MARKING CRITERIA
OPTIONAL DISSERTATION (HML Part II)

In the following marking criteria higher grades should demonstrate not only the qualities specified for that class but also all the qualities expected of lower grades.

Please note: Examiners should not deduct marks for a choice of topic. All topics/titles have been approved by the Chair of the HML Examining Board. The number of supervisions allowed for the HML Optional Dissertation is the same as for any other scheduled paper, namely 8-10 over the academic year.

Mark	Class	Keyword	Content/Argumentation	Research/Presentation	Subdivision
80-85	I* Dist.	OUTSTANDING	The dissertation represents either a new approach to a topic or a very thorough overview of traditional arguments that have been evaluated critically, leading to a clear and strong conclusion. The argument underlying the dissertation is sophisticated and challenging; the point of view is clear and confident. The dissertation could serve as the basis for a future graduate research project or even be considered as the plan for a scholarly article.	Extensive background research is supplemented with thorough critical and analytical assessment of the major contributions; primary and secondary source materials are handled with dexterity and critical acumen; presentation and referencing are immaculate.	
75-79 ® 70-74	I	EXCELLENT ∨ VERY GOOD	Demonstrates comprehensive knowledge of the topic in its broader context; is very well structured with clear expression and judicious illustration. The argument represents an interpretive and considered approach to the question, not excessively reliant on secondary sources, with an added attempt to present an individual argument.	Demonstrates extensive use of available research resources. Primary and secondary sources are handled judiciously and analyzed. Polished presentation and referencing.	75-79: Shows unquestioned mastery of the topic and confidence in the exposition. 70-74: Consistently well-crafted, independent and enterprising.
60-69	II.1	GOOD	A good, sound argument containing competent discussion of the topic while demonstrating good overall knowledge of the field. The dissertation should show signs of clarity and organization with appropriate selection of	Competent use has been made of available research resources. Account is taken of secondary sources, although perhaps not uniformly or exhaustively. Presentation and referencing are very good.	65-69: Cogent and resourceful arguments. 60-64: Keeps to a fairly routine but valid set of ideas.

			material, though it might not go much beyond standard interpretations.		
50-59	II.2	FAIR	Average level of argumentation containing basic ideas. Shows knowledge of the field but not beyond what is found in scholarly summaries. The structure is adequate but often not very well developed and illustration is not always to the point.	Secondary sources substituting for first-hand knowledge of primary materials. While use of secondary literature is acknowledged, it is not dealt with critically or analytically. Presentation and referencing will often have inconsistencies.	55-59: A number of ideas of interest are discernible but the whole is flawed by inconsistencies in argument, referencing or presentation. 50-54: Marked tendency towards padding; paucity of own ideas, and/or simplistic narrative treatment (eg synopsis) at the lower level.
40-49	III	POOR	Very basic approach; does not have a consistent thesis; ideas are unstructured or tacked together; often irrelevant and undirected argumentation; little apt illustration. The dissertation should nonetheless show some knowledge of source material.	Little or inappropriate use of available research resources has been made. Ideas will often be heavily dependent on the work of others, amounting to no more than uncritical paraphrase; possibly sloppy presentation and severely inconsistent referencing.	45-49: A valid but commonplace underlying argument is discernible, but marred by bad presentation and organization. 40-44: Directionless, often padded, showing evidence of great haste and little attempt to mount an argument of any kind.
15-39	F	FAIL	Fails to demonstrate knowledge or understanding of source material. Little attempt to present any evaluation or the evaluation is hasty and ill-considered.	Very few research resources are used or acknowledged; presentation will often show extreme carelessness.	

Examiners may call any candidate to sustain his or her dissertation in a viva voce examination to help ascertain in which of these categories a dissertation should be placed.

Dissertations must be not more than 10,000 words in length, including abstracts, quotations, footnotes and endnotes but excluding preliminary material (title page, contents page), automatically generated material (such as headers, footers, numbers on label sections, notes and other structural units), appendices, and bibliographies. An Examiner who has reason to believe that a dissertation has exceeded the word limit and thus infringed the rubric, should ask the HML administrative team (hml@mmll.cam.ac.uk) to ascertain the exact word count.

HML Dissertations will be penalized for excessive brevity or length according to the following scheme: (a) one mark to be deducted for every 100 words above the word count set out above, and

(b) one mark to be deducted for the first 500 words below the word count set out above, and for every 100 words below that.

NB. The terms "primary and secondary sources" and "research resources" may refer to existing literature as well as empirical data.