Dissertation workshop: The assessment criteria

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ASSESSMENT

The report is read independently by the project supervisor and a second member of staff (and, in some cases, by others). It must be self-contained and include all information relevant to the project since, in general, the readers will be unaware of the work undertaken, the difficulties encountered and the results obtained. The readers allocate a numerical mark after assessing the project work in terms of the following criteria:

BASIC CRITERIA

- Understanding of the problem
- Completion of the project ("Completion" covers achievement of the original objectives, achievement of modified objectives, or providing convincing evidence that the objectives are unachievable.)
- Quality of the work
- Quality of the report

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA

- Knowledge of the literature
- Critical evaluation of previous work
- Critical evaluation of own work
- Justification of the design decisions
- Solution of any conceptual problems
- Amount of work

EXCEPTIONAL CRITERIA

- Evidence of originality
- Inclusion of publishable material

Your project will be marked by your supervisor and a second marker. (Plus a “moderator”, if they disagree.) Marking is solely on the basis of your project report – if it isn’t in the report, it doesn’t count! The marking is according to these criteria. Take these into account when you write your report! They are in three groups: Basic, Additional, Exceptional.
Projects are marked according to the following classifications, which relate to the above criteria:

0-19: Bad Fail
   The project is inadequate on all of the basic criteria.

20-29: Clear Fail
   The project is inadequate on more than one of the basic criteria, but not all.

30-39: Marginal Fail
   The project is inadequate on one of the basic criteria.

40-49: III
   The project is adequate on all of the basic criteria.

50-59: II.2
   The project is at least average on all of the basic criteria and is average on most of the additional criteria.

60-69: II.1
   The project is at least good on all of the basic criteria and is at least average and sometimes good or excellent on all of the additional criteria.

70-79: Low I
   The project is good or excellent on all of the basic and additional criteria; or it almost achieves this by being average on only one of the additional criteria, and also has elements of the exceptional criteria.

80-89: High I
   The project is good or excellent on all of the basic and additional criteria and also has elements of the exceptional criteria.

90-100: Outstanding I
   The project is excellent on all of the basic and additional criteria, and has strong elements of the exceptional criteria.

Your mark depends on your score (N/A, Inadequate, Adequate, Average, Good, Excellent) on each of these criteria. The result is not calculated by a formula – these are guidelines, but they are taken seriously. Bottom line: you need to give the markers a reason to decide that you have performed well on these criteria!
To pass, you need to score at least Adequate on all of these criteria.
BASIC CRITERIA

- Understanding of the problem
- Completion of the project ("Completion" covers achievement of the original objectives, achievement of modified objectives, or providing convincing evidence that the objectives are unachievable.)
- Quality of the work
- Quality of the report

Start by clearly explaining in the introduction what the problem is that you are trying to solve. Understanding is also shown throughout the rest of the report, by the way that you attack the problem and by what you say about what you’ve done.
In the introduction and/or conclusion, compare what the objectives say with what you did. If the objectives were not achieved, explain why, especially if your work demonstrated that they are unachievable or overambitious. A score of Adequate does not necessarily require achievement of all of the objectives.

**BASIC CRITERIA**

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- Quality of the work
- Quality of the report
BASIC CRITERIA

- Understanding of the problem
- Completion of the project ("Completion" covers achievement of the original objectives, achievement of modified objectives, or providing convincing evidence that the objectives are unachievable.)
- Quality of the work
- Quality of the report

Robust bug-free software, well-designed experiments producing solid results, etc.
BASIC CRITERIA

- Understanding of the problem
- Completion of the project ("Completion" covers achievement of the original objectives, achievement of modified objectives, or providing convincing evidence that the objectives are unachievable.)
- Quality of the work
- Quality of the report

Take care with structure, content, grammar, spelling. Proofread! Including checking that your final changes didn’t screw up something in the submission version.
Let’s assume you score at least Adequate on the Basic Criteria. Then, how well you score on the Additional Criteria, and your scores on the Basic Criteria above Adequate, determines whether your mark is in the range I, II.1, II.2, or III.

What you need to do for most of these depends on your project. If in doubt, ask your supervisor!
Determined mainly by your bibliography (extent and quality) and the accuracy of what you say about these sources. Look at the notes in http://www.inf.ed.ac.uk/teaching/courses/proj/bibliography.html
There is no excuse for being sloppy here!

EXAMPLE: 83 references in Bajaj’s 2016 report. Gives web links. Should have also given journal/conference sources.
Determined mainly by your review of previous work. Not just what they did, but what was good, what was lacking. Justify! Often, the point of your work is that you hope to improve on something that is lacking in previous work.

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA

- Knowledge of the literature
- Critical evaluation of previous work
- Critical evaluation of own work
- Justification of the design decisions
- Solution of any conceptual problems
- Amount of work
Not just “I did this, isn’t it great?” rather “I built this, here’s why it’s great”.
- For software-building project, measures of quality (e.g. efficiency, perhaps compared with existing solution).
- For HCI-oriented project, often user trials, with proper analysis of results.
- For experimental work, probably analysis of results.
- For theoretical work, often proofs of theorems.

EXAMPLE: presentation of simulation results in Lamb’s 2016 report.
EXAMPLE: user trials in Bajaj’s 2016 report.
Not just “Here’s how I did this” rather “Here’s why I did this the way I did”.

- Software building project: present engineering choices, advantages and disadvantages of alternatives, justify your choices.
- Experimental project: consider alternatives for the design of your experiments, justify your choices.
- Theoretical project: justify the choice of your definitions and results (but not definitions/results that are not yours).

EXAMPLE: explanation of choice of development framework at beginning of Sect. 4.1 of Bajaj’s 2016 report.
Easy projects may have no significant conceptual problems. Or maybe they do, but they come from going well beyond a basic solution or attacking challenging extensions. More challenging projects offer much more scope for solving conceptual problems. Sometimes, understanding a complicated framework or language/notation amounts to solving conceptual problems. Explain what the conceptual problems are, what you did about them.
Try include all of your work. Emphasise the main achievements in the introduction (bulleted list). Include also paths you followed that didn’t work out, if substantial, especially if failure is due to circumstances beyond your control.
Most projects will not score well on these because there is little scope for originality or publication. For projects that do well on the Additional Criteria, these are used to decide scores in the 70-100 range. If you don’t do well on the Additional Criteria, they don’t really count for much.

**EXCEPTIONAL CRITERIA**

- Evidence of originality
- Outstanding scholarship and/or publishable research
Originality needs to be significant. New but easy doesn’t really count. Should go well beyond what already exists.

EXCEPTIONAL CRITERIA

- Evidence of originality
- Outstanding scholarship and/or publishable research
Publishable research:
- a paper in a conference or journal
- published software or data that is likely to be used by other people