



## **GENERAL INFORMATION FOR AND INSTRUCTIONS TO ASSESSORS OF A DISSERTATION (MASTERS DEGREE) OR A THESIS (DOCTORAL DEGREE)**

A candidate's dissertation/thesis is written under the guidance of a supervisor/promoter and the dissertation/thesis must demonstrate that the candidate is able to conduct scientific research (see Reg. A89 (a)<sup>1</sup>), and report on such research in an academic manner. The UFS's Policy for Master's and Doctoral Studies, paragraph 7<sup>1</sup> should be taken into account throughout in the assessment process. For a master's dissertation, at least two assessors<sup>2</sup> must act, on condition that the external assessors (persons who are not part-time or permanently employed by the University) should constitute the majority of the examination panel in cases where an internal assessor, who does not necessarily need to be the supervisor, is appointed (see Reg. A91 (b)). For doctoral's degree study, at least two (2) assessors must act, on condition that the external assessors should constitute the majority of the examination panel in cases where an internal assessor, who does not necessarily need to be the promoter, is appointed and that, as far as desirable and possible (see Reg. A119 (b)) use should be made of international assessors.

The names of assessors, as well as the assessment reports are dealt with confidentially; only technical details may be provided to the candidate by the supervisor/promoter. Should there be a difference between the recommendations of assessors, the University reserves the right to appoint additional assessors. The final decision rests with the University.

For assessment purposes, the candidate may submit a properly bound copy of the dissertation/thesis or a provisionally bound copy. When the degree is conferred, a properly bound copy of the amended dissertation/thesis will be sent to every assessor, who may retain such copy. Should the assessors require further details regarding the dissertation/thesis or experience problems, they may contact the supervisor/promoter directly.

### **A. GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSORS OF A MASTER'S DISSERTATION**

The master's degree represents the equivalent of full-time research of at least one year. Irrespective of the manner of presentation, assessors are requested to ensure that the standard of outcome corresponds with Level 9 of the Higher Education Qualification Framework (see Reg. A86 (c)), namely that proof is provided that the student is capable of conducting scientific research, possesses methodological and conceptual skills, displays clarity regarding the exposition and development of argument, as well as a sound judgement and interpretation, exhibits originality of approach and makes a certain contribution to the knowledge base of the discipline. Complete coverage of an important problem or a significant contribution to new knowledge should not necessarily be expected. The dissertation should also reflect literary skills applicable to the subject. A concise summary in English and Afrikaans, reflecting the essence of the dissertation, should be included at the end.

Assessors are expected to study the dissertation within the context and fundamental principles of the discipline and submit a report in this regard. In your report on the dissertation, you are requested to address the following issues and add any additional comments you regard as applicable:

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<sup>1</sup> General Institutional Rules and Regulations (Advanced and Postgraduate Qualifications) 2012  
<sup>2</sup> The desirability of supervisors acting as examiners must be considered.

- a) Are the chosen title/subject, scope and objectives of the dissertation clearly defined, contextualised and scientifically founded?
- b) Is there proof of sufficient knowledge, interpretation and application of the relevant literature?
- c) Is sufficient understanding and application of appropriate research methodology, techniques and analysis demonstrated?
- d) Is the argument in the dissertation presented systematically, logically, in a well structured and coherent manner?
- e) Does the subject of the study form a logical progression from the research objectives, and are the chapters coherent units?
- f) Are the research findings presented and interpreted satisfactorily and with evidence-based personal insight into the field?
- g) Do the research findings make a contribution to the knowledge base of the discipline?
- h) Are the conclusions valid and are they presented and evaluated in the context of authoritative published literature. Is significance conveyed clearly and are existing opinions in the field disproved where necessary?
- i) Did the candidate devote sufficient attention to literary style and layout and is the dissertation free of linguistic and typographical errors?
- j) Are the style and quality of tables, illustrations and/or graphic representations satisfactory and in accordance with formal conventions of scholarship?
- k) Are the references made in a proper manner and are the format and layout of the bibliography correct and does it include the most important and recent sources?
- l) Is the final summary relevant and does it convey the aim and findings of the study clearly?
- m) Is the work or parts thereof suitable for publication?
- n) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the dissertation?

