

## School of Communications 2009/2010

### Guidelines for students for academic theses and production projects on all taught programmes

This edition published 1 October 2009

#### Preparation

Every degree will be assigned a thesis / project co-ordinator who will guide students in choosing a topic, formulating a proposal, consulting a supervisor, clarifying research methods. There will be seminars timetabled for this purpose. Every student is required to make a presentation of their own topic and methods of research and to be present and to contribute to the discussion of the work of their classmates. Attendance and participation of all students is compulsory. This will be assessed on a pass/fail basis. Failure to present as scheduled and to participate in at least 75% of seminars will mean that you are ineligible to submit your thesis.

#### Choosing a topic

In choosing a topic many factors come into play, but at a preliminary stage the following are particularly important:

- interest: do you have sufficient interest in a subject area, theme, issue, or topic?
- ability: do you have the necessary skills?
- relevance: how relevant is the topic to what matters in the world? to your degree programme? to your career expectations?
- feasibility: is it possible to carry out all the work envisaged in the time available? are necessary resources available?
- visualisation: for image-based projects, can you envisage the final work and present a basic production schedule to achieve it?
- supervision: does your topic come within the academic expertise and professional experience of possible supervisors?

#### Consulting a supervisor

Students are advised to consult possible supervisors as early as possible. Early consultation for an agreed proposal will not guarantee that the lecturer consulted will be assigned to supervise the project, but it will be an important factor in deciding the ultimate allocation of supervisors. Once supervisors are assigned, you should arrange to consult them as necessary up until the deadline for submission or until 30 June, whichever comes first.

### Submitting a proposal

This should be done in a word document and e-mailed to thesis co-ordinator of your degree programme by the date specified. It should be in the following form:

name of student:

title:

type of proposal: academic thesis or production project

abstract: (300 words approximately)

methodology:

related literature: (where appropriate)

production schedule: (where appropriate)

technical requirements: (where appropriate)

supervisor consulted:

date:

Your email should include a return receipt to verify that your proposal has been received by the coordinator.

### Academic theses

Undergraduate research dissertations should be in the range 10,000 to 12,000 . Postgraduate research dissertations should be 12,000 to 20,000 words in length; but note that some degrees have more specific requirements (for instance, the MSc in Science Communications specifies 'about 15,000 words') so check with your supervisor. The thesis should be viewed as a major piece of independent research and its importance as such is reflected in the substantial weighting it carries in determining the final degree classification. Theses should show evidence of substantial research and original thought, particularly on the postgraduate level, where a higher standard of originality, investigation and reflection is expected.

For Multimedia (MMA) undergraduate students opting for an academic thesis as opposed to a production based thesis, research dissertations should be 15,000 words in length, reflecting the fact multimedia students have a full semester to prepare, research and write up their thesis.

### Components of academic theses

- conceptualisation - formulation of research question(s); aims and objectives, development of theoretical framework to conceptualise the problems or issues
- review of literature - articulation of state of the questions and identification of appropriate theoretical perspectives from a detailed review of the literature
- explanation of research methods - discussion of possible research procedures and a rationale for the methods chosen
- data collection - clear description of the research process undertaken to implement the research design, description, analysis and evaluation of findings
- reporting of results – linked to research objectives, and referring to key methodological issues outlined earlier
- analysis/discussion - effective presentation, discussion and synthesis of results
- conclusion - recommendations for future research
- presentation, layout - physical format of your work, clarity of writing style, effective use of images, tables, figures, charts diagrams etc., coherent use of argument, and critical analysis of evidence, in support of one's investigation

### Layout of thesis

page 1:

title  
"study submitted in part fulfilment of the requirement for the award of  
[title of degree]"  
author's name (s)  
date

page 2: signed declaration that this is your own original work and that all sources used have been cited

page 3: abstract (300 word summary of the whole study)

page 4: table of contents (chapters and sections) with page numbers

page 5: list of maps, diagrams, illustrations, etc with page numbers

page 6: acknowledgements

at end: appendices, bibliography, filmography

### Referencing

Be rigorous about acknowledging sources. The Harvard system is recommended for referencing. This is elaborated at [www.comms.dcu.ie/handbook/](http://www.comms.dcu.ie/handbook/) or in a publication entitled *Citing and Referencing: A Guide for Students* available for use or purchase at the library issue desk.

### Projects

These might be print or broadcast journalism, creative writing, photography, slideshows, websites, radio, video or multimedia productions. These must be comparable in depth and breadth to academic theses. They should take on a substantial theme and relate to the subject matter and skills of the degree programme in question.

All projects must be accompanied by a project report. It should be in the range 3000-6000 words. While many issues (below) are to be considered in this report, the central focus should be on documenting the intellectual work that was central to taking this production from conception to conclusion and a critical analysis of the issues involved.

