

Table 11.5 Example of a generic marking scheme (King's College London, abridged version)

Distinction >=70,	Excellent answer 1. <i>Understanding.</i> Authoritative, full understanding of all the issues with originality in analysis. 2. <i>Selection & Coverage.</i> Full range of sources used selectively to support argument. 3. <i>Structure.</i> Coherent and compelling argument well presented. 4. <i>General.</i> 90–100: striking insight, of publishable quality; 80–90: insightful, possibly of publishable quality with minor revisions; 70–80: excellent grasp of the subject, high quality in all areas.
Merit 60–69	A coherent answer that demonstrates critical evaluation 1. <i>Understanding.</i> Independent, critical evaluation of full range of theories with some evidence of originality. 2. <i>Selection & Coverage.</i> Complex work and concepts presented, key texts used effectively. 3. <i>Structure.</i> Argument concise and explicit. 4. <i>General.</i> 65–69: approaching excellence in some areas; 60–64: well developed relevant argument.
Pass 50–59	A coherent and logical answer which shows understanding of the basic principles 1. <i>Understanding.</i> Some capacity to reflect critically but with no significant evidence of originality. 2. <i>Selection & Coverage.</i> Sound knowledge of primary and secondary sources. 3. <i>Structure.</i> The argument is developed but lacks fluency. 4. <i>General.</i> 55–59: approaching merit; 50–54: broadly satisfactory, appropriate and accurate.
Fail <50	A superficial answer showing limited knowledge 1. <i>Understanding.</i> Lack of understanding and focus. 2. <i>Selection & Coverage.</i> Limited sources or out-of-date/irrelevant sources. 3. <i>Structure.</i> Fundamental mistakes. 4. <i>General.</i> 45–49: patchy overall knowledge, presentational weakness; 35–44: some knowledge but weak grasp of issues, poor presentation; 20–34: fundamental mistakes; <20: deeply flawed, irrelevant or too brief.

write an abstract, follow a style of referencing and know how to clarify your overall aim and related objectives, then you really ought to be securing top marks in each of these tasks, as did Pat Houston in the sample marking sheet. Students who lose marks for each of the aforementioned areas do so because they do not know what they are doing and are reduced to guessing about how to complete each of the tasks. For the *Literature Review* you are essentially getting your marks for the breadth and depth of literature studied, relevant to your overall aim and research objectives, in a way that is not merely descriptive, but exhibits critical evaluation of pertinent literature. For the *Research*

Methods you gain marks for explaining and justifying your design decisions, that they are appropriate for your study. Marks for the *Findings and Discussion* concentrate on your ability to analyse the results of your empirical research in relation to your Literature Review and to your declared research objectives. Your *Conclusion* needs to provide cyclical closure, i.e. that you summarize your results, provide final comments, make recommendations, and review your own work (either from a critical perspective or lessons learned, or both).

When you start your dissertation, get hold of the marking scheme that will be used by your tutors, as well as any accompanying explanatory notes. Make sure that you understand it and use it as a checklist to ensure that, as you develop your dissertation, you are ticking all the right boxes ('Have I justified the need for my research?', 'Are my research objectives clear and achievable?', 'Is my review of literature extensive, showing critical evaluation?', and so on). When you attend meetings with your supervisor, ask your supervisor the same questions ('Are you convinced that I have justified the need for my research?', 'In your view, are my research objectives clear and achievable?', and so on). Prior to submitting your completed dissertation, go over the marking scheme again to check that you have made no damaging omissions (one colleague's dissertation student failed to notice that he had absent-mindedly forgotten to include his list of references).

One last point on dissertation marking schemes: if there is no marking scheme, or set of marking guidelines, then you can legitimately ask your institution how they – markers – arrive at a mark for your work and, at the same time, ensure consistency of approach. They may be leaving themselves open to the claim that their approach to dissertation marking is subjective and unfair.

Good grammar

Marks for your dissertation under the banner *Structure and Quality of Written English*, or the more generic heading *Standards*, refers to how well you have structured your dissertation (logical structure, appropriate numbering of subsections within chapters, use of appendices, figures, inclusion of glossary of terms, correct page format, style of referencing, etc.) and how well you have expressed yourself in written English.

