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| C:\Users\CESA\Downloads\image002.jpg | **COMMERCIAL EDUCATION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA**  **PERIODIC DISCUSSION PAPER No.46[[1]](#footnote-1)\*** | **October**  **2022** |

**RESEARCH ASSESSMENT ISSUES:**

**SCHOLARLY REPORT/RESEARCH THESIS/DISSERTATION**

**ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES**

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**CESA Academic Dean**

**Introduction**

This document is a first attempt to try to help students in their initial research efforts, such as capstone projects. They frequently find the structure of such reports difficult and cannot interpret what it means to go more deeply into something that that they have already written.

Another motivation was that I have examined doctoral theses from three different universities in recent months, and the guidance is often quite vague; this can make the examination process unreliable. I have read dozens of such theses over many years and am aware of my likes and dislikes, but they may differ from the other examiners. The variability of marking schemes can contribute to the unreliability of the process especially when external examiners are engaged to safeguard standards of validity and levels of achievement.

Many of our members are research candidates for higher degrees and many are supervisors and advisors and external examiners for such degrees. The purpose of these guidelines is to attempt to improve the reliability of research degree examinations. It has been prompted from acting as external examiner for many different universities with seemingly quite different expectations for the HDR assessment processes. Thus, these suggestions are intended for discussion among candidates, supervisors and examiners.

**Further Issues**

The capstone report or the doctoral/master thesis or dissertation may be minor or major, depending on its proportion within the tasks of the degree. In some doctoral degrees, it is the only examinable part of the total degree. It can be the most formidable task encountered by candidates, substantially more than other tasks. For that reason, it can require more explanation of how it is going to be judged: usually by 3 examiners, of whom at least 2 will be external to the college or university in which the candidate is enrolled.

Moreover, students often find it vague if they are asked to go more deeply, or more broadly, into particular sections of their writing, and to avoid any unnecessary repetition.

In any project there are six parts which have to be considered so that the research at whatever level can fit into the systematic development of a report.

Figure 1: Six parts of the narrative

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| **A Marking Scheme** | | | | |
| **Marking schemes vary considerably from university to university.**  **In some countries, such marking schemes are still quite a novelty. Until recently, in Australia and New Zealand they were often very simple: generally, just “Pass/Resubmit/Fail!”** | **Rank** | **Range** | **Grade** | **Comment** |
| **1** | **85-100** | **High Distinction** | **Excellent** |
| 2 | 75-84 | Distinction | Very Good |
| 3 | 65-74 | Credit | Good |
| 4 | 50-64 | Pass | Average |
| **5** | **<50** | **Fail** | **Below Average** |

**Topic**

* **Title**
* **Aim**
* **Problem**
* **Scope**
* **Focus**
* **Limits**

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| **1** | * **Excellent explanation of theoretical link between title and topic.** * **Nature, scope and limitations of the report or thesis clearly formulated.** * **Candidate obviously understands and appreciates the place of the problem in the general research within the field of discourse.** * **Prose is crisp and clear, well composed, and the aims are precisely argued.** |
| **2** | * **Well stated connection between thesis title and the research problem.** * **Introduction is above average – shows promise.** * **Candidate understands and appreciates the background to the problem.** * **Scope and range of the study is reasonably well explained.** |
| **3** | * **Adequately stated connection between thesis title and the research problem.** * **Introduction is a conventional attempt.** * **Candidate understands the background to the problem.** * **Scope and range of the study is reasonably well explained.** |
| **4** | * **Inadequate connection between thesis title and the research problem.** * **Introduction is vague.** * **Lack of clarity about the background to the problem.** * **Lack of clarity about the scope of the research in the thesis.** |
| **5** | * **Title of the report or thesis does not seem related to the research problem.** * **Introduction is confusing.** * **Unclear about the importance of the problem.** * **The reader is not guided about the structure of the report or thesis.** |

This attention to the topic relates to the report or thesis as a whole, even though there is an emphasis on how the thesis starts. While the doctoral selection process at a university will normally require an outline draft of the first chapter, that is,

* what the thesis is about,
* why the topic is important,
* how the research is going to be developed;

in practice, the first chapter is usually the final one that is actually refined, because the examiners will judge the thesis by how well the candidate has achieved the aims of the candidate as set out clearly in the introduction.

