

Masters Dissertation / Research Project Assessment Marking Criteria and Standards Information for students

Your Masters dissertation./ research project will be marked using an extensive list of criteria that will be graded in 5 Attainment Levels based on a set of standards. The standards are described for each attainment level. The criteria are presented in grid form below and are divided into **Holistic measure** and **Supplementary criteria**. These grids catalogue the assessment criteria and their associated ranking standards defined for each Attainment Level (1 to 5). These rubrics are designed to more fully explain each criterion and its associated ranking standard at each Attainment Level.

The **HOLISTIC MEASURE** grid will be used as an aid in the assessment of the dissertation / research project as a whole. In other words, it assesses the overall “reasoned argument or case” made, including the project design and execution. The dissertation / research project cannot be awarded an Attainment Level or mark above that given to the **Overall Holistic Attainment Level**, whatever the performance may be in the **SUPPLEMENTARY CRITERIA**. This reflects the importance of the overall argument, its coherence and consistency, integration and use of information to sustain cogent argument, logical progression and critical awareness and other relevant features for the entire work at this level. The Holistic Attainment Level will therefore direct and guide the examiner’s assessment of attainment levels for the **SUPPLEMENTARY CRITERIA**. The dissertation / research project should receive an Attainment Level for at least *three* of the **SUPPLEMENTARY CRITERIA** that match the **Overall Holistic Attainment Level** in order to be awarded that level. Fewer than three would mean the **Overall Holistic Attainment Level** below is to be awarded.

- **Holistic measure:** focuses on the overall “reasoned argument / case” including project design and execution. Your dissertation cannot be awarded an Attainment Level or mark above that given to this category, regardless of your attainment level in the supplementary criteria. The argument / case you develop will be judged on:
 - **internal consistency:** the extent to which ideas are presented coherently and with clear progression from research question through to conclusion
 - **use of information and/or evidence to sustain argument:** how and to what degree the information sourced from authorities in the field or evidence and / or data collected is integrated and used to sustain the argument
 - **demonstration of analytical and critical judgement:** the extent of reflective assessment & appraisal of:
 - strengths & limitations of previous work and/or own work
 - discipline paradigms and methodologies and their application to the research question
 - sources, data and findings
 - **quality of conclusions:** statement of the meaning and relevance of findings presented through linkage to other research and to theories prevalent in the field; statement of the validity of conclusions related to the data and their analysis; statement of the potentiality of findings in identifying a gap or advancing knowledge within the discipline
 - **originality and/or creativity and/or contribution to the field**

- **Supplementary *criteria*:** are designed to pick up specific features of the dissertation / research project which contribute to its overall merit. The dissertation / research project should receive an Attainment Level for three or more of these Supplementary criteria that matches the Attainment Level achieved in the Holistic measure in order to be awarded that level. Fewer than three would mean the Attainment Level below is to be awarded.

HOLISTIC MEASURE: ARGUMENT

When considering the dissertation from a holistic viewpoint you should focus on the following five criteria:

- ◆ *Internal consistency & reasoned argument*
- ◆ *Use of information and/or evidence to sustain argument*
- ◆ *Demonstration of analytical & critical judgement*¹
- ◆ *Quality of conclusions*
- ◆ *Originality and/or creativity*

Attainment level 1 (85-100%)	Attainment level 2 (75-84%)	Attainment level 3 (65-74%)	Attainment level 4 (50-64%)	Attainment level 5 (< 50%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ has internal consistency, fully addresses the research question(s) ▪ sophisticated, cogent argument, very clearly articulated & skilfully developed ▪ extensive information/evidence to support a sustained, coherent argument ▪ insightful, well-supported conclusions which flow logically from work presented ▪ sound, critical judgement in all aspects ▪ [if appropriate] significant, strongly justified recommendations ▪ [if appropriate] exceptional creativity/originality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ has internal consistency, addresses most of the research question(s) ▪ cogent argument, very clearly articulated & capably developed ▪ substantial information/evidence to support a coherent argument ▪ sound, well-supported conclusions which flow logically from work presented ▪ critical judgement in most aspects ▪ [if appropriate] some significant, well justified recommendations ▪ [if appropriate] a high degree of creativity/ originality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ has internal consistency, relates to research question(s) ▪ sound argument which is clearly articulated & developed ▪ uses information/evidence to support a rational argument ▪ conclusions logical & supported by work presented ▪ critical judgement in some aspects ▪ [if appropriate] relevant, well justified recommendations ▪ [if appropriate] creativity./ originality in some areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ has internal consistency, relates to research question(s) some weaknesses in integration ▪ satisfactory argument, with some inadequacies ▪ information/evidence but with weaknesses in use & integration ▪ conclusions generally valid & supported but with limited scope ▪ moderate critical judgement ▪ [if appropriate] relevant recommendations, but may not be well justified ▪ [if appropriate] limited creativity/originality 	<p>Does not meet minimum standards of Attainment Level 4</p>

