

Assessment of Research in Coursework Programs Guideline

Section 1 - Governing Policy

(1) This Guideline is governed by the [Assessment Policy](#) and [Assessment Procedure](#).

Section 2 - Scope of Guideline

(2) This Guideline applies to:

- a. Honours (End-on) programs undertaken after completion of an appropriate undergraduate Bachelors degree;
- b. Honours (Embedded) programs embedded in the third and fourth year of study at Bachelor level; and
- c. postgraduate coursework programs which have a research component.

Section 3 - Definitions

(3) The terms used in this Guideline are consistent with the [Glossary of Student and Course Terms](#). For this policy, the following definitions are also used:

Term	Definition
Thesis	means the output of research undertaken and may be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wholly in written form; or • creative work(s) in the form of a composition, performance, exhibition, or other approved work accompanied by a written critical analysis or exposition.
Research Project	means the output of research undertaken under the auspice of an assessment regime articulated in a unit outline and approved by Academic Board.

Section 4 - Characteristics of the Research Component of Coursework Programs

Honours Thesis

(4) The research component, in whatever form it takes, must be compliant with the [Australian Qualifications Framework](#) (AQF) Level 8 Specifications. At a minimum, it must comprise the following:

- a. a research proposal;
- b. a review of the literature or of previous creative material in the field;
- c. a description of relevant research methodology; and

- d. a record of the outcomes of the research.
- e. The Honours Thesis is typically one of the following as determined by the discipline:
 - i. manuscript between 12,000 and 15,000 words including footnotes, but excluding bibliography; or
 - ii. a creative work (composition, performance, exhibition, or other approved work), accompanied by a critical analysis and exposition of 6,000-7,500 words; or
 - iii. a wholly authored or significant contribution to a research article, suitable for submission to a journal with the word length dependent on the requirements of the specific journal accompanied by a literature review and an expanded methods section or discussion of methodology of 6,000-7,500 words.

Research Project - Masters

(5) Work with a value of a value of less than 40 credit points and not more than 20,000 words in length. The research component, in whatever form it takes, must be compliant with the [Australian Qualifications Framework](#) Level 9 Specifications. At a minimum, a research project must:

- a. demonstrate an understanding of the research process and scholarly conventions in the discipline;
- b. provide an ordered exposition of knowledge gained through the candidate's own efforts;
- c. involve research which is more limited in scope than a Thesis in that it should:
 - i. limit attention to a few main questions;
 - ii. keep data collection to a minimum;
 - iii. be able to be conducted in situations which are easily accessible to the candidate;
 - iv. involve a literature review which should place the study in its research context and be critical without claiming to be exhaustive;
 - v. may include speculation based on the findings, instead of aiming at generalisations grounded on the findings;
 - vi. demonstrate the candidate's ability to present the outcome of the study in a disciplined way that conforms to the scholarly conventions of the discipline;
 - vii. involve research the scope of which need not be a new line of development, but which shows that the candidate has mastered research and synthesis skills in producing a contribution to knowledge; and
 - viii. be presented in succinct formal English.

Thesis - Masters Coursework

(6) Work with a value of equal to or greater than 40 credit points and not more than 30,000 words in length. The research component, in whatever form it takes, must be compliant with the [Australian Qualifications Framework](#) Level 9 Specifications. At a minimum, a Masters level thesis undertaken in a coursework program must:

- a. demonstrate possession of advanced knowledge in a specialised field;
- b. show evidence of an original investigation and testing of hypotheses;
- c. show an ability to make critical use of published work and source materials as well as an appreciation of the relationship between the topic and the wider field of knowledge;
- d. demonstrate competence in independent work or experimentation and an understanding of the techniques and/or approaches which are appropriate to the research questions;
- e. involve research the scope of which need not be a new line of development, but which shows that the candidate has mastered research and synthesis skills in producing a contribution to knowledge;
- f. demonstrate the contribution to knowledge by drawing generalisations or further hypotheses for testing that are well grounded in the findings; and
- g. be presented in succinct formal English.

Section 5 - Supervision of the Research Component of Coursework Programs

Appointment of Supervisors

(7) The principal supervisor will be an ACU academic staff member appointed by the National Head of School or nominee. A co-supervisor may also be appointed.

(8) The academic staff involved in supervising students will hold at least one qualification level higher than the student and have the expertise to appropriately support the student through their program of research.

(9) Involvement in supervision by qualified non-academics, for example from industry, may be appropriate as co-supervisor.

Procedures for Supervisors

(10) The supervision of students enrolled will be conducted in a manner consistent with the best practice and expectations of quality supervision outlined in the [Higher Degree Research Supervision Policy](#).

Induction to Research

(11) The supervisor will provide students with an induction to relevant policies for the conduct of their research. This should be inclusive of each of the matters in Section 6 of this Guideline.