#### **Proposed guidelines for the allocation of marks for a master's dissertation**

<b>% mark</b>	<b>These guidelines may be used for consideration in all fields.</b>
More than 85%	Deserves a distinction ( <i>cum laude</i> ) without reserve. A really excellent dissertation; in the top 10% of master's dissertations. Demonstrates advanced levels of understanding, originality and analysis (theoretical and/or empirical) over and above what is required for the other distinction categories below. Makes a significant contribution to the field of study. Almost no corrections are required. The greater part of the dissertation, more or less as it stands, provides suitable material for publication in peer-reviewed, international prestigious journals.
75-85%	Deserves a distinction ( <i>cum laude</i> ), in the top 20% of all master's dissertations. A highly competent presentation in terms of argument, organisation and style. An authoritative coverage and interpretation of the relevant literature. Proof of originality, clear insight and depth of understanding. Few minor linguistic and/or typographical corrections, if any, are required. A considerable part of the dissertation is suitable for publication in peer-reviewed, prestigious international/national journals.
70-74%	Does <i>not</i> deserve a distinction, although it represents a very competent effort. Proof of a degree of originality, satisfactory insight and depth of understanding. The greater part of the work is covered sufficiently, is well organised and clearly argued. There are minor omissions or mistakes where revisions would improve the work. Parts of the research are suitable for publication in peer-reviewed, prestigious national journals.
60-69%	Does <i>not</i> deserve a distinction, although it is well executed with sufficient organisation, methodology and conclusions. Very little originality, if any, but, on the whole, a competent achievement. May require minor revisions.
50-59%	The dissertation is of a sufficient academic standard to pass. Little or no originality represents a basic overview of the literature, a sufficient understanding of the significance of the research and a reasonably competent methodology and interpretation.
Less than 50%	The dissertation clearly does not meet the minimum academic standards; the candidate fails. The work exhibits such a low level of methodology, interpretation, conclusions and layout that it can be regarded as incompetent. The dissertation does not succeed in demonstrating familiarity with basic academic conventions of presentation and organisation. It is unlikely that even large-scale revision will elevate the dissertation to the minimum academic requirements. Additional research may be required.

**While not binding, the weights of marks as reflected in the table below may serve as a GUIDELINE for the structuring of the assessment of the dissertation (these guidelines might not be applicable to all kinds of disciplinary research reported in a dissertation)\*.**

Areas considered	Weight	Mark awarded
Contextualisation and statement of the problem	10	
Knowledge of the discipline, the field of study and subject of research (literature study and interpretation)	10	
Methodological considerations and procedures. Experimental design and execution (where applicable)	20	
Interpretation of results, validity, phrasing of conclusions and extent of the contribution to the knowledge base of the discipline	50	
Style, layout, language usage and technical quality of dissertation	10	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	

\*See accompanying rubric. The rubric has been compiled according to the level descriptors of the NQF Level 9.

In the case of master's dissertations, the following regulations serve as guideline for the allocation of marks:

#### **Reg. A92 – Module mark/admission to examination and pass requirements**

- (e) Subject to the stipulations of Regulation A92 (f), a student passes if every assessor awards a mark of at least 50 per cent to the dissertation.
- (f) If the assessors are not unanimous about the result of the dissertation, the recommendation of the majority of the assessors is accepted. If there is not a majority decision, an independent assessor, who is not in the employment of the University, must, on recommendation of the supervisor, head of the department and dean, be nominated by the Vice-Rector (mediated by the Postgraduate School or Higher Degrees Committee if required). The independent assessor's decision or recommendation will be final.
- (g) The assessment committee, or a member thereof, may require that a student take a written or oral examination on the subject of the dissertation or the whole field of study it deals with. This examination will be conducted by the whole assessment committee.
- (j) Except with the approval of the Faculty Board, a student may not submit a dissertation that was previously examined unchanged for assessment for a second time.
- (k) If a dissertation is rejected and a student registers for a master's degree once again, with the same or a new topic or new dissertation, the Faculty Board will approve and/or decide about the minimum duration of the study.

