Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University

# MA Marking Criteria

The pass mark for all work at the MA level is 50%.

This Department prides itself on its commitment to intellectual pluralism. We have no preconceived ideas as to the superiority or inferiority of any particular theoretical and/or conceptual approach that may be adopted in studying the wide range of subject matter covered by the department’s remit. Neither do we privilege any particular sub-element of the study of world politics.

This Department is committed to transparency. We seek to make our procedures as transparent as possible. We also aim to provide feedback to each student that, in a succinct manner, draws attention to both the strengths and weaknesses of work submitted for assessment.

## 80 and above: Exceptional Distinction

Outstanding work that shows evidence of independent critical thought and reflection and is likely to be of a quality suitable for publication. It will demonstrate complete command of the subject, comprehensive mastery of a significant body of material, subtlety of interpretation, exceptional critical evaluation of current research and considerable originality. Where relevant, it also shows a deep understanding of research methodology and its implications. Such work will be exceptionally well written and presented.

## 70―79: Distinction

Work in this range will show a considerable degree of critical thought, flair and independence, together with sound factual knowledge, directly targeted at the topic. It will demonstrate strong command of the subject and surpass work placed in the 67―69 level in several areas, such as the following: originality; subtlety of interpretation; power of critical analysis; critical evaluation of current research; understanding of research methodology and its implications where relevant; mastery of a significant body of material. Such work will be written and presented to high academic standards.

## 67―69: Very Good Pass

Written work in this range should be essentially sound and convincing, with evidence of good understanding, solid critical thought and an awareness of research methodology where relevant. There should be clear evidence of independence of thought and originality of approach. The work should show thorough understanding of the subject and broad-based knowledge. Information deployed may go beyond reliance on standard secondary sources. Examples and supporting evidence should be used appropriately, to demonstrate clarity and coherence of argumentation and focused control of relevant data. However they will not demonstrate these qualities as consistently as work of 70-plus standard. Such work will be written and presented to good academic standards.

## 64-66: Good Pass

Work of this standard should be competent and methodical indicating a clear understanding of the topic, and an ability to critically engage with relevant debates. Examples and supporting evidence should be present and used appropriately. The work will be less accomplished than that in the above category and display less originality in approach. The structure of the piece should be broadly sound, with good organisation of ideas, clarity and coherence of exposition. Information deployed may go beyond reliance on standard secondary sources. The work will show analytical power, but not as consistently as work in the 67-69 band. It will be written and presented to good academic standards and should be clear of major grammatical errors.

## 60-63: Fairly Good Pass

Pieces of work will show some limitations in coverage, and some minor errors in fact or credible interpretation. There will be a tendency to accept given ideas uncritically and describe for extended passages, rather than analyse. Some original sections may not quite come off, leading to a few debatable points. Work of this standard should be competent but may be less methodical, yet still indicating a clear understanding of the topic and some ability to critically engage with relevant debates. Examples and supporting evidence will be present, but not always optimally deployed. The structure of the piece of work should be broadly sound, but may be let down by shortcomings in the organisation of ideas, and the clarity and coherence of their exposition. Information deployed may occasionally go beyond reliance on standard secondary sources. The work will show some analytical qualities, but not consistently. It will be written and presented to acceptable academic standards but may contain some grammatical errors.

## 55―59: Satisfactory Pass

This work will demonstrate a reasonable grasp of the principal materials relevant to the subject and link them into an at least partly sustained argument from premises to conclusions. It will be solid and competent. It will have an overall structure, which is logical if not fully thought through. However arguments may display a lack of clarity, crispness and focus. Obvious points will be covered, but the subtleties will have been missed and there will be a tendency to accept received opinions and interpretations with insufficient independent thought. There may be some factual errors, and shortcomings in terms of coverage, reading, organisation and only limited evidence of sustained critical thought. The text will be clear, but may be flawed by grammatical errors that nevertheless do not obscure the meaning.

## 50―54: Low Pass

The work is likely to show limited reading and whole sections may not be pertinent to the question purportedly being addressed. Arguments will be apparent, but show incomplete comprehension and may reveal bias, distortion or excessive simplification. There will be a poor understanding of context. There may be some factual errors. Significant grammatical and/or structural deficiencies may mar the text, leaving the reader to have too much to do to discern the intended sense of the argument. Referencing may have some shortcomings but should still largely conform to acceptable academic standards.

## 40-49: Fail

Work that is likely to be poorly or illogically structured and show only limited understanding of the issues and inadequate appreciation of the context. It will include some relevant material but not enough; and will have significant inaccuracies and significant sections of irrelevance, with some garbled information. A piece of work in this mark-band will typically make a number of statements of opinion not adequately supported by evidence. The work is likely to be insufficiently focused on the question/topic, too derivatively follow secondary sources, fail to shape the piece through argument from premises to conclusions, take little account of key readings, be marred by significant shortcomings of grammar and syntax, and have scrappy or inadequate citations. Referencing is typically inadequate.

## 39 and below: Serious Fail

Such work shows a very limited grasp of the essential literature, revealing major errors or omissions, or substantial irrelevant material. Pieces of work of this sort are likely to contain extensive irrelevance, be slipshod in use of sources and referencing, be seriously and repeatedly marred by errors of grammar and expression. Arguments will be poorly organised and difficult to follow, or not present at all, the work descending into narrative or recitation rather than academic, critical analysis. Evidence is likely to be weak and limited, with only very restricted reading into the subject and the work will abound with unsupported assertions and statements that are not backed up by evidence.