Student Assessment Handbook 2016–17

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1. Introduction

This booklet is designed to steer you through the task of completing and submitting coursework for your Imperial Horizons course in the Science, Culture and Society field of study. Imperial Horizons is aimed at developing a range of competencies, many of which you will develop through attending the course. However, some skills are best developed through assignments. This gives you a chance to consolidate your learning and show that you are able to retrieve and analyse information, that you are articulate in your written skills, that you can develop an argument, and that you can manage deadlines. The feedback you receive from your lecturer will be helpful for other assignments you encounter in your university career. Please bear in mind that you must also fulfill the attendance requirement for your marks to be admissible. Ideally you should attend all classes, but if your attendance falls under 75%, you will fail the course. If you have a valid reason for missing a class, please contact your lecturer in advance and you may be granted an authorized absence which will not count against your attendance requirement.

2. Submitting Written Work

Assignments need to be submitted through the Turnitin portal on the Blackboard Learn site for your SCS course. Uploading your file to Blackboard is usually straightforward, but it may take some time depending on the size of your file and how many other students are trying to upload files simultaneously. You are strongly advised to submit a draft to Blackboard at least five hours ahead of the deadline that you can overwrite with your final version. Please note that it can take up to 10 minutes for files to upload to Blackboard, especially if it is busy, so you need to plan for this to avoid your assignment showing as received late. The College has a zero-tolerance policy on late assignments so this can have serious implications.
Format and word count
Your essay should have 1.5 or double line spacing and margins of at least 2.5 cm. Use a font that is easy to read. Please ensure that your essay does not exceed the word count. The word count includes in-text citations, footnotes, tables and figure captions, but not the reference list. For creative courses (e.g. creative thinking, sound/music technology and creative writing) students are expected to follow the formatting conventions specified by the lecturer.

Deadlines and late penalties
Deadlines for coursework are given in the course outline for your particular course which is available on Blackboard. Please note that the deadline is the latest you can hand your work in. You may submit it earlier if you wish. In accordance with College policy, work received late will not be marked and will receive a grade of zero. Please ensure that you have received and saved an electronic receipt confirming that your work has been successfully uploaded to the portal. This is your proof that you submitted your assignment on time.

Extensions
Managing workload is an important skill and you must meet the course deadlines. Extensions are not usually granted unless students have verifiable mitigating circumstances. To apply for an extension for coursework must fill out a coursework extension request form (on the Imperial Horizons website) before the essay deadline. The Centre for Co-Curricular Studies will then liaise with your home department in deciding whether to grant an extension. ‘Pressure of other work’ is not a valid reason for an extension.

Is it your own work?
Whilst it is acceptable to discuss your ideas with others and to ask for assistance with the English, any assignment for which you are receiving an individual mark must be entirely your own work. If you encounter difficulties, please ask your course lecturer for help in good time. If you have, for example, asked someone to proofread your work or they have performed on your music track (for sound technology or music technology), you should name them under the Acknowledgements section at the end of your written work.

Marking and feedback
All written work for SCS courses is second marked. All marks are provisional until they have been seen and approved or adjusted by the external examiner. The Exam Board takes place in June at which point marks are finalised and released to departments. Feedback on coursework is normally available two to three weeks after it is submitted or as soon as is possible. There is a strong correlation between students who take feedback on board and academic attainment. Please take time to look at your feedback carefully, not just the grade, and to communicate with your course lecturer if you are unclear about how you could improve.

3. Writing a Science, Culture and Society Essay
Your lecturer will give you specific advice for the assessment for your course. What follows is some general guidance on writing an essay.

Undertaking a critical analysis
A good essay involves critical analysis. This means that you should build up an argument in response to the question, drawing on, and evaluating, appropriate forms of evidence.
You should take care not to be overly descriptive at the expense of analysis (i.e. do not spend a lot of time and space describing elements of the topic. Instead, use specific examples to illustrate the points you make. Do not try to cover too many points in your essay. Instead choose those points that are most important and relevant to the question.

Being ‘critical’ in this context is not the same as ‘criticising’. Rather than simply state your opinion on the subject matter you should show how it is supported by evidence. In making your argument you should draw on the theory or theories covered on the course and on relevant literature.

Students who read beyond the course material are likely to have their efforts rewarded in a higher grade. However, it is easy to get bogged down in trying to analyse too many readings. Do not rely exclusively on the views of others – your lecturer will want to see that you are capable of constructing your own arguments, or reconstructing the arguments of others, in an eliminating way not just that you have synthesised a stack of readings.

Structure

An essay has an introduction, a disposition (main body) and a conclusion. Your introduction should clearly state what you are setting out to achieve with your essay. What is its purpose? Your introduction should also summarise the order in which you are going to present your ideas (i.e. preview your essay strategy).

In your disposition, you develop your arguments. Use paragraphs properly: each should present and develop a single argument. As well as referring to the literature as a means of supporting an argument, you can also refer to case studies or examples in support of your point. Make sure you are explicit about why your examples are relevant.

