

Academic appeals for coursework students

Related articles:

- [Stage 1 appeals – frequently asked questions](#)
- [Appeal or complaint?](#)

You have the right to appeal academic decisions made by the University. The [University of Sydney \(Student Academic Appeals\) Rule 2021](#) is the policy that governs academic appeals at the University of Sydney.

What is an appeal?

The University of Sydney provides all enrolled students with an internal process for appealing decisions made by the University. There are 3 escalating stages in the academic appeal process:

- resolution with the original decision-maker
- application for review by the faculty or Academic Panel
- appeal to the Student Appeals Body (SAB).

Decisions that are commonly appealed include:

- a mark for an essay or exam
- the overall mark for a unit of study
- a fail grade
- termination of a placement
- a finding of plagiarism or breach of academic integrity
- a declined [special consideration or special arrangements application](#)
- a declined credit for previous study application
- a decision to impose conditions or restrictions on your re-enrolment after you are asked to Show Good Cause
- a decision not to re-admit or re-enrol you following exclusion from your award course

- a decision to terminate your candidature, if you are completing a postgraduate award.

An appeal must identify your concerns with the decision, or lack of due process. You need to clearly explain how the decision failed to properly follow 1 or more University policies or procedures. For example, an essay marked without following the published marking criteria.

What is not an appeal?

Examples of when you would **not have strong reasons to appeal** include:

- receiving a poor mark or grade alone
- working hard and unexpectedly failing.

It may be difficult to appeal an academic's judgment, expertise, or discretionary powers.

For example, appealing a failed placement where your supervisor assessed your performance as inadequate, as your supervisor used their expertise to make the decision.

If you fail a placement and are not satisfied with the feedback you receive, you can [contact us](#) for advice.

Sometimes **what you are disputing might constitute a [non-academic complaint](#) rather than an appeal.** An academic appeal is a process to challenge an academic decision or a breach in due process in making an academic decision. A complaint, on the other hand, is a way to raise an issue with the faculty or the University over matters such as discrimination, harassment or bullying, or about the quality of teaching or assessment. For more details about these important differences read our article [Appeal or complaint?](#) and our article [Making a complaint](#).

The appeals process

Clear advice on each appeals stage can be found on the [University's academic appeals pages](#).

Stage 1 – informal resolution

If you disagree with, or want to understand more about, an academic decision, **the first step is to make an appeal directly to the person who made the academic decision.**

Key points:

- **You have 15 working days to lodge your appeal** – starting from the date of the decision or release of result (working days do not include weekends, public holidays or the University shut-down period).
- Some faculties require a written appeal, others arrange a meeting to discuss your concerns. Always get the response to your appeal in writing. If you have a meeting, ask for the outcome to be emailed to you after your meeting.

If you are in the Business School, [use their informal resolution form](#) to lodge a Stage 1 appeal.

If your appeal is about special consideration, special arrangements, credit or mobility academic decisions, you must make an informal resolution request online. [The University website has links to submit your request](#).

If you are appealing an exam, you should review your exam script before making your appeal. The faculty will schedule exam review times, but if you miss these you may email your unit coordinator to request a review of your exam paper, as long as you make the request within 15 working days of the release of your result. Late requests may be granted by the associate dean, at their discretion.

For appeals against **exclusion from a coursework** degree we recommend you also read our articles on [Show Good Cause and exclusion](#).

For appeals against **termination of a Higher Degree by Research** candidature, read our article [Show Good Cause and exclusion for HDR students](#).

For special consideration and special arrangements: you must communicate your concerns to the Student Administration Services team that communicated the original decision to you. This communication must be initiated by you within 15 working days of receiving the outcome of your application.

Requests for further feedback

Informal resolutions are often ways for students to request further feedback about an academic decision, such as a grade. Most unit coordinators are happy to give further feedback but are unlikely to change a mark or grade without being presented with strong reasons.

The University's reply

The relevant decision-maker must respond within 10 working days of receiving your informal appeal. Their response will either confirm the original academic decision or amend the decision in writing. You will also receive a clear explanation of the reasons for the decision.

If you do not receive a response within 10 working days, you may proceed to [Stage 2 appeal – application for review](#). Working days do not include weekends, public holidays, or the University shut-down period.

