

Justifying a grade – how to explain the grade awarded using grade descriptors.

When awarding a grade to an assignment it is important that the student is provided with an explanation of how that grading decision was made. Students need to be able to use this information to identify strengths and which skills need to be further developed. At the start of the assessment, the brief would have identified the grading descriptors to be assessed and the grading components selected. Normally the assessor will select one grading component for each descriptor, ensuring that the assessment task enables this to be achieved. The assignment brief can also be utilised to provide further clarification to the student in terms of what would be expected of them to achieve a merit or distinction. Therefore you can use this contextualisation to provide an insight into how the grading decision will be reached. The justification of the grade in the feedback can therefore refer to this contextualisation and the wording of the grading components.

The following example is based on a learning outcome taken from Developmental Psychology

Task: Construct an essay using the following title – Discuss how the formation of attachment in early relationships can affect later behaviour, with reference to relevant research.

LO1: Understand the importance of early relationships in child development.

- 1.1 Discuss research into an aspect of an early relationship, for example attachment, language.
- 1.2 With reference to research, discuss possible effects of early relationships upon later behaviour.

1 Understanding of the subject	
Indicative content for Merit : The student, student's work or performance	Indicative content for Distinction: The student, student's work or performance
Demonstrates a very good grasp of the relevant knowledge base	Demonstrates excellent grasp of the relevant knowledge base
2 Application of knowledge	
Indicative content for Merit : The student, student's work or performance	Indicative content for Distinction: The student, student's work or performance
a makes use of relevant facts with b breadth or depth that goes beyond the minimum required to Pass and c very good levels of analysis	a makes use of relevant facts with b both breadth and depth and c excellent levels of analysis
5 Communication and Presentation	
Indicative content for Merit : The student, student's work or performance	Indicative content for Distinction: The student, student's work or performance

shows very good command of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> language (including technical or specialist language) spelling punctuation referencing 	shows excellent command of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> language (including technical or specialist language) spelling punctuation referencing
7. Quality (used for all units)	
Indicative content for Merit : The student, student's work or performance	Indicative content for Distinction: The student, student's work or performance
a. taken as a whole, demonstrates a very good response to the demands of the brief/assignment	a. taken as a whole, demonstrates an excellent response to the demands of the brief/assignment

Grade Profile:

Understanding of Subject	Distinction
Application of Knowledge	Merit
Communication and Presentation	Distinction
Quality	Distinction

Grade Awarded: Distinction

The essay demonstrates an **excellent understanding and grasp** of the different theories of attachment and deprivation. You have focussed on Bowlby's contribution to this area but have also clearly understood the earlier contributions to this area and how they influenced Bowlby in the development of his ideas. In addition you have referred to later contributors such as Michael Rutter.

Your independent research has sourced a number of different research studies relating to attachment and deprivation, although you could have utilised more articles from relevant journals such as the British Journal of Psychology. Nevertheless, you have extracted **the relevant facts** from the research and **applied** them to develop a very good discussion of the possible effects of early relationships upon later behaviour. There was **breadth** within your discussion as you did not restrict yourself to just considering the effects on later childhood; you also reflected on the effects on adulthood and the effects of different types of deprivation. There was an opportunity to provide more detail at times. For example, when you talk about the effects of using child care you could have distinguished more between the short and long term effect. There was also a **very good level of analysis** as you examined some of the research in terms of its strengths and weaknesses. This was particularly more so for Bowlby's research. In future you could improve this by analysing more of the other examples of research and elaborating on comments such as 'The weakness of this research is the sample does not allow for full generalisation'. You should be able to explain what it is about the sample that does not allow for full generalisation.

Throughout the essay, you have demonstrated **excellent command of specialist language**, particularly terms such as 'monotropy', 'imprinting' and 'affectionless psychopathy'. **Spelling and**

punctuation are excellent. Harvard **referencing** style has been used accurately throughout for citation and referencing.

Overall, the essay demonstrates an **excellent response to the demands of the brief.**

Note that we are using “very good” in our feedback to refer to work of Merit quality and “excellent” to refer to work of Distinction quality. Confusion easily occurs if the use of descriptor vocabulary in feedback gets mismatched.