Undergraduate Grade Appeals
and Other Requests for Relief

The purpose of this handout is to outline the procedures for appealing marks and other decisions related to individual courses, for example:

- requests for extensions of deadlines for the submission of work
- requests for make-up or special exam
- requests to have a particular grade reweighted on compassionate grounds
- appeals against the conclusion that cheating or plagiarism took place
- appeals against the sanction or penalty for cheating or plagiarism

If you are considering an appeal of any kind, you should read the policies on “Academic Rights and Responsibilities” [www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic_policies/rights_responsibilities.html](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic_policies/rights_responsibilities.html). Also keep in mind that many programs and departments have program-specific rules and procedures. Be sure to look them up on the program web site or ask your academic counsellor about them.

Every appeal or request for relief must begin at the level of the original mark or decision.

Step 1  Informal consultation

Grade appeals: begin by informally consulting the instructor - ‘informally’ usually means you don’t have to write a letter. When you meet, be prepared to be a good listener when the instructor explains why the mark is what it is. Feel free to make notes of important points.

**Note:** it is your right to see and review exams see “Access To and Retention of Examination Papers and Other Work” [www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/retention.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/retention.pdf).

Extensions; special exams: begin by explaining your circumstances to your instructor. The approval of your instructor, while often a necessary condition, will not always be sufficient for your request. For example, a special final exam or permission to complete work after the term (Incomplete grade) requires approval from the instructor, department chair or school director, and dean.

What if you cannot reach your instructor? If leaving a message hasn’t worked, try writing a short email explaining what you want and giving times and phone numbers where you can be reached. You could also check with the department office to see if the instructor is around. Remember to always use your Western email address when emailing instructors and department offices.

If attempts to reach your instructor are unsuccessful, proceed to step two without delay. Be mindful of deadlines.
Academic counsellors are a good source of information and advice in a wide range of situations. Contacting your academic counsellor may be a good first step. Keep in mind that all emails to Academic Counsellors should be sent from your UWO email address and include your name and student number.

**Step 2**  Written request

The first formal step in appealing a grade or other decision of an instructor requires submission of a written request to the department chair or designate by the appropriate deadline.\(^1\) See the notes in Step 3 on how to write a proper appeal letter to a department chair.

**Deadlines for grade appeals and other requests for relief**

**Final grades**

A formal appeal of a final grade must be made to the department chair by:

- **January marks:** January 31
- **April/May marks:** June 30
- **Intersession:** July 31
- **May/June Dentistry marks:** July 31
- **Summer Evening:** August 31
- **Summer Day:** September 15
- **Spring/Summer Distance:** October 15

Appeals and requests for relief should always be made as early as possible. Delays without good reason can give the impression that you do not take your appeal or request very seriously.

*(Note: Requests for Dean’s Waivers in undergraduate programs must be made in writing to the dean of your faculty of registration by June 30. For further information see the guide Appealing for a Dean’s Waiver.)*

Your letter should be succinct, explaining what you are appealing and the grounds for the appeal. Its objective is to create a reasonable doubt in the mind of the chair about whether the grade is correct or the instructor’s decision fair and consistent with normal department practice. You need to submit the appeal letter in hard copy to the Department Office, rather than by email. Do not courier the appeal package as couriers to the University go to a central mail room and could take a few days to get to the necessary office. You can fax an appeal and follow up to ensure it was received. For a model letter and tips on how to write an effective one, see the handout Writing an Effective Appeal or Request Letter.

\(^1\) Some undergraduate programs designate an ‘undergraduate chair.’ In graduate programs without departmental affiliation, the designate is the ‘graduate program chair.’
Grounds for appeal
The grounds for your appeal or request for relief are the reasons you think the decision-maker should consider granting your appeal. Typical grounds are medical or compassionate circumstances, extenuating circumstances beyond your control, or inaccuracy. In the case of a grade or mark, the grounds are the reasons why you think the decision-maker should arrange for your work to be reread or otherwise reviewed.

What the chair or school director does
A chair will normally need about two weeks to respond to an appeal or request. A student who requires a decision within a particular time frame (e.g. because of transcripts to be sent as part of an application process or because of an upcoming test or exam) should indicate so in the letter.

The chair will not normally review work submitted for review in a grade appeal. It is his/her job to decide whether the student has made a case for appeal and, if so, to pass the work to a faculty member qualified to review it. Some departments have a committee to oversee grade appeals. It is important to note that if the chair finds the reasons for the appeal inadequate, the appeal may be denied on those grounds and without any review of the work.

With regard to other requests (for makeup tests, extensions on work), the chair will consider your request and the instructor’s reasons for refusing that request. He or she may ask for additional evidence of the circumstances. Part of the chair’s job is to ensure a degree of consistency in decisions across the department. This helps make things fair for all students.

Upon receiving the chair’s response, you have three options:
- accept the decision, thus ending the matter
- request a meeting with the chair to clarify things
- appeal to the dean if dissatisfied with the outcome

Step 3  Appealing the chair's decision to the dean
An appeal in writing to the appropriate dean must be made no later than three weeks from the date of the chair’s letter. If you are appealing a mark or grade or other decision relating to a specific course, appeal to the dean of the faculty offering the course, not the dean of your home faculty.

