

M.Phil. in Theological and Religious Studies

Assessment Criteria, Marking and Classing

A General

1 Progression

Candidates for the M.Phil. are expected to show progression in achievement beyond undergraduate level, and in particular to display greater knowledge and critical awareness. Marking should reflect assessment of this progression.

2 Mark Ranges

The range of marks for each class is as follows:

Distinction	100-75
Pass	74-60
Fail	59-0

3 Individual and Agreed Marks

The two examiners are expected to reach an agreed mark for each candidate between them. This agreed mark should be based on a considered judgement of the quality of the work. If they do reach an agreed mark, that should be regarded as final, unless it becomes necessary to re-read all a candidate's work because the overall result is borderline.

If examiners are unable to reach an agreed mark, the work should be submitted to an external examiner for adjudication; the final mark should then be determined as a result of discussion between all three examiners; if agreement is impossible the external examiner shall determine the final mark.

A clear record should be kept of such cases, so as to ensure equitable treatment between candidates.

Individual and agreed marks will be included on the first Mark Sheet, primarily to make sure that any transcription errors can be easily checked. **The Final Mark Sheet should only include agreed marks.**

4 Rules for Classing

Candidates' work is in two parts, each accounting for 50% of the final mark: (i) three pieces of work (Essays, Exercises, and Language Papers, in various possible combinations), and (ii) a thesis. Both parts must be passed for the Degree to be awarded, except that a marginal fail in Part (i) may be compensated by a high mark in the Thesis.

In Part (i):

(a) Where a candidate has two marks of 75 or above, and the mark in the third component is not lower than 67, the overall result in Part (i) will be a Distinction.

(b) Where a candidate has two marks of between 60-74, and the mark in the third component is not lower than 55, the overall result in Part (i) will be a Pass.

(c) Where a candidate has two or more marks below 60, the overall result in Part (i) will be a Fail.

(d) Where a candidate has a mark below 55 in one component, and marks of 60 or above in the other two components, the overall mark, and result, for Part (i) will be determined by the average of the marks in the three components.

(e) Where a candidate has, for the three components, one mark of 75 or above, one mark between 60-74, and one mark below 60, the overall mark, and result, for Part (i) will be determined by the average of the marks in the three components.

5 The Use of External Examiners

(a) External examiners in the M.Phil. should normally be sent all work in their subject area. The purpose of this is to enable them to form a judgement on whether the marking is appropriate. Marks should not normally be raised or lowered unless the whole range of work in that area has been assessed, in order to avoid the selected candidates being advantaged relative to others.

(b) External examiners may be invited to adjudicate in difficult cases, as described in A3 above.

(c) External examiners will be expected to comment on the standard of work allocated to them, as well as making other comments on the way in which they regard the examination as having been handled.

6 Examiners' Comments

Examiners are asked to write short comments on the performance of candidates in the work they have marked. The purpose of such comments is to explain the mark for each examined piece as a whole. These comments should be in a form suitable for transmission to candidates.

Any other notes that examiners make about work they have marked should be destroyed, once the final marks and results have been agreed.

7 Changes and Additions to Code of Practice

So far as possible, contingencies not foreseen here should be recorded and incorporated in future versions of this code of practice so as to discourage the development of appeal to oral tradition in examiners' meetings.

B Assessment of Essays and Exercises

1 Criteria for assessment

In assessing candidates' work, examiners should have regard to three principal criteria:

- (a) the extent to which the candidate identifies the key issues to be dealt with;
- (b) the quality of the argument offered;
- (c) the range, depth and relevance of the knowledge and understanding shown.

It is recognised that these criteria overlap; nevertheless they should be the starting point for the allocation of a mark. What the criteria involve, more specifically, is indicated on the attached sheet.

2 Presentation

Proper presentation, such as the careful use of footnotes and a formatted bibliography, is essential to secure a Pass mark; and the ability to utilise footnotes in appropriate circumstances as more than simply references – for example, to indicate other points of view which are not being explored in detail – should be rewarded just as the difference between a well-presented bibliography and a list of books should be reflected in the mark. Accurate, apposite and selective use of quotations from both primary and secondary sources should also be taken into account in the overall assessment.

3 Plagiarism

Examiners need to be alert to issues of plagiarism in long essays, as indicated in the Faculty Board's Notice on the subject.

