



Calculating assessed marks

This factsheet is for exams officers, Heads of Centre and other centre staff who may need to understand how we calculate an assessed mark. It explains what an assessed mark is, how we calculate it, and why.

In this factsheet we have included information about:

- [What an assessed mark is and when they are used.](#)
- [How assessed marks are calculated using cumulative percentages, and their reliability.](#)
- [How assessed marks make sure candidates are not disadvantaged.](#)
- [Receiving results and certificates that include assessed marks.](#)

What is an assessed mark?

An assessed mark is a mark we calculate for a missed component. When a candidate is absent for an acceptable reason from a component, we may calculate an assessed mark. We do this so we can award the candidate an overall syllabus grade. We explain when we may calculate an assessed mark for a missing component and when we cannot calculate an assessed mark for a missing component [here](#).

When are assessed marks used?

Calculated assessed marks are used to give a mark to a component that a candidate missed for an acceptable reason, or to provide marks for a component missed by a whole cohort of candidates for example because of adverse weather. Find out when we can and cannot calculate an assessed mark for a missed component [here](#).

Are assessed marks reliable?

Assessed marks are reliable and the grade that we issue using an assessed mark can be trusted. The calculation of assessed marks is a well-established method of awarding a mark to a candidate for a particular component. In every exam series we have a number of candidates who cannot complete a component and apply to us for 'special consideration – absent for an acceptable reason'. In these cases, we calculate an assessed mark so that the candidate can receive a syllabus grade and progress with their education or next life steps. Without calculating an assessed mark, we are unable to award an overall syllabus grade. Universities accept and trust results that use this process.

How are assessed marks calculated?

We calculate assessed marks based on how the marks the candidate scored in the components they sat compare to the marks scored by all Cambridge candidates worldwide who are entered for those same components. This tells us whether the candidate is among the highest-scoring candidates, lowest-scoring candidates or average-scoring candidates for these components. We use cumulative percentages to work this out. The method for calculating assessed marks places the candidate in the same rank order position for the component(s) they did not sit as their position for the components they did sit.

It is important to note that this method takes into account any differences in the difficulty of scoring marks on different papers in the syllabus. This makes sure candidates with assessed marks for a component are not given an advantage or disadvantage compared to the candidates who sat the component.

What are cumulative percentages and how are they used to calculate assessed marks?

Cumulative percentages tell us the percentage of candidates at or above a certain mark. They allow us to compare how well a candidate performs compared to all other Cambridge candidates worldwide who are entered for the same syllabus and components, in the same exam series.

For example, if a candidate's mark has a cumulative percentage of 20 per cent this means that 20 per cent of all Cambridge candidates worldwide who sat the same component in the same exam series scored the same mark or better. It also means that the candidate is 20 per cent of the way down the rank order of all candidates (the rank order is a list of all candidates who took the paper listed in descending order of marks).

The table below shows an example of the mark distribution for a question paper (paper 1). It also shows how a certain candidate's mark corresponds to their cumulative percentage.

- The candidate has achieved 45 marks on the question paper.
- To find their cumulative percentage, we compare this to the mark for the same paper scored by all Cambridge candidates worldwide.
- We find that 35.5 per cent of candidates scored the same or better than the candidate. This means 35.5 per cent is their cumulative percentage.
- In this example, their cumulative percentage corresponds to a component grade B.

[At the end of this factsheet](#), there is a full example of how we use a cumulative percentage and rank order position to calculate an assessed mark.

Mark	Number of candidates	Cumulative percentage	Component grade
49	280	27.0	B
48	296	29.4	B
47	261	31.4	B
46	277	33.6	B
45	250	35.5	B
44	256	37.5	B
Grade threshold – grade B			
43	270	39.7	C
42	241	41.5	C

Are candidates given the same percentage of the marks for the missing component as their marks for the components they have sat?

No. This approach would produce a mark for the missing component, but it could give the candidates who missed the paper a systematic advantage or disadvantage compared to the candidates who took all the components. If the candidates who took all the components had a mean (average) mark of 60 per cent on Paper 1 and a mean (average) mark of 45 per cent on Paper 2, then we know that it is harder to score marks on Paper 2 than on Paper 1. Giving candidates the same percentage mark for both papers would either be a big advantage or disadvantage compared to the candidates who took both papers. Instead, we use a percentile-based approach, as described in the questions above. This factors in the relative difficulty of the different components by considering the marks scored by all candidates who took them.

How do calculated marks make sure that candidates are not disadvantaged?

Our approach to calculating assessed marks makes sure candidates with assessed marks have no advantage or disadvantage compared to candidates who took all the components. The assessed

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mark they receive reflects their hard work and their performance in the other components. Candidates can still get 100 per cent of the marks and have access to top grades. When calculating an assessed mark, we look at the performance pattern of **all** candidates worldwide across the same components of the same syllabus. We also look at how well the individual candidate has performed on the components they did sit, compared to all other candidates. We replicate this pattern for candidates who have an assessed mark. This makes sure that candidates are not disadvantaged if their assessed mark is for a component that candidates usually find easier.

You can find an example of how this works [at the end of this factsheet](#).

Can candidates be given their forecast grade as a calculated assessed mark?

No. This approach presents many problems. Firstly, it is not clear how a mark for the missing component could be produced. Secondly, this approach ignores the strongest evidence that we have of the candidate's performance, which is the marks scored on the components they were able to sit. Thirdly, some candidates outperform their forecast grade, so this approach would limit the grades that they could achieve.

In summary, to calculate assessed marks we use the strongest evidence we have, which is the mark(s) awarded for the paper(s) the candidate has sat.

