



SUBMISSION TO SENATE

Faculty	RESEARCH AND INTERNATIONALISATION		
Department	UJ Postgraduate School		
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ITEM TITLE	Guidelines for the Assessment of a Doctoral Thesis and a Master's Dissertation		
RECOMMENDATION:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is recommended that the proposed guidelines for external examiners be used for the development of individual guidelines as needed per faculty or discipline. 			
MOTIVATION:			
<p>It was recommended by the SHDC that a proposed guideline be developed for the assessment of theses and dissertations done according to the article and essay format.</p> <p>Background</p> <p>On 6 November 2014 the SHDC considered all the revised templates relevant to Higher Degrees and Postgraduate Studies. These templates were used as the basis for the proposed assessment guidelines attached to this document. Subsequent to this, the draft guidelines were presented at SHDC and several iterations of feedback received from the various faculties, were included. The assessment guidelines are in line with the <i>Higher Degrees Policy and/or the Higher Degrees: Administration Structures and Processes</i>. The updated guideline document was supported and recommended to the Senate. Based on decisions made by the Senate of 15 November 2018, the following final changes were incorporated:</p> <p>The Guidelines for the Assessment of a Doctoral Thesis, was referred back by Senate to the SHDC for further discussion, with the advice that the following additional proposed amendment should be considered, after which it should be re-submitted to the next Senate meeting: "<i>To add an option that an independent person/structure within the faculty or department in the University might confirm that major changes had been made to the thesis or dissertation without sending it back to the examiner</i>".</p> <p>The Guidelines for the Assessment of a <u>Doctoral Thesis</u> was amended at the SHDC meeting of 20 November 2018 in terms of the four recommendations on the final assessment outcome. The Guidelines for the Assessment of <u>Master's Dissertation</u> was amended in terms of the final assessment outcome whereby the fifth option was deleted.</p> <p>The SHDC meeting of 6 March 2019 reviewed the documents finally and all the changes are indicated in red in the attached Annexures.</p>			
Annexure(s) (if any)	Annexure A Guidelines for Assessment of a Doctoral Thesis Annexure B Guidelines for Assessment of a Masters Dissertation		
Date of implementation	When approved by Senate		

1.	SHDC	2 August 2017
2.	SHDC	9 October 2017
3.	SHDC	20 November 2017
4.	SHDC	30 January 2018
5.	SHDC	19 March 2018
6.	SHDC	11 April 2018

7	SENATE	15 November 2018
8	SHDC	20 November 2018
8	SHDC	6 March 2019
9	SENATE	14 March 2019

Prof Motala
6 March 2019

TEMPLATE FOR GUIDELINES FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF A DOCTORAL THESIS



ASSESSING A DOCTORAL THESIS

1. BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR A DOCTORAL THESIS

A doctoral thesis utilises a self-directed research project in order to achieve the objective of the qualification and requires the candidate to undertake research at the most advanced academic levels. The doctoral thesis makes a significant and original contribution to the body of knowledge in the discipline or field. The output of a doctoral degree takes the form either of a conventional thesis or a thesis by collection of essays or articles, as governed by the UJ Guidelines on Theses or Dissertations in Article or Essay Format ([URL to be provided](#)) through which the student reports on the various aspects of the research project.

The submitted thesis (in whole or in part) must not have been submitted elsewhere previously or concurrently for a formal qualification.

The thesis should be assessed with reference to the *UJ Higher Degrees Policy* and *UJ Higher Degrees Administration: Structures and Processes* that are available at [\(URL to be provided\)](#)

2. ASSESSOR'S DUTIES

The assessor can indicate whether or not they want their identity to be disclosed. The supervisor and/or the non-assessing chair share the contents of an assessor's report with the candidate. The identity of the external assessors will only be disclosed after the finalization of the outcomes if permission has been granted for this by the particular external examiner.

Acceptance of the assessment task does not give the assessor the right to insist on significant or substantive changes to the goals, focus or methodology of the study, as this would effectively be insisting that a fundamentally different thesis be produced. The goal is to assess the thesis against the broad conceptual framework in which the thesis was produced. Assessors may not request any colleague or other expert to assist in the evaluation of any part of the thesis.

The assessor may request to receive the thesis as a hardcopy in addition to the electronic copy supplied. An external assessor may request an oral examination of a thesis when advised by the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee when this is compulsory within the faculty or when the FHDC recommends this in a specific case. Where the external assessor deems it necessary they might provide a substantiated recommendation that will be considered by the FHDC.