Assessment of Essays and Exercises: Criteria for Assessment

Class	Numerical Range	Addressing the Question or Topic	Quality of Argument	Range of Knowledge/Understanding
Distinction	75+	Work which identifies the key issues to be tackled, and addresses the broader implications, demonstrating the ability to engage with abstract issues. The structure will allow a clear, coherent unfolding of writer's argument. Descriptive and factual elements will be linked effectively to the argument, and their relevance to the issues under discussion made clear.	Work which displays the ability to use the knowledge at the writer's disposal to the very best effect. Linguistically and structurally the writing will be clear, authoritative and to the point. Awareness will be shown of scholarly debate in the field but will go beyond merely paraphrasing the ideas of others and demonstrate independent conceptual command. In this sense work should be original rather than derivative. It may, more rarely, also be original in the sense of putting forward persuasive and well-supported new ideas or making unexpected conclusions.	Work which displays an impressively wide range of knowledge and critical understanding, drawing on relevant evidence, knowledge of textual variants where appropriate and showing awareness of the conclusions of other writers. Awareness of argument and interpretation will be held in an appropriate balance with factual information, so that the work is neither too generalising nor too weighed down by detail. Writers will show the ability to evaluate the knowledge to their disposal, where necessary identifying apparent contradictions and resolving them.
Pass	74-60	Work within this class can cover a broad range of achievement. It will display a clear identification of the issues, and will deploy a range of relevant evidence in dealing with it. At best it will be regularly, but not consistently, analytical, perhaps failing to explore all the implication of the issue under discussion, or not bringing out the full relevance of the evidence cited. These weaknesses will be more marked at the bottom of the class.	Work which displays the ability to deploy ideas and knowledge to create a sustained argument. The argument will shape the structure of the work rather than emerging piecemeal, but will lack the conceptual grasp of a distinction-level answer, demonstrating rather the ability to synthesise the view of others. At the top of the range this will be done persuasively and efficiently, but work towards the bottom of the scale, although competently structured, will lack sharpness. There may be a tendency to state ideas, rather than analysing them, or the argument may rest on unsupported claims.	Work which at best reveals a high density of relevant knowledge and deploys it effectively, demonstrating an awareness of critical issues. Nevertheless the work falls short of the highest standards in some way, perhaps by an imbalance between information and interpretation. At the bottom of the scale this imbalance may be marked, or the knowledge deployed may at times seem hackneyed and imprecise.
Fail	59-0	Work which may make some relevant points but fails to identify clearly the issues to be tackled, leaving the reader to draw out the implications of what is being said. The structure is likely to be dictated by the requirements of the topic under discussion. The implications of the topic may have been overlooked or misunderstood.	Work in which the ideas and knowledge at the writer's disposal are presented as an end in themselves, rather than as an argument. Such argument as there is may be fragmentary or unfocussed, or may be explicitly addressed only in the opening and closing paragraphs. Linguistically as well as structurally the presentation of ideas may be rather clumsy, with points imperfectly explained. There is likely to be a sense of other people's ideas being repeated uncritically; and at worst the accretion of points may give rise to unreconciled contradictions, or raise issues which are not explored.	Work which displays a degree of knowledge sufficient to deal with the topic only at a relatively generalising level, in which statements are supported by trite or imprecise evidence, such as a tendency to simplify the arguments of other writers or to stumble over factual detail.

C Assessment of Language Papers

Criteria for Assessment

(a) Gobbets:

Distinction - The standard for a Pass is met, and in addition there is a freshness of approach and/or control of the subject which makes the comments stand out from the majority.

Pass – The literary and, where relevant, historical context is briefly but precisely indicated, and the comments mainly focus on one or two major points of interest in the extract, which are related concisely to wider issues. Important details are accurately elucidated. At the bottom of the class these elements will be partially present.

Fail – Too much space may be given to the context or to the elucidation of unimportant details. There may be errors of fact and the main point(s) may have been missed in what is otherwise a coherent and relevant comment.

(b) Translation Exercises:

Distinction – A translation which is highly accurate and reads well in English. Notes, if required, are to the point and sufficiently full. At the top of the range they may be extensive or show exceptional learning.

Pass – An accurate translation which reads well in English. Notes have some relevant points but not all.

Fail – Translation is fair or weak; it may be too free (perhaps because of imperfect understanding of the original or reliance on memory). Notes lacking or with errors.

NB A problem arises when an excellent translation is accompanied with no notes or poor ones, for example. A Pass mark would often be appropriate for this, but the examiner has to weigh the merits and demerits against one another in each case and decide accordingly.

D Assessment of Theses

1 Criteria for Assessment

An M.Phil. thesis is the key indicator of a student's preparedness and aptitude for postgraduate research. The chief criteria by which a thesis may be assessed are by reference to topic, sources and treatment:

(a) choice of topic; its situation within its theological or religious context; and its situation in current knowledge and debate; the ability to establish why it constitutes a genuine lacuna or *desideratum* in scholarship;

(b) identification and study of primary sources or fundamental issues; understanding, analysis and interpretation of sources; contribution to the subject from primary sources or reconsideration of existing literature on the subject;

(c) organisation of argument and narrative; capacity to summarise findings; awareness of limits of knowledge; style of writing; quality of presentation.

What these criteria involve, more specifically, is indicated below.

