

Q & A Related to Diploma Exam Weighting – August 2015

Q: What are the purposes of diploma exams?

A: The Grade 12 Diploma Examinations Program, established in 1984, has three main purposes:

1. to certify the level of individual student achievement in selected Grade 12 courses
2. to ensure that province-wide standards of achievement are maintained
3. to report individual and group results.

Q: Does a change to a 70/30 weighting increase or decrease the rigour associated to diploma exams?

A: The rigour of diploma exams remains high regardless of the weighting. All of the processes and standards that existed for diplomas worth 50% will remain. This includes working with teachers for each step in the process. Maintaining consistent standards is and will continue to be an important part of the diploma exam program.

Q: Will the change in weighting mean that diploma exam standards are being lowered?

A: The expectations for what students must learn remain the same. The same processes that give us high-quality diploma exams worth 50% will be in place for developing high-quality diploma exams worth 30%.

Q: Does a 70/30 change to weighting increase fairness to the students?

A: While Alberta's current diploma exams assess a significant number of outcomes in the provincial programs of study, they do not assess them all. 70/30 weighing puts more emphasis on classroom work and the school-awarded mark. Teachers work closely with students on a daily basis on the full range of learning outcomes in the provincial programs of study over a longer period of time. The 70/30 weighting reflects this, rather than relying so heavily on exams lasting only a few hours.

Q: Will some students be negatively impacted by this change?

A: There are some students who perform well on diploma exams. Alberta Education will ensure that all students are aware of the change in weighting so that students know the importance of working on their coursework year-round.

Q: If a student rewrites a diploma exam after September 1, 2015, will it be counted as 30% or as 50% of their final mark?

A: If the new diploma exam mark is higher, then the 70/30 weighting will be applied. For example, in June 2015, a student completed Biology 30 and received a 65% school-awarded mark and a 55% diploma exam mark. Based on the 50/50 weighting, the final mark was 60%. In January 2016, the student rewrites the diploma exam and the mark is 58%. Since the new diploma exam mark is higher than the previous diploma exam mark, the final mark will be calculated based on a 70/30 weighting of the highest school-awarded mark (65%) and the new higher 58% diploma exam mark. The final mark will be 63%.

However, if a student completed Biology 30 in June 2015 with a 60% school-awarded mark and an 80% diploma exam mark (with a 50/50 final mark of 70%) and then rewrote the diploma exam in January 2016 and achieved 85%, the 70/30 weighting would result in a final mark of 68%. The student's best overall mark is the mark from the 50/50 blend prior to September 1, 2015, so this is the mark that will be shown on the student's transcript.

Q: If a student re-takes a diploma course, having written the diploma exam prior to September 1, 2015, what weighting will be used?

A: If the new course mark is higher, then the 70/30 weighting will be applied. For example, in June 2015, a student completed Chemistry 30 and received a 65% school-awarded mark and a 55% diploma exam mark. Based on the 50/50 weighting, the final mark was 60%. The student re-takes the course and receives a mark of 80% in January 2016. Since the new school-awarded mark is higher than the previous school-awarded mark, the final mark will be calculated based on a 70/30 weighting of the 80% school-awarded mark and the 55% diploma exam mark. The final mark will be 73%.

However, if a student completed Chemistry 30 in June 2015 with a 60% school-awarded mark and a 80% diploma exam mark (with a 50/50 final mark of 70%) and then re-takes the course and achieves a 64%, the 70/30 weighting would result in a final mark of 69%. The student's best final mark is the mark derived from the 50/50 blend prior to September 1, 2015, so that is the mark that will be shown on the student's transcript.

Q: Will there be cases where students marks are still calculated using the 50/50 blend?

A: Yes, in cases where the course and diploma exam were completed before the 2015/2016 school year, if the 50/50 blend produces the highest final mark for the student, it will still be used. For example, in June 2015, a student completed Social Studies 30-2 and received a 60% school-awarded mark and an 80% diploma exam mark. Based on the 50/50 weighting, the final mark was 70%. The student retakes the course and the mark is 61% and also re-writes the diploma exam and the mark is 81% in January 2016. Based on a 70/30 weighting, the final mark would be 67%. Since the 50/50 blend in June 2015 was higher (70%), the final Social Studies 30-2 mark will be 70%. Please note that the marks for courses and diploma exams competed after September 1, 2015 (61% and 81%) won't be blended using 50/50. Likewise, marks for courses and diploma exams competed before September 1, 2015 (60% and 80%) won't be re-blended using 70/30.

Q: How will summer students or year-round students be affected?

A: Students who completed diploma courses over summer 2015 and write diploma exams for the first time after the beginning of the 2015/2016 school year will have their marks weighted at 70/30.

Q: Can students who completed their coursework in the 2014/2015 school year write their diploma exam in the 2015/2016 school year?

A: Yes. Students writing diploma exams for the first time in the 2015/2016 school year will have their marks weighted at 70/30.

Q: What about adult students who wish to challenge the diploma exam?

A: This is still possible, and the process for this will not change.

Q: Other than reducing stress, what are some other benefits for students?

A: Graduation rates may increase and drop-out rates may decrease. There may be a reduced utilization of "test-prep" companies, and more students will be eligible for scholarships, like the Rutherford Scholarship.

Q: How will post-secondary institutions respond to a 70/30 change?

A: Post-secondary institutions set their admission rules and requirements. Post-secondary institutions accept transcripts from a wide variety of authorities throughout the world and respond accordingly.

Q: Will post-secondaries only look at the diploma exam marks for decisions related to admitting students?

A: Post-secondaries develop and apply their own admission rules and requirements.

Q: Does reducing the diploma exam weighting mean that post-secondaries will change/lower the mark needed to get into post-secondary programs?

A: This decision is up to each post-secondary institution.

Q: Will Alberta slip in its performance on international assessments, like PISA?

A: Alberta has various provincial assessments that help ensure that standards for learning are maintained. Some Canadian provinces do not have an equivalent to Alberta's diploma examinations (e.g., Ontario, Quebec) and perform well on national and international assessments.

For more information about diploma weighting, please refer to the Appendix in the Marks, Results and Appeals section of the 2015-2016 Diploma Exam [General Information Bulletin](#). If you have questions, please contact Deanna Shostak, Director of Diploma Programs, at Deanna.Shostak@gov.ab.ca or at 780-422-5160 (toll-free by first dialing 310-0000).