

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
MPhil IN PHILOSOPHY
2020/2021

These guidelines are in addition to the 'Guide to Examiners and Assessors for the Degree of Master of Philosophy (one-year course)' issued by the Board of Graduate Studies:

https://www.student-registry.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/mphil_ad_stud_and_mres_examiners_guide_sept_2018.pdf

These guidelines mention only those issues that are not covered by the Guide, and explain how the Faculty of Philosophy implements the Guide, given the Special Regulations covering the MPhil in Philosophy. It should be noted in particular that the Board of Graduate Studies guidelines mention the possibility of an exam allowance for MPhil students, which normally comes into effect if a candidate has been, or is likely to be, unable to undertake part or all of their examination, or has failed part or all of it because of illness or other serious and unforeseen cause (such as serious illness of a close family member).

See: <https://www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/your-course/examinations/graduate-exam-information/after-examination/examination-allowances-graduate>

Requirements of the Course

MPhil candidates are examined on an essay of not more than 4,000 words (including footnotes but excluding bibliography), an essay of not more than 8,000 words (including footnotes but excluding bibliography), and a dissertation of not more than 12,000 words (including footnotes and appendices but excluding bibliography), all on topics which must first be approved by the Degree Committee.

i) Essays

The essays must be in the following areas of Philosophy, including their history: *Metaphysics and Epistemology, Philosophy of Mind, Logic and Philosophy of language, Philosophy of Science, Ethics and Moral Psychology, Aesthetics, and Political and Legal Philosophy*. Both essays cannot be in the same area. However, the Degree Committee may decide to grant candidates specific permission to submit one essay in an area not listed above, provided it is in Philosophy.

ii) Dissertation

The topics of all MPhil dissertations must be in Philosophy, and be such that suitable Supervisors and Examiners are available; but they need not fall within the areas listed above. They may be related to candidates' essay topics, but the dissertation must not reproduce or paraphrase any significant part of either of the essays.

MPhil Essay and Dissertation Titles, Appointment of Examiners and Examiners' Meetings

A. Submission of Titles

1. In 2020/21 titles should be submitted for approval on the following dates

| | |
|---------------|----------------------------------|
| First essay: | 12 noon on Friday, 13th November |
| Second essay: | 12 noon on Friday, 22nd January |
| Dissertation: | 12 noon on Monday 12th April |

B. *Amendment of Titles*

1. Minor amendments to titles may be approved by the Director of Postgraduate Studies up to the following dates

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Second essay: | 12 noon on Friday, 26 th February |
| Dissertation: | 12 noon on Monday, 10 th May |

C. *Submission Deadlines for Essays and Dissertation*

1. The submission deadlines are as follows:

| | |
|---------------|---|
| First essay: | 12 noon on Friday, 4 th December |
| Second essay: | 12 noon on Friday, 19 th March |
| Dissertation: | 12 noon on Monday, 21 st June |
2. Late submission will, except in exceptional circumstances, attract a penalty of 5 marks for every working day or a proportion of this for part of a day.

D. *Marking of First Essay*

1. Once first essay titles have been received, the Degree Committee appoints examiners on the recommendation of the MPhil Course Director.
2. Internal Examiners will be informed once essays have been submitted via Moodle. Examiners will also be sent report forms, a copy of these guidelines, the deadline for submitting marks and the time, date and location of the examiners' meeting.
3. Each essay is read and marked by two internal examiners. Internal examiners will normally be members of the Faculty. Supervisors are disqualified from examining essays they have supervised. Internal examiners **should not discuss the content of the essay with anyone else, or their proposed individual mark**, until they have submitted their individual mark to the Postgraduate Secretary.
4. After the internal examiners have submitted their marks to the Postgraduate Secretary, they are invited to discuss their marks with their co-examiner in person or by phone. If, after discussion, agreement on a mark is reached, the initial marks and the agreed mark will be recorded. Relevant essays, together with internal marks and reports, are emailed to the external examiner for moderating, as specified below, The Role of the External Examiner, §1.

E. *First Essay Examiners' Meeting*

1. All internal essay examiners are invited to the examiners' meeting at 2 pm on Friday, 11th December.
2. The external examiner's written report is presented to the meeting.
3. In the light of this report marks are agreed.
4. In general, examiners do not participate in the discussion of marks of essays that they have supervised.

5. After the examiners' meeting candidates are informed of their marks, subject to Degree Committee approval, and sent their examiners' reports, except for those parts confidential to the examiners' meeting/Degree Committee. They are offered the opportunity to consult their supervisor and/or the MPhil Course Director for further comments and feedback.

