

Marking approach guidelines – making holistic judgements

Following our release of guidelines about the use of top-down and bottom-up approaches to marking, we received a further request for advice about making holistic judgements.

We have developed additional guidance to support teachers in making holistic judgements when assessing against internally assessed standards.

A simple guide to making holistic judgements

This guide supports teachers in making holistic judgements when assessing against internally assessed standards.

What is a holistic judgement?

A holistic judgement involves evaluating a student's work as a whole, rather than checking off isolated parts or discrete components. It draws on your professional expertise to judge whether the overall quality, coherence, and content of the evidence meet the criteria for Achieved, Merit, or Excellence.

Why use holistic judgement?

Holistic judgement:

- supports authentic learning, creativity, and critical thinking,
- allows students to demonstrate understanding in diverse ways,
- avoids fragmenting learning into overly specific tasks,
- encourages deeper thinking and integration of ideas.

Key elements of holistic judgements

To make valid, reliable, and consistent judgements, teachers need:

- clear standards and criteria,
- annotated exemplars showing different levels of achievement,
- relevant expertise and experience to interpret student work.

Making holistic judgements

Teachers must:

- understand the standard and its criteria, and what is required at each level of achievement,

- read the entire student response, and evaluate its overall quality, depth, coherence, and insight,
- use professional judgement to make a grade decision based on how well the student's response aligns with the requirements of the standard,
- identify evidence of relevant knowledge and use of critical skills that support the grade decision,
- see sufficient evidence that all the requirements have been met at the level of the grade awarded and be confident the student would be able to repeat the performance with consistency.

Common mistake to avoid

A common mistake is assuming that meeting most criteria is enough. In fact, all requirements of the standard must be met—but the evidence can come from any part of the student's work. For example, if a student does not draw a conclusion in one part of an activity but does so in another, that still counts.