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”.

Dissertation style and structure (2018/19) – slide 3
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 the 2018-19 page, 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 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18. 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: Matthew Hepburn (2015-16), Teodor Marinov (2015-16) and Margus Lind (2016-17).
Informal Guidelines for writing the report

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

- Matthew Hepburn (2016) wrote an excellent short! dissertation on a tool to simulate Finite State Machines. More words/pages aren’t always better.

- Lenka Marekova (2018) does a very nice job of combining well-written explanations and theory/algorithms (and diagrams) in her work on E-voting protocols.

- Nevena Blagoeva (2018) writes a nice presentation of systems-building and evaluation for a Inf2B “workbench”.

Dissertation style and structure (2018/19) – slide 7