These guidelines are intended to be general in nature. Some points will be adapted to different types of assessment. Always read the question and take note of any specific requirements given for individual pieces of assessment.

**Marks between 85-100**

**High distinction** – An excellent piece of work that demonstrates a sophisticated, subtle and nuanced understanding of the debates and concepts relevant to the question. It places the position defended within a broader context and shows evidence that the student has read widely around the topic (and perhaps drawn on sources beyond those provided on the course reading list). It develops a coherent argument with clear signs of originality. The student will be comfortable using appropriate technical terminology. The piece of work deftly and succinctly engages with counter-arguments and demonstrates an impressive degree of critical, independent thought in its analysis. The marker may feel that they have learned something, or taken something new from the analysis. It is extremely well-structured and the ideas are expressed with confidence. It is written in clear and elegant academic English. If it is an essay, it is properly referenced. It is a pleasure to read.

The student may have gone out on a limb to make a point about the topic and/or to challenge some accepted position, and they have been able to back up their argument with sound resort to evidence, to theoretical sources, or with rigorous logical analysis. The defining features of work marked in this band are that they show flair, maturity and confidence in handling the material.

- Markers should be prepared to award marks in the 90s – and even high 90s – if warranted, although the quality of the writing and the sophistication of the analysis for a piece of work in the high 90s should – especially in the case of an essay – be deemed to be close to publishable standard in a national level academic journal.

**Marks between 75-84**

**Distinction** – The piece of work is of a high standard. It demonstrates a very good understanding of the relevant material and shows an ability for subtle and nuanced analysis. It shows evidence of the student having read a diversity of material from the reading list. The piece of work also shows evidence that the student has thought deeply about the topic and has not simply reproduced standard arguments or evidence from major sources. The conceptual discussion and/or use of appropriate empirical material will be of a high standard. It recognises and provides a very clear account of counter-arguments. The piece of work displays a high level of independent thought (that goes beyond simply describing the different positions). It is very well structured, clearly written and well presented. The student seems at ease in handling empirical data and/or theoretical ideas as appropriate. In the case of essays, all sources are properly cited.
Particularly in marks at the higher end of this band, the work shows confidence in handling complex issues of understanding or interpretation.

**Marks between 65-74**  
**Credit** – The piece of work is good, although has some weaknesses. It demonstrates a good awareness of the relevant material. The work shows evidence that the student has read the basic material for the topic and has a reasonable understanding of it. Moreover, the student has avoided heavy reliance on any one source or point-of-view (unless this is in the nature of the topic). There is an acknowledgment of opposing arguments and some critical engagement. The work sustains a fairly well-structured argument and is generally well expressed, although there may be some signs of weakness, such as phraseology that needs to be re-worded, some confusion about the relevant debates and arguments, or not-too-serious misinterpretation of relevant concepts. Overall the argument is sound and the material is coherently presented. The standard of language is competent. In the case of an essay, there is a proper referencing system although there may be errors in terms of consistency.  
A work in this band is either reasonably competent but somewhat predictable, or shows signs of an attempt at originality which is nevertheless insufficiently grounded in a thorough appreciation of the material.

**Marks between 50%-64%**  
**Pass** – The piece of work indicates a basic understanding of the relevant material, but shows little or no appreciation of the subtlety of debates or how it relates to counter-arguments. The work probably displays evidence of only the basic reading. At the mid-range, the work might show a reasonable understanding of the relevant material, but will not have gone beyond this and may show signs of some confusion regarding details. In the 50%-54% range, the assignment will only just minimally meet the basic criteria and might be very poorly or incorrectly organised. Across this range, there will likely be no genuine critical engagement with relevant arguments (beyond, perhaps, unsupported expressions of its strength of weakness). The work may be poorly written and structured, but it is understandable. In the case of an essay, material might be poorly or incorrectly referenced. There may be problems with consistency and quite a heavy reliance on just a couple of sources.

**Marks below 50%**  
**Fail** – The piece of work is poor (or very poor). It has not met the basic criteria. A work in this category may be incomplete, and/or jumbled to the extent that it is not understandable, and/or (in the case of an essay) heavily derivative (although sources should still be cited). It is likely to display evidence of very little reading (perhaps a dip into a core reading plus a few random snippets picked up from attending a lecture). There is no clear argument, or an argument that is largely unsubstantiated by appeal to sources. The work will lack a clear structure and the introduction and/or conclusion may be very poor. The standard of language may be weak. Significant themes in the topic are likely to be neglected, and there will be little or no appreciation of complexity and subtlety of arguments or evidence.

- For really weak work, markers should use the full range of marks from zero upwards.