 2006: N47). This complaint is a comment not only on the inconsistencies inherent in the ‘A’ grade but also on the assessment processes. If the assessors had been provided with adequate narrative grade descriptors to
assess the students, this inconsistency could have been reduced and potential employers would be able to gauge the value of an ‘A’.

Other than contributing to aspects of feedback, there are other areas that closely tie a generic narrative grade (GNG) description to quality assurance. Narrative descriptions of grades facilitate institutional self-evaluation, fulfilling a condition clearly stated in the Code of Practice set out by the Ministry of Education (2004:5): ‘internal quality assessment is the responsibility of the university’. Furthermore, transparency of criteria used (a prerequisite for GNGD) would promote public confidence as well as allow accreditation and review of programs by outside bodies. In addition, if a system of GNG description could be employed across the whole nation, it would not only allow for standardization but also facilitate credit transfers across universities.

Conceptualizing GNGD

There is no doubt about the contribution of a GNG description to assuring quality in tertiary institutions; it is its feasibility that needs scrutiny. In our attempt to study whether a generic narrative description could be implemented across the undergraduate program, we had to first deal with a number of concerns. First we had to define GNGD; the next issue was one of how to develop GNGD. However before we could embark on that, we needed to review what other institutions, both local and international, had to offer in terms of GNGD. Having surveyed the literature, we were then in a better position to devise the methodology to be adopted for the research. The final phase of our conceptualization was related to decision making - who should have a say regarding the manner of instituting the GNGD. Each of these concerns is addressed below in greater detail.

Defining GNGD

The first issue that needed to be addressed was the definition of GNGD itself. In terms of conceptualizing generic narrative grade descriptors, two concepts – generic and narrative – had to be defined. While the former is implicit in our current grading system, the latter is not. The Cambridge International Dictionary of English (Proctor, 1995:587) defines ‘generic’ as something that is ‘shared
by, typical of or relating to a whole group of similar things rather than to any particular thing’. Hence, a generic grade description would be one which is standard and nonspecific, one that encapsulates the common elements of a grade. The present grading system (e.g. A = 76-100 marks) applies to all courses; therefore, it is understood that an ‘A’ in one course means the same ‘A’ in another course. It can then be inferred that the grading system that is currently being used is a generic one. However, although there is a one or two-word descriptor, there is no narrative description for each grade.

The concept of narrative is not as easy to define. It appears that a variety of terms – narrative evaluations, performance evaluations, rating scales, weighted rubric, performance bands and grade descriptors – have been used in the literature to describe an underlying construct. Brown (1994) considers narrative evaluations as feedback of test performance that goes beyond a score, a grade or a phrase. He feels the teacher should ‘respond to as many details throughout the test as time will permit’, giving praise and constructive criticisms as well as giving ‘strategic hints on how a student might improve certain elements of performance’ (p.386). A similar idea underlies the term performance evaluation. According to the University of California, Santa Cruz, (2006) performance evaluations, especially written ones, tend to ‘anchor a system that encourages students and instructors to get to know one another, that allows instructors to acknowledge and document the full range of student achievements, and that can provide much more information than do conventional transcripts’.

From these two descriptions, it can be assumed that they are referring to the same concept but by slightly different terms. What is more pertinent is that narrative or performance evaluations are meant as individual feedback for teacher-conducted classroom tests and more suited for small groups. They are more appropriate for formative assessment and not so practical for summative, standardized tests involving large numbers.

Hughes (2003) describes a rating scale in terms of the ‘criterial levels of performance’, that is, ‘the level(s) of performance for different levels of success’ (p.61). What is meant is that the scale contains a series of ordered categories indicating different levels of ability. A similar concept is conveyed by the term weighted rubric, meaning the breaking down of a language skill like writing or speaking into
categories and sub-categories and assigning a specific point value to each. When they come in the form of bands, they are known as *performance bands*. Rating scales/performance bands are often used as scoring guides by assessors, especially in the field of language testing. On the other hand, the term *grade descriptor* is very specific as it is linked to the grade. According to Greatorex (2001:451) grade descriptors ‘are the characteristics which are found in the performance of candidates at particular grades’. A similar definition is available from the University College Dublin (UCD) website, which states that grade descriptors ‘show how a given level of performance will be reflected in a grade’ (UCD Registrar’s Office, University College Dublin, 2006).

