

What is a “reasonable attempt”?

A Guide for Students in CSE Subjects

Purpose of this Document

In all CSE subjects, the subject outline specifies that one of the requirements to pass is that you “*Submit a reasonable attempt at all items of assessment.*” This document helps students understand the main principles behind what counts as a “reasonable attempt.” It also assists both assessors and students in deciding whether a compulsory assessment satisfies the “reasonable attempt” standard needed to pass a subject.

This document is general in nature and does not replace specific guidance provided in the Subject Outline, Assessment Overview, marking rubric, or other information provided by a subject coordinator or lecturer. The Subject Outline and Assessment Overview remain the authoritative source of truth, and all decisions about what constitutes a reasonable attempt are ultimately at the discretion of the subject coordinator.

Principles of a Reasonable Attempt

A reasonable attempt refers to a submission of assessment that demonstrates significant engagement with the task and may include one or more of the following:

- a work that addresses each of the stated criteria in a defined marking rubric.
- a quality that demonstrates an attempt to meet the intended learning outcomes at a basic level.
- if the assessment has a length requirement (e.g. word/page count), a volume of at least 50% of maximum length or equivalent indicators.

Work will be considered to address the assessment criteria if the response contains all the following elements:

- relevance to the task
- makes use of appropriate concepts or materials
- goes beyond a superficial answer (refer to the table below for examples)
- includes relevant concepts, readings, and/or methods expected for the assessment as outlined in the assessment rubric, even if incomplete or limited in scope.

EXAMPLES OF SUPERFICIAL VS. MEANINGFUL RESPONSES ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Note: The following examples are illustrative only and are intended to demonstrate differences between superficial and meaningfully engaged responses. They are representative for questions specifically requiring a 1-sentence response—in many cases, a longer response (but of equivalent depth) will be expected. The examples do not represent minimum standards for a pass in all subjects or disciplines (even where the discipline is named below).

Field	Example question: In 1-2 sentences...	Superficial answer	Meaningful answer
Environmental Science	Describe one impact of climate change on coral reef ecosystems	“Climate change is bad for coral reefs.”	Rising sea surface temperatures contribute to coral bleaching, where corals expel their symbiotic algae (Jones et al., 2020).
Chemistry	Why is water considered a universal solvent?	Because it can solve many things.	Water is considered a universal solvent because its polar molecules can form hydrogen bonds with a wide range of solutes, enabling it to dissolve salts, sugars, and other polar substances (Smith, 2015).
Molecular Biology	Explain the role of enzymes in biochemical reactions.	Enzymes are important in reactions	Enzymes act as biological catalysts by lowering the activation energy of reactions. For example, amylase speeds up the breakdown of starch into glucose (Pink, 2026).
Engineering	Name one advantage of using composite materials in aircraft design.	Composites are better than metals	Composite materials are lighter than metals but maintain high tensile strength, improving fuel efficiency and load capacity in aircraft design (White, 2019)
Marine Science	What processes govern the transport and redistribution of sand in nearshore marine environments?	Waves and currents move sand around the coast.	Sand transport is controlled by wave orbital velocities, longshore currents, tidal flows, sediment grain-size dynamics, and seabed roughness, which together determine patterns of suspension, bedload movement, and shoreline morphodynamics.
Marine Biology	What factors most strongly determine coral survival during prolonged thermal stress events?	Corals survive heat stress if the water cools down and they are healthy	Coral survival during thermal stress depends on the interaction of host genotype, symbiont thermal tolerance, energetic reserves, and local environmental conditions, which together shape bleaching susceptibility, recovery capacity, and long-term resilience.
Zoology and Ecology	What drives variation in reproductive strategies among aquatic invertebrates?	Different species reproduce differently to suit their environment.	Reproductive strategies in marine invertebrates arise from trade-offs among offspring size, number, dispersal potential, and parental investment, shaped by selection pressures such as predation risk, resource availability, and habitat stability.
Aquaculture	What factors most strongly influence feed conversion efficiency in intensive finfish production systems?	Feed conversion is better when fish get good feed and grow well.	Feed conversion efficiency reflects interactions among diet formulation, feeding regime, water quality, stocking density, and fish physiology, all of which determine nutrient assimilation, metabolic costs, and growth efficiency.
Veterinary Science	What factors determine the severity of clinical disease in livestock during a viral infection?	Disease is worse when the virus is strong and the animals are weak.	Clinical severity results from interactions among viral virulence, host immune competence, co-infections, environmental stressors, and management practices, which collectively influence pathogen load, immune response dynamics, and overall disease outcomes.
Geology	What controls the rate of chemical weathering in silicate rocks?	Chemical weathering happens faster when there is more water and higher temperatures.	Chemical weathering rates in silicate rocks are governed by mineralogy, temperature–moisture regimes, surface area, and fluid chemistry, which together regulate dissolution kinetics and the production of secondary minerals.
Information Technology	What is one advantage of using version control systems in software development?	Version control helps manage code changes.	Version control systems such as Git allow developers to track changes to code over time, collaborate safely, and revert to earlier versions if errors occur. This supports parallel development, reduces the risk of accidental data loss, and improves accountability in team-based software projects.