



Marking a portfolio of evidence

We will move schools to the portfolio of evidence route in specific circumstances where exams cannot take place. This factsheet will help you to understand how we mark the portfolio of evidence.

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Marking a wide variety of evidence

For students taking the portfolio of evidence route, we will ask schools to submit a portfolio of three substantial pieces of evidence for each student. Every student will submit a different portfolio of evidence and the tasks may be different between different students and different schools.

We accept a wide variety of types of work in the portfolio of evidence route. Details of acceptable types of work, and other relevant information about collecting a portfolio of evidence are in our guidance [Collecting a portfolio of evidence](#). This is because we want schools working in difficult circumstances to be able to send us work they already have available – they should not need to produce additional work. The purpose of the portfolio of evidence is to make sure that students who cannot take exams are still able to get a result and progress.

The way we mark the portfolio of evidence is designed to manage this wide variety of types of work. It differs from the way we mark exams. In the exam route, students all complete the same questions or tasks and we know in advance what these questions or tasks are. This means that we can mark exams using a mark scheme. It is not possible to write a detailed mark scheme that could be applied to the varied work that we see for a portfolio of evidence.

Cambridge examiners mark the portfolio of evidence by considering the overall quality of the work that they see in each piece of evidence. They give a single mark to each piece of evidence which represents its overall quality. This is known as holistic marking. They do this using one of the approaches explained in this factsheet.

If you have used a Cambridge past paper or have submitted coursework as evidence for your students, Cambridge examiners will not mark it using the published mark scheme. This is because this approach cannot be consistently applied to all types of evidence. In contrast, the marking approaches we use for portfolio of evidence are applicable to all different types of evidence.

Marking a portfolio of evidence continued

The different marking approaches

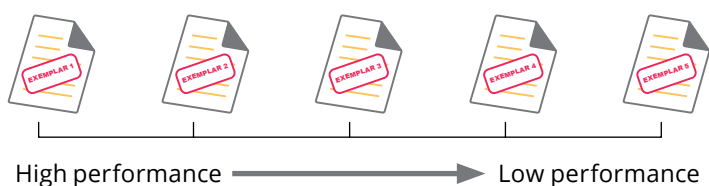
Each syllabus will use one of three different marking approaches used for portfolio of evidence. All three different marking approaches are based on a holistic marking approach:

- Holistic marking using exemplar materials
- Holistic marking using traffic lights
- Holistic marking using level descriptors

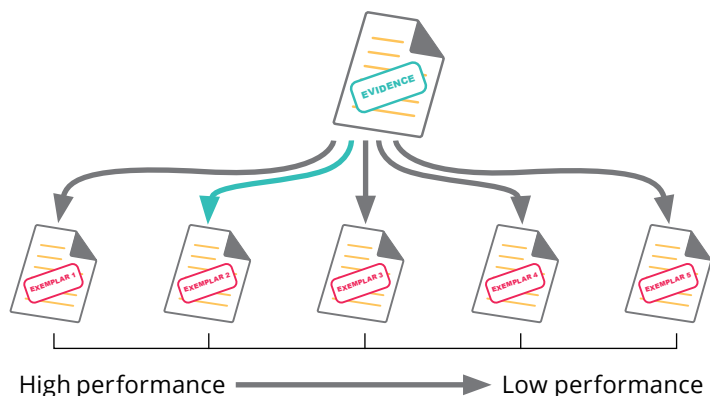
Holistic marking using exemplar materials

Many syllabuses will be marked directly using exemplar materials. Cambridge examiners will use exemplar materials which show the performance level expected at regular mark points throughout the mark range. Examiners make a single judgement about the performance level shown in each piece of evidence as a whole, and they do this by referring to the exemplar materials. This is different from marking exams. When marking exams, examiners mark question by question. The decisions they make on the mark to award for each question are based on a detailed mark scheme. Portfolio of evidence examiners take a more holistic approach.

