

The University of Sydney

Faculty of Health Sciences Graduate Studies Committee

Guidelines for Candidates & Markers

Masters Coursework Honours Dissertations

Version 2, 21/3/01

General Comments

1. Masters Coursework Honours dissertations may take many forms: an empirical investigation using quantitative or qualitative methods and reported in a traditional dissertation format; a journal article; a literature review; a theoretical thesis; a research proposal; or another acceptable format.
2. These guidelines have been designed to be applicable to as many formats as possible. However, not all conceivable formats can be covered. Candidates and markers should use their common sense in following the spirit of the guidelines.
3. The guidelines are based on the work of Biggs (1999), and follow an hierarchical taxonomy of mastery. A summary is given below.

Using the Guidelines

1. The table overleaf provides criteria for marking facets of a project. A column is devoted to each facet. Some facets are not relevant to some projects.
2. Candidates and their supervisors should nominate which columns are to be used to evaluate a dissertation. ***This information should be included with the dissertation.*** Candidates and their supervisors must be prepared to justify their choice of columns.
3. A standard empirical dissertation would be evaluated under all five columns. A literature review would be evaluated under columns 1 & 5. A theoretical dissertation would normally be evaluated under columns 1, 4 & 5. A research proposal would be evaluated under columns 1, 2 & 5.
4. Markers should attach less weight to column 5 than to the other columns.
5. Markers should use common sense in deciding how rigidly to apply the criteria. For example, given the limitations on the length of a dissertation, a format which is to be evaluated under all five columns should not be expected to have as much detail in sections relevant to any one column as would a dissertation that was to be evaluated principally under that column. ***Please follow the spirit of the guidelines rather than the rigid letter.***
6. Candidates who elect to submit their dissertation in the form of a journal article must (i) nominate the journal whose format they are following, & (ii) include with their dissertation a copy of the 'Instructions to Authors' page from that journal. Markers will take into account, under the criteria of 'Presentation', the candidate's ability to follow the journal's instructions.

Biggs Stages

<i>Prestructural:</i>	A stage characterised by the lack of any coherent grasp of the material. Isolated facts or skill elements may be acquired.
<i>Unistructural:</i>	A stage in which a single relevant aspect of the material or skill may be mastered.
<i>Multistructural:</i>	A stage in which several relevant aspects of the material or skills are mastered separately.
<i>Relational:</i>	A stage in which the several relevant aspects of the material or skills which have been mastered are integrated into a theoretical structure.
<i>Extended Abstract:</i>	The stage of 'expertise' in which the material is mastered both within its integrated structure, and in relation to other knowledge domains, thus enabling the student to theorise about the domain. This stage is sometimes known as 'helicopter vision'.

Reference: Biggs, J. (1999). What the student does: teaching for enhanced learning. *Higher Education Research & Development*. 18 (1) 57-75.