The remaining parts which follow here refer to the different parts of the report or thesis, which can be set out in a manner best suited to the nature of the research problem and the scope of the study as indicated in the introductory chapter. The thesis itself might be structured as follows:

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| 1. **Introduction** 2. **Literature Review** 3. **Analysis of the Problem** | 1. **Synthesis of a Solution** 2. **Application of the Solution** 3. **Concluding Comments** |

1. **IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH PROBLEM**

* **Basis of the problem**
* **Relevance of problem**
* **Importance of problem**
* **Rationale of the problem**
* **Gaps in the literature**
* **Critical issues**

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| **1** | * **The research problem is enunciated in an excellent clear manner.** * **The importance of the problem, and its context, are very clearly linked.** * **The causes of the problem and relevant references are clearly explained.** * **How the thesis will resolve the issues is clearly outlined.** |
| 2 | * **The research problem is very clearly enunciated.** * **The importance of the problem, and its context, are clearly linked.** * **The causes of the problem and relevant references are generally explained.** * **How the thesis will resolve the issues is generally outlined.** |
| 3 | * **The research problem is reasonably clearly enunciated.** * **The importance of the problem, and its context, are basically linked.** * **The causes of the problem and relevant references are partly explained.** * **How the thesis will resolve the issues is roughly outlined.** |
| 4 | * **The research problem is enunciated at a rudimentary level.** * **The importance of the problem, and its context, are generally linked.** * **The causes of the problem and relevant references are basically explained.** * **How the thesis will resolve the issues is attempted.** |
| **5** | * **The research problem is not clearly enunciated.** * **The importance of the problem, and its context, are not linked.** * **The causes of the problem and relevant references are not explained.** * **How the thesis will resolve the issues is only partially outlined.** |

1. **DESIGN & METHODOLOGY**

* **Review of relevant scholarship**
* **Presentation of research design**
* **Theoretical research methodology**
* **Convincing data collection plan**
* **Adequate data analysis strategy**
* **Validity, reliability and generalizability**

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| **1** | * **Explains very clearly how the methodology is appropriate for the problem.** * **Excellent review in critical depth of the relevant literature.** * **Secondary sources and quotations are extremely apt.** * **Theoretical evidence infuses very well justified arguments.** |
| **2** | * **Explains clearly how the methodology is appropriate for the problem.** * **Very good review in critical depth of the relevant literature.** * **Secondary sources and quotations are reasonably apt.** * **Theoretical evidence infuses well justified arguments.** |
| **3** | * **Explains how the methodology is appropriate for the problem.** * **Good review in some critical depth of the relevant literature.** * **Secondary sources and quotations are appropriate.** * **Theoretical evidence infuses arguments.** |
| **4** | * **Explains how the methodology relates to the details of the problem.** * **Reasonable review in some depth of the relevant literature.** * **Secondary sources are appropriate.** * **Theoretical and practical evidence supports arguments.** |
| **5** | * **Research methodology is insufficient for the problem.** * **No linking reasons for material in the review of the literature.** * **Secondary sources and quotations are inadequate.** * **Theoretical evidence not related to arguments, and poorly expressed.** |

1. **RELEVANCE OF RESULTS**

* **Presentation of results**
* **Examination of evidence**
* **Discussion of conclusions**
* **Suggestions for further research**

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| **1** | * **Sources are excellent in scope and used very logically.** * **Evidence is analysed in a sophisticated manner.** * **Precise and concise summaries of evidence.** * **Advanced scholarship and accurate summaries of results.** |
| 2 | * **Sources are very good in scope and used logically.** * **Evidence is analysed in a careful manner.** * **Precise and concise summaries of evidence.** * **Advanced scholarship and fairly accurate summaries of results.** |
| 3 | * **Sources are good in scope and used logically.** * **Evidence is analysed in a systematic manner.** * **Accurate and concise summaries of evidence.** * **Scholarly summaries of main results.** |
| 4 | * **Sources have a broad scope and used logically to support claims.** * **Evidence is reviewed in a sophisticated manner.** * **Accurate, but broad, summaries of evidence.** * **Reasonable summaries of results.** |
| **5** | * **Sources are limited in scope and relevance to topic.** * **Evidence does not support the claims.** * **Poor summaries of evidence in relations to aims of the study.** * **Little evidence of scholarly thinking.** |

1. **ACADEMIC LITERARY STYLE**

* **Writing style**
* **Editing**
* **Syntax**
* **Bibliography**
* **Tables**
* **Figures**