Studying the definitions for all these terms, the existence of a central or underlying idea becomes evident. It can be inferred that rating scales/weighted rubrics which are used as scoring guides by teachers can be the basis for giving feedback to students or when the need for informing other stakeholders (for example, employers, parents and fund providers) about students’ performance is required. In this case the rating scales function as performance bands. The rating scale takes on a slightly different role when it is used for the purpose of narrative or performance evaluation. It is then used to provide an individualized feedback of how a student has performed and it need not be tied up to a letter grade. On the other hand, a grade descriptor describes performance directly related to the grade. Based on this analysis, we felt that our concept of ‘narrative grade descriptor’ would be very similar to that of the grade descriptor. We conceived it as being generic in nature, providing a detailed description of the common elements of a grade which holds true for that specific grade across all courses in a particular program (in this case the undergraduate program at the Faculty). The GNGD has a function that is all encompassing in the sense that it serves as the scoring guide for assessors, the provider of detailed feedback for students and the descriptor of standards for the other stakeholders.

**A Survey of Narrative Grade Descriptors**

In order to further understand the practice of adopting a narrative grade description, a literature search was conducted. Despite the fact that the Ministry of Higher Education has stipulated that narrative
feedback should be provided to students as discussed above, a survey at the local level indicated that hardly any of the public universities have begun to provide narratives in their description of grades.

An Internet search of educational institutions revealed that grade descriptors were commonly used in the United States of America schools systems as a means to give feedback to students (for instance, those of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.). As such, they are used with classroom-based formative assessments and targeted individual students. Reporting systems ranging from ticking in the boxes or spread sheets to computerized systems such as Taskstream’s (n.d) Competency Assessment and Reporting Systems were available for producing profiles based on students’ performance in the assessments. However, these were subject-specific.

At institutions of higher learning, grade descriptors have taken on other dimensions. It is a means of quality assurance. For instance, the University College Dublin has on its website a listing of grade descriptors approved by its Academic Council. Criteria for the six grades (A-G) awarded for the courses in this University are presented. These descriptors seem to cover both the cognitive and linguistic skills at two separate levels for each grade (a sample of grades A and B are provided in the Appendix). It is also interesting to note that parallels can be drawn between these descriptors and the descriptors given in the marking scheme of their programs (see http://www.ucd.ie/hispanic/marking_descriptors.htm). General descriptors for courses such as foreign language courses are also available.

The University of Sydney website features the grading system employed in each of its faculties. At the onset itself, the justification for this system is given so as to make students understand ‘… the way their work is assessed within the unit of the study and the broader policy framework within which their grades are distributed’ (Department of Linguistics, University of Sydney, n.d.). Grade descriptors for the Linguistic Department from this University are presented at their website: (http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/departs/linguistics/undergrad/assessment.shtml).
Another relevant document that enabled us to appreciate the position of narrative grade descriptors, particularly within the framework of quality assurance, was the subject benchmark statement which is available from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2007). It is stated here that ‘Subject benchmark statements provide a means for the academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of programs in a specific subject or subject area. They also represent general expectations about standards for the award of qualifications at a given level in terms of the attributes and capabilities that those possessing qualifications should have demonstrated’ (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2007: iii). It is the second part of this definition that sheds light on the relationships between subject benchmark statements and the narrative grade descriptors.

Within this framework, the benchmarking of academic standards for linguistics had been undertaken by a group of subject specialists drawn from and acting on behalf of the subject community. The membership listing at the end of this document reveals that they are representatives from well-established universities in the UK. Additionally, associations representing individuals with special interests in this area i.e. British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL), Linguistics Association of Great Britain (LAGB) and so on had also been consulted in drawing up the statement. The final document contains the following sections: defining principles, subject skills and other skills, teaching-learning and assessment. The last section is on standards.

