

Assessment Disputes

Assessment Disputes Self-Help Guide

For a video explainer - please checkout the [website](#).

TLDR; Quick Guide

Assessment disputes are an area where the Advocacy Service can offer *only limited assistance*. Most of this assistance will be found here - in these self-help resources. This is essentially because there is only a limited range of processes available to deal with disputes over marking, and most of them are down to you as a student.

Check out our [quick guide](#) for the key principles of this process and how to progress your matter, or read on for the detailed version.

How It Works

Issues with assessment – and particularly final grades – are fairly common, especially as the pressure mounts toward the end of a degree. Ultimately the basis for all assessment disputes is a belief that the final mark is not fair, or appropriate. It is however important to distinguish an assessment dispute from a special consideration matter. If you feel the result you have ended up with is unfair because you were affected by unforeseen circumstances out of your control which had a severe impact on your assessment, then this is more properly characterised as a [special consideration](#) matter.

However, if the problem is that you worked hard, believe you approached the assessment sufficiently well to pass (or better), and you are disappointed with the final result, then this is an assessment dispute.

Despite it being a very common issue, requesting a review of a grade, or disputing a result generally, is not a simple matter, and there are a number of things you need to understand to make sense of the University's processes and go about things in the right way.

Firstly, imagine a world where any student can dispute any grade, just because they don't like it. If academics' professional judgement could be challenged at every turn, the wheels of education at the University would soon grind to a stop. For this reason, there are relatively narrow grounds upon which you can pursue an assessment dispute, and it is important to address the appropriate basis to progress your concerns. For example, it may be very frustrating to receive a mark of 47% or 48% – but that alone is not a basis to request a review of the mark. As you will see below, before any subjects are marked as an overall fail, each piece of assessment in the subject must be double marked by two different examiners.

The following may seem rather dense and complicated, but bear with it to learn how to approach this issue the right way.

The good news is that students have a number of rights in relation to assessment, which are set out in the University's [Assessment and Results Policy](#). Specifically relevant to assessment disputes are sections 4.43 – 4.45 regarding the right to receive assessment task information – including a range of important details regarding how the assessment is to be conducted. Similarly, section 4.47 provides that students have a right to detailed assessment criteria, including 'an explanation or example of the qualities of work required to achieve particular grades'. Additionally, the University must provide meaningful feedback on assessment, which 'should indicate how the student has performed against the assessment criteria. Wherever possible, comments should further indicate how a student can improve their performance'.

Accordingly, the first step in any assessment dispute is to check whether these obligations have been complied with, and to exercise the right to seek feedback on the assessment, in order to understand how the grade was derived. In many cases, the belief the mark was unfair is based on the amount of time and effort a student has put into their assessment or study. It is a profoundly disappointing experience to work really, really hard on something, and fail to realise that investment of effort. Unfortunately putting a lot of effort into a piece of work is not, in itself, a sufficient basis to ground an assessment dispute. In the majority of cases, there is a valid reason for a disappointing grade, which is disclosed when detailed feedback on the task is provided. A common culprit is misunderstanding the task, answering only part of a question, or using the wrong format to complete the work.

From here it becomes important to understand that assessment disputes are characterised in two distinct ways, and the method by which they may be addressed will largely be determined by which type of dispute you are progressing. The two types of matter are:

- disputes about **academic judgement** – which is the examiner’s expert academic opinion about your work, and
- procedural issues – **how** the University’s principles relating to assessment were applied.

This is also outlined on the University’s ask.unimelb page for [appealing a grade](#).

If you have followed so far, you will know that before all else, you need to seek feedback from the examiner to better understand the reason for your grade. The feedback should help you to understand what you could do to improve your performance and should also indicate how you have performed against the published assessment criteria.

If the semester has ended and you are concerned about your exam result or final grade, act immediately. Contact the examiner (usually the subject coordinator) to seek feedback about your performance. Examiners are required to be available to meet with students after the release of results, but some students find it difficult to contact academics during the non-teaching period.

If the examiner is not cooperative or communicative regarding requests for feedback, or you are not satisfied with their response, and/or you believe that the procedure has not been fair, you can approach the course coordinator or the Head of Department for further assistance. Should the matter still not be resolved, it may be helpful to [contact us](#) and we will be able to advise you if there is anything further you can meaningfully do. While there is a complaints and grievance process all the way to the Academic Board, there are only very narrow grounds to take these matters further.

Once you understand the way your work has been graded, if you believe there has been an error in the academic judgement of the assessor, for example if you feel that the mark has been incorrectly derived based on the assessment criteria, or the feedback you have received does not correspond to the marks awarded, you may be able to dispute this. You need to write to the chair of the Examination Board (you can contact Stop 1 to see who this is) and explain the reason you are not satisfied with the mark. Then they will decide whether the original grade was correctly determined according to the established marking criteria or rubric. It is important to understand

that any remark may result in one of three possible outcomes: the mark increases, the mark remains the same, or the mark may be lowered. For this reason, it is not wise to request a review without considering the possible consequences.

Alternatively, your concern might more properly be framed as a procedural error regarding the conduct of the assessment. For example the way the assessment has been set may not comply with the requirements in the [Assessment and Results Policy](#) and this has directly affected the way you have undertaken and performed in the task. In this case appeals may be made directly to the Academic Board based on procedural irregularity, as per the [Student Appeals Policy](#). The Academic Board will only consider procedural matters; any disputes grounded in academic judgement are expressly excluded from their remit. This is because members of an Academic Board Appeal committee must be drawn from faculties other than the appellant's, which means there is no capacity to evaluate the substantive merit of a piece of assessment. That is, if you are an Arts student, you don't want a professor of Vet Science evaluating your critical theory essay, and engineering students would not want their code or maths proofs reviewed by a Professor in the Dental School.

University Policies, Procedures and Legislation

The [Assessment and Results Policy](#) provides a great deal of useful information about the conduct of assessment in coursework degrees.

The relevant University statute is the [Academic Board Regulation](#).

Disputes arising under aspects of assessment policy are dealt with through the [Student Complaints and Grievances Policy](#). Information from the University about this policy and procedure, including information on where to lodge grievances, can be found [here](#). You can also read more about how this process works on our [Grievances and Complaints page](#).

The University's [ask.unimelb](#) page describes this process quite simply as well, outlining the different processes for disputes based on academic judgement as opposed to procedural complaints.