



# A Guide to UNSW Grades

This guide is intended to assist students and others to interpret results obtained for studies undertaken at The University of New South Wales.

## Assessment at UNSW

Each course undertaken by a student at UNSW is assessed using a variety of methods, usually culminating in the award of a single final mark out of 100. Under normal circumstances, the mark determines the associated final grade, according to this scale:

Mark Range	Grade	Code	Interpretation
85–100	High Distinction	<b>HD</b>	An outstanding performance
75–84	Distinction	<b>DN</b>	A superior performance
65–74	Credit	<b>CR</b>	A good performance
50–64	Pass	<b>PS</b>	An acceptable level of performance
0–49	Fail	<b>FL</b>	Below an acceptable standard

In some cases special grades are awarded, with or without a mark:

Mark Range	Grade	Code	Interpretation
46–49	Conceded Pass	<b>PC</b>	Marginally acceptable result (undergraduate)
40–100	Unsatisfactory Fail	<b>UF</b>	Poor performance in a required component
(none)	Absent Fail	<b>AF</b>	No assessments attempted
(none)	Withheld	<b>WD, WC</b>	Result withheld

## Distribution of Grades

The proportion of marks lying in each grading range is determined not by any formula or quota system, but by the way that students respond to assessment tasks and how well they meet the objectives of the course. Nevertheless, since higher grades imply performance that is well above average the number of distinctions and high distinctions awarded in a typical course is relatively small. At the other extreme, on average 7.7% of students do not meet minimum standards, a little more (10.7%) in first year courses.

## European and US Grading Systems

The European Credit Transfer System of letter grades (ECTS) was devised to deal with the plethora of grading standards across universities in the European Union, and to enhance the portability of results. It is based on fixed percentiles, relative to the number of students who achieve a pass.

ECTS Grade	% Assigned	Definition
<b>A</b>	10	<b>Excellent:</b> outstanding performance with only minor errors
<b>B</b>	25	<b>Very Good:</b> above the average standard with some errors
<b>C</b>	30	<b>Good:</b> sound work with a number of notable errors
<b>D</b>	25	<b>Satisfactory:</b> fair but with some significant shortcomings
<b>E</b>	10	<b>Sufficient:</b> performance meets with minimum criteria

Grading schemes in the United States usually have a higher proportion of As and Bs than ECTS. For example, even a conservative scheme in the US such as that recently adopted by Princeton University awards about 35% of students a grade of A– or higher.

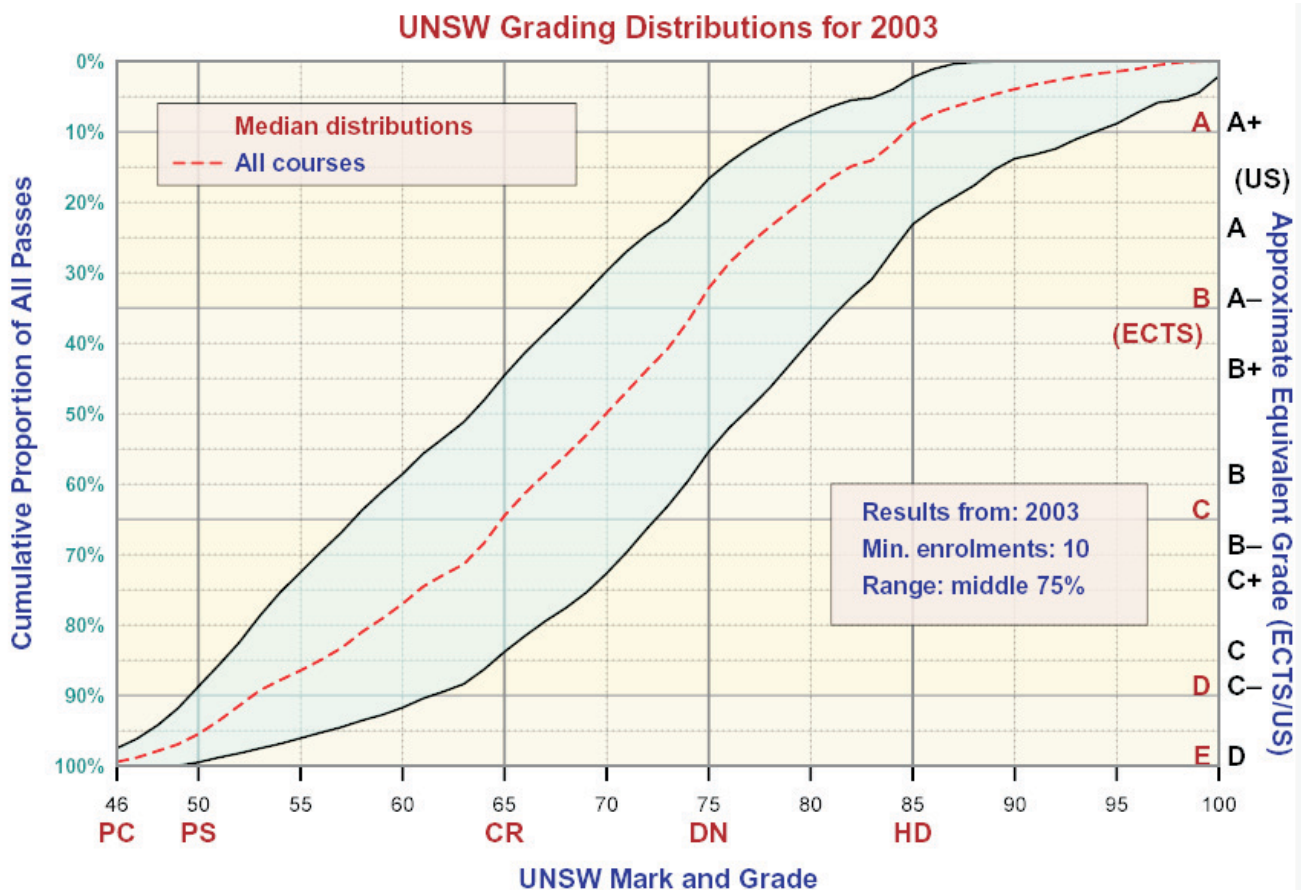
Although ECTS or US grading systems are *not* formally used at UNSW, it may be useful for students to know what approximate grade their result corresponds to under other standards.

## The Gumleaf Diagram

Although the particular distribution applicable to a given course is not published, students may obtain a rough estimate of their ranking in the course given their mark. The diagram below represents a composite plot of the cumulative distributions of courses assessed in **2003** (there are slight variations each year). The shaded area represents the middle 75% of all distributions; its resemblance to the shape of a eucalyptus (gum tree) leaf gives the diagram its name.

The dashed red line is the median distribution over all courses.

Horizontal grid lines are drawn at each 5% of the cumulative distribution, with distinctive boundaries drawn at the ECTS cutoff points.



## Using the Diagram

The diagram gives a range of percentiles corresponding to any UNSW mark, and also shows the corresponding ECTS and conservative US letter grades. For example, if you received a mark of 80 (Distinction, see diagram at right), the vertical line at that value intersects the gumleaf region at about 40% and 8% on the vertical scale. Your ranking would probably lie within these bounds.

For a single estimate, use the intersection with the dashed red median line at 20%. The corresponding ECTS grade is B, or an A on a conservative US scale. Similarly, a 65 Credit is near the lower third of passing grades, a borderline C in the ECTS scheme (or US B-).

