

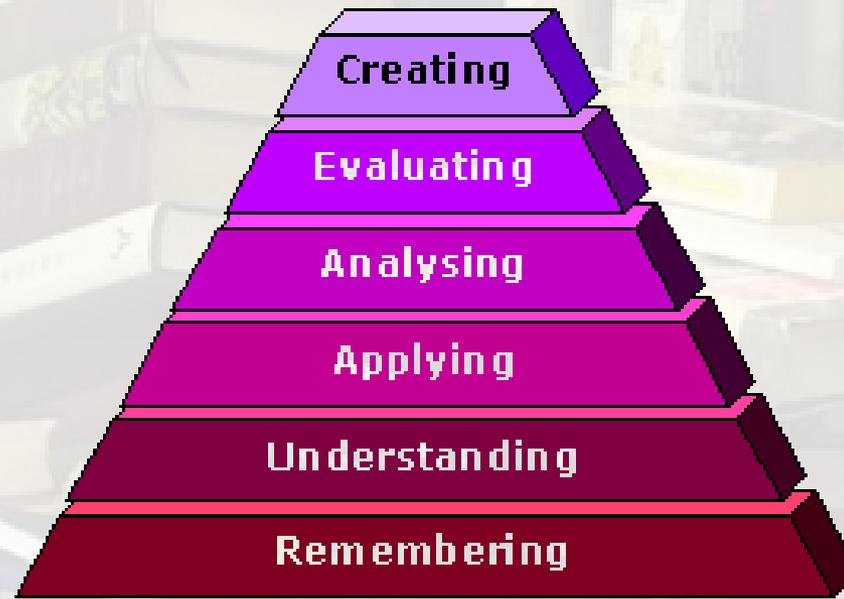
# Assessing Student Writing: A Perspective from English Literature



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# Writing in Maths Assignments

- Increasingly popular means of assessing undergraduates (especially early year)
- Provides “an avenue for students to develop and present their own thoughts and perspectives on the mathematics they are studying”
- Seen as a more “empowering” teaching tool accounting for a broader range of learning (and teaching!) styles



Revised taxonomy of the cognitive domain following Anderson and Krathwohl (2001)

The grading of essays, especially short essays, is quite similar to the grading of proofs and word problems. When we have a stack of papers to work through, we start grading a particular piece by scanning it quickly, checking to see if important features are present. We then check the essay more carefully, examining the parts as well as how they fit together. Items we often look for include:

- Does the student have a clear introduction which presents the main points of the essay? Is this introduction actually interesting?
- Is there a clear conclusion?
- Is the essay well organized and easy to follow? Does the student's argument support the introduction and conclusion?
- Are mathematical items (such as variables) introduced without explanation? That is, do you as reader ever say, "Wait! What's going on here?"
- Is there clear indication as to why the student is performing his or her calculations?
- Are the mathematical arguments clear and well stated? Is sufficient detail shown? Are the arguments correct?
- Is the paragraph structure supportive of the student's general discussion?
- How's the spelling, grammar, and punctuation?

# Informal observations from a Politics PhD Student

- “An essay that makes you go ‘meh’ will normally get about a 58”
- “A good essay that doesn’t really push any boundaries will get about a 65”
- “Firsts and 2:2s are the easiest essays to mark”

# Student Assessment in English Literature

For a 3<sup>rd</sup> Year course...

- 1 X weekly Lecture (1 hour), 1 x weekly Seminar (1 hour).
- Assessment based on 2 x 2000 word essays, blind marked. A selection will be peer-reviewed.
- Optional weekly office hours



## “11.2 (50-59%)

- develops a relevant argument in response to the question, although at times this may be inconsistent or faulty
- supports the argument with both primary and secondary literature, although derives much from lectures and seminars and tends towards description rather than analysis
- mostly readable and grammatical, although occasionally simplistic or inaccurate use of jargon, imprecise expression, errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- makes claims without developing them with appropriate textual analysis
- contains an identifiable structure, although its development can be somewhat arbitrary
- largely observes formal requirements”

## “II.1 (60-69%)

- **All the better qualities of II.2 work plus:**
- contains proof of having thought through the question independently, though relying on material from lectures and seminars to some extent
- some, but not all points are developed with detailed textual analysis
- contains a clear, consistent and well-evidenced line of argument
- identifies relevant primary and secondary material and employs this analytically rather than descriptively
- demonstrates a readable, competent use of vocabulary and grammar for the most part
- is clearly structured
- has observed formal requirements (footnotes, complete bibliography)”

## “First (70-79%)

- **All the better qualities of II.1 work plus:**
- distinctive, independent and relevant thought and argument
- argument/s convincingly presented, limitations / restrictions recognised; willing to problematise and move beyond material from lectures and seminars (while taking them into account)
- well-selected primary and secondary material incorporated into own text and competently and imaginatively analysed
- develops argument through nuanced and sustained textual analysis
- engages critically with the critics
- aware of the academic debate surrounding the subject
- readable, lucid and concise, clear and competent use of vocabulary and grammar
- well structured and signposted in agreement with argument (let your reader know where you are)
- formal requirements observed (footnotes, complete bibliography)”

# Marking Subjective Essays: Challenges

- Ensuring consistency across different essay topics and writing styles
- Pre-judging an essay based on poor grammar or a bad introduction
- Avoiding bias for students with easily detectable interests or writing styles
- Seeing through overuse of needless jargon

**“The biography here will fitfully attend to the putative traces in Manet’s work of “les noms du père,” a Lacanian romance of the errant paternal phallus (“Les Non-dupes errent”), a revised Freudian novella of the inferential dynamic of paternity which annihilates (and hence enculturates) through the deferred introduction of the third term of insemination the phenomenologically irreducible dyad of the mother and child.”**

**- Steven Z. Levine**

*Twelve Views of Manet’s “Bar”*

(Princeton University Press, 1996)

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# Training and Preparation expectations at Southampton

- Mandatory teacher training for PhD students (all non-lab disciplines)
- Seminar activities planned roughly in advance
- Feedback provided as regularly as possible
- Peer observation once per semester



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