For final exams/assessments you may not be able to receive a response by your unit coordinator before staff go on holiday or the University closes for the summer break. The important thing is to email your unit coordinator within 15 working days of the decision, as this ensures your appeal is submitted in time regardless of when you receive a response.

Stage 2 – application for review

If your concerns are not resolved, or you believe there was a failure to follow due process, you may [submit an online application for review](#). Include your reasons for the review and any support documentation.

Your application must be submitted within 20 working days from the date you received the outcome of your informal appeal. Your application should carefully explain your reasons for appealing the academic decision and clearly explain any breaches in due process.

If you would like help writing your application for review, please [contact us](#).

Find instructions on how to submit an application for review on [the University website](#).

The University's reply

The faculty or Student Administrative Services **will acknowledge receipt of your application within 3 working days**.

The review will consider all relevant information. **You should receive a decision within 15 working days from receipt of your application**, or you will be informed of the reasons for the delay and be given an estimate of how long your review will take.

What happens if I submit my application late?

If you are late to submit an application for review, the associate dean may grant an extension. [Contact us for help](#) to prepare a late application, which should include an explanation for why you are late.

Stage 3 – appeal to Student Appeals Body (SAB)

If you believe a decision made by a faculty, school or academic panel was not based on merit, procedurally fair, or made in accordance with all relevant University policies and procedures, local provisions and rules, you may [appeal to the Student Appeals Body \(SAB\)](#).

You must submit your written appeal online within 15 working days of receiving an outcome from your review. If you are late, the Director of Compliance and Student Affairs may extend at their discretion.

For your SAB appeal:

- Your appeal letter needs to clearly explain your reasons for believing a decision was not made fairly, or that there was a breach of due process, policy and procedures.
- You must submit all relevant documentation to support your claims in your appeal.

After you submit your appeal:

Your appeal will be reviewed by the SAB and they may grant you a hearing if they believe your reasons for appeal meet the eligibility requirements.

If you are not granted a hearing, you may apply for a review of the decision to the Register within 10 working days of receiving the outcome. Your review must be submitted in writing and must clearly outline your reasons for believing the decision was not made in accordance with clause [1.6 of the Student Appeals Rule](#).

Appeal hearings

The SAB will notify you, your faculty, school, Academic Panel or relevant HDR examination committee with at least 10 working days' notice of the date, time and location of your hearing. You have the right to bring a support person to your hearing – this may include a caseworker from SUPRA.

The SAB will provide you with a copy of the faculty, school or Academic Panel's written response to your appeal 5 working days prior to your scheduled hearing.

We strongly recommend you [contact us for advice](#) on preparing for your appeal hearing.

Hearing outcome

A decision is reached by the SAB panel on a simple majority. Your appeal may be upheld or dismissed.

If your appeal is upheld, the SAB may: refer the decision back to your faculty, Academic Panel or HDR examination committee; make a new decision; or determine no further action will be taken.

If your appeal is dismissed, the decision from your faculty, Academic Panel or HDR examination committee will stand.

You will receive a decision within 20 working days of your hearing. If there is a delay you will be notified.

Information and advice on how to submit your SAB appeal is on [the University website](#).

What if my academic appeal is still not resolved?

One external complaint option is to contact the [NSW Ombudsman](#). For local students, recommendations by the NSW Ombudsman are non-binding on the University, but you can usually expect them to be followed. For international students, federal government requirements mean the University is obliged to implement any decision or corrective action the NSW Ombudsman recommends.

The Ombudsman will only investigate complaints on limited types of conduct.

Useful tips for appeals

- Use email rather than phone calls or face-to-face conversations so that you have written documentation.
- If you have a face-to-face meeting, send an email summary of what you discussed as confirmation.

- Read your unit of study outline at the beginning of the semester so you understand the content and assessments. Familiarise yourself with the University's late penalties, as well as the process for simple extensions and special consideration.
- Make sure you receive sufficient feedback on each assessment task as you progress towards the final assessment of a unit.

Policies

- [University of Sydney \(Student Academic Appeals\) Rule 2021](#)
- [Coursework Policy 2021](#)
- [Assessment Procedures 2011](#)
- [Student Complaints Procedures 2015](#)

Written by SUPRA Postgraduate Advocacy Service July 2023