# Managing Special Grades and Multi-Term Courses in Astra

## Executive Summary

- Astra assigns AF, EC or WC grades where appropriate, based on available item results and Special-Consideration/Supp Assessment exceptions.
- Convenors can assign WD, EC or PE to any student by applying an exception individually; *however,*
- Astra will assign EC grades automatically if at least one significant item result is missing and the course is either a member of an MTCG (multi-term course group), or has an Astra-specific flag on the course catalogue.
- Astra will assign PE grades automatically if at least one significant item result is missing and the course is has an Astra-specific flag on the course-catalogue.
- Item results roll forward automatically from one MTCG course enrolment to subsequent ones, provided items have identical definitions. The feature works whether it's the same course, or a different course in the same group.

## Introduction

Special grades are non-numeric results submitted for a student who under normal circumstances would receive either

- A mark and related grade, if the course catalogue specifies the GRD grading basis, *or*
- A mark and the UF grade, if the student does not meet a hurdle and the Astra configuration specifies this outcome, *or*
- Either SY or FL, if the course catalogue specifies the SUS grading basis.

Some special grades are generated by Astra on behalf of the course authority based on what has been recorded during the term.

| Grade | Name | Circumstances |
|---|---|---|
| AF | Absent Fail | *All* assessment items are in the initial NoResult status (.) |
| LE | Late Entry | *Any* assessment item is in the Pending status (?) |
| WC | Withheld Consideration | A **Special Consideration: Supplementary Assessment** exception has been applied to an assessment item and no result has been subsequently added |

LE and WC are interim grades: they must be resolved within a reasonable time or the result reverts to NC.

In addition, a **Special Grade** exception can be applied to the FINAL item for any student, which overrides the above decisions. The special grades that currently can be applied are (overleaf)

| Grade | Name | Reason for Applying |
|---|---|---|
| **WD** | Withheld | Result is finalised but should not be released to the student. Should not be used when something is missing but expected, LE is more suitable (enter a ? for that item). |
| **EC** | Enrolment Continuing | The student has completed some of the assessment but must re-enrol (or enrol in a related course) before receiving a normal result. This is a finalised grade, and counts as a pass. |
| **PE** | Professional Experience | Course involves external work and assessment, and cannot be assessed in the usual timeframe. |

WD and PE are interim grades: they must be resolved within a reasonable time (the *Amendments Deadline*, usually the census date for the next major term) or they revert to NC.

## Multi-Term Courses

Some sets of courses, typically for undergraduate Honours, are undertaken over more than one term. The student can enrol in some combination of these courses over several terms until sufficient units of credit are accumulated. Results prior to the last are awarded EC, and the final result represents an overall result for the course group. The group is defined by a course attribute (MTCG) on the course catalogue, with a specific course attribute value (such as ASIA1) identifying group members. Even if there's only a single course taken more than once, an MTCG group should be defined for it[1]. The benefits of this configuration are:

- The EC results for MTCG courses are replaced by a mark and EC once the final grade is awarded. The student's WAM then includes the full effect of all contributing courses.
- Astra helps both by assigning the preliminary EC grades and rolling forward assessment items from the early attempts to any later offering of a course in the group (described next page).

For multi-term courses, it's important that *every course has the same structure*, representing all items that can contribute to an overall result.

## Other Courses that typically award EC or PE results

Courses where the usual result is either EC or PE can be flagged in the course catalogue with a course attribute SPGD, the attribute value being the required grade, either EC or PE (one or the other, can't be both). Astra detects this and applies the default grade subject to **Auto-grading** below. Course attributes remain indefinitely until explicitly removed.

## Auto-grading

A course with either an MTCG or SPGD attribute is handled specially when the final result is determined by the Astra calculation engine.

- For any student, if results for any of the Level-1 items (those contributing directly to FINAL) is missing the FINAL result is set to EC or PE as appropriate.
- If all results have a finalised result, normal calculation rules apply.
- Special-grade processing takes precedence. AF is available as a special grade to avoid a student who attempted nothing getting an EC (and units of credit).

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[1] A single course with *Repeat for Credit* ticked on the course catalogue does receive the benefit of the EC backfill function, but Astra requires an MTCG group to be created for the course.

## Roll forward – MTCG courses only

The courses in each MTCG group should have identical Astra assessment structure as far as possible. The roll-forward feature will work best when this applies. At the start of term, or when a student enrols if that's later, any course that's a member of an MTCG group may have results inserted for some non-calculated item. The results that appear have been rolled forward from previous attempts at any of the courses in the group for which the final result is EC. The prior items must have the same name, type (mark or scale) and other attributes (maximum, precision, or scale ID). The most recent available completed result is rolled, along with any exception on the latest row, but it can be from any past attempt that has an Astra record. Astra's history page shows what term the result originally came from, should it be necessary to go back to see what happened then.