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| 1 | * Clear and concise, accurate and precise, logical and sequential language. * Excellent proof-reading. * Scholarly fluency in narrative. * Figures and tables are apt and well-integrated with the text. |
| 2 | * Concise, accurate and precise, logical and sequential language. * Very good proof-reading. * Fluency in narrative. * Figures and tables are apt and well-integrated with the text. |
| 3 | * Accurate and precise, logical and sequential language. * Good proof-reading. * Narrative wanders from the problem at times. * Figures and tables are reasonably apt and illuminate the text. |
| 4 | * The language is reasonably logical and sequential. * Room for improvement in proof-reading. * Repetition at times in the narrative. * Figures and tables are generally appropriate and illuminate the text. |
| 5 | * The language wanders away from the problem at hand. * Poor proof-reading. * Too much repetition in the narrative. * Figures and tables are not always related to the text. |

1. **PRESENTATION**

Many universities also require an oral presentation to staff and other candidates as a quality assurance mechanism before the report or thesis is presented for examination. A basic maxim for candidates is that “less is more”: do not try to cover too much material.

Many universities actually require the thesis to be examined orally in the presence of an appropriately selected panel who are experienced supervisors of research degrees. In either case, the candidates need to be aware of some of the issues in speaking to an audience. Some other universities utilise the oral examination (*viva voce*) as a quality control mechanism for marginal candidates. An advantage of the oral examination can be that the candidate learns of the result on that day, rather than having to endure a long wait while the Registrar chases external examiners.

Power-point presentations are also sometimes required at different stages of the candidature. Preparation for these is part of the teaching duties of their supervisors or advisors.

* **Oral presentation**
* **Power-points**
* **Planning**
* **Overview of thesis**

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| **1** | * **Candidate is confident with eye contact, answers questions simply & correctly.** * **Candidate provides excellent scholarly overview of the whole project.** * **Candidate provides a logical and coherent ‘road map’ of project.** * **Candidate explains range and scope of the thesis or report.** |
| **2** | * **Candidate is confident with awkward eye contact, answers questions correctly.** * **Candidate provides comprehensive overview of the whole project.** * **Candidate provides a logical and fairly coherent ‘road map’ of project.** * **Candidate explains range and limitations of the thesis or report.** |
| **3** | * **Candidate is confident, and answers questions correctly.** * **Candidate provides overview of the whole project.** * **Candidate provides a fairly logical and coherent ‘road map’ of project.** * **Candidate explains limitations of the thesis or report.** |
| **4** | * **Candidate is confident, but is hesitant with answers.** * **Candidate provides reasonable summary of the whole project.** * **Candidate provides a barely logical and coherent ‘road map’ of project.** * **Candidate is aware of the limitations of the thesis or report.** |
| **5** | * **Candidate lacks confidence in trying to answer questions correctly.** * **Candidate provides confused overview of the whole project.** * **Candidate provides a confusing ‘road map’ of project.** * **Candidate is unaware of the limitations of the thesis or report.** |

**Concluding Comments**

**Some further reading**

Muhammad Abid Saleem, Lynne Eagle, Naveed Akhtar & Allah Wasaya (2020) What do prospective students look for in higher degrees by research? A scale development study, Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 30:1, 45-65, DOI: [10.1080/08841241.2019.1678548](https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2019.1678548).

Clark, L. A., & Watson, D. (1995). Constructing validity: Basic issues in objective scale development. *Psychological Assessment*, *7*(3), 309–319. doi: 10.1037/1040-3590.7.3.309

Pham, H. T., & Starkey, L. (2016). Perceptions of higher education quality at three universities in Vietnam. *Quality Assurance in Education*, *24*(3), 369–393. doi: 10.1108/QAE-07-2014-0037

David Baume & Mantz Yorke (2002) The Reliability of Assessment by Portfolio on a Course to Develop and Accredit Teachers in Higher Education, Studies in Higher Education, 27:1, 7-25, DOI: [10.1080/03075070120099340](https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070120099340)

# [George D.Allen,](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S8755722303001819?via%3Dihub" \l "!) [M.Gaie Rubenfeld,](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S8755722303001819?via%3Dihub" \l "!) [Barbara K.Scheffer](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S8755722303001819?via%3Dihub" \l "!) (2004) Reliability of assessment of critical thinking [Journal of Professional Nursing](https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/journal-of-professional-nursing), 20:1, 15-22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2003.12.004>

1. **\* These papers are for internal discussion within CESA on topics related to the CESA Mission.** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)