

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 exams
- 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 in the Academic Policies section under the subheading [Rights and Responsibilities](#) on the Governance web site. 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.

This guide does not pertain to appeals in relation to decisions of Accessible Education or King's Accessibility Services made under the Policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities. To learn more about that policy and appeals under that policy, please see the [Guide for Students with Disabilities](#).

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

Step 1 Informal consultation

Grade appeals: You must begin by informally consulting the instructor - 'informally' means you do not have to write a letter. The best way to discuss the grade with an instructor is to visit them during office hours. If it is an online course, you will need to email the instructor or follow other instructions they have put on the course OWL site. When you meet with the instructor, be prepared to be a good listener and 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).

What if you cannot reach your instructor? If your instructor does not have office hours or their office hours conflict with your schedule, write a short email explaining what you want and giving times when you would be available. You may 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. Be mindful of deadlines.

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 an 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 or designate (usually undergrad chair) by:

<u>First term course:</u>	January 31
<u>Second term or full year course:</u>	June 30
<u>Intersession course:</u>	July 31
<u>Summer Evening course:</u>	August 31
<u>Summer Day course:</u>	September 15
<u>Spring/Summer Distance Studies course:</u>	October 15

You should submit your appeal as early as possible.

(Notes: 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](#). Appeals for program eligibility decisions must also be made by June 30.)

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 can drop off your appeal to the department undergrad office, or email it to the undergrad chair. Staff in the undergraduate office in the department offering the course can tell you the name of the undergraduate chair, and more specifically, to whom you should send your appeal.

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. As stated in the Senate-approved [Undergraduate Student Academic Appeals policy](#), the grounds for appeal are medical or compassionate circumstances, extenuating circumstances beyond the appellant's control, bias, inaccuracy, or unfairness.

What the chair or school director (or designate) 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

¹Some undergraduate programs designate an 'undergraduate chair.' In graduate programs without departmental affiliation, the designate is the 'graduate program chair.'

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 their 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. The chair 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 (or designate)

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 your home faculty, preferably before the end of the regular examination period. You must submit supporting documentation with your request. (Note: Aegrotat standing is rarely granted.)

The Dean usually delegates appeals to the Associate or Assistant Dean in the faculty in which you are appealing. 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:

Date Associate Dean's Name Associate Dean's Faculty Building and Office Number or email address Re: Student name and number, subject (e.g. John Smith, Student Number 000111222 Appeal of final grade in French 0000) Dear (Associate Dean's Name): Paragraph one: Explain what you are appealing and the grounds upon which 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

<p>Give the decision maker time to respond. Appeals, especially at the level of the Associate Dean can take at least three weeks.</p>
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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 on page four of ["Academic Appeals – Undergrad"](#).

Your appeal to SRBA must be in writing and include the following:

- 1) The application form;
- 2) Details of the appeal, including a description of the matter under appeal and the reasons for challenging the Dean's decision;
- 3) The requested relief;
- 4) A copy of the Dean's decision;
- 5) A copy of the student's letter to the Dean requesting relief, if applicable; and
- 6) All relevant supporting documentation.

The University Secretariat will only accept applications that include all of the required information and documents. You can drop off or mail your appeal to the Secretariat, Room 4101 Stevenson Hall, or you can email it to the address on the bottom of the application form.

A note on extensions and special exams:

You can only receive an extension on an assignment or permission to write a special exam (commonly known as academic consideration) by providing documentation to your home faculty academic counselling unit. If academic counselling denies your request, you must appeal in writing to the Associate Dean of your home faculty. Consideration for a missed exam is not always a special exam. For example, the weight of a mid term or missed assignment might be transferred to the final exam or another assignment. After academic counselling approves a missed exam or assignment, you must contact your instructor to find out what type of consideration will be given. The instructor sometimes mentions the type of consideration to be given on the course outline.

Self-Reported Absences

In September 2019, Western introduced the Self-Reported Absence process. Students who are ill or experience an unexpected interruption to their academics for **48 hours or less** may report their absence through the Self-Report Portal in Student Centre, and no Student Medical Certificate is required. Students may submit two Self-Reported Absences between September and April and one between May and August. The Self-Reported Absence process does not apply to assignments worth more than 30 per cent. Self-Reported Absences are not allowed for scheduled final examinations; for midterm examinations scheduled during the December examination period; or for final lab examinations scheduled during the final week of term.

Be sure to review information regarding the Self-Reported Absence process posted on your home faculty academic counselling web site, and in the [Academic Calendar](#).

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) invalid questions are eliminated before releasing marks.

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.

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.

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. It is not an official university document and is not intended to replace university policy. Revised 05/2021