

MPhil in African Studies Examining and Marking Scheme

All written work is marked independently by two assessors before a final mark is agreed, and may additionally be marked and/or moderated by the External Examiner, who will confirm borderline marks and adjudicate in the case of a significant discrepancy between markers.

Coursework (the two essays combined) cannot compensate for failure in the dissertation (and vice versa), although a High Pass in one component may compensate in cases of borderline failure ('redeemable performance') in the other.

The total mark awarded for the degree is reached by adding the thesis mark (60%) and the mark for the coursework essays combined (40%). The essays are weighted at 20% each.

Officially, the MPhil degree is awarded in two categories only, Pass and Distinction. To gain a Pass, candidates need to achieve an overall weighted mark of 60 or higher. To gain a Distinction, candidates need an overall weighted mark of at least 75. Final marks are rounded up to the nearest whole number. The threshold for leave to continue to the PhD is usually a 73 for the MPhil overall with a mark of 75 or more for the dissertation or the coursework.

In judging essays and dissertations, examiners are asked to bear in mind that candidates are at the beginning of their careers in research. At this stage, particularly in an interdisciplinary field such as African Studies, many MPhil candidates may well be writing about topics, or operating in whole fields or disciplines, which they are encountering for the first time.

Examiners should begin by attending to the academic content of submitted work. They should consider **scope** (i.e. the appropriateness of the topic and its larger context, and in current debate), **research content** (i.e. identification and study of appropriate sources and/or academic literature/historiography), **quality of argument** (i.e. analysis of academic literature/sources, development of analytical arguments, or reconsideration of existing accounts), and **awareness of limits of knowledge**. While originality might be possible even in an MPhil essay, it is not required at this stage. But examiners are asked to bear in mind that the African Studies MPhil is interdisciplinary, and students should be given credit for showing breadth of knowledge and a willingness to engage with more than one disciplinary approach.

Work at MPhil level, particularly the dissertation, should reveal high standards of intellectual enquiry, research skills and analytical sophistication. A mark of 67 or above should be awarded only if the candidate might reasonably be expected to go on to complete a successful PhD. Note that 'leave to continue' to the PhD is judged primarily on the basis of dissertation performance, although essay performance may be taken into account in marginal cases.

Candidates are also expected to present work which is clearly and correctly written and which has an adequate (though not necessarily full and complete) scholarly apparatus; they have been issued guidelines on these matters, which suggest either traditional or author-date style footnotes, while stating that any clear and consistent system may be used.

Inadequacies on these criteria can be weighed against the standards attained on the criteria relating to academic content. The decision to balance judgment on content and presentation in marking MPhil essays, on how to mark relatively for weaknesses either of argument or of prose and presentation must rest with the examiner. High quality argument can be presented sloppily and meticulous presentational skills can hide shallow and undeveloped arguments. Examiners should consider the **organisation of the narrative** and the argument; **capacity to summarise** findings; **style and clarity** of prose and **precision in documentation** (including footnotes and bibliography). Many candidates are not native English speakers and examiners should acknowledge this, while commenting on shortcomings of linguistic skills if appropriate. Candidates are expected to make use of all available resources to ensure that their submitted work is written in correct English; such shortcomings can be penalised if their effect is to make the work unintelligible.

Essays

Distinction: 75 and above

Tackles a topic not widely covered in the literature or approaches a topic covered in the literature from a new angle; shows an excellent grasp of a wide range of relevant academic literature, historiography and/or sources and utilises this material in a scholarly fashion; shows superior understanding of relevant theoretical and methodological issues; provides a well-argued and referenced answer, with indications of insight and/or originality.

High Pass: 70 and above

Shows a firm grasp of a good range of relevant academic literature and/or sources and utilises this material in a scholarly fashion; provides a clear, well-organised and suitably referenced answer, showing understanding of relevant theoretical and methodological issues.

Pass: 60 and above

Shows knowledge of a good range of academic literature and/or sources and utilises this material in a scholarly manner; provides a clear, well organised answer but has some theoretical and/or methodological weaknesses and/or displays some weaknesses in written expression or argument. Marks at the upper end of the range will have minor and less serious weaknesses: those at the lower end will have more substantial weaknesses.

Fail: below 60

Shows an inadequate grasp of relevant academic literature and/or utilises sources in a casual manner; fails to provide a coherent answer; shows inadequate understanding of theory and/or methodology; displays significant weaknesses in written expression and/or argument.

Dissertations

Distinction: 75 and above

Tackles a problem not well covered in the literature or approaches a topic from a new angle; shows an excellent grasp of a wide range of relevant academic literature, historiography and/or sources and utilises this material in a scholarly fashion; shows a superior understanding of relevant theoretical issues and/or shows ingenuity in applying a particular method to an empirical problem; presents a well-argued thesis which integrates theory, methods and data and shows insight and/or originality.

High Pass: 70 and above

Tackles a problem from a new angle; shows a firm grasp of a wide range of relevant academic literature and/or sources and utilises this material in a scholarly manner; shows a good understanding of relevant theoretical issues; applies chosen research method(s) in a sound manner; presents a clear and well-argued thesis which integrates theory, methods and data and demonstrates some insight.

Pass: 60 and above

Shows an adequate grasp of a wide range of sources and utilises them in a scholarly manner; shows an adequate understanding of theoretical issues; applies chosen research methods in a sound manner; presents a clear and well-argued dissertation which adequately integrates theory, methods and data. There may be some limited theoretical and/or methodological weaknesses and/or weaknesses in written expression or argument. Marks at the upper end of the range will have minor and less serious weaknesses: those at the lower end will have more substantial weaknesses.

Marginal Fail: 58, 59

A dissertation that shows insufficient evidence of competence in conducting a scholarly investigation of a clearly defined empirical problem and does not reach the standards of achievement in several of the aspects defined under criteria for a Pass, but which exhibits sufficient signs of knowledge to be redeemed by other work of a higher standard.

Fail: below 60

A dissertation that shows insufficient evidence of competence in conducting a scholarly investigation of a clearly defined empirical problem and does not reach the standards of achievement in several of the aspects defined under criteria for a Pass.