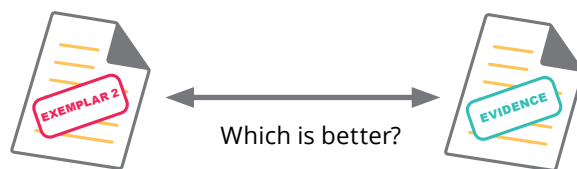
Exemplar materials exist for each Cambridge International Education syllabus. Each set of exemplar materials gives examples of students' work for that syllabus which help our examiners mark different types of evidence within a portfolio of evidence. Exemplars are usually past exam papers or coursework. The exemplars cover a range of quality of performance, from high performance to low performance.



Portfolio of evidence examiners look at a student's piece of evidence and choose the exemplar materials which most closely match the type of task completed by the student. For example, if the student's piece of evidence is a past paper of paper 1 of the syllabus, the examiner would choose exemplar materials which also relate to paper 1 of the syllabus. The examiners then read through the student's piece of evidence to form a holistic view of its overall quality. Examiners will then compare each piece of evidence in a student's portfolio against the exemplar materials and make an overall holistic judgement about which exemplar is nearest to the student's piece of evidence in quality.



Once the examiner has chosen which exemplar is closest in type and quality to the piece of evidence, they will then judge whether the student's performance in the piece of evidence is of the same standard as the performance in the exemplar work, or whether it is of a slightly higher or slightly lower standard.



The exemplar has a mark associated with it: if the candidate's work is of exactly the same quality, then the examiner will give the candidate the same mark as the exemplar. If the candidate's work is a little better or a little weaker than the exemplar, then the examiner can give a mark higher or a mark lower than the exemplar.

Better than the exemplar – one extra mark



Same quality as the exemplar – same number of marks



Weaker than the exemplar – one less mark



If the examiner decides that the quality of the evidence is considerably different in overall quality from the exemplar, they look again at the full set of exemplar material and select one that is closer to the quality of the piece of evidence.

The same process is followed for each piece of evidence in the student's portfolio.

Marking a portfolio of evidence continued

Holistic marking using a traffic lights approach

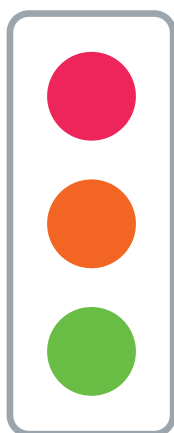
For mathematics and science subjects, Cambridge examiners will review each piece of evidence against specific categories. These categories are based on syllabus content or skills. Each category may combine several related smaller topics from the syllabus, so that examiners can consider the content area holistically.

Examiners make two judgements for each category. These judgements are:

- the quality of the student's response
- the level of demand of the questions or tasks.

It is important that examiners take into account the demand of the questions or tasks that students were given. This is because good answers to easy questions do not indicate a high level of performance.

The two judgements are combined to give a rating on a traffic lights scale. This indicates the overall standard of work demonstrated in that category. On this traffic lights scale, red corresponds to work of an overall lower standard, amber to work of an intermediate standard and green to work of a higher standard. The signs (+) and (-) are used to provide further information about the quality of the work.



Red

e.g. Easier questions which have been poorly answered

Amber

e.g. Intermediate questions which have been relatively well answered or easier questions that have been well answered

Green

e.g. Harder questions which have been well answered

The traffic lights scale also accounts for work with mixed characteristics, for example, hard questions which have been attempted but not answered well might be given an amber traffic light.

The traffic lights across all the categories covered by the piece of work are combined to generate a mark for the piece of evidence. Examiners also add an annotation to the evidence to indicate the judgements that they have made on the traffic lights scale. An example is shown below. Where a category is not covered by the piece of evidence, 'N/A' (not applicable) is shown.

Number Green -, Algebra Amber -, Graphs N/A, Geometry Amber +,
Mensuration Amber +, Trigonometry N/A, Vectors Green -,
Transformations Amber +, Probability Green -, Statistics Amber -,
Total mark = XX

We do not expect every piece of evidence to cover all the categories but there should be reasonable coverage of the categories when all pieces of evidence in the portfolio of evidence have been reviewed. This indicates that the portfolio of evidence has adequately covered the syllabus content and assessment objectives.

Examiners marking using the traffic lights approach do not refer directly to exemplar materials when they mark the evidence. Instead they mark the evidence against a standardised scale of red, amber and green traffic lights, as described above.