In terms of the quality of English evidenced in student dissertations, two common mistakes recur frequently: poor student attention to spelling and a failure to understand the basic linguistic rules associated with good grammar. Sadly, both problems are on the increase. Such was the importance of grammar in medieval times that special schools were created – *grammar schools* – to educate the English middle classes on Latin and Greek grammar. Unfortunately, schooling in the rules of good grammar, even in one's own natural language, has dissipated down through the ages. As a result, many of today's students lack even a basic understanding of what constitutes good grammar.

One student, on being berated by her dissertation supervisor about the excessive grammatical errors and spelling mistakes found in her draft submission, emailed her tutor to reassure him that, in future, she would pay particular attention to her grammar and spelling. Her supervisor replied: 'It's grammar, not grammar.' Spelling mistakes can be eradicated by using a spell checker, making friends with an authoritative dictionary and getting someone else to check over your work. The issue of sloppy grammar is more deep-rooted and so advice is given in this section on the common grammatical errors committed by dissertation students. Most of the grammatical errors witnessed by dissertation supervisors seem to involve: (a) confusion between *its* and *it's*; (b) general misuse of the apostrophe; (c) split infinitives; and (d) inappropriate application of the colon and semi-colon.

(A) Confusion between *its* and *it's*

It's is a contraction of *it is*, whereas *its* is one of seven possessive pronouns in the English language (the others being *mine*, *yours*, *his*, *hers*, *ours* and *theirs*). A correct use of *it's* is:

It's only fair that we share the shopping.

If you expand *it's* to *it is* and the sentence still makes sense then you are using the contraction *it's* correctly. We can see that if we expand the contraction *it's* in the example above that the sentence retains its meaning:

It is only fair that we share the shopping.

A proper use of *its* is:

Jealousy rears its ugly head.

If you tried to expand that example with *it is* then it would not make sense, showing that *it's* (the contracted form of *it is*) would be inappropriate in this case:

Jealousy rears it is ugly head.

'It's a lovely cat' is correct because if we expand *it's* to *it is* the sentence still makes sense ('It is a lovely cat'); whereas 'That dog is so big! It's head is as big as a lion's!' does not make sense because if we expand *it's* to *it is* in this example then the sentence reads 'That dog is so big! It is head is as big as a lion's!', which is obviously nonsense. The correct term to use in this case is the possessive pronoun *its* ('That dog is so big! Its head is as big as a lion's!').

So, read *it's* as an abbreviation of *it is* and *its* as a substitute term for a previously referred to noun ('Jealousy', 'Dog', etc.). Some supervisors might prefer

that you shun the use of the contraction *it's* altogether and use the fuller form *it is* instead, minimizing any drift towards colloquialism.

It's can also be viewed as an abbreviation of 'it has', as in 'It's been established that people are living longer'. This abbreviation is quite rare these days, but it is an acceptable use of *it's*.

(B) General misuse of the apostrophe

An apostrophe can denote a missing letter, as in 'What's life all about?' (= 'What is life all about?') or 'You're not dressed for the occasion' (= 'You are not dressed for the occasion'), but it is when an apostrophe is used to denote possession that students tend to get it wrong, particularly when dealing with *plurals*.

When we wish to convey that an object (such as a car) is owned by a subject (such as John) then we usually do so by placing an apostrophe at the end of the subject followed by an *s* (e.g. John's), as in 'John's car is red'. Other examples include: 'Alan's notes are illegible'; 'Robert's exam results are excellent'; 'Thomas's hair is soaking wet'; and 'Kay's eyes are lovely!'. As you can see, it is normal practice to add an apostrophe *s* ('s) to someone's name, even if it ends in '-s' (e.g. 'What is Collins's response to this criticism?'), although it is still convention in some quarters to place an apostrophe after the possessive 'Moses' and with Greek names ending in 'es' ('Moses' beliefs, Sophocles' writings, Xerxes' battles).

When you connect two or more names together with an 'and', you put the apostrophe *s* ('s) after the last name: Kennedy and Smith's opposition to free speech is difficult to comprehend.

If the subject is plural to begin with (e.g. Boys) then you place an apostrophe after the *s* (e.g. Boys'), as in 'The boys' clothes were covered in mud'. If you were to write 'The boy's clothes were covered in mud', then you are referring to one boy, which is fine if that is your intention. Similarly, the sentence 'Politicians' views are often contradictory' means that you are referring to more than one politician. As an alternative to placing the apostrophe after a subject when it is plural, you can use 'of' and the noun, as in 'The clothes of the boys were covered in mud' and 'The views of the politicians are often contradictory', but this is a clumsy way of expressing oneself and ought to be avoided. If the subject is plural but does not end in an *s* (e.g. Women), then place the apostrophe *s* at the end of the subject, as in 'Women's struggle for equal pay is an endless fight', or 'The children's games are fun'.

