MSc HLST Dissertation

Guidelines

September 2016

1 Introduction

An MSc dissertation is the enduring written record of a substantial piece of academic work that is intended to demonstrate the ability to define and implement a project chosen to realise a specific aim through mastery of an advanced technical area. Although it is not a requirement of an MSc to advance the state of research with respect to the topic, it is most desirable to show evidence of innovation, for example by applying a known technique to a new problem, or developing a technique to extend solutions to an existing problem.

The dissertation is a story of a very particular kind in which all of these elements play a role. For the story to make sense, the order of presentation is crucial, the main idea being to have three main divisions which

- situate the work in its context;

- present the main technical content;

- discuss the results.

This document supplies some general guidelines as to how this can be done and to what is generally considered the norm in such scientific documents. It is a guideline - not a law. So it need not be followed to the letter. However, the spirit of it is more or less mandatory if the resulting dissertaion is to be scientifically acceptable.

The recommended length is 15-20,000 words, including diagrams. Additional material may be placed in appendices although this is generally not assessed by examiners.

2 Structure

2.1 Title Page

2.2 Abstract

300 words max summarising the main theme approach and results.

2.3 Declaration

2.4 Acknowledgements

2.5 Table of Contents

Most decent word processing systems will provide this automatically.

2.6 Introduction

- Guide to the problem

- Guide to the structure of the report

2.7 Aims and Objectives

Note that the **aim** sets out the *general* characteristics of the goal, whilst the **objectives** indicate what has to be carried out in order to realise the aim. The objectives embody the author's conception of how to achieve the aim. It is possible to imagine two different MScs having the same aim but very different objectives.

2.8 Background and Context

This section should include

- a summary of background knowledge required to understand the work presented

- relevant technologies;

- survey and assessment of current related work.

2.9 Main Contents

2.9.1 Design

2.9.2 Methodology

How you went about realising the design. In a software project, this might involve a description of key algorithms, or key classes from an OO perspective. In a more theoretical project, details of the methodology would show how the design goals have been reached.

2.9.3 Results

Besides results presented in a formal sense, this section might involve a description, illustration or demonstration of any artifact that produced as a result of the work.

2.10 Evaluation

2.10.1 Evaluation Criteria

All evaluation should be with respect to a set of previously established criteria. This is the place where these are set out.

2.10.2 Evaluation of Results

2.11 Conclusions

Essentially - this section expresses what has been learned.

2.11.1 Discussion of Results

Crucially, this should refer back to the list of objectives and assess the extent to which the original aims were met. A statement of achievements should be loud and clear, as well as shortcomings.

2.11.2 Future Work

Bearing in mind the results achieved, this section should make some concrete suggestions for future work. This should consist of a a long list of objectives that were not achieved due e.g. to lack of time. Rather, it should be viewed an opportunity to identify points of continuation, to potential future researchers, of the work initiated in this dissertation.

2.12 Bibliography

2.13 Appendices

3 Timetable

Month/Week	EVENT	COMMENT
Nov/wk3	Identification of Topic and Supervisor	This will involve getting to know the various specialities of lecturers in the Department. In the first instance go to Department website for this
Dec/wk1	1-page proposal	This is really just to substantiate the title, and should indicate a) main scientific issue and (b) deliverables. The basic format of such a proposal is to be found on the wiki
Jan/wk2	Inception Report	This document is intended to provide evidence of the student's engagement with the topic under investigation. It should be 3-5 pages long.
Feb/wk1	Seminar	The student gives a 30 minute seminar to staff and students with emphasis on the background, aims, and objectives of the project. The student is *not* expected to fully describe the solution
Jul/wk4	Submission	With the permission of the Supervisor, the student submits the final version (pdf) of the dissertation to the Department Secretary.
Aug/wk1–Sep/wk4	Viva Voce	The student gives a 30-40 minute presentation of the work to the Board of Examiners and responds to any questions from the Board of Examiners.

4 Notes

4.1 Length

Please note that according to regulation, the length of the dissertation is 15-20,000 words. AT 250 words per page, that is 60-80 pages in length.

4.2 Submission

- Official submission takes place with the permission of your local supervisor at the University of Malta. The version submitted is definitive from the point of view of content for grading purposes.

- Submission should be in the form of a pdf by email to the Departmental Secretary, who will arrange for distribution.

- The submitted document should be 1.5 spaced to facilitate comments

4.3 Extension

Requests for extension should be discussed in good time (4 weeks before deadline) with your local supervisor.