Section 6 - Conduct of the Research Component of Coursework Programs

Research environment

(12) Students will be provided with a collegial and productive learning environment, including a coordinated program of activity to integrate them into the learning environment.

Academic Integrity

(13) All students must familiarise themselves with the [Student Academic Integrity and Misconduct Policy](#) prior to commencing their program.

Research Code of Conduct

(14) All students undertaking the research component within a coursework program are required to comply with the [Research Code of Conduct](#). Where appropriate, students must obtain ethics clearance prior to commencing their program.

Ownership of Intellectual Property

(15) All students undertaking a research component within a coursework program are required to comply with the [Intellectual Property Policy](#) prior to commencing any data collection.

Research Progress

(16) Schools will monitor the student's performance through a structured process and will provide regular and

systematic feedback to students on their progress and performance.

Presentation of Research

(17) Students should periodically present their research and scholarship in modes determined by their School.

Section 7 - Criteria for Assessment of Thesis or Research Project

(18) Schools will develop explicit criteria for the assessment of Honours and coursework Masters research. Such criteria will include expected standards of performance in relation to:

- a. clarity of the aims and the demonstrated significance of the research;
- b. breadth and depth of the survey of relevant literature and evidence of appropriate critical understandings;
- c. design and use of appropriate methodology to provide relevant insights and/or data, or clear conception of form, structures and processes associated with creative practice;
- d. demonstration of critical analysis and perceptive scholarship to draw conclusions, or evidence of technical ability, facility with craft and critical awareness of relevant issues of aesthetics;
- e. evidence of research and theory-led studio practice for creative works;
- f. accuracy and clarity of the presentation of the thesis.

(19) All students and examiners will be provided with a clear statement of the criteria and standards.

Section 8 - Submission of the Research Project or Thesis for Examination

Thesis Format

(20) The Thesis will follow the discourse conventions of research in the discipline, however the typical structure will normally be as follows:

- a. Preliminary information:
 - i. title page;
 - ii. author declaration;
 - iii. abstract of no more than 500 words;
 - iv. table of contents;
 - v. list of all illustrations and diagrams.
- b. Body of the thesis:
 - i. review of the literature: systematic or narrative review, depending on the nature of the thesis;
 - ii. a description of relevant research methodology;
 - iii. the outcomes of the research.
- c. Appendices.

Submission

(21) A Thesis should:

- a. be submitted electronically including a digital copy or recording of any creative work;
- b. include a report from a text-matching software;
- c. include bound copy(ies) where required by the School; and
- d. be submitted to a deadline determined so that results will normally be finalised to enable students to apply for further study or scholarship such as an Australian Postgraduate Award (APA).

Postgraduate Coursework Research Projects

(22) On completion of the course of study and research, a candidate will submit a written report in the form of either a Research Report in the case of a Research Project, based on work carried out during the period of study and research.

Requests for Extension

(23) An Honours or Masters student may apply to the National Head of School or nominee for an extension to the submission date of a thesis or research project. The maximum extension which may be granted is 6 months. Requests for extension must be:

- a. made on or before the due date for submission; and
- b. must demonstrate and evidence exceptional circumstances which warrant the granting of an extension.

Section 9 - Examination of the Research Report or Thesis

Appointment of Examiners - Honours

(24) Every Honours thesis will be examined by two examiners appointed by the National Head of School or nominee. This may include one internal and one external examiner and will exclude the student's supervisor(s).

Appointment of Examiners - Postgraduate Coursework

(25) Examiners will be appointed by the National Head of School or nominee, after consultation with the supervisor.

(26) One or two examiners will be appointed for a Research Report. This may include one internal and one external examiner and will exclude the student's supervisor(s).

(27) Two examiners will be appointed for a Thesis - Masters. At least one examiner must be external to ACU and independent of the supervisor. A candidate's supervisor must not be appointed to be an examiner.

Assessment Framework for the Honours Thesis

(28) Examiners will be requested to provide a grade and numerical mark for the Honours Thesis, which will be calculated in accordance with the following:

Grade	Numerical Marks	Explanation
HD	85-100	Work of exceptional quality showing clear understanding of subject matter and appreciation of issues; well formulated; arguments clearly developed and sustained; relevant literature referenced; marked evidence of creative ability and high level of intellectual work. The thesis suggests excellent potential for future research work.
DI	75-84	Work of high quality showing strong grasp of subject matter and appreciation of dominant issues; arguments clearly developed; relevant literature referenced; evidence of creative ability. The thesis suggests high potential for future research work.

