



ALWAYS LEARNING

Levels Based Mark Schemes

Additional guidance

2018

How to award marks when Level descriptors are used

1. Finding the right level

The first stage is to decide into which level the answer should be placed. To do this, use a 'best-fit' approach, deciding which level most closely describes the features of the answer.

Example A: Balanced responses

Level	Mark	Descriptor
AO1 (4 marks), AO2 (4 marks), AO3 (4 marks) Candidates must demonstrate an equal emphasis between knowledge and understanding vs application vs evaluation/conclusion in their answer.		
Level 1	0	No rewardable material.
Level 1	1-3 marks	Demonstrates isolated elements of knowledge and understanding. (AO1) Provides little or no reference to relevant evidence from the context (scientific ideas, processes, techniques & procedures). (AO2) A conclusion may be presented, but will be generic and the supporting evidence will be limited. Limited attempt to address the question. (AO3)
Level 2	4-6 marks	Demonstrates mostly accurate knowledge and understanding. (AO1) Line(s) of argument occasionally supported through the application of relevant evidence from the context (scientific ideas, processes, techniques & procedures). (AO2) Candidates will produce statements with some development in the form of mostly accurate and relevant factual material, leading to a superficial conclusion being made. (AO3)
Level 3	7-9 marks	Demonstrates accurate knowledge and understanding. (AO1) Line(s) of argument supported by applying relevant evidence from the context (scientific ideas, processes, techniques & procedures). Might demonstrate the ability to integrate and synthesise relevant knowledge. (AO2) Arguments developed using mostly coherent chains of reasoning leading to a conclusion being presented. Candidates will demonstrate a grasp of competing arguments but evaluation may be imbalanced. (AO3)
Level 4	10-12 marks	Demonstrates accurate and thorough knowledge and understanding. (AO1) Line(s) of argument supported throughout by sustained application of relevant evidence from the context (scientific ideas, processes, techniques or procedures). Demonstrates the ability to integrate and synthesise relevant knowledge. (AO2) Displays a well-developed and logical evaluation, containing logical chains of reasoning throughout. Demonstrates an awareness of competing arguments, presenting a balanced conclusion. (AO3)

This candidate has demonstrated equal AO1, AO2 and AO3 in their response, with their answer matching all the Level 2 descriptors evenly. The response would therefore be placed in **Level 2**.



However, some answers can display characteristics from more than one level, and when this happens, markers must use the guidance below and their professional judgement to decide which level is most appropriate.

Example B: Imbalanced responses

Level	Mark	Descriptor
AO1 (4 marks), AO2 (4 marks), AO3 (4 marks) Candidates must demonstrate an equal emphasis between knowledge and understanding vs application vs evaluation/conclusion in their answer.		
Level 1	0	No rewardable material.
Level 1	1–3 marks	Demonstrates isolated elements of knowledge and understanding. (AO1) Provides little or no reference to relevant evidence from the context (scientific ideas, processes, techniques & procedures). (AO2) A conclusion may be presented, but will be generic and the supporting evidence will be limited. Limited attempt to address the question. (AO3)
Level 2	4–6 marks	Demonstrates mostly accurate knowledge and understanding. (AO1) Line(s) of argument occasionally supported through the application of relevant evidence from the context (scientific ideas, processes, techniques & procedures). (AO2) Candidates will produce statements with some development in the form of mostly accurate and relevant factual material, leading to a superficial conclusion being made. (AO3)
Level 3	7–9 marks	Demonstrates accurate knowledge and understanding. (AO1) Line(s) of argument supported by applying relevant evidence from the context (scientific ideas, processes, techniques & procedures). Might demonstrate the ability to integrate and synthesise relevant knowledge. (AO2) Arguments developed using mostly coherent chains of reasoning leading to a conclusion being presented. Candidates will demonstrate a grasp of competing arguments but evaluation may be imbalanced. (AO3)
Level 4	10–12 marks	Demonstrates accurate and thorough knowledge and understanding. (AO1) Line(s) of argument supported throughout by sustained application of relevant evidence from the context (scientific ideas, processes, techniques or procedures). Demonstrates the ability to integrate and synthesise relevant knowledge. (AO2) Displays a well-developed and logical evaluation, containing logical chains of reasoning throughout. Demonstrates an awareness of competing arguments, presenting a balanced conclusion. (AO3)

This candidate has demonstrated very strong AO1 (Level 4), strong AO3 (Level 3) but weaker AO2 (Level 2).

In such cases, a balance (**best-fit**) between these AOs must be found. Here, it would be appropriate to place the response in **Level 3**. This rewards the candidate for their performance across AO1 and AO3; and allows a stronger performance in AO1 to counteract a weaker performance in AO2.

The Level 2 descriptors **would not** best match this response, as it wouldn't reward their high performance in AO1 and AO3.

An award of Level 4 would not be appropriate, as performance on two of the three AOs is lower than this Level.