If the assessor requires further information concerning the thesis or the assessment process, they are encouraged to contact the Head of Faculty Administration.

3. THE NARRATIVE REPORT

Assessors should report on the aspects of the candidate's work, with particular reference to the requirements spelt out below:

- Has the candidate made an original contribution to the body of knowledge in the particular discipline? (This is a requirement for a doctoral study.)
- Is the study presented in a coherent and integrated format?
- Has the delimitation of the field of study been done?
- Is there a statement of aims which presents the problem to be resolved or investigated?
- Has the candidate demonstrated his/her mastery of research methodology and techniques?
- Are the findings a logical outcome of the analysis of the data?
- Is the general layout and flow of information (division into chapters etc.) logically structured?
- Has the candidate shown a capacity to use, evaluate and where necessary refute existing opinions in the field? Does he/she come to responsible conclusions that suggest satisfactory, evidence-based, personal insights in the field?

Individual colleges, faculties, schools or departments may have specific formats for such a report.

3.1 FORMAL ASPECTS

While formal aspects are important, a candidate should not be unduly penalised for shortcomings unless these shortcomings are so serious that they impede comprehension or seriously undermine the academic quality of the work. The assessor should consider the following:

- The text should be written in clear and precise language in a predominantly argumentative writing style.
- The text should be structured into logical, cohesive sections that flow coherently.
- When used, lists should be introduced, discussed and accounted for and should be functional.
- The language should remain scholarly throughout and the student should refrain from using bureaucratic language and/or informal registers.
- Visual components of the text, including figures, tables, photographs and diagrams, should be discussed and integrated into the verbal text.
- Content lists, lists of figures, tables, diagrams and multimedia texts/illustrations should be systematic and meticulous.
- The text should have been edited carefully and thoroughly. Are the language (syntax, style, etc.) and presentation (proof-reading, layout, use of appendices, etc.) of a satisfactory standard?
- References should be comprehensive and accurate.

3.2 OTHER ACADEMIC ASPECTS

Assessors should apply their mind to the overall academic merit of the work as a doctoral thesis within the specified field. In particular, an assessor should consider the questions below:

- Is the thesis worthy of publication in part or as a whole, or would it be after some minor repackaging or revision?
- Are there any specific matters that, in your opinion, require correction, amendment or revision? Please furnish details in your narrative report, and be clear about the nature and scope of any corrections that you think are required.
- Is the thesis worthy of publication in part or as a whole, or would it be after some minor repackaging or revision?

3.3 THESIS AS A COLLECTION OF ARTICLES OR ESSAYS

In order for a candidate to produce a successful thesis in the form of a collection of article or essays, the chapters (articles or essays) need not necessarily follow a linear narrative format. Alternatively, the chapters could be self-contained contributions, which are linked thematically. The submission presented for assessment should, however, provide the overarching argument of the thesis with the articles or essays as elements or supporting evidence.

The articles or essays should thus have a common theme, even if this theme is broader than that in a traditional dissertation or thesis. A theme is much wider than a research question, and each article or essay would typically have its own research question. In some cases, the articles or essays would each explore different issues that are broadly related to that theme. The essays could also employ different methodologies and could be of different natures, e.g. one theoretical, one econometric and one using a different type of empirical methodology. The guidelines for minimum standards for articles presented for publication are published/outlined in the specific faculty guidelines that will be provided to the assessor.

Where prior publication has included co-authorship, the declaration must be included either that the portion included in the submission is the student's own contribution, or a clear indication of the nature and extent of contribution by other co-authors, so that this contribution can be excluded from the assessment. Proof that an article or essay has been published should not affect the assessor's judgement regarding the quality of the thesis as a collection of articles or essays and does not guarantee that the thesis will be passed.

4. FINAL EVALUATION

As an assessor of a doctoral thesis it is not required to award a mark (grade), but instead is expected to recommend a final assessment outcome for the thesis on the Assessor's Report form supplied. The final assessment outcome may be one of four recommendations, namely:

- Approval of the thesis and that the doctoral degree be conferred, with or without minor editorial corrections;
- Provisional approval of the thesis, subject to the candidate effecting non-substantive corrections and improvements as identified in the assessor's report, to the satisfaction of the supervisor;
- Non-approval by the assessor due to substantial deficiencies in the thesis as identified in the assessor's report. Recommend that the substantial amendments be effected:
 - To the satisfaction of the SHDC (The FHDC's process may involve the advice from an internal/external independent expert.); or
 - The thesis to be re-submitted to the assessor for re-assessment.
- Reject the thesis, in which case no reassessment is recommended or considered.