F. *January Degree Committee*

1. The marks for the first MPhil essay are received by the Degree Committee at its meeting on Monday 1st February 2021.

G. *Marking of Second Essay*

1. The procedure is the same as for the first essay.

H. *Second Essay Examiners' Meeting*

1. All internal essay examiners are invited to the examiners' meeting at 11.00am on Friday 26th March. The external examiner is also invited to attend.
2. The external examiner's written report is presented to the meeting.
3. In the light of this report marks are agreed for the second essay, and for the overall essay component. It should be noted that a failing mark in either essay is consistent with an overall pass in the degree, provided that the overall mark for the essay component is 60 or above; or that the overall mark for the essay component is within the range 57–59 and there is at least a Clear Pass for the dissertation component. Overall essay mark = $(1/3 \times \text{mark for 4,000 word Michaelmas Term essay}) + (2/3 \times \text{mark for 8,000 word Lent Term essay})$, averaged upwards in the case of half marks.
4. In general, examiners do not participate in the discussion of marks of essays that they have supervised.
5. If the external examiner does not attend, all relevant paperwork will be forwarded to him/her after the meeting and any comments s/he makes will be communicated to the Degree Committee.
6. After the examiners' meeting candidates are informed of their marks, subject to Degree Committee approval, and sent their examiners' reports, except for those parts confidential to the examiners' meeting/Degree Committee. They are offered the opportunity to consult their supervisor and/or the MPhil Course Director for further comments and feedback. At the same time candidates are informed of their overall essay mark and what mark they need to achieve in order to pass the MPhil.

I. *May Degree Committee*

1. The marks for the second MPhil essay, and the overall essay mark, are received by the Degree Committee at its meeting on Monday 24th May 2021.

2. At this meeting, the Degree Committee may decide that a candidate whose combined essay marks constitute a Fail not be permitted to submit a dissertation, if in the Committee's view, on the advice of the examiners, the mark falls below that of Marginal Fail.

3. The Degree Committee appoints internal examiners for the dissertation, the first named being the convenor. It is the responsibility of the convenor to arrange a convenient date, time and location for the oral examination.

J. *Submission and Marking of Dissertation*

1. Dissertations are submitted by 12 noon on Monday 21st June 2020.

2. Each dissertation is read and marked by two internal examiners. Supervisors are disqualified from examining dissertations they have supervised.

3. Dissertations are forwarded to examiners together with report forms, the deadline for submitting marks and the time, date and location of the examiners' meeting. Convenors also receive an examiners' certificate and mark sheet, to be completed after the oral examination.

4. MPhil candidates will have an oral examination, on a date to be arranged with them by the examiners, usually in the week following submission of their dissertation. (The examiners may in exceptional circumstances waive the oral examination, but candidates must not assume that they will.) The oral examination will usually concentrate on the dissertation, but it may also include questions on the general field of knowledge in which it falls. Other examiners, or the external examiner, may in addition attend the Oral, but this is not usual.

In cases where the marks given to the dissertation by the two examiners prior to the oral examination are significantly different, one purpose of this part of the process is to help them to come, if possible, to an agreed mark. The primary purpose of the oral examination, however, is one which applies even when the two examiners are in agreement, namely to test the depth of the candidate's understanding of the issues discussed in the dissertation and its surroundings. The examiners may decide to move their mark up or down after the oral to the extent that the information that they glean during it affects their judgment as to the strengths and weaknesses of the dissertation. For instance, the candidate may persuade them during the oral that objections to the argument of the dissertation which they had formulated while reading it are not valid; in such a case they may move their marks up. Or the candidate may show during the oral an ignorance of relevant literature and a failure to respond to objections which persuades the examiners that a principle of charity which they had applied in reaching their marks was not warranted; in such a case they may move their marks down. Only in exceptional circumstances, however, should their post-oral agreed mark be more than 5 marks outside the range of their pre-oral marks.

5. Each of the internal examiners is required to submit an independent report prior to the oral, and the two examiners together are required to submit a joint report and an agreed mark, if possible, for the dissertation after the oral examination has taken place.

6. The external examiner will be presented with relevant dissertations, internal marks and reports for moderating, as specified below, The Role of the External Examiner § 1.