Your conclusion should be a summing up. Have you answered the questions you said you were going to address in your introduction? The conclusion should have a clear ‘take-home message’ and should not introduce new material that hasn’t been fully discussed in your essay.

Writing style

The style of your writing is crucial to how successful your essay will be. Try to use language creatively without gushing or overwriting. Avoid using jargon when plain English will do, but do use terminology associated with the field accurately. Avoid clichés. Keep sentences short. Your tutor will want to see that you have moved beyond a superficial understanding of the topic.

Essays are, by their nature, formal pieces of writing written in mainly the passive voice. Where it is important for you to distinguish your own view from that of an author you may be discussing, feel free to use personal pronouns, ‘I am convinced that ...’, etc. Please avoid exclamation marks. They are inappropriate in formal writing: your sentences should not need help from flourishes of punctuation to make an impact.

Referencing

Your essay must have a comprehensive reference list. If you have drawn on the ideas of others, you must attribute them. Please use the Harvard referencing style guide from the library to see how your references should be laid out – especially web references where you are required to give the date of access as well. It is important to get referencing style right; sloppy, incomplete and inconsistent style of referencing will lose you marks unnecessarily and may land you in trouble regarding plagiarism. Guidelines on avoiding plagiarism are
given here. Please note that if you merely change a word here and there, you are too closely paraphrasing the source and this will constitute plagiarism. If you feel the original author formulated an argument using the best possible words, it is permissible to quote them, by putting quotation marks around the reproduced text and citing the source and the page number from which you obtained the quote. An essay made up mainly of quotes, however, is likely to come across as disjointed and insufficiently substantial to earn a good mark. Writing a good essay consists of making your own argument using the work of others to support it.

Make sure that you have actually read and understood what you are citing. Merely citing works that others have referred to as if you have read them yourself is unacceptable. If you cannot obtain the primary source and you want to use a quote or cite from another author, you must cite it as a secondary source, giving the primary source (the one from which you are working) as the reference, e.g. (Turney, 2006, quoted in Holliman, 2009).

Ensure that the way you reference sources makes it clear where the authors’ arguments are distinct from your own. If you put a reference at the end of a sentence, it implies that the entire sentence is attributable to that author. Referring to the author as part of the sentence makes the distinction clear, e.g. ‘Turney (2006) argued that …, but this overlooks the argument that …’.

Some tips for the process of essay writing

- Decide on your choice of topic as early as possible so that you will have adequate time for reflection and to do the necessary reading.
- Read the question carefully.
- Draw up an essay outline. This is a list of headings and subheadings in the order that you intend to address them. It might help to formulate these as questions.
- Start writing as soon as possible. Try to do your draft in one session. The key to a good essay is revision. Once your draft is written, go through it and edit it. Every time you do this, you will improve your essay.
- Relate your draft back to your outline and read the question again. Have you answered all aspects of the question?
- Remember to do a spell-check before you submit your essay. There is no excuse for bad spelling in a coursework assignment. Also check grammar and punctuation.
- Check that you have cited all sources and referenced them correctly.
- Know when to stop.

4. Essay and exam grading

Science, Culture and Society courses are set at levels according to the National Framework for Qualifications. Different criteria may apply to creative work and this will be specified in your course outline.

90–100% (Exceptional, equivalent to a high First)
Shows an exceptionally insightful command of the topic, with evidence of independent thought. Essays shows perfect grasp of academic conventions and exceptional writing style.

80–89% (Outstanding, equivalent to a good First)
Answer is an exceptionally well presented exposition of the subject, showing command of the relevant concepts and facts, an excellent critical or analytical ability (probably including non-standard lines of argument), originality and evidence of substantial outside reading (where applicable). Grammar, punctuation, spelling and writing style will all be excellent.

70–79% (Excellent, equivalent to First)
The student will have produced an excellent essay that achieves well in all the categories for assessment. As well as showing clear evidence of engaging with the literature, the work will
show an ability to understand clearly different arguments, to answer the question effectively, and to sift evidence for and against a particular line or argument. The essay will represent an intelligent interpretation of relevant material covered in the course.

60–69% (Very Good, equivalent to Upper Second Class)
Work shows that the student has worked diligently, has done the required reading, and is able to write reasonably well. The essay will have answered the question directly. There will be some evidence of an ability to critically engage with the literature and to present a nuanced argument.

50–59% (Good, equivalent to Lower Second Class)
Work shows that student has clearly learnt during the course. There will be few major errors of fact or interpretation. Referencing will be adequate. Grammar and style will generally be adequate. An attempt will have been made to answer the question directly.

40–49% (Adequate, equivalent to Third Class)
Work will show that the student has learnt something about the subject, but essays will generally have few references to sources, be poorly written and contain errors of fact and interpretation. The essay may not have directly addressed the question.

30–39% (Fail)
Shows flawed understanding of the topic. The work will usually contain many serious errors of fact and interpretation. There will be little distinction between opinion and reasoned argument, and essay will be badly written.