Tan and Prosser (2004) in their phenomenographic study report on the different ways that academic staff understood and practised grade descriptors as forms of standards-based assessment. Four qualitatively different conceptions of grade descriptors were identified. Firstly, grade descriptors were described as generic descriptors as they depict achievement levels as descriptions of standards for generic purposes. Secondly, grade descriptors were understood as grade distributors as they focus on how students’ work can be understood in terms of how they are distributed amongst different levels of achievement. Thirdly, grade descriptors were labeled as grade indicators since they indicate to staff and students what a piece of student's work might mean in terms of specific criteria. Finally, grade descriptors were labeled as grade interpreters since they are perceived as authentic bodies of intrinsic
meaning as to what actual achievement levels are. In their study, Tan and Prosser (2004) seek to provide a basis for identifying and resolving different expectations for understanding and practicing grade descriptors as well as clarifying the place of standards and criteria in assessment. Each of the conceptions is discussed in terms of providing a form of standards-based assessment. Suggestions for enhancing the use of grade descriptors as standards-based assessment are then made.

**Developing GNGD**

Having obtained a relatively comprehensive understanding of how other tertiary institutions implement GNGD, the next step of our conceptualization process involved the issue of how to develop GNGD that would be applicable to our purpose. Only one study on the process of developing generic descriptors could be located. This was in the form of a research report that had been commissioned and funded by the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) Taskforce. Bringing together the experience of experts and information from students’ test performance, this study proposes a model for developing ‘exit proficiency descriptors’ for the Japanese language program which would be ‘grounded in actual student performance’ (Scarino, Jenkins, Allen and Taguchi, 1997:9). The attempt here is to ‘embody what the students are able to accomplish and show the degree depicting standards’ (Scarino et al., 1997:9). The study highlights two important issues in arriving at the descriptors, namely, the ‘level at which exit proficiency is pitched’ and ‘the style of the descriptor’ (Scarino et al., 1997:9). It suggests that further development is ‘essential to create the necessary assessment resources, i.e. sample test tasks, test specifications, marking and reporting formats, and moderation procedures, which will be useful accompaniments to the descriptors’ (Scarino et al., 1997:9).

It needs to be emphasized that the focus of the NALSAS report was on the development of new courses and course material, which is contrary to the focus of our study which looks at developing a narrative grade descriptor system that will have to be imposed on the existing structure of courses that have already been offered at the Faculty for the last ten years. In other words, the NALSAS study took a ‘top-down’ approach for instituting generic descriptors as theirs was a program yet to be
implemented, but we preferred not to. While appreciating the contribution of the NALSAS model, we realised that we needed to take a different approach to the problem at hand. Imposing GNGD on an already existent program was bound to be disruptive and complicated. Furthermore, since our study was meant to be a feasibility study, we concluded that we should adopt a ‘bottom-up’ approach, that is, examine the existing assessment system to see whether it could support a GNG description. In order to reflect this approach, our first research question was formulated as:

- What are the elements in the current assessment system at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics that affect the possibility of deriving a GNG description?

Underlying this question was the belief that if the findings showed there existed enough common elements or patterns in the assessment practices currently employed, these could form the basis for deriving narrative descriptors for the grades. In other words, we wanted to know whether there existed a standardized approach to assessment for all the courses offered in the undergraduate program and whether there were sufficient commonalities in it on which a generic narrative description could be anchored. We were cognizant of the fact that the assessment practices which include the grading scheme, vetting and moderation procedures, marking formats, etc. could also be affected by the program structure such as the different categories of courses, course pre-requisites, and contact hours, to name a few. Hence all of these would have to be examined for commonalities which could then form the bases for our GNGD.

As part of our bottom up approach, we also recognized that we should tap into the perceptions of the instructors teaching the different courses as to what they believe is implicitly stated when they assign grades to students. Thus the second research question of our study was conceived as:

- How do the perceptions of assessors regarding the meaning of a particular grade (for instance, grade A) affect the possibility of arriving at a generic narrative grade description?