If the assessor has written any comments or made corrections in the assessment copy of the thesis, this copy should please be returned to the Head of Faculty Administration together with the other documentation such as the Assessment Report form and narrative report.

5. INTERNAL PROCESSES TO FINALISE THE ASSESSMENT

In the event of different outcomes proposed by the assessors the necessary steps will be taken to resolve such a discrepancy as stipulated in the *Higher Degrees Policy and the Higher Degrees Administration: Structures and Processes*. The final decision on the assessment outcomes of a doctoral thesis is taken by the Senate Higher Degrees Committee.

Once the Senate Higher Degrees Committee has approved the assessment outcome and the candidate has made all the corrections and/or amendments proposed by the individual assessors, a finally bound copy of the doctoral thesis will be sent to the assessor for their personal use if it is requested. Theses are generally published via the Institutional Repository (IR) and made available as open access.

We thank the assessors for their valuable contribution to postgraduate assessment processes at the University of Johannesburg.

TEMPLATE FOR GUIDELINES FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF A MASTER'S DISSERTATION



ASSESSING A MASTER'S DISSERTATION

1. BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR A MASTER'S DISSERTATION

A master's degree is awarded on the basis of an advanced study in a given discipline and submission of a dissertation based on research undertaken in a particular field of study. The dissertation may consist of a traditional dissertation or a collection of articles or essays, as governed by the UJ Guidelines on Theses or Dissertations in Article or Essay Format ([URL to be provided](#)). When submitted as a collection of articles or essays, the format is altered but not the academic standard of the submission. This mode of presentation does not affect requirements concerning word count, or any other academically significant feature of the dissertation. The submitted document is the outcome of an advanced research programme within a particular disciplinary field.

The core output of a research master's degree is a dissertation in the form of a written document in an appropriate format (with or without an associated oral component), reporting on the various aspects of the research project; this accounts for 100% of the credits for the degree. The dissertation must provide proof of the candidate's capability to plan, carry out and report on a sound research endeavour. The candidate should demonstrate mastery of the selected research methodology and an understanding of the research processes.

The dissertation should be assessed with reference to the *UJ Higher Degrees Policy* and *UJ Higher Degrees Administration: Structures and Processes* that are available at ([URL to be provided](#))

2. THE ASSESSOR'S DUTIES

The assessor can indicate whether or not they want their identity to be disclosed. Acceptance of the assessment task does not give the assessor the right to insist on significant or substantial changes to the goals, focus or methodology of the study. The goal is to assess the dissertation against the broad conceptual framework in which it was produced. The assessor may request to receive the documentation as a hardcopy in addition to the electronic copy provided. The assessor may not delegate any aspect of the assessment process to any other person. An external assessor may request an oral examination of a dissertation when advised by the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee when this is ~~the~~ compulsory within the faculty or when the FHDC recommends this in a specific case. Where the external assessor deems it necessary they might provide a substantiated recommendation that will be considered by the FHDC.

If an assessor requires further information concerning the dissertation or the assessment process, they are encouraged to contact the Head of Faculty Administration.

3. THE NARRATIVE REPORT

The study should provide evidence that the student has advanced to a level of emergent scholarship. The final product of the study will thus reflect intellectual work that goes beyond the collation of literature content and empirical data. The assessor is requested to report on the aspects of the candidate's work, with particular reference to the requirements:

- Is the study presented in an integrated and coherent format?
- Has the study field been delimited?
- Is there a statement of aims which presents the research problem to be resolved or investigated?
- Has the candidate demonstrated his/her mastery of research methodology and techniques?
- Are the findings a logical outcome of the analysis of the evidence/data?
- Is the general layout and flow of information (division into chapters, etc.) logically structured?
- Has the candidate shown a capacity to use, evaluate and where necessary refute existing opinions in the field? Does he/she come to responsible conclusions that suggest satisfactory evidence-based personal insights in the field, commensurate with master's-level study?

Individual colleges, faculties, schools or departments may have specific formats for such a report.