20–29% (Fail)
Inadequate knowledge of the subject. As well as flaws in content, there will be little attempt at putting forward argument. Writing and referencing technique will fall well below expected standard.

10–19% (Fail)
Shows lack of understanding in key areas of the topic. No attempt to engage with relevant literature. Writing and referencing technique will be wholly inadequate.

0–9% (Fail)
No academic merit or any indication that student has made any effort to engage with the course content.

5. **Exams**

Some courses include an exam. Please ensure that you are aware of the date and that you attend. You will not be eligible for a resit if you don’t attend the exam (see Resit Policy below).

6. **Group Work**

Working effectively as part of a group is an essential skill. Group work promotes teamwork which is a skill highly valued by employers, negotiation skills and interpersonal skills. Most Science, Culture and Society courses will involve group work of some description and the way you work collaborative may contribute to a participation mark where this forms part of the assessment for a particular course.
7. Presentations

Some courses have individual or group presentations. The following criteria will be taken into account when your presentation is assessed.

- Content (well researched, accurate use of terminology)
- Structure of talk (good flow of ideas, evidence of clear line of argument, good signposting)
- Use of visual aids (appropriate for topic, legible, integrated into argument rather than merely illustrative, credited)
- Delivery (audible, good engagement with the audience, appropriate pace, good eye contact, good non-verbal communication)
- Ability to answer questions

8. Participation

Science, Culture and Society courses emphasise ‘active learning’ which includes showing good engagement with the topic and with fellow students in the class. Students who are well prepared for classes, make valuable contributions to discussion, and engage well with their classmates, have an opportunity to have these attributes recognised in a participation mark for some courses.

You can maximize your participation mark by being well prepared for classes, making a constructive contribution to class discussions, and working well in group exercises. This does not mean you should try and dominate discussion – listening carefully to others and responding appropriately can be more important than doing all the talking. Some courses have Blackboard discussion boards or associated blogs. Active and constructive contributions to these may be taken into account as part of the grade. You may be asked to contribute a self-assessment questionnaire on how effectively you feel you have contributed.

Creative courses require students to participate in workshop sessions where you act as listeners/readers and critics of your colleagues’ creative work. The ability to develop a critical vocabulary for discussing creative work and to provide and deliver constructive feedback is a key element in your progression as editors/composers and critics of your own work.

Participation grading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade (for this example, when out of 20),</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16—20</td>
<td>Demonstrates very good or excellent preparation. Moves beyond the obvious in class discussion. Contributes significantly and constructively. Responds thoughtfully to the views of others. Take an active role in discussion but does not dominate it at the expense of others. Shows active engagement and effort. Works very well within a group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11—15</td>
<td>Shows evidence of preparation for classes and interest in the topic. Offers interpretation and analysis. Contributes actively to discussion. Listens carefully to the points of others and responds constructively and without undue defensiveness. Works well within a group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6—10</td>
<td>Little evidence of preparation or effort. Does not usually</td>
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actively participate in discussion. When called upon, does not offer much by way of comment or useful argument. Is passive in group work.

1–5 No evidence of preparation. Makes no effort to contribute to discussion. Does not work constructively in a group.

9. Resit policy

Assessment for SCS courses is comprised of various elements of coursework, participation, presentations and exams. Where students do not submit any coursework and fail the course, they are not normally entitled to a further resubmission opportunity (this is considered on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the field leader, the exams officer and the student’s departmental tutor). Where students do submit at least one element of coursework but fail the course, they are entitled to resubmit the failed or incomplete elements of the coursework but the mark for the course is capped at a pass. Students who do not attend presentations will be awarded 0 marks for that piece of assessment. A further submission opportunity is normally given for presentations if there are extenuating circumstances. For courses with exams, no resit is normally offered if students do not attend the exam unless there are extenuating circumstances. If a student sits and fails an exam causing them to fail the course, a resit will be offered, with the mark for the course to be capped at a pass.

Please note that documentary evidence will be required for extenuating circumstances to be considered.

10. Getting Help

Please approach your lecturer in the first instance if you are worried about any aspect of the assessment. It is important not to leave it till the last minute – your lecturer will not be able to help you if you only raise issues within a few days of the deadline. If English is not your first language, you may ask an English-speaking friend to proofread your assignment for you (as long as you have written it yourself). There is also help available from the Centre for Academic English.

We will endeavour to assist students who suffer any form of disability: sight, hearing, mobility etc., including specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia. Students suffering from any type of disability are encouraged to make themselves known to the lecturer. Alternatively you may contact the Centre’s disability officer, Mrs Maggie Causley. If you wish to record classes, please ask the permission of the lecturer beforehand.

We hope you will enjoy your Science, Culture and Society course and that it will be problem-free. However, if you have any concerns, you are advised to seek the help of the individual lecturer concerned without delay. If you are reluctant to approach your lecturer directly, please contact the Coordinator for Science, Culture and Society, Ms Giskin Day, giskin.day@imperial.ac.uk.