(C) Split infinitives

Some tutors have bugbears about *split infinitives*. Here is the technical bit . . . a split infinitive occurs when a word or phrase – usually an adverb – appears between to and the *base form* (infinitive) of a verb. Let us put this into simple English. Imagine that you have written the following sentence (the pronoun to and the verb *convince* are highlighted for discussion purposes):

Those in favour of building a new community centre need to **convince** the local populace of the merits of their case.

Suppose further that you decide to separate (i.e. split) the words *to* and *convince* with the adverb *fully* so that your sentence now reads:

Those in favour of building a new community centre need to **fully** convince the local populace of the merits of their case.

We have now split the infinitive, i.e. placed a word between the base form 'to' and the infinitive 'convince', which some grammarians would argue is sloppy English. A grammatically 'correct' version is:

Those in favour of building a new community centre need **fully** to convince the local populace of the merits of their case.

Some grammarians hold to the belief that an infinitive should never be split. However, this is a rule that was introduced in the nineteenth century, now considered by others to be outdated and misplaced as split infinitives are part of everyday language. A famous split infinitive appears at the start of the TV series *Star Trek*, where the aim of the *Starship Enterprise* is 'to **boldly go** where no man has gone before', splitting *to* and *go* with *boldly* (instead of the grammatically correct 'to go **boldly** . . .'). The original *Star Trek* version ('to correct version ('to go **boldly**'). Indeed, trying to deliberately avoid split infinitives can make for odd reading (did you spot the split infinitive in this sentence?). *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1998) – 'the foremost authority on current English' – cautions against strict adherence to avoiding split infinitives, citing its own example: 'this is an artificial rule and can produce clumsy or ambiguous sentences. In many cases a split infinitive sounds more natural than its avoidance, e.g. 'What is it like to *actually live in France?*' (splitting *to* and *live* with *actually*). Grammatically correct alternatives such as 'What is it like to live actually in France?' or 'What is it like to live in France actually?', although maintaining the infinitive, sound disjointed and awkward.

The rationale for not having split infinitives seems to stem from the days when those of education and high culture, who were fluent in Latin, a language where split infinitives are not in evidence, believed that the English language would benefit by mimicking aspects of Latin grammar. Unfortunately, the split infinitive is one grammatical imposition that has proved an odd custom, based on a misunderstanding between Latin and English. Verbs in Latin consist of one (infinitive) word (e.g. *amare*, to love), whereas the English equivalent can have two parts (e.g. *to* and *love*). Thus, while it is impossible to split an infinitive in Latin (because it consists of only one word anyway, the infinitive part), it is possible, indeed highly likely if not inevitable, that split infinitives will

occur in the English language. Table 11.6 provides further examples of split infinitives and their allegedly grammatically improved alternatives.

Table 11.6 Examples of split infinitives

'To' + verb	With split infinitive	Grammatically correct alternatives
To desire	To always desire	To desire always / Always to desire
To increase	To slowly increase	To increase slowly / Slowly to increase
To love	To intensely love	To love intensely / Intensely to love
To consider	To carefully consider	To consider carefully / Carefully to consider
To argue	To aggressively argue	To argue aggressively / Aggressively to argue
To evaluate	To critically evaluate	To evaluate critically / Critically to evaluate

Having split infinitives is not automatically wrong: if it sounds right, then it probably is, for instance, 'to critically evaluate' sounds and reads more natural than the stunted and clumsy, but grammatically acceptable, 'to evaluate critically'. The world will not stop spinning if you have split infinitives but it is better to play safe in your dissertation and avoid them where possible.

On the other hand, if you are comfortable with the subtleties and nuances of the English language, there are occasions when you can make the deliberate decision to split your infinitives – where you consider that the alternative hinders the flow of what you are trying to say. This book, for example, contains a number of split infinitives, a conscious decision on the part of the author after dismissing the grammatically correct alternatives as stiff and artificial. If you decide to split your infinitives then you are in good company: Raymond Chandler, the famous detective writer, often complained vigorously about overzealous proofreaders 'correcting' his split infinitives, commenting on one occasion that

By the way, would you convey my compliments to the purist who reads your proofs and tell him or her that I write in a sort of broken-down patois which is something like the way a Swiss-waiter talks, and that when I split an infinitive, God damn it, I split it so it will remain split . . . The method may not be perfect but it is all I have (Hiney and MacShane 2000: 77).