#### **Reg. A93 – Qualification with distinction**

- (d) If a dissertation is required, a candidate obtains the qualification with distinction if the majority of the assessors award a mark of at least 75 percent.
- (e) If the assessors are not unanimous about the result of the dissertation, the recommendation of the majority of the assessors is accepted. Failing a majority decision, an independent assessor, who is not in the employment of the University, must, on recommendation of the supervisor, head of the department and dean, be appointed by the responsible Vice-Rector (mediated by the Postgraduate School or Higher Degrees Committee if required). The independent assessor's decision or recommendation will be final (EM 08/11/2004).

#### **Reg. A102 – Assessment reports**

- (a) With a view to the Winter graduation, an assessor must provide the Registrar with the assessment report within sixty (60) days after receiving the dissertation which was handed in before 01 February. (EM 27/07/2009).
- (b) With a view to the Summer graduation, an assessor must provide the Registrar with the assessment report within sixty (60) days after receiving the dissertation, which was handed in before 02 July (EM 27/07/2009).
- (c) The supervisor is not allowed to peruse the assessment reports of other assessors before he/she has handed in his/her own report.
- (d) The final evaluation of the assessment reports is done by the Vice-Rector in consultation with the dean on the recommendation of the head of the department (mediated by the Postgraduate School or Higher Degrees Committee if required).

- (e) If the student is required to effect changes or improvements, the supervisor must inform the Registrar no later than the date as published in the calendar of the University that all the requirements set by the assessors have been met<sup>3</sup>. Only once this has been done, will the student receive confirmation of the result.
- (f) Assessment reports are not made available to students, but the contents can be made known to the student orally or in writing by the supervisor at discretion

## B. GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSORS OF A DOCTORAL THESIS

The doctoral degree represents the equivalent of full-time research of at least two years. The contents of a doctoral thesis are defined as original research and should make an exceptional contribution to the knowledge basis of and insight into the particular scientific discipline. Irrespective of the manner of presentation, assessors are requested to ensure that the standard of outcome corresponds with the Level 10 descriptors of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (see Reg. A115 (a) iv). The general guidelines for the assessment of a master's dissertation (above) also apply to the assessment of a doctoral thesis, but it is recognised that a higher level of competence, methodology and conceptual skills, clarity of exposition and development of the argument, sound judgement, interpretation and originality of approach are required. Of critical importance is the conceptualisation of new research initiatives and the creation of new knowledge and expertise in a field/discipline. A concise summary in English and Afrikaans, reflecting the essence of the thesis, must be included at the end. A considerable part of the thesis should be suitable for publication in peer-evaluated, prestigious journals.

In the report on the doctoral thesis, the following should also be specifically commented on:

- Does the thesis provide proof of original work?
- Does the thesis provide proof of independent critical thought and that the candidate has the ability to conduct research independently?
- Does the thesis make an exceptional contribution to the knowledge base of and insight into the particular scientific discipline?

**No mark is awarded**, the assessor merely indicates whether the thesis is accepted (unconditionally or with corrections) or is rejected.

In the case of doctoral theses, the following regulations serve as **GUIDELINE** for assessment:

### Reg. A120 – Pass requirements

- (a) In order to pass, all assessment reports must be positive (even though minor corrections or requirements may be required) and, in the case of a written and/or oral examination, a final mark of at least 50 per cent must be obtained.
- (b) The examination commission or a member of the examination commission may require of a student that he/she must take a written or an oral assessment on the topic of his/her thesis, or the entire field of study that has been selected. This assessment is taken down with the entire examination commission present, except if decided differently by the Vice-Rector concerned. (EM 03/09/2008).
- (c) Should the assessors not be unanimous about the result, the recommendation of the majority of the assessors will be accepted. Should there not be a majority decision, an independent assessor, who is not in the employment of the University, must, on recommendation of the promoter, head of the department and dean, be nominated by the Vice-Rector (mediated by the Postgraduate School or Higher Degrees Committee if required). The independent assessor's decision or recommendation will be final.
- (d) No doctoral qualification is conferred with distinction.
- (e) Except with the approval of the Faculty Board, a student may not submit a thesis that was previously assessed unchanged for assessment for a second time.

<sup>3</sup> A faculty may determine internally whether, after corrections, a dissertation will be sent to the same examiners for the final assessment.