The report should include detail of the original conception of the project and any subsequent changes in direction, the developmental process, the methods employed, the research undertaken into previous and related published coverage of the topic, selection of sources, the nature of the problems encountered and the solutions devised to meet them, and a rationale for the suitability of the chosen medium.

The report should cover these points:

- objectives: why did you pick this topic? what has been done in this field already (literature review)? what was it you were expecting to find out or convey that is new or different?
- format: why did you pick this medium and format? what is the intended publication and audience?
- method: how did you go about your research? what new material or information did you gather? what did you find out?
- process: what decisions did you make in relation to the production process? why did you make those decisions? what did you decide in relation to the concept, planning, budget, acquisition of material, selection and editing of material (images, sounds, quotes, interviews, archive etc),

scripting, final production or assembly? what obstacles did you encounter? what was easier or more difficult than you thought?

- production assessment: did this format suit your topic? did it *work* as radio (or whatever)? did you achieve something new or different? what problems arose? how did you solve them? did you achieve your objectives? did you learn anything new? would you do anything different next time? can you attach a full script?
- sources: can you give a full account of all sources (books, articles, internet, your own interviews, etc), if possible in such a way that quotes in the article or programme can easily be matched to the sources (consider using page references)? are there sources that are to remain anonymous? (if so they must be identified, but on a separate page which can be removed before the report goes to the library).
- conclusion: what can you say in relation to the overall scope, originality and style of your project? how is your work positioned in contemporary culture and critical discourse?

**The report MUST give a full account of all sources (books, articles, internet, your own interviews, etc), in such a way that quotes in the article or programme can easily be matched to the sources. Sufficient detail (including viable phone numbers) must be given that quotes can be authenticated.** If some sources are to remain anonymous in the published work, this must be explained and justified editorially in the report, and the sources must be identified and contact details given, but on a separate page which can be removed before the report goes to the Library.

The length of the project itself will depend on the format chosen and must be agreed by your supervisor.

A photographic project will normally be a minimum of 30 exhibition quality images.

A radio documentary will normally be 40-45 minutes.

Print journalism projects should be major pieces of journalistic work. This could be, for example, a 5-part investigative or feature series, a proposal for the design and content of a new magazine, journal or newspaper. Where the scope and depth of inquiry justifies it, a supervisor may approve a single investigative story.

A journalistic project must specify the newspaper(s), magazine(s), radio or TV slot(s) for which the student believes it to be most suitable. Whether written or recorded for broadcasting, it should demonstrate an ability to apply journalistic techniques: investigative reporting, incisive interviewing, editorial judgment, newspaper/magazine design.

For creative writing projects, including screenplays, radio or TV dramas, short story collections or novellas, the length depends on the overall aims and structural requirements of the work as agreed with your supervisor.

Where the project is submitted by a group, separate project reports are required from each student. Each report must document in detail the role played by each individual. The work done by each individual must be equivalent to that done by a student who submits an academic thesis or other individual project.

#### Format for all written theses / project reports

- A4 size paper
- 2cm margin at the top of the page, 1 cm margin on the right hand side and 2cm margin on the left to facilitate binding
- numbered pages
- copyright clearance for photographs, music, etc, if wider publication is likely
- photographs and related pictorial matter reproduced with sufficient clarity
- signed declaration

## Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious offence. It is the use of source material, thoughts or work product of another without properly attributing the work to that other person. Plagiarism is a violation of the university's disciplinary code. Cases of plagiarism may be sent directly to the disciplinary committee of the university. Sanctions for plagiarism are severe.

## Checklist for assessment of theses and projects

for all:

- is it of the right length?
- how is it visually presented?
- is it sufficiently conscientious work?
- is it well structured? is there a good sense of proportion?
- is there originality and flair in what has been written?
- is there any repetition or padding in evidence in the work?
- has it been properly proof read? are there any mistakes of spelling, grammar, punctuation?

for academic theses:

- is there a properly identified research focus?
- is there a coherent and logical argument presented?
- has the right type of literature been identified and critically discussed?
- are the research methods well chosen? have they been appropriately used?
- how well is the data formulated, analysed, interpreted?
- how good is the overall quality of the writing?

for projects:

- has the initial conception been developed to a successful conclusion ?
- does it meet the normal standards of the target publication or audience?
- if a creative writing project, how well are narrative, theme, characterisation, dialogue handled?

## Allocation of marks

source: school of communication student handbook

<http://www.comms.dcu.ie/handbook>

undergraduate:

first class honours (1) - 70% or above  
second class honours grade one (2:1) - 60-69%  
second class honours grade two (2:2) - 50-59%  
third class honours (3) – 40-49%  
fail - 39% or less

postgraduate:

first class honours (1) - 70% or above

second class honours (2) - 60-69%  
pass - 40-59%  
fail - 39% or less

### What the marks mean

#### a) academic theses

These are marked using the following criteria:

(80%+) This is work of an exceptional standard of original research, critical analysis and creative presentation.