Holistic marking using syllabus level descriptors

In some subjects, for example Cambridge IGCSE Global Perspectives, marks are awarded predominantly for the skills demonstrated by a candidate, rather than for specific knowledge. Where this is the case, we have developed a high-level marking framework. This framework is a set of syllabus level descriptors, based on the full set of syllabus assessment objectives, for examiners to use to mark each piece of evidence in the student's portfolio. Examiners will use these descriptors to make a holistic judgement about what the mark should be for each piece of evidence. They will judge the overall level of performance against the part of the descriptors which most closely corresponds to the type of piece of evidence submitted. They are not the same as the levels-based marking bands used to mark exam questions.

The syllabus level descriptors have been created with reference to the performance standard demonstrated in the exemplar materials for the syllabus, but examiners will not be referring directly to the exemplar materials to mark each piece of evidence.

Frequently asked questions

How will you make sure that all examiners mark in the same way?

Holistic judgements about the quality of a student's work need to be done carefully and this is where our examiner training is very important, as it makes sure that all examiners are looking for the same indicators when they judge the overall quality of a piece of evidence. We follow our usual processes to make sure that all examiners mark in the same way.

Before they are allowed to start marking, each examiner must successfully complete a process called standardisation:

1. An examiner marks some 'practice scripts' – these are portfolios of evidence which have already been marked and annotated by senior examiners. Each examiner studies the practice scripts to make sure they understand why the senior examiners have given the marks they have.

Marking a portfolio of evidence continued

- Each examiner then marks a set of 'standardisation scripts'. These have also already been marked by senior examiners, but in this case the examiner cannot see what marks have been awarded. If the examiner's marks are in agreement with the senior examiners' marks, the examiner is allowed to begin marking.

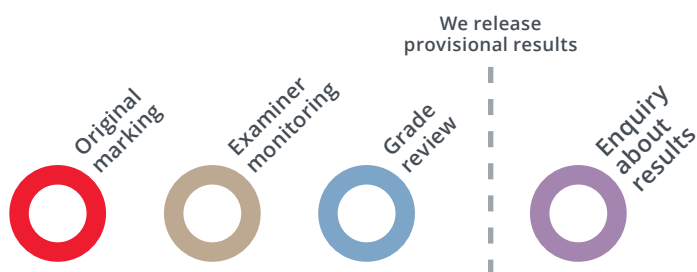
Once an examiner is marking during the live series, their work is checked at regular intervals to make sure that they are continuing to mark accurately. This checking process is called monitoring. There are two types of monitoring checks:

- A senior examiner looks at some of the examiner's marking and checks that it is accurate.
- 'Seeding scripts' are dropped into the examiner's worklist. We add portfolios of evidence that have already been marked by senior examiners to an examiner's worklist. These are called 'seeding scripts'. The examiner does not know which portfolios are seeding scripts and which are not, and they cannot see the senior examiners' marks. We check the examiner's marks on the seeding scripts to make sure that they continue to be in agreement with our senior examiners' marks.

If we find that an examiner is marking erratically, we will stop the examiner and cancel all of the marks that they have awarded. Other examiners will then re-mark those portfolios of evidence.

Every portfolio goes through the original marking stage, and some are checked during monitoring. Portfolios may also go through a further stage of checking before results are released. This further stage is called grade review. A grade review happens after grading is complete and before results are released. Grade review is an opportunity for us to check a student's work if they are close to a grade threshold (at syllabus level) and meet at least one other of our pre-determined criteria.

Lastly, we offer an enquiries about results service if a school would like us to check the results for particular candidates after the release of provisional results.



Is your holistic marking method for portfolio of evidence reliable?

Yes. When we talk about reliability here, we are talking about the likelihood that two different examiners will give the same mark as each other if both examiners marked the same student's portfolio of evidence. We have analysed

portfolio of evidence data from the June 2022 exam series and can see that the marking reliability of portfolios of evidence is broadly comparable with the reliability of marking for a typical exam paper.

At the same time, there is a scale of reliability – some approaches to determining marks are more reliable than others. Exams are generally more reliable than the portfolio of evidence route. This is one of the reasons why portfolios of evidence are only available when exams cannot happen. The difference is that students taking exams usually take more than one exam paper in each subject, and this increases the reliability of exams.