(D) Inappropriate use of the colon and semi-colon

The use of the colon and semi-colon is often so erratic in student dissertations that many supervisors are of the view that their students *guess* rather than *know* how to use this type of punctuation. A colon, in the context of writing, is not the greater part of a large intestine but a punctuation mark that is used typically in the following circumstances:

- 1 when introducing a quotation;
- 2 when presenting a list;
- 3 when separating distinct parts of a sentence (clauses) where the second part builds on or illustrates the first part.

Examples of each of the aforementioned uses are now given.

1. When introducing a quotation (or referring to a quotation).

E.g. 1 Johnson (2006: 7) introduced his guests as follows: 'My dear friends! Please leave your sorrows at the door, for tonight will be a night to remember!'

2. When presenting a list.

E.g. 1 Kay's chocolate cake had many wonderful ingredients: flour, white sugar, baking soda, ground cinnamon, butter, cocoa powder, egg, vanilla extract, chopped walnuts, and water.

E.g. 2 A good life contains three elements: a healthy body, an educated mind, and a moral spirit.

3. When separating distinct parts of a sentence where the second part builds on or illustrates the first part.

E.g. 1 Jim is a bad boy: he is always in trouble.

E.g. 2 Pearson (2007) has a strange definition of e-learning: he neither relates it to learning nor does he mention technology.

E.g. 3 There are two main conclusions that can be drawn from this research: small businesses lack the means to operate in a global environment and they are reluctant to seek advice from consultants.

A semi-colon can be used in the following cases:

- 1 to separate a list of items; and
- 2 to separate closely related, but independent, parts of a sentence.

Examples:

1. To separate a list of items, where the list is not simple.

E.g. 1 Proficiency in a martial art requires the development of a number of traits: technical ability in both hand and foot techniques; flexibility and balance when initiating an attack and defending against an aggressive opponent; a fit body, built around cardiovascular exercises, and capable of short 'fighting' bursts; and, not least, a fighting spirit.

If you are dealing with a simple list, then use commas instead of semicolons.

Example:

Edward failed three of his subjects: History, Art, and Geography.

However, where the list is simple and already contains commas then you need to revert back to using semi-colons. Example:

We travelled to Paris, France; Rome, Italy; Vienna, Austria; and Amsterdam, Holland.

2. To separate closely related, but independent, parts of a sentence.

E.g. 1 The soldiers were on leave; they were exhausted from fighting on the front.

E.g. 2 I love ice-cream; eating too much makes me sick, though.

E.g. 3 Ten runners started the race; only two failed to cross the finishing line.

The opening lines of W.H. Auden's poem *Musée des Beaux Arts* demonstrates perfectly the combined use of the colon and the semi-colon:

About suffering they were never wrong,

The Old Master's: how well they understood

Its human position; how it takes place

While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully

along;

How when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting

For the miraculous birth, there always must be

Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating . . .

The colon is used in line 2 as an indication that what will follow will be an expansion of Auden's thoughts on the 'human position'; the semi-colons are employed to separate his observations on what he sees as the 'human condition'. Shortly after, Auden repeats his uses of the colon and semi-colon:

In Breughel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away

Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may

Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,

But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone

As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green . . .

The colon in the first line lets the reader know that the poem will now look at the human condition as it is depicted in Breughel's painting of *Icarus*, in which *Icarus* falls from the sky into the sea and drowns; the semi-colons are used as a way to list aspects of the painting that reflect examples of nature's indifference towards seemingly tragic events suffered by humans.

Students can also fall prey to writing incomplete sentences. Refrain from writing sentences that do not make sense (as in 'During when Napster trading and sharing music files for free') or truncating sentences, leaving them hanging (e.g. 'The transformation to a successful business'). There is not much to be said regarding incomplete sentences, other than it is something that is avoidable. Read your work out aloud and you will soon spot sentences that do not make sense, either because they are garbled or because they are incomplete. If uncorrected, you will lose marks on two counts: the standard of English employed is inadequate and you have failed to communicate fully your ideas.