### C. GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMISSION OF THE ASSESSOR'S REPORT

Assessors may keep their copies of the dissertation/thesis, unless the dissertation/thesis is rejected or the necessity of corrections is pointed out on the assessor's copy, in which case it should be returned to the Senior Director: Student Academic Services (address below) together with the assessor's report.

In evaluating a dissertation/thesis, the recommendation must be one of the following:

***Accepted unconditionally***

Dissertation/thesis is accepted unconditionally in fulfilment of the prescribed degree requirements.

***Accepted with corrections of the contents***

The dissertation/thesis is accepted on condition that evidence is provided of corrections regarding technical or language editing and/or contents, as stipulated, are made to the contents to the satisfaction of the supervisor/promoter and the head of the department.

***Accepted conditionally and reassessment allowed***

The dissertation/thesis is accepted on condition that *major revision* is done and corrections regarding technical or language editing and/or contents, as stipulated, are made to the contents to the satisfaction of the supervisor/promoter and the head of the department. After this, the dissertation/thesis must be submitted for reassessment.

**Rejected**

The dissertation/thesis is rejected – the candidate fails.

For assessor's reports, the following regulation serves as a guideline:

**Reg. A121 – Assessment reports**

- (a) With a view to the Winter graduations, an assessor must provide the Registrar with the assessment report within sixty (60) days after receiving a thesis, which was handed in as required before 1 February. (EM27/07/09).
- (b) With a view to the Summer graduations, an assessor must provide the Registrar with the assessment report within sixty (60) days of the date on which an assessor receives a thesis, which was handed in as required, before 1 July (EM27/07/09).
- (c) The promoter is not allowed to peruse the assessment reports of other assessors before he/she has handed in his/her own report.
- (d) The final evaluation of assessment reports is done by the Vice-Rector in consultation with the dean and on the recommendation of the head of the department (mediated by the Postgraduate School or Higher Degrees Committee if required).
- (e) If a student is required to effect changes/ improvements, the promoter must inform the Registrar in writing no later than the date published in the calendar of the University that all requirements, as set by the assessors, have been met. Only once this has been done, will the result be confirmed to the student.
- (f) Assessments reports are not made available to students, but the contents can be made known to the student orally or in writing by the supervisor or promoter at discretion.

## GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EXTERNAL MODERATION

The Quality Assurance Policy accepted by the Senate on 21 February 2006 and by the Council on 24 March 2006, stipulates as follows (numbering of the Quality Assurance Policy was maintained):

**External assessment** of all minor dissertations, master's dissertations and doctoral theses, including articles within the article option, must be done as determined by the *General Regulations for Advanced and Postgraduate Qualifications*, Regulations A91 and A130-A131.

The making of arrangements regarding above-mentioned processes must take place in terms of the institutional guidelines for teaching/learning, assessment, postgraduate teaching and supervision.

In order to comply with the above-mentioned guidelines, the following guidelines for implementation as proposed by the Portfolio Committee: Education and Research (22 May 2006) were and approved by the Executive Management (14 August 2006) and the Senate (22 August 2006):

- The stipulation that all **examination papers** for exit-level modules for both examination sessions in both semesters must be moderated externally applies to all undergraduate and honours programmes, as well as to the examination papers of structured master's degrees. This moderation must take place **before** the examination sessions so that all amendments at the recommendation of external moderators may be made in good time.
- All minor dissertations, master's dissertations and doctoral theses, including articles within the article option), must be assessed externally as stipulated by the General Regulations for Advanced and Postgraduate Qualifications (*Regulations A91 and A130 –131*).

**You are kindly requested to complete the attached Assessor's Recommendation Form and return it together with the full report to:**

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

ASSESSOR'S RECOMMENDATION REGARDING THE  
CONFERRING OF A MASTER'S OR DOCTORAL DEGREE

STUDENT NUMBER:
FULL NAMES AND SURNAME:
NAME OF DEGREE:
FACULTY:
TITLE OF DISSERTATION/THESIS:

Please mark the appropriate box with an X.

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. Accepted unconditionally.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Accepted with corrections of the contents as stipulated.                              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Accepted conditionally with major revision; resubmission and re-examination required. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Rejected  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Mark awarded for master's dissertation<br>(Does not apply to a doctoral thesis.)      | .....%                   |

Name of assessor (Please print.)

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Signature of assessor

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Date