(70%+) The work contains all relevant information and has a coherent, logical and precise argument. It also shows an awareness of the broad and more subtle implications of the issues. There is evidence of wide knowledge and reading, an understanding of the issues and a critical analysis including original and fresh insights into the problem.

(60-69%) The question is approached in a confident manner, the issues are identified, evidence and reading are used and some awareness of broader issues is displayed. There is some critical analysis, but it lacks the poise and fluency of a first class answer.

50-59%) There is solid work that grasps the material, but does not always recognise the broader implications. While it shows some intelligent application and understanding, it lacks a clear grasp of the level of critical analysis required.

(40-49%) This shows some basic knowledge, but there is difficulty in comprehending the material in general and the question in particular. Critical analysis and awareness of the broader implications and subtle issues in the debate are lacking. At the lower, barely adequate, end of the range, displays weak development of argument.

Fail (0-39%) There is little, if any, evidence of a grasp of the basic relevant material. It shows a simplistic approach to the question and shows no awareness of the issues and related debates. It is disorganized, and may be poorly written and proof-read. It does not bring to bear sufficient material or awareness of sources. It may contain errors of fact and understanding, and shows little evidence that serious work was carried out by the student.

#### b) projects

These are assessed according to technical, editorial and creative criteria appropriate to the medium chosen.

(80%+) This is work of an exceptional standard for the intended publication or audience, in terms of the material acquired and the style of presentation. It is accompanied by a correspondingly thoughtful and well organised project report.

(70%+) The work is ready for immediate publication or broadcast. Any flaws are very few and minor, and could be corrected in the normal editorial production process. Or it may be an outstanding project, with a less impressive project report.

(60-69%) The work either:

- contains substantial original material, and displays a very good understanding of the technical requirements of the medium, but contains a fairly significant flaw in its execution
- or
- displays a very good understanding of the technical requirements of the medium but lacks sufficient original material.

(50-59%) This is solid work that grasps the main technical requirements with more than one significant flaw, or incomplete acquisition of material. Shows a good appreciation of the requirements of the medium, and major shortcomings are fully addressed in the project report.

(40-49%) This is work that meets the basic requirements of the medium but does not reflect adequate effort or where there is adequate effort but significant technical and editorial flaws that are not addressed in the project report. Editorial flaws may include errors of fact or significant risk of libel or contempt of court.

fail (0-39%) This is the result of some combination of a lack of effort, inability to meet the technical and editorial requirements of the chosen medium and disregard for normal editorial, ethical or legal standards. This may also result from the presentation of a disorganised or incoherent project report for an otherwise adequate project.

Failure in the thesis or project cannot be compensated by high marks in other subjects, as the project forms a substantial proportion of the total marks for the award. A student may resubmit a failed thesis or project, but the initial failure will result in a degree classification capped at Third Class Honours (for BA/BSc) or capped at Pass (for MA/MSc).

### Deadlines

Many students have difficulties in meeting deadlines in relation to theses and projects, mainly due to inadequate preparation, leaving all or most of the substantial work to be done after taught courses and examinations have been completed. Almost without exception, the most successful theses/projects are those on which the student has been working continuously over the course of the academic year. Pressure of work is in no circumstances acceptable as a reason for delay in submitting the thesis/project. A student who believes that he or she may not be able to submit a thesis/project on time may seek an extension. However, extensions for submission of the thesis/project are accepted in a very limited number of circumstances, e.g. illness or family bereavement. Students must be able to verify the circumstances which have made the extension necessary, e.g. with independent professional assessment such as a doctor's certificate. Explanations for any delay must be submitted before the project deadline to the school secretary, who will time and date stamp it and pass it to the chair of the programme board.

### Submission procedures

Three copies of all work must be submitted to the school secretary on the day assigned. For theses and project reports, these must be one loose-leaf for binding and two soft-bound copies. A fee of 20 euro should accompany these copies to cover the cost of binding. An electronic copy of your thesis must also be e-mailed to your supervisor. Media projects should be clearly marked and in a format to be agreed with the supervisor and thesis co-ordinator. Radio projects should normally be supplied on CD (three copies).

### Results

The mark for your thesis / project will be communicated formally by the university as with all of your other results. The thesis / project cannot be discussed with examiners between the time of submission and the receipt of results. If you wish to receive comment on your thesis, you can contact your supervisor or thesis co-ordinator for your degree at that stage to receive an evaluation of your work.

### Publication

Students must not seek to have their thesis/project work published without the permission of their supervisor. This will normally be given only after marks have been issued.

These guidelines may be supplemented by more specific guidelines appropriate to each degree programme.