K. *June Dissertation Examiners' Meeting*

1. All dissertation examiners are invited to the dissertation examiners' meeting at 11.00am on Friday, 2nd July when marks for MPhil dissertations and overall marks for each candidate are agreed.
2. The external examiner is required to be present at this meeting.
3. In general, examiners do not participate in the discussion of marks of theses that they have supervised.
4. The examiners make their recommendation for the award of the Matthew Buncombe prize. Here are rules as they appear in the Statutes and Ordinances:
 - i) The sums subscribed by Dr Teresa Clay and others in memory of Matthew Buncombe, MA, PhD, of Trinity College, shall form a fund the income of which shall be used to provide a prize called the Matthew Buncombe Prize.
 - ii) The Prize shall be awarded each year by the Degree Committee for the Faculty of Philosophy, on the recommendation of the Examiners for the examination in Philosophy for the MPhil Degree (one-year course), for the best overall performance in that examination.
 - iii) The Prize shall not be divided between more than two candidates.
 - iv) The value of the Prize shall be the annual income of the Fund.
 - v) If in any year the Prize is not awarded the income for that year shall be added to the capital of the Fund.
5. All examiners must sign the mark sheet.

L. *July Degree Committee Meeting*

1. At its meeting on Monday 5th July the Degree Committee receives the marks for the MPhil dissertations and the overall mark for each candidate.
2. The Degree Committee considers the recommendations of the MPhil Examiners and where the appropriate conditions are met, awards the MPhil degree.
3. The report of the external examiner is received at the next meeting of the Degree Committee (i.e. in mid-October).
4. The Degree Committee considers the examiners' recommendation for the award of the Matthew Buncombe prize.

5. Following the Degree Committee, the agreed marks and approvals/failures are entered on CamSIS and an electronic version of the results is sent to the Student Registry for verification purposes.
6. MPhil candidates will be sent the appropriate formal letter (MPhil approval/2nd MPhil approval/MPhil non-approval) as soon as possible after the Degree Committee meeting. In a separate letter they will also be told their dissertation marks and will be sent their examiners' reports.

The Role of the External Examiner

The external examiner will be invited to discuss with the MPhil Course Director how the moderating role will be conducted. But the general framework will be as follows:

1. Before each examiners' meeting, the external examiner will be sent by email the essays or dissertations that the internal examiners would like him/her to consider, along with internal marks and reports. The external examiner will be asked to consider those essays and dissertations where (i) the examiners can agree on a mark but the difference between the raw marks is 8 or more; or (ii) the internal examiners are unable to agree a mark that lies between their individual marks; or (iii) the mark agreed by the internal examiners is less than 60; or (iv) the MPhil Course Director thinks it is appropriate for any other reason. To assist the external examiner in cases (i) and (ii), internal examiners produce a brief statement for the reasons for their recommended mark, or for any significant continued disagreement. In addition, in the first year that he/she examines, the external examiner will be invited to sample all the essays and dissertations, paying particular attention to those receiving borderline marks.
2. The external examiner is not required to attend the examiners' meetings for the essays but should provide a written report.
3. The external examiner is required to attend the final examiners' meeting at which the marks for the dissertations are agreed and recommendations for the award of the degree are made.

Degree Committee Meetings

The recommendations of the MPhil Examiners are circulated to the members of the Degree Committee, who vote on proposals for the award of marks and the award of the degree. At the Degree Committee, it is the convention that the supervisor and the examiners may vote — provided, of course, that they are members of the Committee. As with all other votes on proposals to grant degrees, the numbers voting for and against must be recorded. Where results are not straightforward, the chair should include the reasons for the recommendation of the Committee in the minutes.

Criteria for Marking for MPhil Essays and Dissertations

The word limit for both essays and dissertation should be strictly applied and examiners may decline to read any material in excess of it. For both essays and the dissertation, candidates are required to clearly state the word length at the end of their piece of submitted work. In addition, the word length will be verified by the Postgraduate Secretary, using the electronic copy of the work submitted via Moodle. Dates for submitting both

essays and dissertation should be strictly adhered to and examiners may penalise or decline to read work which is submitted late (see B.2. above).

For the purpose of examining, the work done in the MPhil is divided into two components: the essays, taken as a group and the dissertation. Award of the MPhil Degree requires that EITHER both components reach the Pass standard OR one component reaches the Marginal Fail standard but this is compensated for by the other component reaching the Clear Pass standard, or higher. These standards are defined below:

The examiners will award a distinction to any candidate who (i) gains a distinction mark (i.e. 75 or better) in at least one component of the MPhil and (ii) gains an average of 72 in both components.

The overall mark for the MPhil Degree is a weighted average of the marks for both essays and the dissertation. The weights are in proportion to the word limits for each, according to the following formula:

Overall mark = (1/6 x mark for 4,000 word Michaelmas Term essay) + (2/6 x mark for 8,000 word Lent Term essay) + (3/6 x mark for 12,000 word Easter Term Dissertation), with the essay component and the dissertation component individually averaged upwards in the case of half marks.