**Example**

The ASIA1 MTCG consists of ARTS4810 (6UoC), ARTS4811 (12 UoC), ARTS4812 (18 UoC) and ARTS4813 (24 UoC). Students must accumulate 24 UoC overall to satisfy requirements. All courses have the same Astra structure, which represents all required course work for a final result. A certain student enrols in two lots of 6UoC and one at 12UoC, over three terms with a gap in the middle:

| Term: | 5196 | 5199 | 5206 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Item | ARTS4810 | ARTS4810 | ARTS4811 |
| ASSIGN | 87 | | |
| BLOG | | 99 | |
| ESSAY | 76 | | |
| SEMNAR | | | 92 |
| THESIS | | | 90 |
| FINAL | EC | EC | |

In term 5199 the ASSIGN and ESSAY results will be transferred, and term 5206 (skipping 5203) both these and the ESSAY completed in 5199 will be copied. Copied data is highlighted here. Results can be finalised once the remaining T5199 items have results:

| Term: | 5196 | 5199 | 5206 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Item | ARTS4810 | ARTS4810 | ARTS4811 |
| ASSIGN | 87 | 87 | 87 |
| BLOG | | 99 | 99 |
| ESSAY | 76 | 76 | 76 |
| SEMNAR | | | 92 |
| THESIS | | | 90 |
| Transcript | 91 EC | 91 EC | 91 HD |

Note that the convenor doesn't have to do anything once the course is correctly configured. The 91EC results are backfilled after results are released, to ensure update students' WAMs include the contribution of all courses.

## Fixed-Order MTCGs

In some faculties, notably Engineering, particular MTCG courses must be taken in order, but the same principle applies. For example, Thesis A may have preliminary planning items, Thesis B a seminar and progress report, and Thesis C has the final report. Thesis A and B produce EC and Thesis C uses all assessable items from A, B and C to produce a final result. Rather than replicate the entire structure for all three courses, A and B include their own assessment items plus an administrative item (MTCG) that's never assessed, but its presence generates the EC. Thesis C has all items. A student's Astra record might look like this:

| Item | Max / weight | Term:<br>Thesis A<br>5193 | Thesis B<br>5196 | Thesis C<br>5199 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PLAN | 5 | 4.5 | (omitted) | 4.5 |
| LITRVW | 10 | 9 | (omitted) | 9 |
| PROG | 10 | (omitted) | 8 | 8 |
| SEM | 10 | (omitted) | 7.5 | 7.5 |
| MTCG | 0 | | | (omitted) |
| THESIS | 65 | (omitted) | (omitted) | 59 |
| **FINAL** | | **EC** | **EC** | **88 HD** |
| **Transcript** | | **88 EC** | **88 EC** | **88 HD** |

## Fail results

In the hopefully unusual instance where a student fails a course that normally awards an EC grade, it will be necessary to bypass the usual automated final grade determination.

- To assign AF, add a Special Grade exception, where AF is available (AF should not be manually applied in other circumstances, it's automatic for all missing results for any course except an EC/PE-enabled one).
- To assign a failing grade to an EC/PE-enabled course that still has missing items, assign an Exempt exception to the items that belong to other terms. The student should be assessed as having finalised everything else, however this hypothetical scenario has only recently arisen, and is subject to confirmation.
- To assign a failing grade to an EC/PE-enabled course that has a zero-weighted MTCG item, assign 0 to the item, and 0 to any other missing items to ensure finalisation can occur.

## Maintaining the Course Catalogue

Course attributes are not currently part of AIMS, and updating them is a separate task. Academic Administration manages these changes, except for the initial definition for the new SPGD attributes and any MTCG changes needed for Astra to work, which the Astra project team will organise for T2 and T3 2019. It's important that SiMs exactly reflects what schools want.

| Action | Contact | Details Needed |
|---|---|---|
| Adding or removing courses from a multi-term course group | Acad Admin | Group code, courses, what to do |
| Creating a new multi-term course group | Acad Admin | Suggested group code (subject |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | area+digit), courses |
| Deleting a multi-term course group (though they can be left alone) | Acad Admin | Group code |
| Flagging courses to have a default grade of EC (via the SPGD attribute) | Astra project | List of courses, confirm EC |
| Flagging courses to have a default grade of PE (via the SPGD attribute) | Astra project | List of courses, confirm PE |

During June faculties will be send lists of courses that

- Are in existing MTCG groups, or
- Are marked as multi-term in the course catalogue but are not in any MTCG, or
- Have awarded a significant number of EC grades in the past 2 years, but are not in any MTCG group, or
- Have awarded a significant number of PE grades in the past 2 years

Schools or faculties can respond indicating whether any actions in the table above should apply to their courses, including changes or any new courses. In the first instance the Astra project team will action. Any subsequent requests for changes go through the Service Desk.

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