

Using grade descriptors

What are grade descriptors?

Grade descriptors describe generalised student performance in five categories for each unit.

When are grade descriptors used?

They assist teachers in making comparable judgements about the grades to be awarded at the conclusion of a unit. Grade descriptors are best used as points of reference when determining cut-offs after the evaluation of assessment data.

Teachers make grade judgements based on a variety of student assessment data. These judgements reflect assessment information gathered throughout a unit, not just a single piece of work. Such assessment information is compiled in accordance with the unit assessment outline.

The grade descriptors are not used to grade individual assessments.

What do grade descriptors describe?

Grades describe the overall achievement of a student in the unit as:

- Grade A: excellent achievement
- Grade B: high achievement
- Grade C: satisfactory achievement
- Grade D: limited achievement
- Grade E: inadequate achievement.

What are the key features of grade descriptors?

In general, grade descriptors:

- summarise the general characteristics of student performance at each grade
- express, in positive terms, what a student knows, understands and is able to do
- clearly define the level of proficiency for each grade (A, B, C, D and E) on a continuum of performance
- provide a guide to parents, employers and post-school providers of the relative achievement of students against defined achievement standards
- are developed with reference to student work samples and should be read in conjunction with these work samples
- provide a guide for teachers when developing teaching and assessment programs
- relate directly to the content of the units studied at a particular stage, and
- provide improvement targets for students.

How can there be consistency of grade judgements?

The following considerations may assist teachers with the consistency of grade judgements within and between schools:

- developing assessment tasks linked directly to the unit syllabus
- developing robust assessment procedures which:
 - are based on the unit assessment outlines
 - show what will be assessed and when
 - show how a teacher will gather evidence in relation to the assessment types
- using marking guides that arise directly from the assessment task(s), and
- comparing students' work with annotated work samples.

How do the assessment process and grade descriptors relate with each other?

The following steps characterise the way in which assessment for a unit of work would be carried out and how the grade descriptors are used.

1. Using the unit assessment outlines, which show what will be assessed and when and how a teacher will gather evidence in relation to the assessment types, identify the syllabus component(s) to be assessed.
2. Develop each assessment task which will enable students to demonstrate their achievement.
3. For each assessment task, set the marking key based on explicit criteria that derive naturally from the task and anticipated student responses. Allocate marks or score points. Where possible, validate the marking key using a sample of student responses.
4. Mark the assessment task.
5. Combine the results of various assessments using weightings in the unit assessment outline.
6. Rank students based on their aggregate results.
7. Compare achievements of students at grade boundaries with grade descriptors and associated exemplars. Allocate grades (A–E) by identifying grade cut-off points.