Guidelines for Candidates & Markers - Masters Coursework Honours Dissertations

GRADE	Introduction/Literature Review	Research Plan/Design/Proposal	Results	Discussion/Theoretical Analysis	Presentation
High Distinction 85-100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Review of literature is comprehensive -Shows a high level of abstraction & reflection -Student is able to relate material to other knowledge domains -Review critiques well, and may resolve, theoretical and/or empirical problems -May show evidence of creative or innovative conceptualisation -Discussion is integrated into a logical, coherent whole -Creates a sense of mastery of literature and relevant technical issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Design elegantly addresses research aims -Sense of imaginativeness in choice of methods -Awareness of methodological pitfalls -Choice of materials and subject selection are appropriate and are properly justified within the viable scope of the study -Explanations of procedure and analysis are detailed, clear, complete & ethical -Flows logically from issues raised in Introduction/ Literature Review -Setting-out follows acceptable conventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Presentation is as succinct as possible, -All relevant information is presented -All relevant analyses are clearly presented -Outcome of research aims/questions hypotheses is clearly explained -Results follow a reasoned sequence which shows abstract and reflective understanding of the research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -High level of abstraction & reflection displayed -Reconceptualisation of ideas occurs -A sense of mastery of issues is created -Information is generalised beyond the immediate context -It creatively combines new with old conceptions, based on evidence -Implications of research are discussed imaginatively -Uses limitations of existing knowledge to suggest new possibilities -It locates inquiry in a larger context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Presentation is orderly, clear and aids understanding in all sections of the report -Where appropriate, sections and sub-sections are used and are logically ordered -Expression is clear -Complex arguments are structured in an orderly way
Distinction 75-84	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Review is reasonably comprehensive -Evidence of abstraction and reflection -Some attempt to relate material to other knowledge domains -Review identifies and attempts to resolve theoretical puzzles -Essential content within the domain is successfully integrated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Criteria are those for HD except that -Individual sections are excellent, but the sense of logical continuity is uncertain -OR one section is abbreviated -OR a significant but solvable (non-fatal) problem exists -OR the plans are technically perfect, but are pedestrian and lack elegance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Criteria are those for HD except that -The report is unnecessarily wordy -OR expression is occasionally unclear -OR one or two aims/questions/hypotheses are not fully dealt with -OR a minor flaw exists in an otherwise insightful interpretation -OR the report is rather unimaginative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -It explores all necessary content -It argues well and clearly within issues but does not make higher-level abstractions -Minor omissions/errors flaw otherwise compelling argument -Sense of mastery of issues is uncertain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Criteria are those for HD except that -A notable number of trivial errors occur -OR some inappropriate conventions are followed -OR one section is flawed
Credit 65-74	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Review identifies and defines major issues -Clear arguments are developed within at least some major issues -Argument is strong on some issues but integrative analysis is unconvincing -Technical issues treated competently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Criteria are those for D except that -several sections lack detail -OR moderate but solvable flaws exist in the research plan -OR one research aim is not well met -OR setting out is somewhat flawed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Criteria are those for D except that -The report lacks some key details -OR the report is needlessly repetitive -OR some aims/questions/hypotheses are treated inadequately -OR one or two non-fatal errors occur -OR the report is confused in places 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Individual issues/outcomes are argued clearly and thoroughly BUT -integrative abstraction is absent -There may be several minor flaws in argument -Arguments tend to lack imagination -A sense of the larger context is missing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Criteria are those for D except that -Occasional large but non-fatal OR more frequent but minor errors occur -OR layout is a bit confusing but is comprehensible
Pass 50-64	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Review identifies some major issues -Comments are essentially descriptive -Minimal critical analysis is attempted OR analysis is shallow OR analysis is somewhat confused -Main focus is on concrete issues -Lack of integrating argument -Some technical expertise revealed -May have non-major factual errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Criteria are those for CR except that -all/most sections lack some details -OR several significant but solvable flaws exist in the research plan -OR only some research aims are fully met -OR setting-out lacks logical continuity, though most major issues are covered -OR no analysis plan is reported -OR no imagination whatsoever is displayed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Criteria are those for CR except that -The report is totally unimaginative -OR some lesser aims/questions/hypotheses are not reported -OR setting-out is moderately unclear -OR several non-fatal errors occur -OR trivial inconsistencies occur -OR no attempt is made to justify several reported outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Arguments are correct/mostly correct but are rather limited in scope -OR there is little evidence of imagination -OR the effects of limitations of existing evidence/knowledge tend to be missed -OR some conclusions are missed AND -Some minor errors in logic occur -OR some key issues are ignored 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Criteria are those for CR except that -There is little coherence between sections -OR there are frequent non-fatal errors -OR layout is quite confusing -OR it is generally sloppy
Fail <50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Review skips or skirts essential issues -Poor understanding of key concepts -Isolated issues dealt with adequately but no evidence of synthesis -Creates a sense of fragmentation and incoherence -Comments are largely/entirely descriptive -May contain serious errors of fact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The plan is fatally flawed -OR the plan does not address key aims -OR major sections are omitted entirely -OR setting out is so eccentric that the plan is incomprehensible -OR the plan involves clear violation of the standards of ethical research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Key aims/questions/hypotheses are not reported -OR major conclusions are obviously wrong -OR serious inconsistencies appear in the report -OR the candidate clearly does not understand her/his/its research -OR fudging/hiding results is noted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The candidate appears to lack a coherent grasp of the material -OR major issues are not addressed -OR arguments are absent or illogical -OR expression is incomprehensible -OR flaws in existing knowledge/evidence are completely ignored -OR arguments are a clear distortion of existing knowledge/evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -It is incomprehensible -OR major errors occur in key sections -OR key sections are absent -OR there is evidence of plagiarism