3.1 FORMAL ASPECTS

While formal aspects are important, a candidate should not be unduly penalised unless there are shortcomings so serious that they impede comprehension or seriously undermine the academic quality of the work. The assessor should consider the following:

- The text should be written in clear and precise language in a predominantly argumentative writing style.
- The text should be structured into logical, cohesive sections that flow coherently.
- When used, lists should be introduced, discussed and accounted for and should be functional.
- The language should remain scholarly throughout and the student should refrain from using bureaucratic language and/or informal registers.
- Visual components of the text, including figures, tables, photographs and diagrams, should be discussed and integrated into the verbal text.
- Content lists, lists of figures, tables, diagrams and multimedia texts/illustrations should be systematic and meticulous.
- The text should have been edited carefully and thoroughly. Are the language (syntax, style, etc.) and presentation (proof-reading, layout, use of appendices, etc.) of a satisfactory standard?
- References should be comprehensive and accurate.

3.2 ACADEMIC ASPECTS

The assessor should apply their mind to the overall academic merit of the work as a master's dissertation within the specified field. In particular, the questions below should be considered:

- Is the dissertation worthy of publication in part or as a whole? A master's level study need not be original, even at distinction level, and thus this question should be understood as applying to the quality of the scholarship rather than the originality.
- What contribution does this dissertation make to the field of study? (Comments on these aspects would be helpful in the case of a master's dissertation that is under consideration for a distinction.)

3.3 DISSERTATION AS A COLLECTION OF ARTICLES OR ESSAYS

In order for a candidate to produce a successful dissertation in the form of a collection of article or essays, the chapters (articles or essays) need not necessarily follow a linear narrative format. Instead, the chapters could be self-contained contributions, which are linked thematically. The submission presented for assessment should, however, provide the overarching argument of the dissertation with the articles or essays as elements or supporting evidence.

The articles or essays should thus have a common theme, even if this theme is broader than that in a traditional dissertation or thesis. A theme is much wider than a research question, and each article or essay would typically have its own research question. In some cases, the articles or essays would each explore different issues that are broadly related to that theme. The essays could also employ different methodologies and could be of different natures, e.g. one theoretical, one econometric and one using a different type of empirical methodology. The guidelines for minimum standards for articles presented for are published/contained in the specific faculty guidelines that will be provided to the assessor.

Where ~~prior~~ publication has included co-authorship, the declaration must be included either that the portion included in the submission is the student's own contribution, or a clear indication of the nature and extent of contribution by other co-authors, so that this contribution can be excluded from the assessment. Proof that an article or essay has been published should not affect the assessor's judgement regarding the quality of the dissertation as a collection of articles or essays and does not guarantee that the dissertation will be passed.

4. FINALISING THE ASSESSMENT

An assessor of a master's dissertation is expected to recommend a final assessment outcome and award a mark (grade) for the dissertation on the Assessor's Report form supplied. The final assessment outcome may be one of five recommendations, namely:

- Approve the dissertation with no corrections to be made, and award a mark above 50%;
- Provisionally approve the dissertation with minor corrections to be done to the satisfaction of the supervisor and award a mark above 50%;
- Recommend substantial amendments to the dissertation without awarding a mark in the light of deficiencies identified in your narrative report and advise that the revised version be submitted to you for reassessment acknowledging the fact that your final mark will be capped at 50%; or
- Reject the dissertation, awarding a mark reflecting a fail (less than 50%) in which case no reassessment is recommended or considered;
- ~~Recommend an excellent dissertation for transfer from a master's to a doctoral registration.~~

The assessor will be requested to indicate on the assessment report form whether they oppose the award of a distinction mark in the event of them not having awarded a distinction where the other assessor(s) has awarded a distinction.

If the assessor has written any comments or made corrections in the assessment copy of the thesis, this copy should be returned to the Head of Faculty Administration together with the other documentation such as the Assessment Report form and narrative report.

5. INTERNAL PROCESS TO FINALISE THE ASSESSMENT

In the event of a large discrepancy between the marks allocated by the individual assessors or different outcomes proposed by them the necessary steps will be taken as stipulated in *the Higher Degrees Policy and the Higher Degrees Administration: Structures and Processes* to resolve such a discrepancy. The final decision on the

assessment outcomes is ratified by the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee.

Once the Senate Higher Degrees Committee has ratified the assessment results and the candidate has effected all the corrections and/or amendments proposed by the individual assessors, a finally bound copy of the dissertation will be sent to the assessor for personal use if requested. Dissertations are generally published via the Institutional Repository (IR) and available as open access.

We thank the assessors for their valuable contribution to postgraduate assessment processes at the University of Johannesburg.