What sample size is used when calculating assessed marks?

We base the assessed marks on the entire cohort of candidates worldwide who took the same combination of components. We do this because it is the largest possible sample, and it ensures all candidates in the same situation are treated in the same way. This makes the process both reliable and fair.

Are assessed marks shown on certificates?

No, assessed marks are not shown on certificates, only the candidate's final syllabus grade is given. Assessed marks do appear on results documents that show component marks.

Do universities accept assessed marks?

The calculation of assessed marks is a well-established method of awarding a mark to a candidate for a particular component and is regularly used for candidates who have missed an exam for an acceptable reason. Universities accept and trust results that use this process.

Will there be any delay to candidates receiving results?

As long as the centre successfully applies for special consideration on time, there will not be a delay.

Can we still submit an enquiry about results and appeal about the outcome?

Enquiries about results are not available for components that have assessed marks. This is because assessed marks for a missed component are not given by an examiner who has judged the candidate's performance. Assessed marks are produced by a calculation based on the marks the candidate scored in the components they sat. Therefore, there is no human judgement to be reviewed via enquiries about results. However, if a candidate's mark for a component they were able to take is increased following an enquiry about results, we will recalculate the assessed mark for any affected components.

Can assessed marks be calculated for all Cambridge exams?

Yes, calculated assessed marks are available for exams of all syllabuses at Cambridge IGCSE, O Level and Cambridge International AS & A Level. The requirements for calculating an assessed mark are outlined in section 5.5.3 of the Cambridge Handbook.

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If a candidate is absent for an acceptable reason from a component, the minimum requirements for calculating an assessed mark in the June 2024 series are that the candidate must:

- (i) have covered the whole course
- (ii) have completed 15 per cent of the total assessment* by component weighting in the relevant exam series. Carry-forward marks do not count towards this.

*Our usual requirements are that candidates complete 50 per cent of the total assessment.

Are there any situations when assessed marks cannot be calculated?

Yes. The following situations are also outlined in section 5.5.3 of the Cambridge Handbook:

- (i) We cannot calculate an assessed mark for Cambridge International A Levels where a candidate has not completed any A Level components (A2 Level components) in the exam series.
- (ii) We cannot calculate an assessed mark for any component that does not have a weighting, e.g. some endorsed components.
- (iii) If a candidate is absent for a non-coursework test and has recovered before the end of the test date window, you must ask us if they can take it at another time within the test date window. Please see section 3.4.10 of the Cambridge Handbook.
- (iv) Where a candidate has a valid mark for a component that can be used, including carry-forward marks, we prioritise this over calculating an assessed mark based on the performance in other components of the syllabus.

Example

In this example:

- the syllabus consists of two exam papers, 1 and 2.
- a candidate called Sadiya has taken paper 1 and scored 45 marks.
- Sadiya has been unable to sit paper 2 and her centre applies for special consideration – absent for an acceptable reason.
- we accept the application and calculate a mark for paper 2.
- Sadiya is concerned that paper 1 was challenging, and that she would have performed better on paper 2.

Our calculated assessment approach cancels out the effect of an easy or difficult paper. We make sure that the assessed marks for the question paper that has been missed reflect any difference in difficulty. This makes sure that no candidate is systematically advantaged or disadvantaged.

How do we calculate the missing mark for paper 2?

1. We look at the mark Sadiya scored for paper 1 and we compare this to the mark for paper 1 scored by all Cambridge candidates worldwide who are entered for both components.
2. Sadiya scored 45 marks (out of 75) on paper 1. We find that 35.5 per cent of candidates scored the same or better than Sadiya. This is called the cumulative percentage.

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This table shows part of the mark distribution for paper 1, with Sadiya's mark highlighted.

Mark	Number of candidates	Cumulative percentage	Component grade
49	280	27.0	B
48	296	29.4	B
47	261	31.4	B
46	277	33.6	B
45	250	35.5	B
44	256	37.5	B
Grade threshold – grade B			
43	270	39.7	C
42	241	41.5	C

3. We next look at the mark distribution for all Cambridge candidates worldwide who sat paper 2 and we find the percentile that is closest to Sadiya's for paper 1 – 35.5 per cent, as shown in the table below.

This table shows part of the mark distribution for paper 2, with Sadiya's mark highlighted.

Mark	Number of candidates	Cumulative percentage	Component grade
37	409	25.5	B
36	227	27.3	B
35	292	29.6	B
Grade threshold – grade B			
34	277	31.8	C
33	318	34.3	C
32	329	36.9	C
31	243	38.8	C
30	255	40.8	C

4. We award the corresponding mark to Sadiya – in this example the mark we calculate is 33 (out of 50).
5. We use the marks for papers 1 and 2 to work out Sadiya's final syllabus mark and grade. In this example, she achieves a syllabus grade B.

Is Sadiya's calculated mark fair?

Yes, the approach we use is fair and does not advantage or disadvantage any candidate. Our approach considers the different difficulty of papers 1 and 2. It places Sadiya in the same rank order position for the component she did not sit as her position for the component she did sit.

We can see that it is harder to get a grade B on paper 2 than paper 1 – 37.5 per cent of candidates achieved a grade B on paper 1 whereas 29.6% of candidate achieved a grade B on paper 2. Typically, candidates who are just above the grade B threshold for paper 1 achieve a grade C on paper 2.

It is fair to award Sadiya a grade C for paper 2 because most other Cambridge candidates who got the same mark as Sadiya on paper 1 also got a C on paper 2.

In this example, Sadiya achieves a syllabus grade B.