Imperial Horizons
Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS)
Student Handbook

Centre for Languages, Culture and Communication
1. Introduction

This booklet is designed to steer you through the task of completing and submitting coursework for your Imperial Horizons module in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) field of study. Imperial Horizons is aimed at developing a range of competencies, many of which you will develop through attending the module. 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 module. 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.

Full regulations for student use, including information on mitigating circumstances, can be found here.
2. Submitting Written Work

Assignments need to be submitted through the Turnitin portal on the Blackboard Learn site for your HSS module, unless there are specific other arrangements in place. 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 two 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.

Deadlines and late penalties

Deadlines for coursework are given in the module outline for your particular module 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. If your assignment is late but within 24 hours of the deadline, your grade will be capped at 40%. Assignments received after 24 hours will get no marks. This is in accordance with the College’s Policy on Late Submission. 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 module 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 Languages, Culture & Communication 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 module 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 HSS modules 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 mid-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 module lecturer if you are unclear about how you could improve. There is guidance on how to make the most of your feedback.
3. Writing a Humanities and Social Sciences Essay

Your lecturer will give you specific advice for the assessment for your module. 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 module and on relevant literature.

Students who read beyond the module 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.

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 assignment 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 modules (e.g. creative thinking, sound/music technology and creative writing) students are expected to follow the formatting conventions specified by the lecturer.

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 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. Making the most of your feedback

Engaging with feedback is essential for your development as a maturing student, but research shows that most students don’t use feedback to improve their learning. Reasons for this include:

- You may feel feedback is pointless because you will never be doing an exercise like this again.
- You may feel angry and upset about not doing as well as you would have liked. Feedback can feel demotivating.
- If you have done well, it may seem like there is no reason to engage with feedback because you’ve ‘got it right’.

One thing is certain: ignoring feedback won’t help you to improve.

As a marker, there are two main aims when writing feedback:

1. To give clear indications on how you could do better. Quite a lot of your feedback will be about transferable skills (e.g. aligning your assignment with the brief, improving writing style, enhancing study skills like careful proofreading). They should help you identify weakness that you can improve for all your future assignments.

2. To justify the grade. We have a responsibility to explain where marks have been lost and gained. We are assessing the assignment against the brief and Imperial College’s grading criteria to decide whether it is adequate (3rd), good (2.2), very good (2.1) or excellent (1st). If your feedback seems negative it is because markers are explaining why you have lost marks. Comments will usually point out what you could have or should have done, so these should be seen as opportunities for how to improve rather than just a list of things you did wrong.

How should you use your feedback?

Approach your feedback unemotionally. If you feel upset at first, put it aside for a few hours or days, and come back to it when you are ready to use it to enhance your learning. Remind yourself that it is your assignment that is being critiqued, not you as a person.

Make a list of those factors that had an effect on your process of writing the assignment. These are nothing to do with the assignment itself and everything to do with the conditions that may have affected performance. If you did well, these might include that you allowed sufficient time to write the assignment and came back to it to polish it, or you had found a
particularly good place to sit and work on your assignment that encouraged you to focus. If you didn't do so well, write down what stopped you from submitting an assignment that was not to the best of your abilities. Were there other things on your mind? Did you leave it a bit late to get started? Did you get tired of your assignment before you had a chance to go over it properly? Which of these areas can you address to help you do better next time?

Go through your feedback and make a list of those things that went well and areas in which you could improve. Take especial note of those that will be useful for future assignments so that you don't repeat mistakes. Do you need to pay better attention to referencing? Do you need to articulate arguments more clearly?

Is there anything in your feedback you don't understand? Ask for clarification.

**Things it may help you to know**

All HSS assignments are double marked. Any discrepancies are discussed and an agreement arrived at. If markers can't agree, your assignment will be third marked, or the external examiner will arbitrate.

The grading is scrutinised by an external examiner who has access to all the assignments submitted on Blackboard. If, after carefully reading the feedback, you still feel your work has been marked unfairly, please ask your lecturer, or e-mail the HSS field leader michael.weatherburn@imperial.ac.uk, who will refer it to the external at the end of the module. The external will look at it unbiasedly and make a judgement about whether your grade should be changed. The decision of the external examiner is final. Students may appeal their grades but not on grounds of academic judgement. The appeals procedure is given here.

As educationalists, we are aware that we can improve the way we give feedback. If you have suggestions on how assignment feedback can be improved, please let your student rep know, speak to your lecturer and/or e-mail Michael.weatherburn@imperial.ac.uk
5. Essay and exam grading

Humanities and Social Sciences modules 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 module 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 module.

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 module. 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 module content.

6. Exams
Some modules 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).

7. 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 Humanities and Social Sciences modules 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 module.

8. Presentations
Some modules 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
9. Participation

Humanities and Social Sciences modules 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 modules.

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 modules 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 modules 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>
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<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. Takes 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 actively participate in discussion. When called upon, does not offer much by way of comment or useful argument. Is passive in group work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1—5</td>
<td>No evidence of preparation. Makes no effort to contribute to discussion. Does not work constructively in a group.</td>
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10. Resit policy

Assessment for HSS modules is comprised of various elements of coursework, participation, presentations and exams. Where students do not submit any coursework and fail the module, 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 module, they are entitled to resubmit the failed or incomplete elements of the coursework but the mark for the module 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 modules 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 module, a resit will be offered, with the mark for the module to be capped at a pass. Please note that documentary evidence will be required for extenuating circumstances to be considered.

11. 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, Ms Alison Rew (a.rew@imperial.ac.uk). If you wish to record classes, please ask the permission of the lecturer beforehand.

We hope you will enjoy your Humanities and Social Sciences module 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 Field Leader for Humanities and Social Sciences, Dr Michael Weatherburn: michael.weatherburn@imperial.ac.uk.