Acquiring good marks is not just about *what* you write in your dissertation but also *how* you write. Make an effort to expunge trivial spelling mistakes and slovenly grammar from your final dissertation. An excellent book that will help you get to grips with elementary grammar is *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* by Lynne Truss (2003). Another educational, and entertaining, book on grammar is *Fumblefingers: A Lighthearted Guide to Grammar and Good Usage* by William Safire (2002). Careless grammar and slapdash spelling could prove costly in terms of lost marks, so take time to iron out such errors. In other words, watch your language!

A word of warning: plagiarism

In the world of education, technology is ubiquitous. Understandably, student use of the Internet in support of their academic studies is common in universities; indeed, it is to be encouraged. A student interested in Renaissance Art can be transported, with a few clicks of the keyboard, to a virtual gallery depicting works by Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci, and Raphael. The same student can also access expert opinion on these artists. However, with a similar paucity of keyboard clicks, students can effortlessly cut and paste material found on the Internet, insert it into their assignments (e.g. essays, reports, papers, etc.) and submit it as their own work. Therein lies the danger with coursework and easy access to the Internet: that avenues and opportunities exist that may encourage you to cheat.

Plagiarism is clearly a growing problem in the world of education. School pupils reared on the Internet, and the move towards continuous assessment, have contributed towards a 'cut and paste' generation. You may be guilty of this practice yourself. Given the seriousness of this issue, this is a topic that is worth looking at in some depth.

What counts as plagiarism?

It needs to be emphasized that it is your institution's view of what counts as plagiarism that matters most, not the one that is given in this book. Marshall

and Garry (2006) raise the point that many students themselves appear to be unaware of what constitutes plagiarism. Find out what your institution has to say on the issue of plagiarism, including the consequences of such cheating if you are caught. If you are not sure what counts as plagiarism, then be proactive and ask your dissertation supervisor to give you examples of what is and is not plagiarism and how to avoid it.

Defining plagiarism is not an abstract, academic exercise: how an institution views what counts and does not count as plagiarism can impact not only on a student's future career – your future – but also on an institution's reputation. A simple definition of plagiarism is given by Northwestern University (2005: 1): 'submitting material that in part or whole is not entirely one's own work without attributing those same portions to their correct source'. An obvious example of plagiarism that would meet this definition is where a student takes a complete chapter from a book, changes the authorship, and then submits it as his own work. What if a student 'stole' a paragraph (not a whole chapter) from another source, copied it into his essay, word for word, and failed to cite the source. Is that plagiarism? For example, the following paragraph was submitted by a student:

Cryptography may seem to be a black art requiring extremely complex mathematics and access to supercomputers. This may be the case for professional cryptanalysts (codebreakers). But for ordinary people who need to protect data, cryptography can be a strong, often simple to use, and sometimes freely available tool.

The actual source of the text was found on the web. The student neither acknowledged the source nor placed the verbatim text in quotation marks, implying that these were her own words. Even though it may only have formed a small part of her essay, it is still plagiarism ('submitting material . . . in part . . .'). By the same logic, even if a student copies a sentence verbatim without acknowledgement, that is still plagiarism. It is a simple fact: taking someone else's text, word for word, without due acknowledgement, is straightforward plagiarism.

The types of plagiarism that students get up to, based on ideas developed at Indiana University of Bloomington's School of Education (www.indiana.edu/~istd/examples.html), with real-life examples of plagiarism italicized, include:

Copying whole paragraphs verbatim, e.g.:

There is no easy or perfect solution, no silver bullet to eliminate the security risks involved in operating online. Threats and vulnerabilities are constantly evolving. Moreover, a network is as weak as its weakest

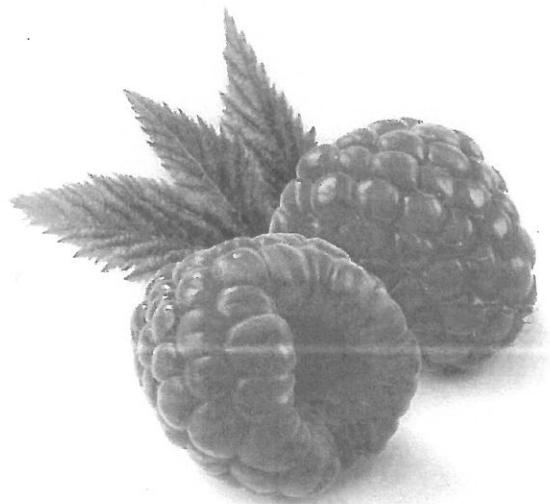
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