Two examples:

1. You are accused of cheating on an exam and fail the course as a result. You appeal to the chair, who denies your appeal. You wish to appeal to the dean. The faculty offering the course is not the faculty in which you are registered. To which dean do you appeal? To the dean of the faculty offering the course.

2. You were unable to write a final exam, for good reason. You want aegrotat standing in the course, or, if that is not granted, permission to write a make-up exam. What must
you do? Seek permission from the dean’s office of the faculty offering the course. The dean or designate may contact your home faculty to verify documentation. (NB: Aegrotat standing is rarely granted.)

In faculties which have an associate or assistant dean, appeals are usually delegated to him or her. Write to the appropriate person (or the dean, if in doubt), enclosing copies of your letter to the chair, the chair’s response, and the work to be reviewed (in the case of a grade appeal). Requests on compassionate or medical grounds should include relevant documentation from a professional.

Some faculties have specific forms that must accompany appeals. It is not good enough to simply include a letter. Be sure to check with an academic counsellor or on the faculty web site to see what is required.

A good letter to a dean appealing a grade or decision will look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associate Dean’s Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Dean’s Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and Office Number</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Re: Student name and number, subject (e.g. John Smith, Student Number 00011222 Appeal of final grade in French 0000)

Dear (Associate Dean’s Name):

Paragraph one: Explain what you are appealing. (e.g. I am writing to appeal my final grade in French 0000 on compassionate grounds.)

Go into detail about why you are appealing, what the circumstances are, etc.

Explain that you have attached your original letter to the chair and the chair’s response, as well as any other supporting information such as emails from the professor, assignment sheets, etc.

Sincerely,

Your name

Enclosures: [be sure to enclose everything!]

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**Step 4  Appealing to the Senate Review Board Academic (SRBA)**

The deadline for appealing a dean’s decision to SRBA is six weeks from the date on the dean’s letter of decision. Not all appeals to SRBA are granted a hearing; see the "Jurisdiction" section under "Appeals to SRBA" in the “Academic Rights and Responsibilities” policy.
Common Questions about Grade Appeals

Do marks ever go up on appeal? How often?
Marks do go up sometimes. They can also go down or remain the same. It is hard to find out how often marks change on appeal; each case is looked at on its own merits.

Can a multiple choice test mark be appealed?
There is no rule against appealing the mark on a multiple choice test, but such an appeal is likely to fail because: (1) there is no discretion in the way a multiple choice test is graded; and (2) if there is an error, for instance, an invalid question, every student will have been subjected to the error.

Suppose your marks have been belled down or otherwise adjusted - how can you appeal that?
A grade which has been adjusted can be appealed, but a reason is needed. The mere fact that the grade was adjusted is not a reason to appeal.

If you write a test when you are sick and do poorly can you appeal to get a better mark?
No. If you are sick and decide to write a test or exam, you have assumed the risk and your grade will normally stand. However, you may be granted other accommodations, such as a reweighting of the grade. Speak to your instructor about your situation.

If you get a low mark on an essay and you want to appeal, should you wait until the end of the course?
No. Approach the instructor for clarification about the mark as soon as you get your essay back. If you feel your instructor is hard to approach, talk to the chair or to your academic counsellor.

What about essays or tests which get lost?
The University places a very high value on the accuracy of grades. If a test or exam is lost, even if it is not your fault, you may have to write another test or exam. You should always keep copies of essays and assignments to protect yourself in case of loss.

Suppose you only need two more marks and they are very important to you? Isn't it true that an instructor can always find two more marks when it counts?
No, it isn't true. In the vast majority of cases the original grade is the best and most accurate grade.

If I appeal my mark, will my work be compared to other students' work?
No. Normally the person who reviews work is given the work, the course outline, and other essential details about the assignment (for example, a list of essay topics or requirements or a copy of the test questions).

If the marker makes a mistake in my favour, can my mark be lowered when the mistake is found?
Yes, a mistake can be corrected. For example, to allow one student to keep a grade of
75 when that grade should have been 65 creates a situation which is unfair to other students.

**Can you appeal an oral exam? A musical performance grade?**
Yes. The Undergraduate Student Academic Appeals policy states that a request for relief "can be launched regardless of whether a record of the student’s work exists." However, in the absence of an adequate permanent record of the student’s work, the only form of relief that might be appropriate would be allowing the opportunity for reassessment. So if the Board upheld your appeal, the best you could expect might be a chance to redo the exam, performance, or practicum.

**What can you do if you think a particular exam or assignment is unfair?**
Raise the issue with the instructor informally first. Then write to the chair. Be sure to state your reasons clearly, and, if possible, what remedy you are seeking. (You may wish to look at What Makes an Examination Fair?)

NOTE: This guide was produced by the Office of the Ombudsperson [www.uwo.ca/ombuds](http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds). It is not an official university document and is not intended to replace university policy. Frances Bauer wrote the original text. Revised 01/2013