

WERKLUND SCHOOL OF EDUCATION - GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN EDUCATION

Thesis and Dissertation Rubric: Summative Criteria For Examiners

Overview: The thesis/dissertation is a significant *process* in and *product* of a master’s (thesis) or doctoral (dissertation) program. Writing a thesis/dissertation is a process of developing expert knowledge, demonstrating an understanding of the skills and critical thought processes of a researcher, and developing the skill of writing in a scholarly fashion. Writing a thesis/dissertation requires a student to refine and apply skills learned throughout the program, including research design and implementation, data analysis and interpretation, and scholarly writing and reporting. This rubric has been designed to: (1) make transparent the standards and criteria by which a graduate student’s thesis/dissertation will be evaluated; and (2) communicate common standards, criteria and expectations for examiners.

Purpose: The summative criteria have been designed to guide examiners, both in evaluating the thesis/dissertation and in writing the examiner’s report.

Prior to the oral examination/defense: Each member of the examining committee should carefully read and evaluate the quality of the thesis/dissertation. The summative rubric provides criteria to guide the review and evaluation process as it has been designed using the components of the Faculty of Graduate Studies *Examiner’s Assessment of Thesis* report form. The summative assessment rubric can be used to inform the preparation of the FGS Examiner’s Report.

After the thesis/dissertation oral examination/defense: Examining committee members may choose to provide the supervisor with the rubric and comments describing areas of strength and weakness so the supervisor can use the feedback to assist the student in addressing any areas of concern. In the case of a failed defense, examining committee members may use their ratings and comments to explain their decision.

References

Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2012). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end*. Sage Publications, Inc.: Thousand Oaks, CA.

Lovitts, B.E. (2005). How to grade a dissertation. *Academe*, 91(6), 18-23.

Lovitts, B.E. & Wert, E. (2009). *Developing quality dissertations in the humanities: A graduate student’s guide to achieving excellence*. Stylus Publishing Company: Sterling, VA.

Pathirage, C. Haigh, R., Amaratunga, D. Baldry, D., Green, C. (2004). *Improving dissertation assessment*. University of Mississippi. (n.d.). School of Graduate Studies in the Health Sciences Written Dissertation Scoring Rubric.

Summative Assessment – Prior to Exam and for the Examiner’s Report

	Unacceptable (does not meet program standards)	Acceptable (expected level of attainment for the program)	Outstanding (worthy of nomination for a major award)
Use of Relevant Literature and Techniques	The literature review does not cite sufficient relevant sources (omitting important studies) or cites irrelevant or out of date sources, or misinterprets the literature. No evaluation, analysis and/ or synthesis of the literature is undertaken. Writing suggests that the student did not read the articles closely and does not use the literature to provide a context and rationale for the research.	The literature review adequately incorporates the current literature demonstrating understanding of key issues and an acceptable analysis and synthesis. The review demonstrates acceptable discrimination between important and unimportant literature, uses the literature to provide a context for the research problem and as a source of justification for the study.	The literature review demonstrates synthesis of current literature as well as critical and analytical thinking. It may include the integration of literature from other fields. The literature review takes into account the history and context of the research problem, and the student is able to weave personal insights into the scholarly review. The literature review advances the thinking in the area, and makes a good case for conducting the research.