If the majority of the assessors had a common perception of what a particular grade meant or embodied, then it would be possible to use that commonality as a basis for deriving GNGD. On the
other hand, if there were variations in responses, what would that entail? This was an issue that needed careful reflection. Initially, in order to elicit assessors’ perceptions of what a grade meant to them, the idea was to get the respondents to choose from a list of characteristics or descriptors of the grade prepared by the researchers. Such a list would have made the task of analyzing the responses easier as the data would have been more quantifiable. More important, the list, being a carefully thought-out product would have incorporated most of the significant characteristics of the grade as perceived by the researchers. However this idea was rejected in favour of an open-ended questionnaire requiring respondents to state in their own words their perceptions of what the grade embodied. This was done to capture the authentic thoughts of the assessors which may have been influenced if a list prepared by the researchers had been provided. Having made that decision, the researchers had to be prepared for the variability that was bound to occur in the responses due to the apparent ‘creativity’ of each respondent. In other words, due to the qualitative nature of the data, variations were bound to occur. The challenge for us was to determine whether these variations were only at the surface level, i.e. they were differences in expressions of the same ideas or whether the differences were truly reflections of variations in assessors’ beliefs and practices. If it was the latter, then the notion of a generic descriptor would be hard to arrive at. In other words, the bottom-up approach for deriving a GNG description would not be feasible.

**Methodology**

In line with our objectives and the particular approach that we had decided upon, our study adopted an ‘emergent design’ (Denscombe, 1998:217) where conceptualization occurs simultaneously with data collection and preliminary analysis. A number of instruments such as questionnaires, interviews, analyses of students’ results and inspections of documents were employed to gather data.

We started off with an exploratory study of the different courses offered for the undergraduate program via inspection of documents which then led to a questionnaire to find out which courses were being offered by which instructor and so forth. The questionnaire was piloted and after preliminary analysis, a second questionnaire was developed. The purpose of the second questionnaire was to
gather information about the courses taught and the evaluation process used by the assessors of those courses; information on the criteria used by assessors to arrive at grades and assessors’ perceptions about narrative grades. The information gathered from the faculty documents and the feedback from the first questionnaire facilitated a representative sampling for the second questionnaire. The initial level of analysis of the latter showed that certain crucial items had not been well captured and/or were inadequate, such as how the respondent would characterize an ‘A’ student. Hence there was a need for another instrument – the third questionnaire, and this time, the whole population was sampled. Furthermore, the questionnaire adopted open-ended items in order to elicit respondents’ authentic perceptions of what a grade meant to them (see section above). For purposes of triangulation, interviews were conducted with selected teaching staff regarding assessment procedures. Finally, as a means of determining whether the varying percentile value allocated to continuous assessment and the examination proper had any impact on the final grade, an analysis of all the students’ results for a whole academic session was carried out.

In the context of this study, the data collected from the first two questionnaires represented factual data about the prevailing situation in the undergraduate program. The data from the third questionnaire comprised assessor perceptions about an ‘A’ student across all courses in the program. The responses were subjective in nature and there was a need for the data to be scrutinized carefully to determine the extent of commonality and/or variability in the assessor’s perceptions of the ‘A’ grade. Documentation of the data was done according to the three different course types and the language of response (i.e. English and Malay). Frequency lists were generated using Wordsmith Tools version 3.0 (1999). Concordance patterns were drawn for frequently occurring words which indicated concepts relating to ‘A’ students. The 10 most frequently occurring words that indicated overlapping concepts were placed in clusters and word clusters that were conceptually related were placed according to concept categories. A total of 12 word clusters were placed in seven concept categories according to each course type in the program. This approach to data organization enabled the identification of criterial features in terms of ability, performance and personal attributes that would be used as input for drawing up a GNGD.
Decision makers

The final issue that needed to be addressed was who should make the decision regarding how to institute a GNG description. As observed in the case of The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2007) mentioned earlier, a number of people from different backgrounds had been involved in benchmarking - subject specialists, individuals as well as representatives from well-established universities in the UK. This composition of people reflects the extent benchmarking and quality assurance is given prominence in the UK. In our case, the management had taken the first step by appointing a team of academics to research on the feasibility of introducing GNGD for the undergraduate program. Although we realize that ideally all stakeholders such as students, parents, fund providers and employers should also be involved in this process, time limitations and other practical constraints did not allow us this privilege. However we were able to tap into the perceptions of the course assessors (see section 3.3) as we believed they should have a say in how GNGD should be developed since they are the course designers as well as instructors.