Will examiners use my forecast grade?

No. Our examiners mark work independently, based on the quality of work that they have seen in the student's portfolio, and the work is marked to our common standard. However, we will use forecast grades to support the portfolio of evidence in the same ways that we use forecast grades for candidates who take exams. For example:

- As part of grading, we consider what the forecast grade data tells us about the likely performance for the overall cohort taking each syllabus to help us to understand the quality of the students taking the syllabus this year compared to previous years.
- We refer to individual candidate forecast grade information in specific circumstances, such as in cases of special consideration.

Will you publish the exemplar materials?

No, the exemplar materials are not published. These are only shared with our examiners, to protect the identity of students whose work is included in the exemplars.

What are the component codes for the portfolio of evidence?

When we move your school to a portfolio of evidence route, we will move your entries from their original entry code to a new portfolio of evidence entry code. This entry code will be a single component which represents the three pieces in a student's portfolio. The usual component codes are given below.

- For an IGCSE, O Level or AS Level portfolio of evidence, the component code is component 50.
- For an A2 portfolio of evidence, the component code is component 60.

Candidates who are taking a linear A Level will produce two portfolios of evidence, one for AS (component 50) and one for A2 (component 60).

More information about entry codes for the portfolio of evidence are in our guidance [Entry guidance – moving to portfolio of evidence](#).

Marking a portfolio of evidence continued

What are the marks for the portfolio of evidence?

Our examiners will give a mark to each of the pieces of evidence. These marks will be added together to give a total mark for the portfolio of evidence. The types of evidence submitted will be different from different schools.

To manage this consistently across schools when marking, all pieces of evidence will contribute equally to the total mark. So, each portfolio of evidence will be marked out of a maximum total mark, and each piece of evidence will be assigned a third of the total mark for the portfolio. The usual total marks are given below.

For an IGCSE or O Level portfolio of evidence:

- the total mark is 90
- the maximum mark available for each piece of evidence is 30 marks.

For an AS Level, A2 or A Level portfolio of evidence:

- the total mark is 75
- the maximum mark available for each piece of evidence is 25 marks.

We will use the total mark for the portfolio of evidence to calculate a syllabus grade for each student.

What information can I see about my student's marks for the portfolio of evidence?

If you usually receive Component Marks Reports from us, you will see the portfolio of evidence component(s) on the report. The mark on this report will be the total mark for the portfolio of evidence (the marks for each piece of evidence added together). This report will not show you the individual marks for the individual pieces of evidence.

If you request a copy of the script as part of an enquiry about results service, this copy will show you the individual marks for the individual pieces of evidence. It will also show you any examiner annotations which may help to explain how marks have been awarded.

There is more information about how to understand the marks on students' portfolios of evidence in our guidance. [Enquiries about results and marks on script factsheet](#).

What annotations will I see on the portfolio of evidence?

In general, portfolios of evidence have fewer annotations than exam scripts because the portfolios are marked holistically rather than using a mark scheme.

When we mark exams using a mark scheme, examiners may annotate answers to show where they do, or do not, meet the criteria in the mark scheme – or where they do, or do not, score marks.

When marking holistically, the examiner may show more generally how the marking standard has been met. This could be a letter reference indicating which exemplar the piece of evidence has been matched to, or this could be a reference code, which is an annotation that shows how the examiner made their decision. A summary annotation is used for marking using the traffic lights approach to show the judgements made in each category (see *Holistic marking using a traffic lights approach*). The exact approach to annotations will vary between different subjects, even when those subjects are using the same type of marking approach.

For both exams and portfolios of evidence, annotations are used by our senior examiners if they review the marking at different stages of the marking process (see *How will you make sure that all examiners mark in the same way?*). Annotations help senior examiners to understand the marks awarded and are not intended to be used by our schools.

Will students get higher marks if their school chooses their best work?

We asked schools to select pieces of evidence that were typical of the general level of the student's work. We also advised schools that the portfolio of evidence should include tasks at levels of demand which match well to their level of ability. It is important the evidence contains a range of tasks.