¹ What to look for as evidence of analytical & critical judgement. Reflective assessment & appraisal of:

- strengths & limitations of previous work and/or the student's own work
- sources, data, methodologies, findings & conclusions
- discipline paradigms & research
- application of methodologies & paradigms to research question

SUPPLEMENTARY CRITERIA: STRUCTURE

Supplementary criteria	Attainment level 1 (85-100%)	Attainment level 2 (75-84%)	Attainment level 3 (65-74%)	Attainment level 4 (50-64%)	Attainment level 5 (< 50%)
<p>Research question(s) or basis for project</p> <p><i>Focus</i> <i>Rationale</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>very clear & specific</i> focus ▪ <i>explicit, precise, achievable</i> aims & objectives ▪ <i>full & convincing</i> justification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>clear & specific</i> focus ▪ <i>well-defined & achievable</i> aims & objectives ▪ <i>convincing</i> justification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>clear</i> focus ▪ <i>clear & achievable</i> aims & objectives ▪ <i>clear & justified</i> rationale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>clear</i> focus for research <i>in general</i> ▪ <i>appropriate</i> aims & objectives most of which are achievable ▪ <i>reasonable</i> justification 	<p align="center">Does not meet minimum standards of Attainment Level 4</p>
<p>Review of previous work (e.g. literature review)</p> <p><i>Range of reading</i> <i>Relevance to research question</i> <i>Critical evaluation or critique of previous work</i> <i>Positioning research within conceptual framework of the area/discipline(s)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>discerning</i> selection of literature <i>explicitly</i> related to project ▪ previous work <i>meticulously & critically</i> evaluated ▪ <i>compelling</i> account of the position of research or project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>comprehensive</i> reading & <i>literature is clearly related</i> to project ▪ evaluates previous work <i>comprehensively & critically</i> ▪ <i>strong</i> account of the position of research or project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>wide</i> reading that relates to project ▪ evaluates previous work <i>critically</i> ▪ <i>effective</i> account of the position of research or project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>satisfactory amount</i> of reading <i>mostly</i> related to project ▪ evaluates previous work <i>adequately</i> ▪ <i>satisfactory</i> account of the position of research or project 	<p align="center">Does not meet minimum standards of Attainment Level 4</p>
<p>Methodology</p> <p><i>Appreciation of methodological issues</i> <i>Rationale for chosen approach</i> <i>Reliability & validity of methods</i> <i>Awareness of strengths & weaknesses of methodology (e.g. amount of data)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>excellent</i> exposition of methodological issues ▪ <i>excellent & insightful</i> rationale for research approach & data collection methods ▪ <i>most reliable & valid</i> methods available <i>OR systematically</i> gathered <i>highly relevant</i> information ▪ <i>profound & extensive</i> critical awareness of the strengths & weaknesses of approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>very strong</i> exposition of methodological issues ▪ <i>comprehensive & persuasive</i> rationale for research approach & data collection methods ▪ <i>reliable & valid</i> methods <i>OR highly relevant</i> information ▪ <i>deep</i> awareness of the strengths & weaknesses of approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>sound</i> exposition of methodological issues ▪ <i>comprehensive</i> rationale for research approach & data collection methods ▪ <i>reliable</i> and/or <i>valid</i> methods <i>OR useful & appropriate</i> information ▪ awareness of strengths & weakness of approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>familiarity</i> with key methodological issues ▪ <i>adequate</i> rationale for research approach & data collection methods ▪ <i>appropriate</i> methods, but <i>without</i> full awareness of reliability & validity issues <i>OR appropriate</i> information ▪ <i>some</i> awareness of the strengths & weaknesses of the approach 	<p align="center">Does not meet minimum standards of Attainment Level 4</p>