Conclusion

The careful addressing of the different issues involved in the conceptualization of the GNGD helped to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings of the study. The findings with reference to the first research question showed that while a number of the current assessment practices had enough commonalities on which the GNGD could be anchored, there were also other factors like the particular structure of certain courses of the undergraduate program which necessitated further standardization or restructuring before a generic narrative description could be considered. Where the second research question was concerned, the findings reveal a recurrence of certain salient characteristics in the assessors’ perceptions of what constitute a grade. These suggest a number of criterial features that could be used to draw up GNGD for certain courses of the undergraduate program. The findings indicate that any GNG description for the Faculty should include in its description a range of criterial features of the different grades in terms of student ability, performance and personal attributes.
Besides testing out the feasibility of using GNGD, the process of the study has engendered significant awareness and discernment among the researchers. This can be largely attributed to the conscious decision by the researchers to adopt a bottom up rather than a top down approach to the study. This decision necessitated conceptualizing a research design that had to take into account how to ‘impose’ a GNG description on an already existing program without causing too great a disruption. In addition, the process has facilitated institutional self-evaluation, which as noted earlier fulfills one of the conditions for ensuring internal quality assurance. Furthermore, it has sensitized the researchers to the notion that while standardization is necessary for ensuring ‘genericity’, the narrative grade has also to accommodate the individual characteristics of each course. Herein lies the challenge. Finally it has made us aware, and hopefully the academia at large too, of how crucial even a seemingly minute aspect like a generative narrative grade description can be in the larger context of providing adequate confidence that quality is being maintained and enhanced in tertiary institutions.
References


Appendix

Sample Grade Descriptors

Grade descriptors allow module co-ordinators to set out in advance how a given level of performance will be reflected in a grade. They act as guidelines for student and co-ordinator. Here are some examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Criteria more relevant to levels 0, 1 and 2 - Knowledge, understanding, application</th>
<th>Additional criteria more relevant to levels 3, 4, and 5 - Analysis, synthesis, evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| A     | **Excellent** A comprehensive, highly-structured, focused and concise response to the assessment task, consistently demonstrating:  
   ▪ an extensive and detailed knowledge of the subject matter  
   ▪ a highly-developed ability to apply this knowledge to the task set  
   ▪ evidence of extensive background reading  
   ▪ clear, fluent, stimulating and original expression  
   ▪ excellent presentation (spelling, grammar, graphical) with minimal or no presentation errors | A deep and systematic engagement with the assessment task, with consistently impressive demonstration of a comprehensive mastery of the subject matter, reflecting:  
   ▪ a deep and broad knowledge and critical insight as well as extensive reading;  
   ▪ a critical and comprehensive appreciation of the relevant literature or theoretical, technical or professional framework  
   ▪ an exceptional ability to organise, analyse and present arguments fluently and lucidly with a high level of critical analysis, amply supported by evidence, citation or quotation; a highly-developed capacity for original, creative and logical thinking. |
| B     | **Very Good** A thorough and well-organised response to the assessment task, demonstrating:  
   ▪ a broad knowledge of the subject matter  
   ▪ considerable strength in applying that knowledge to the task set  
   ▪ evidence of substantial background reading  
   ▪ clear and fluent expression  
   ▪ quality presentation with few presentation errors | A substantial engagement with the assessment task, demonstrating:  
   ▪ a thorough familiarity with the relevant literature or theoretical, technical or professional framework  
   ▪ well-developed capacity to analyse issues, organise material, present arguments clearly and cogently well supported by evidence, citation or quotation;  
   ▪ some original insights and capacity for creative and logical thinking. |