Evidence needs to include demanding questions to allow candidates to access the highest marks. However, evidence should not consist of demanding questions only because that will not allow weaker candidates to demonstrate what they know and can do and may disadvantage them.

Sending us a student's best pieces of work would be malpractice ('cheating'). Where we have reason to think that has happened, we will carry out a malpractice investigation and, if necessary, we will take action.

Will my student get the same mark on portfolio of evidence as on exams?

When we mark holistically, for example using exemplars, we make sure that the performance standard expected for the portfolio of evidence is the same as exams. However, the indicators that examiners look for when they judge overall quality may be given slightly different weight compared to when an exam paper is marked. This is one of the reasons why portfolio of evidence marking can place students' work in a slightly different rank order from marking exams using a mark scheme.

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In maths exams, for example, which are marked according to a mark scheme, students are awarded marks for accurately completing calculations. The marks credit two elements of the answer: the correct final answer, and their method ('working out') to complete the calculation.

In portfolio of evidence marking, examiners do not have a mark scheme, and each student's evidence can be different. This means that the method the student shows for reaching their answer may be given more weight in portfolio of evidence marking. This is because an examiner for portfolio of evidence can 'follow' the steps in a candidate's method, and doing this allows a holistic judgement to be made of the candidate's level of performance.



Both marking approaches (using a mark scheme and marking holistically) credit the student's mathematical ability, but the two elements of the answer are weighted differently. So, the rank order of students may be slightly different between exam marking and portfolio of evidence marking. We cannot say that one rank order is right and the other is wrong: both are valid ways of ranking the candidates, but because the approaches to marking are different, the rank orders may also be slightly different.

The overall marking standard for portfolio of evidence is the same as for exams. We know this because we have used materials at known performance standards from the exam route to set our standards for holistic marking. The exemplar materials used for holistic marking are typically students' work from previous exam series, such as exam papers, at known performance standards. The marking standard using the traffic lights approach to mark for portfolio of evidence is also aligned to the marking standard for exams. We know this because we have used materials at known performance standards from the exam route to set the standard for the traffic lights scale for each syllabus.

Will my student get the same grade on portfolio of evidence as on exams?

We will set grade thresholds for the portfolio of evidence in the same way that we set grade thresholds for the exam route. Many of our syllabuses offer different options (different combinations of papers that candidates can take). We are used to setting grade thresholds that ensure the different options are aligned – that is, that it is no easier to get a good grade on one option than on another. The portfolio of evidence route is simply another option, and we will set grade thresholds that keep it aligned with the exam options. It is a normal part of what we do.

The grade that a candidate achieves on the portfolio of evidence may be slightly different from the grade that they might have achieved on the exam route. This is because the tasks that they have completed to receive a grade for the portfolio of evidence are different from the papers that they would have taken on the exam route. We do not expect candidate performance on different tasks to always be identical.

How can I help a student or parent who is disappointed with a portfolio of evidence grade?

For the portfolio of evidence, marking can be reviewed through the enquiries about results services, in the same way that exam marking can be reviewed.

You can request a copy of a student's portfolio to see what they submitted, and a review of marking if they want to have the mark of the portfolio double-checked.

For portfolio of evidence, the pieces of evidence were selected by the school. Students and parents who are disappointed with grades may attempt to blame the school for not selecting the best work available. The best response to this would be to point out that selecting the best pieces of work rather than typical pieces of work would have constituted malpractice, with potentially serious consequences for both the student and the school.

If students or parents complain that the work selected as evidence was among the student's worst pieces, you may be able to show them the other requirements which also needed to be taken into account in the evidence selection (such as to provide as broad a coverage of assessment objectives and subject content as possible). You may also be able to refer to the student's records to show that the work selected was not in fact their worst.

You can also tell parents and students about our enquiry about results service 10, in which students may query whether or not the selection of evidence met Cambridge's requirements. However, this service will not consider whether or not the work was typical of the student's general level of performance.

Learn more! For more information please visit [cambridgeinternational.org/examsOfficers](https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/examsOfficers) or contact Customer Services on +44 (0)1223 553554 or email info@cambridgeinternational.org