Grade	Numerical Marks	Explanation
CR	65-74	Work showing competent understanding of subject matter and appreciation of main issues; arguments developed and supported by references; some evidence of creative ability; well prepared and presented. The thesis suggests some potential for future research work.
PA	50-64	Adequate, but lacking breadth and depth; work generally has gaps; frequently work of this grade takes a simple factual approach and does not attempt to interpret the findings; at the lower end, indicates a need for considerable effort to achieve improvement. The thesis suggests limited potential for future research work.
NN	0-49	Unsatisfactory; demonstrates lack of understanding of the topic and inadequacy in degree of relevance and/or completeness. The thesis does not suggest potential for future research work.

Assessment Framework for the Research Report and Thesis - Masters

(29) Examiners should refer to:

- a. the Academic Grading Descriptors in the [Academic Regulations](#) to provide a grade for the Research Report; or
- b. the Academic Grading Descriptors in the [Academic Regulations](#) and the following to provide a grade and numerical mark for the Thesis – Masters:

Grade	Numerical Marks	Explanation
HD	85-100	The Thesis - Masters demonstrates a level of competence which suggests excellent potential for further research work
DI	75-84	With some strengthening of present competence, the Thesis - Masters suggests high potential for further research work
CR	65-74	The Thesis - Masters is a competent piece of work and suggests some potential for further research work
PA	60-64	The Thesis - Masters presented is an adequate piece of work and suggests limited potential for further research work
NN	0-49	The Thesis - Masters should not be passed

Examiners' Reports

(30) The examiners will examine the research report or thesis and make separate reports which will be submitted for consideration to the National Head of School or nominee. Each examiner's report will include a recommendation that the student:

- a. has met the research report or thesis requirements and has passed outright; or
- b. has passed the research report or thesis requirements, subject to minor changes, as recommended in the examiners' reports, being made to the satisfaction of the National Head of School or nominee acting on the advice of the supervisor; or
- c. be permitted to revise and resubmit the research report or thesis within an appropriate timeframe of no more than one semester full-time or equivalent part-time, as determined by the National Head of School or nominee, in consultation with the supervisor and in accordance with clauses (35) or (36); or
- d. has failed to meet the research report or thesis requirements.

Resolution of Significant Differences in Thesis Marks

(31) Where two examiners recommend results that are more than 15 marks apart or where only one examiner requires revisions, the National Head of School or nominee will appoint an external adjudicator who is not a person

who has been involved in the supervision or examination of the thesis.

(32) The adjudicator will be provided with the examiners' reports and the thesis and will recommend a mark based on the examiners' reports and the thesis.

Allocation of the Grade for the Honours Thesis

(33) The research report or thesis will be graded as submitted for examination and not based on a version produced after revisions have been made in the light of examiners' comments.

(34) Normally the grade of the Honours or Masters thesis will be calculated based on the average of the marks awarded by the examiners, unless an adjudicator has been appointed in which case the National Head of School may accept the adjudicator's recommendation of a final mark.

Revision and Resubmission - Honours

(35) The conditions for the revision and submission of an Honours thesis are:

- a. The re-submitted thesis will be re-marked by the examiner who requested the revision.
- b. Any student who is permitted to resubmit a thesis will not be awarded a class of honours higher than Third Class.
- c. No student will be permitted to submit the thesis for a third time.

Revision and Resubmission - Coursework Masters

(36) The conditions for the revision and submission of a research and submission of Research Report or Thesis - Masters are:

- a. The re-submitted report or thesis will be re-marked by the examiner who requested the revision.
- b. A candidate may be permitted to re-submit their Research Report or Thesis no more than once.
- c. Any student who is permitted to resubmit a Research Report or Thesis will not be awarded a grade higher than a Pass.
- d. A candidate who has been deemed to have failed to meet the Research Report or Thesis - Masters requirements by the examiner(s) and has failed outright shall not be permitted to re-submit for further examination.

Section 10 - Calculation of the Honours Level Classification

(37) The final Honours grade will be:

- a. calculated as the average of the marks obtained by the student in all units contributing to the honours program, including any approved cross-institutional units, weighted by the credit point value of each unit; and
- b. awarded in accordance with the table of Grading Codes contained in the [Academic Regulations](#).
- c. where cross institutional units employ a different marking schema to ACU, this will be taken into account.

Section 11 - Record Keeping

(38) The National Head of School or nominee will maintain written records of the criteria used for grading students' performance to facilitate comparability from year to year.

(39) Written records of the process followed in determining final grades for students will be maintained.

Section 12 - Review and Appeal

(40) The right of review and appeal against a decision under this Guideline will be in accordance with the [Student Appeals Policy](#).

Section 13 - Revisions Made to This Policy

(41) Unless otherwise indicated, this policy will still apply beyond the review date.

Section 14 - Associated Information

(42) For related legislation, policies, procedures and guidelines and any supporting resources please refer to the Associated Information tab.

Status and Details

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Effective Date	19th December 2023
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Approval Date	19th December 2023
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Responsible Executive	Julie Cogin Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
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