Faculty of History
Part I and Part II Marking Criteria – a guide

This document summarises the key points from the marking standards and classing conventions section of the Handbook for Examiners and Assessors. We hope students will find it helpful.

The full guide can be found here.

We urge you to read the longer guide, which details exactly what makes a script or essay fit into a particular marking band. Marking scripts and essays inevitably has a subjective element. However, examiners at this University, in conjunction with External Examiners from other universities who oversee practices here, take the utmost care to ensure that marking practices at Cambridge are as fair, consistent, and rigorous as they possibly can be. We know how important it is, and the system is set up to ensure that there is sustained attention and multiple examiners involved in marking every single piece of work.

1. Mark Range
All papers are marked out of 100.

Class Marks are as follows:	Class	Marks
	1	70-100
	2.1	60-69
	2.2	50-59
	3	40-49
	Fail	0-39

The markbook sent to your College may show one of the following symbols against your marks, indicating:

* Exam script has one full First Class answer, but did not receive a First overall.

X One or more of the answers was "exiguous" or too short/insufficient to constitute a full answer to the question. You don't want to see a lot of these, as it could affect the overall class.

These symbols will not appear in your CamSIS record.

2. Marking and Assessment Criteria, *or* ' What Examiners Want'

a) Part I/Part II scripts and Part II Special Subject Long Essays

There are **THREE** key areas:
i) the extent to which the candidate addressed the question(s) asked;
ii) the quality of the argument offered;
iii) the range of knowledge displayed.

The first is the most important, and examiners are instructed to weight this aspect most heavily.

Therefore, answering the question clearly, and grappling with both the actual questions AND ITS LARGER IMPLICATIONS, is what often makes for the strongest answers.
For instance, on Paper 22 a few years ago, there was a question: "When did the American Revolution begin?" Such a question was deceptively simple. Some candidates simply answered with a recitation of events of 1765 (the year of the Stamp Act) and other major political events. Such students

sometimes seemed to be answering a slightly different previous question ("'It started with the Stamp Act.' Discuss."). So, those students who seemed to import this other answer (about 1765) into this question tended not to do as well. They also tended to do less well than those who defined the key term ("American Revolution"), who unpacked what was at stake in asking such a question (why it seems simple but is anything but), and who set out a more original set of arguments. Such arguments were more about how the series of events known as the American Revolution had been narrated at the time and/or by subsequent historians, and what was at stake in the ways it has been cast.

Good answers should of course have a clear and ideally compelling argument and a wide range of evidence (primary source but also secondary source in some cases) shown. The answer does not have to be "right." Rather, it should make a lucid, preferably bold and interesting argument, which shows thought about the larger issues of a Paper. Boldness can mean challenging the question or its key terms; it can also mean probing the implications of the question (essentially showing an understanding of why *this* particular question has been posed). It should also marshal evidence effectively.

A detailed grid with descriptors for each class/mark range can be found in the longer version of this document. You can tell from this that the three major criteria are followed, with the first, Addressing the Question, the most vital.

b) Part I Long Essays

A good Long Essay can come in many forms. However, they most usually involve an astute interpretation of a significant set of primary sources; an especially sophisticated, focused and clear thematic argument based on primary sources; or, ideally, a blend of the two.

Long Essays are assessed in terms of the following three criteria:

i) understanding analysis and interpretation of primary sources;
ii) development of a coherent and substantial argument which illuminates a significant thematic question;
iii) effectiveness and style of writing and quality of presentation: all matters of presentation should follow the Faculty Style Guide available online.

A fuller discussion of these matters can be found in the longer version of marking criteria.

c) Dissertations
Dissertations should make an original contribution. Dissertations are a chance to shine on a topic entirely of your own choosing; to showcase impressive work with primary sources; and to suggest new perspectives on existing historical and historiographical work. All successful dissertations must use primary sources. Normally such sources will enable a dissertation to make its distinctive contribution to the subject. But some works will merit first-class marks more for their reconsideration of an argument, a situation, a sequence of events, or a social phenomenon. First-class work will display understanding of the provenance, context, and meaning of sources and the relationship among them and a thorough knowledge of the relevant secondary material. It should be noted that work of the highest quality will also be aware of its limitations and of questions left unanswered. The writing should be lucid and persuasive.

The chief criteria by which a dissertation may be assessed are by reference to topic, sources and treatment:

- An appropriate topic
- Situation of the topic within its larger historical context
- Situation of the topic in current knowledge and debate
- Identification and study of primary sources
- Contribution to the subject from primary sources or by reconsideration of existing accounts.
- Understanding, analysis and interpretation of sources.
- Organisation of argument and narrative
- Capacity to summarise findings
- Awareness of limits of knowledge
- Style of writing
- Quality of presentation

A fuller discussion of these matters can be found in the longer version of the marking criteria.

3 Classing Conventions
a) Part I

- 12 marks
- Class determined primarily by the number of marks achieved in each class
- Aggregate (average) mark does not of itself determine class, but will be taken into consideration in discussed cases.

Typically, candidates are classed as follows:

First Class:
- 6 or more first class (70+) marks
- 5 first class marks – candidate may be discussed
- For the award of a starred first at least 9 marks should normally be first class; an exceptionally high aggregate is also required.

Upper Second:
- 7 or more 2.1(60-69) marks
- 6 2.1 marks – candidate may be discussed

Lower Second:
- 7 or more 2.2 (50-59) marks
- 6 2.2 marks – candidate may be discussed

Third Class:
- 6 or more 3rd class (40-49) marks
- 2 papers with agreed 3rds

Failure:
- Candidates with an agreed fail on one paper will normally drop one class.
- Agreed failure on two papers indicates failure in the examination as a whole.
- Any anomalous scripts (e.g. with very uneven marks, or where an Examiner has indicated exiguity or breach of a rubric) will be discussed.

b) Part II
- 10 marks
- Class determined primarily by the number of marks achieved in each class
- Aggregate (average) mark does not of itself determine class, but will be taken into consideration in discussed cases.

Typically, candidates are classed as follows:

First Class:
- 5 or more first class (70+) marks
- 4 first class marks – candidate may be discussed
- For the award of a starred first at least 8 marks should normally be first class; an exceptionally high aggregate is also required.

Upper Second:
- 6 or more 2.1(60-69) marks
- 5 2.1 marks – candidate may be discussed

Lower Second:
- 6 or more 2.2 (50-59) marks
- 5 2.2 marks – candidate may be discussed

Third Class:
- 6 or more 3rd class (40-49) marks
- 2 papers with agreed 3rds

Failure:
- Candidates with an agreed fail on one paper will normally drop one class.
- Agreed failure on two papers indicates failure in the examination as a whole.
- Any anomalous scripts (e.g. with very uneven marks, or where an Examiner has indicated exiguity or breach of a rubric) will be discussed.

A fuller discussion of these matters can be found in the longer version of the marking criteria.

c) Two-year Part II candidates
- Year 1 (Prelim to Part II) not classed. To appear on the list of successful candidates, pass marks (40+) in 3 papers (including HAP) must be achieved.
- Year 2 (Part II) – 7 papers are offered. Refer to full document for classing conventions.