Note:

The mark chosen in this case within Level 3 is likely to depend on the relative strength of the performance in AO1 and the relative weakness of the performance in AO2. For example, a response where the AO1 performance was deemed to **just meet** Level 4 and the AO2 performance was deemed to **just meet** Level 2 is likely to be placed at the lower end of Level 3 in terms of mark awarded.

The first two examples above consider an *evenly* weighted levels based mark scheme in terms of AOs, i.e. AO1 (4 marks), AO2 (4 marks) and AO3 (4 marks).

In cases of *unevenly* weighted mark schemes, the same principles need apply; however, attention should be paid to the balance in the mark allocation of the different AOs.

Example C: Unevenly weighted mark scheme

Level	Mark	Descriptor
AO1 (6 marks), AO3 (10 marks)		
Candidates must demonstrate a greater emphasis on evaluation/conclusion vs knowledge and understanding in their answer. Knowledge & understanding is capped at maximum 6 marks.		
Level 0	0	No rewardable material.
Level 1	1-4 marks	Demonstrates isolated elements of knowledge and understanding. (AO1) A conclusion may be presented, but will be generic and the supporting evidence will be limited. Limited attempt to address the question. (AO3)
Level 2	5-8 marks	Demonstrates mostly accurate knowledge and understanding. (AO1) Candidates will produce statements with some development in the form of mostly accurate and relevant factual material, leading to a superficial conclusion being made. (AO3)
Level 3	9-12 marks	Demonstrates accurate knowledge and understanding. (AO1) Arguments developed using mostly coherent chains of reasoning, leading to a conclusion being presented. Candidates will demonstrate a grasp of competing arguments but evaluation may be imbalanced. (AO3)
Level 4	13-16 marks	Demonstrates accurate and thorough knowledge and understanding. (AO1) Displays a well-developed and logical evaluation, containing logical chains of reasoning throughout. Demonstrates an awareness of competing arguments, presenting a balanced conclusion. (AO3)

This candidate has demonstrated very strong AO1 (Level 4) with weaker (but still Level 2) AO3.

In such cases, a balance (**best-fit**) between these AOs must again be found. Here, it would be appropriate to place the response in **Level 3**. This rewards the candidate for their performance in AO1; but acknowledges that the weaker performance in AO3 prevents Level 4 being accessed. Equally, the response should not be limited to Level 2, where the performance in AO1 clearly exceeds this Level.

The mark chosen within Level 3 here should reflect the relative weighting of AO1 – 6 marks out of 16, versus AO3 – 10 marks out of 16. The lower mark weighting for AO1 means that this response should be placed in the lower range of Level 3 (perhaps 9 marks).

If AO1 and AO3 were equally weighted, i.e., 8 marks each, then a mark towards the middle of Level 3 (10 or 11 marks) would more likely be appropriate.

In all cases of imbalanced responses it is vital to reward candidates for what they have demonstrated, and not penalise them by focusing on their areas of weakness.

However, the Level Descriptors for 'Evaluate', 'Assess', 'To what extent' all require some form of judgement or conclusion for the AO3 in order to meet the requirement for Level 2 or above for the AO3 element of the level criteria. This judgement or conclusion can be explicit or implicit so carefully check the whole response for some form of judgement or conclusion to the benefit of the candidate.

2. Finding a mark within a level

After a level has been decided on, the next stage is to decide on the mark within the level. The instructions below tell you how to reward responses within a level. However, where a level has specific guidance about how to place an answer within a level, always follow that guidance.

Levels containing 2 marks only

Start with the presumption that the work will be at the top of the level. Move down to the lower mark if the work only just meets the requirements of the level.

Levels containing 3 or more marks

Markers should be prepared to use the full range of marks available in a level and not restrict marks to the middle. Markers should start at the middle of the level (or the upper-middle mark if there is an even number of marks) and then move the mark up or down to find the best mark. To do this, they should take into account how far the answer meets the requirements of the level:

- If it meets the requirements fully and perhaps shows some characteristics of the level above, markers should be prepared to award full marks within the level. The top mark in the level is used for answers that are as good as can realistically be expected within that level.
- If it only just meets the requirements of the level, markers should award marks at the bottom of the level. The bottom mark in the level is used for answers that are the weakest that can be expected within that level.
- The middle marks of the level are used for answers that have a reasonable match to the descriptor. This might represent a balance between some characteristics of the level that are fully met and others that are only barely met.

To reinforce the guidance provided in above in reference to **Examples B** and **C**, the mark chosen within a level is likely to depend on: 1) the relative strength of performance between the AOs, and 2) the relative weighting of AOs given in the mark scheme. For example:

1. In **Example B**, a response where the AO1 performance was deemed to just meet Level 4 and the AO2 performance was deemed to just meet Level 2 is likely to be placed at the lower end of Level 3 in terms of mark awarded.
2. In **Example C**, if the AO1 and AO3 were equally weighted i.e. 8 marks each then a mark towards the middle of Level 3 (10 or 11 marks) would have been appropriate. However with the relative weighting of AO1 – 6 marks out of 16, versus AO3 – 10 marks out of 16. The lower mark weighting for AO1 means that this response should be placed in the lower range of Level 3 (perhaps 9 marks).