Supplementary criteria	Attainment level 1 (85-100%)	Attainment level 2 (75-84%)	Attainment level 3 (65-74%)	Attainment level 4 (50-64%)	Attainment level 5 (< 50%)
<p>Analysis of data (=results, information and/or findings)</p> <p><i>Making sense of data</i> <i>Presenting data coherently, logically, clearly & succinctly</i> <i>Thorough, accurate & rigorous analysis of data</i> <i>Evaluation & application of theory</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ critically uses the best available analytical techniques & approaches, or creates new ones [if appropriate] ▪ outstanding presentation - coherent, logical, clear & succinct ▪ excellent analysis - thorough, accurate & rigorous ▪ outstanding evaluation & application of theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ uses the best available analytical techniques & approaches [if appropriate] ▪ coherent, logical, clear & succinct presentation ▪ very strong analysis - thorough, accurate & rigorous ▪ very strong evaluation & application of theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ valid analytical techniques & approaches [if appropriate] ▪ sound presentation - largely coherent, logical, clear and/or succinct ▪ systematic analysis - largely thorough, accurate and/or rigorous ▪ robust evaluation & application of theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ acceptable analytical techniques & approaches [if appropriate] ▪ acceptable presentation - may be coherent, logical, clear and/or succinct ▪ generally methodical analysis ▪ satisfactory evaluation & application of theory 	<p>Does not meet minimum standards of Attainment Level 4</p>
<p>Presentation & Communication</p> <p><i>Structure of material</i> <i>Clear appropriate & logical presentation of data/ findings (e.g. graphs, tables etc) [if appropriate]</i> <i>Presentation appropriate to purpose & audience (e.g. uses academic language for an academic audience, or business language & conventions for a report to business etc)</i> <i>Referencing</i> <i>Use of language</i> <i>Spelling & grammar</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ outstanding logical flow & cohesion ▪ data/findings presented astutely, creatively & effectively ▪ uses visual presentation to maximum effect ▪ the best presentation approach for purpose & audience ▪ appropriate & consistent in-text referencing ▪ accurate & complete reference list ▪ appropriate language, clear, accurate & to maximum effect ▪ outstanding command of grammar & spelling; editing is thorough 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ very good logical flow & cohesion ▪ data/findings presented discerningly & effectively ▪ uses visual presentation successfully ▪ effective & appropriate presentation approaches for purpose & audience ▪ appropriate & consistent in-text referencing ▪ accurate & complete reference list ▪ appropriate language, clear, accurate & effective ▪ excellent command of grammar & spelling; very few typos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ good logical flow & cohesion ▪ data/findings presented effectively for the most part ▪ uses visual presentation capably ▪ appropriate presentation approaches for purpose & audience ▪ appropriate & consistent in-text referencing ▪ accurate & complete reference list ▪ appropriate language, clear & accurate but with some errors ▪ very good command of grammar & spelling; some typos present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ most sections have logical flow & cohesion ▪ data/findings presented competently, with some areas needing improvement ▪ uses visual presentation satisfactorily ▪ adequate presentation approaches for purpose & audience ▪ appropriate & consistent in-text referencing ▪ some inconsistencies and/or omissions in reference list ▪ appropriate language, clear & accurate but with significant errors ▪ good command of grammar & spelling, but several typos 	<p>Does not meet minimum standards of Attainment Level 4</p>

Supplementary criteria	Attainment level 1 (85-100%)	Attainment level 2 (75-84%)	Attainment level 3 (65-74%)	Attainment level 4 (50-64%)	Attainment level 5 (< 50%)
<p>(Optional) Contribution to the field (relative to the limited time available for the research or project)</p> <p>Exploration of the limits & strengths of current knowledge OR Contribution to development of current theory, research or practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meticulous, substantial exploration of limits & strengths <p style="text-align: center;">AND/OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Far reaching contribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Substantial exploration of limits & strengths <p style="text-align: center;">AND/OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant contribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explores limits of current knowledge in some areas <p style="text-align: center;">AND/OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moderate contribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Suitable review of current knowledge, with demonstrated awareness of limits in some areas; <p style="text-align: center;">AND/OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discernable but limited, contribution 	<p style="text-align: center;">Does not meet minimum standards of Attainment Level 4</p>
<p>(Optional) Acknowledgement of ethical issues/aspects of the work [if appropriate] e.g. of data collection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ very highly developed awareness & appreciation of ethical issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ thoroughly developed awareness of ethical issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ well developed sense of ethical issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ some sense of ethical issues 	<p style="text-align: center;">Does not meet minimum standards of Attainment Level 4</p>