Organization	<p>Relationships among the problem, the cited authorities, the major constructs, the plan of inquiry, and conclusions are poorly drawn and explicated, and lack coherent development.</p> <p>The thesis is poorly organized and lacks the transitions and structure to form a coherent piece of scholarly work.</p>	<p>The thesis/dissertation is logically and systematically organized. The chapters are woven into an integrated whole. There is an obvious and explicit relationship constructed between the problem, the background, the design, the method and the findings. The thesis/dissertation demonstrates technical and literary competence. Subheadings and transitions between sections and chapters are smooth and coherent.</p>	<p>The thesis/dissertation is elegantly written and organized, and synthesizes relevant and significant interdisciplinary information. The chapters/parts are integrated seamlessly, so that each part relates to and enhances the others. Chapters, headings and subheadings, and transitions assist the reader to comprehend the continuity and significance of the work the findings.</p>
Literary Competence	<p>The thesis/dissertation is poorly written, with low literary competence, evidenced by a rambling and sloppy presentation, inadequate development of ideas, and extensive errors in spelling, grammar, and mechanical structure, that interferes with the content, readability, and significance of the work. APA publication guidelines are not followed consistently.</p>	<p>The thesis/dissertation is written in scholarly language. Clarity, simplicity, parsimony, coherence, and appropriate and correct English characterize the writing. Sources are correctly documented using the most current APA format with few errors.</p>	<p>The thesis/dissertation employs sophisticated thinking and argumentation and elegant, scholarly writing. The writing is powerful with strong cadence, rhythm, and movement. It is largely free of spelling, grammatical, and mechanical errors. The candidate has used APA style, including citations and references, flawlessly. Errors are few and minor, providing for a smooth, seamless, and informative read.</p>
Logic of Enquiry	<p>The scope and/or strategy of the inquiry is inappropriate or insufficiently explicated for the problem. The plan of inquiry is poorly explicated, such that the relationships between the problem, the method, and the results are unclear or poorly drawn.</p>	<p>The significance to the field / profession of addressing the research problem is clear and follows a logical line of reasoning. There is a relationship formulated between the problem, the questions, the method, and the patterns and significance of the data. All data collection methods, tools, instruments, and procedures are appropriately justified and described. The role of the researcher in the data collection procedure is clearly described.</p>	<p>The problem is clearly and evocatively described, and a clear line of reasoning demonstrates the research process and logic of the study, and shows the reader the value of exploring this phenomenon. The inquiry fits the nature of the problem, and the patterns and relationships between components are clearly explicated. All data collection methods, tools, instruments, and procedures are appropriately justified and clearly described in detail. The role of the researcher in the data collection procedure is clearly described, along with the strengths and limitations that this role provides.</p>
Argumentation	<p>The purpose of the research is poorly or unclearly stated, and the significance of the literature is not apparent. Other studies are listed, but themes and gaps in the literature are not clearly identified or explored. The arguments made do not provide sufficient identification and clear presentation of relationships. Application of the study to appropriately justified, larger contexts is not undertaken.</p>	<p>The purpose of the research and the significance is reasonably clear. Gaps in the literature are identified and explored. The thesis/dissertation identifies the significance of the study in how it contributes to the profession and/or discipline/field of study. The arguments made are linked to the literature, and provide new perspectives with references to application in larger contexts.</p>	<p>The purpose of the research is exceptionally well articulated, the significance of the study is obvious, and is stated with strength and conviction. The argumentation in the thesis/dissertation informs current research in the field and/or discipline, and addresses an important lack of understanding. Arguments presented emerge from a deep, critical review of literature, and a thorough analysis of the data. New perspectives are clearly presented and appropriately supported. The study is related to a broader context, and is presented creatively and critically.</p>
Degree of Sophistication	<p>Development of content in the thesis/dissertation is restricted, incomplete or unclear, and there is a lack of fluency in expression</p>	<p>Development of content in the thesis/dissertation is adequate, with stated positions and supporting information/evidence. Fluency of expression is acceptable. The path of the inquiry and the argumentation is logically developed.</p>	<p>Development of content (focus, relevance, explanations, support) in the thesis/dissertation is full, rich and compelling. The writing demonstrates creativity, a critical stance, in-depth analysis, and clear and fluent expression.</p>

Originality	The student asks a question or poses a problem that is trivial, weak, unoriginal, or already solved. The inquiry includes results that are obvious, already known, not clearly explained, or misinterpreted.	The student explores a problem and makes a small contribution to knowledge. There is a relevant question or problem clearly stated. A new methodological approach is undertaken, or an existing methodology is creatively applied. Findings contribute to new understandings in the profession and/or discipline / field of study. The thesis/dissertation contains original ideas, insights, and/or new observations.	The student asks a question or addresses an important question or problem in a way that opens up a new field of study, examines problems of practice in the profession in a new way, or contributes a new or synthesized, significant, original methodology. The study is ambitious, persuasive, and compelling, and contributes surprising, thoughtful insights to the profession and or discipline / field of study.
Contribution to the Discipline, Field or Profession	In the thesis/dissertation, the student does not make a meaningful contribution to the field.	The thesis/dissertation states how the study and results contribute to theory (PhD) and/or professional knowledge and/or practice (EdD). The work has the potential to make a modest contribution to the field but does not open up new areas for research.	The thesis/dissertation states how the study and results contribute to theory (PhD) and/or professional knowledge and/or practice (EdD). In the work, the student addresses an important problem that is of interest to a larger community and has the potential to change the way people think. The results and conclusion push the boundaries of the discipline and open new areas for research. The significance of the research is clearly articulated (e.g., knowledge generation, professional application, and/or social change).
Ability to Undertake Future Research	The overall thesis/dissertation does not provide evidence of the skills necessary to undertake high quality, independent research. As such, the student demonstrates limited skill in: formulating relevant research questions; or conducting an in-depth literature review; or designing and conducting an appropriate study that answers the research question; or utilizing appropriate analysis techniques and tools; or presenting results that answer the research question, or providing original insights into the field; or providing an adequate discussion on the relevance of the results, their applicability to the field, and future directions for research	The overall thesis/dissertation provides evidence of the student's skill in conducting high quality research. As such the student demonstrates competency in: developing relevant research questions, conducting a thorough literature review, designing and conducting an appropriate study that answers the research question, utilizing appropriate analysis techniques and tools, presenting clear and concise results that address the research question, and make an original contribution to the field, providing a discussion on the relevance of the results, the applicability to the field, and future directions for research and practice.	The overall thesis/dissertation provides clear evidence of the student's superior skill in conducting high quality research. As such the student demonstrates advanced competency in: constructing relevant, original, research questions that open up the field of study in a new way; conducting a sophisticated, critical, and thorough-going literature review; designing and conducting a high quality study that addresses the research questions posed; utilizing appropriate analysis techniques tools, and methods; presenting clear and concise results that answer the research question; and providing an advanced discussion on the relevance of the results, applicability to the field, and future directions for research, such that an original contribution is made to the field of study, the discipline, the profession or the research methodology employed.