Distinction (75+)

The topic can be treated effectively within the word limit and with material reasonably available from a brief period of research (three to four months). The writer has conceptualised the topic and situated it within its larger theological and religious context, which is explained only to the extent needed to understand the contribution of the thesis. The state of knowledge of the subject is indicated and the inquiry is related to it, without merely paraphrasing the ideas of others. Primary sources, or other fundamental issues, have been identified with flair and imagination; they have been studied critically and assiduously, probably using linguistic or other special skills. All successful theses must use some primary sources or tackle fundamental issues in Theology and Religious Studies. Normally these will enable a thesis to make its distinctive contribution to the subject, perhaps by means of a case-study or the elucidation of a particular topic or set of issues. Some works will a Distinction more for their reconsideration of an argument, a situation, a theory or a set of ideas.

Distinction-level work will display critical understanding of the provenance, context and meaning of sources or ideas and the relationship among them, together with a thorough knowledge of the relevant secondary literature. There will be a clearly structured argument, appropriately illustrated with narrative or other explanatory detail, but not in such a way that the underlying argument is obscured. Rather, the detail will serve an overall argument stated clearly in the introduction and conclusion, developed systematically and held before the reader throughout. Work of the highest quality will be aware of its limitations and of questions left unanswered. The writing will be lucid, persuasive and probably elegant. The presentation will be immaculate, with references to source materials and other authorities in a standard form, and a full bibliography of relevant materials and secondary works consulted, organised to the best convenience of the reader. A distinguished thesis will be suitable of publication as an article in refereed journal in the field.

Pass (marks 74-60)

Work within this class can cover a broad range of achievement. It may show some of the qualities of a distinction-level thesis, but in less sustained form. It will display a high level of competence. The topic will have been chosen carefully to permit the study of primary sources or a set of issues of fundamental importance, and will be manageable with the time and space available, although in some cases it may be a little narrow and constitute a useful illustration of the familiar.

The subject will be situated within its context and there will be a fair understanding of the state of knowledge and debate, but in both areas there may be some unnecessary background material or recapitulation of established views, while the writer may merely state the larger context and then neglect it for the detailed topic. Primary sources may have been examined with great industry or the issues considered with great care, but there may be gaps in either the sources or the issues discussed. There may be a tendency to reproduce or paraphrase rather than analyse the material under consideration, or there may be failures of understanding or neglect of difficulties. Although an argument will be stated, there may be a tendency to get lost in detail or to substitute narrative or exposition for critical analysis. Critical reflection on the limitations of the work may be incomplete. The writing will probably be lucid, but possibly a little colourless, a repetitive or verbose. Presentation will generally be good, with references to most authorities and a considerable bibliography, but some

important primary or secondary works may have been overlooked. These weaknesses will be more marked at the bottom of the class.

Fail (59-0)

Some theses in this class will display all the weaknesses of work marked in the low 60s, but generally in more pronounced form. Other theses will have a major flaw which prevents a higher mark. The topic may be too ambitious to handle in the space available or so familiar that there is little scope for an interesting contribution. The primary sources may have proved disappointing or not to have been studied with adequate time and attention, so that much space is filled with 'background'; the issues may not be presented adequately. Alternatively there may be an inability to relate the topic to the wider theological or religious context, which may be sketched vaguely and then forgotten while the writer plunges into detail. Treatment of the primary sources of issues may show failures of understanding or lack of curiosity. The thesis may be structured by the information available rather than by the need to address a clearly-formulated question. The structure is likely to be clumsy, either episodic with barely-connected chapters, or dominated by extensive position. Any overall argument will at best be stated at the beginning and end, or possibly left for the reader to work out. Large issues may go unexplored. The capacity for brief summary or self-criticism is likely to be slight. The style may be unclear, repetitious and ungainly. Factual errors, non sequiturs, self-contradictions and obvious gaps in knowledge are likely in weaker these. Presentation may be careful and even pedantic, but in other cases the typing will be poor, the footnotes sporadic and unstandardised and the bibliography ill-organised and incomplete.

In some clear cases of failure, a topic may have been chosen that did not permit serious study of primary sources or fundamental issues, or there may have been failure to examine the obviously indispensable sources, primary or secondary. Either case might be compounded by ignorance of the general area of study and the literature about it. The result might be a thesis which met the requirement of length and presentation, but had nothing of interest to say. Alternatively a thesis might show major misunderstanding of the subject or the sources. It might consist of undigested primary or secondary material presented in an unstructured form with virtually no relation to an argument. The argument might be either disorganised or unsustainable. A thesis of this quality might show signs of haste or inadequate command of written English. Although these faults could co-exist with excellent presentation, there would be a strong chance of error, disorder and a lack of references and bibliography.

2 Oral Examinations

Oral examinations shall be held when all three of the following conditions are met:

- (a) a dissertation has been marked as 'borderline' (ie 59 or 74) or given a failed mark,
- (b) both examiners agree it is desirable, and
- (c) the viva will be conducted in the presence of an external examiner.

Penalties for Essays and Theses

1 Late Submission

There will be a deduction of 5 marks per day for late submission without good cause unless the candidate has been granted an extension by the M.Phil. Course Director.

2 Over-length essays or theses

Over-length essays or theses will be penalised by one mark for each 100 words in excess of the limit.