

Writing the ug4/MInf Dissertation

structure and style

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Your dissertation

For the reader, should be an experience . . .

“like taking a walk with a good friend, and having them tell you a story”

A story with *background, definitions* and *clear conclusions*.

As the writer of a dissertation, you should pitch the level of your material to a member of your own class. Someone good!

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Common Mistakes and Oversights

- ▶ Assuming too much from the reader.
Insufficient background chapter, definitions but no examples, writing “clearly”(for something that needs justification)
- ▶ Lack of clarity about “who did what”.
If you are using Matlab resources, the reader needs to be told what functions *you* wrote, and which other parts were written by `matlab-expert@online-resource` (say).
Same for someone writing Android software and making use of code available online (on the many forae, blogs) for standard layouts, etc.
SPELL IT OUT - “*written by myself*”, “*taken from resource x*”, “*adapted from resource y*”.

Common Mistakes and Oversights

- ▶ Weak evaluations.
“I got my friends to try it out and they said they liked it.”
Not sufficient. Even having a Questionnaire for the person testing the software is not enough - need to design questions carefully, and think about other ways of Evaluating (Don will speak).
- ▶ Poor Structuring/Guiding.
Poor decomposition into chapters, background (work by others) drifting into later chapters, insufficient “guiding” of the reader.

Guidance from our project webpages

The top-level of the project webpages (not 2016-17 specific, the overall page) has a link to pointers on how to write the dissertation.

The guidance page (“Report requirements ...”) is at

<http://www.inf.ed.ac.uk/teaching/courses/proj/report.html>

Don also has organised pages containing the best dissertations from 2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17. These pages are here:

<http://project-archive.inf.ed.ac.uk/ug4>

Setting out *your* Contributions

Directly from the recommendation of our *External Examiners*

This Introduction chapter should include a clear and concise summary of your contributions (examples: adapting a suite of existing code; interpreting a theoretical algorithm; coding; testing; conducting an experiment) preferably as a bulleted list.

This advice was missed *even* by many of our excellent dissertations. Some examples of dissertations which did it well are: Veselin Blagoev (2015), Sean Coyle (2014), Euan Maciver (2014), Andre Tamm (2015).

Informal Guidelines for writing the report

<http://www.inf.ed.ac.uk/teaching/courses/proj/guide.html>

- ▶ Adrian Velicu (2014) has very nice presentation of Algorithms, and other Graphical information.
- ▶ Sebastian Schulze (2016) writes an excellent short! dissertation.