

Student Handbook

Humanities and Social Sciences

2023-24

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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 can 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.

Ideally you should attend all classes. If you have a valid reason for missing a class, please contact your lecturer in advance and you may be granted an authorized absence.

2. Imperial Horizons Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) Summary

As of academic year 2023-24, information on i) mitigating circumstances; plagiarism, collusion, and academic misconduct; coursework extensions; resit policy; disability support and reasonable adjustments; student representatives and data privacy have been combined into the online handbook here: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/horizons/ug-handbook/>

Modes of delivery

For the academic year 2023-24, most Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) modules will be taught in the classroom. Some will be delivered online. Notification is given for the method of delivery applicable to your module.

Preparation

Preparation for classes is essential. On average one hour of preparation time is required for each class, although this will vary across module levels. Students must complete the specified tasks (homework, reading, watching, listening, research, etc.) before each class. You will likely be asked to discuss this material and your ideas in class.

Assessment

Assessments will either take place in class or students will be asked to complete pieces at home by a certain deadline. Where applicable, please familiarise yourself with any upload procedures well in advance of the submission deadline. Regulations on late submission penalties, extensions, mitigating circumstances can be found [here](#).

Participation

In line with Horizons' regulations, your attendance will be recorded weekly, so please let your lecturer know if you are unable to attend a particular session and why.

Session recording

Horizons HSS online sessions may be recorded and placed securely online for the use of yourself and other students for revision and other work outside of regular teaching hours ('asynchronous learning'). Students are not permitted to distribute these recordings.

Queries

In case of any queries, please refer to information on Blackboard and the [I-Explore/Horizons handbook](#) first before contacting the lecturer. There may be a chatroom or wiki for this purpose – if so, your lecturer will draw this to your attention.

Lecturers might be available shortly before and/or shortly after classes for queries and will try to respond to emails as soon as possible. However, since most Horizons lecturers work part-time and have other commitments, replies may take several days.

3. 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.

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.

4. 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 by 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 can construct your own arguments, or reconstructing the arguments of others, in an eliminating way, and 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

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

Word count

One of the most frequently asked questions we are asked is whether students can exceed the word count. To answer directly: **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/bibliography.

Writing succinctly and effectively is a valuable skill you are learning as part of your university experience and skills. Indeed, including more information and examples does not necessarily make a better essay. Learning to 'edit down' (i.e. make written texts shorter) is a vital part of this.

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 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 ...'.

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.

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.

5. 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 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 influenced 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 credit-bearing 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.

6. Notes for Online Modules

We expect students to adopt the appropriate netiquette (online etiquette) during online sessions, show the appropriate level of respect and courtesy in discussions, not interrupt each other, have their microphones muted in plenary sessions and use the 'raise hand' tool or 'chat' function to communicate (chat should be used for class-related discussions only).

Webcams

Unless you are experiencing connectivity problems which can be remedied by turning the camera off, we strongly recommend students have their webcams on. This is so you can engage most effectively with both the lecturer and your classmates.

Focus

Focusing in an online context is a valuable skill and we are supporting you in learning and honing it. Please treat the online class as if it were a real classroom situation: arriving on time, focusing on the session, do not eat during class, and turn your mobile off. Avoid the temptation to multi-task by closing all other windows and tabs.

Equipment and resources

To take part in classes, you will need a computer with webcam and ideally headphones (in noisy environments these are essential). You will need to find a quiet area with space for notes and materials. Unless it is an emergency, we do not recommend the use of phones to participate in our classes.

If on the day your connection is poor, try re-connecting. Contact your lecturer via the 'chat' function and/or by email.

Please ensure that you have the required resources. Relevant study materials will be provided through Imperial's Library and will be accessible via the Library's Reading List system.

7. 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 (if 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. More information can be found on our [dedicated page](#). Students suffering from any type of disability are also encouraged to make themselves known to the lecturer. Alternatively, you may contact the Centre's disability officer, Ms Mel Mullin (melanie.mullin@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.

8. Appendix (list of useful resources)

College and departmental introduction

The Imperial Success Guide: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/students/success-guide/ug/>

Imperial College term dates: www.imperial.ac.uk/admin-services/registry/term-dates/

Location and facilities of campus, including maps and accessibility:

www.imperial.ac.uk/visit/campuses/ and www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/imperial-college-london

The Imperial Mobile app: www.imperial.ac.uk/imperialmobile

Department and programme information

Aims and benefits of Horizons: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/horizons/why-horizons/>

Link to I-Explore modules: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/centre-for-languages-culture-and-communication/i-explore/>

Link to Horizons webpage: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/horizons/>

List of key CLCC academic/administrative staff and their responsibilities:

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/centre-for-languages-culture-and-communication/contact-us/>

Assessment

Link to Academic and Examination regulations: www.imperial.ac.uk/about/governance/academic-governance/regulations/

Instructions to candidates for examinations: www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/administration-and-support-services/registry/academic-governance/public/academic-policy/exam-arrangements-and-re-sits/Instructions-to-candidates-for-examinations.pdf

Academic Integrity and Academic Misconduct: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/student-records-and-data/for-current-students/undergraduate-and-taught-postgraduate/exams-assessments-and-regulations/plagiarism-academic-integrity--exam-offences/>

Late Submissions Policy and Penalties for late submission: www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/administration-and-support-services/registry/academic-governance/public/academic-policy/markings-and-moderation/Late-submission-Policy.pdf

Mitigating circumstances policy and procedures: www.imperial.ac.uk/about/governance/academic-governance/academic-policy/exams-and-assessment/

Link to religious obligations in assessments: www.imperial.ac.uk/student-records-and-data/for-current-students/undergraduate-and-taught-postgraduate/exams-assessments-and-regulations/exams-and-religious-obligations/

Location and accessibility

Maps: www.imperial.ac.uk/visit/campuses

Accessibility: www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/imperial-college-london

Smoke-Free Policy: www.imperial.ac.uk/smoke-free

Health and Safety

College Safety Department: www.imperial.ac.uk/safety

Policies and procedures

Academic Feedback Policy:

www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/administration-and-support-services/registry/academic-governance/public/academic-policy/academic-feedback/Academic-feedback-policy-for-taught-programmes.pdf

Provisional Marks Guidance:

www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/administration-and-support-services/registry/academic-governance/public/academic-policy/mark-and-moderation/Guidelines-for-issuing-provisional-marks-to-students-on-taught-programmes.pdf

Wellbeing and Support

Departmental Disability Officers:

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/disability-advisory-service/current-students/support-available/departmental-disability-officers/>

Exam arrangements in respect of disability:

www.imperial.ac.uk/student-records-and-data/for-current-students/undergraduate-and-taught-postgraduate/exams-assessments-and-regulations/additional-exam-arrangements-in-respect-of-disability

Imperial College Union Advice Centre: www.imperialcollegeunion.org/advice

Student Hub: www.imperial.ac.uk/student-hub

Other useful information and support services:

Alumni Services: www.imperial.ac.uk/alumni/

Registry: www.imperial.ac.uk/admin-services/registry/

Careers Service: www.imperial.ac.uk/careers

Accommodation: www.imperial.ac.uk/study/campus-life/accommodation/

Student Finance: www.imperial.ac.uk/fees-and-funding/

ICT Service: www.imperial.ac.uk/students/online-services/

Sport Imperial: www.imperial.ac.uk/sport/

Student online services: www.imperial.ac.uk/student-records-and-data/for-current-students/