To reach the required standard, MPhil work must be clearly written, must take account of previously published work on the subject, and must represent a contribution to learning. The examining reflects the fact that there are many ways to write a successful MPhil essay or dissertation. A successful piece might, for instance, provide new arguments or develop original positions; it might synthesise existing ideas and arguments in interesting ways; or it might present new explorations, criticisms or analyses of extant ideas. It might be fairly wide-ranging, or narrowly focused.

Assessment will take into account the different ways in which work can be successful. Nevertheless there are criteria of excellence that are relevant to all MPhil writing, and which will be used in determining its mark:

(i) Breadth and depth of research. The piece will need to give an adequate coverage of its philosophical topic, including the relevant existing philosophical literature and demonstrate an adequate understanding of that literature. Adequacy here will depend on the nature of the topic. For example, it may be appropriate for an essay that is focused exclusively on a few recent articles to contain more depth, but less breadth, than an essay that is focused on a wider philosophical tradition. Similarly, the understanding that is required when the focus is on a notoriously difficult historical text will be different to that required when it is on a set of straightforward recent articles. The appropriate breadth and depth of research will also take into account the word limit for the piece, so that expectations are higher for a dissertation than a shorter essay.

(ii) Quality of argumentation. This depends on the precision and sophistication with which the central philosophical points made in the piece are understood, developed, and defended, the strength of the arguments or interpretations that are given, and the extent to which the piece considers and responds to pressing objections. The appropriate type of argumentation will depend on the type of essay; e.g. an essay that intervenes in a contemporary debate may require a different type of argumentation to that required in an essay in the history of philosophy.

(iii) Quality of philosophical writing: This depends on a piece's ability to convey its ideas effectively: it requires a thoughtful structure that accommodates both the complexities of

the material and the needs of the reader. A well written piece will display clarity, concision and elegance.

(iv) Originality. Philosophical originality can be demonstrated in many ways: for example, by posing new questions; by exploring and developing new arguments (even if these do not ultimately work); by providing new criticisms of existing work; by structuring or synthesising existing work in new ways; by providing new and stimulating examples; or by opening up new avenues of philosophical inquiry e.g. an unexplored issue in the history of philosophy.

Of course these criteria are not entirely distinct: it is hard to write well in the absence of a good argument, and originality in the absence of understanding is rarely a virtue. But they are sufficiently distinct that a piece will sometimes shine with respect to one or two of them, whilst not being so successful with respect to the others; conversely, a piece may fail in virtue of one of these criteria, while being adequate with respect to the others.

In light of these criteria, essays and theses will be given marks as follows:

0: Unacceptable Fail

Work fails to contain anything of philosophical merit that is relevant to the question.

1–49: Low Fail

Work in this category will contain something of value, but is clearly deficient in all of the first three categories: that is, in terms of the breadth and depth of research, and the quality of argumentation and writing.

50–56: Clear Fail

Work in this category will contain something of value, but is clearly inadequate for the MPhil on the balance of the first three criteria: in terms of the breadth and depth of research, and the quality of argumentation and writing. There will be substantial failings in at least two of them.

57–9 Marginal Fail

Work in this category will contain something of value, but is marginally inadequate for the MPhil on the balance of the first three criteria: in terms of the breadth and depth of research, and the quality of argumentation and writing. This may be the result of performance that is only just below the standard on all three, or because of a more substantial failing in one of them that is not sufficiently compensated by success with respect to the others.

60–64: Low Pass

Work in this category is adequate for the MPhil on the balance of the first three criteria: in terms of the breadth and depth of research, and the quality of argumentation and writing. An essay can be adequate in terms of this overall balance, while being inadequate with respect to one of them.

65–69: Clear Pass

Work in this category is adequate for the MPhil on the balance of the first three criteria: in terms of the breadth and depth of research, and the quality of argumentation and writing. In addition, it will show some strength on at least one of them.

70–74 High Pass

Work in this category is more than adequate for the MPhil on the balance of the first three criteria: in terms of the breadth and depth of research, and the quality of argumentation and writing. In addition, it will show some strength on at least two of them, and may show some originality. It constitutes some evidence of potential for PhD work.

75–79: Distinction

Work in this category makes a contribution to research. It is strong in terms of the first three criteria, and will show some originality. It constitutes strong evidence of the potential for PhD work.

80 and above: High Distinction

Work in this category makes a significant contribution to research. It is outstanding in terms of all four criteria: the breadth and depth of research and understanding that is displayed, and the quality of argumentation and writing. It will exhibit significant originality. It will typically be of sufficient quality to form the basis of a publication. It constitutes very strong evidence of the potential for PhD work.

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