**University of Malta
Department of Criminology**

Dissertation Guidelines

Contents

Introduction

Dear Student,

The Department of Criminology welcomes you to this academic journey. This booklet provides details of expected practices together with basic guidelines for your dissertations.

Students may contact the Department of Criminology for any clarifications or help they might need throughout the whole process.

Good luck!

Dissertation

Your dissertation should be:

- Typed
- Double-spaced on standard-sized A4 paper with 2.5cm margins on all sides
- You should use a clear font that is highly readable. APA 7th edition recommends using 12 pt. Times New Roman font
- Observe the maximum word length (for example: BA Hons in Criminology 7-9K)
- Use a limited number of headings in each dissertation chapter (no more than six or seven, including your Introduction, Conclusion)
- Highlight headings in bold
- Do not increase the font size or underline or use italics for the headings
- Check the appropriate use of headings, sub-headings and sub-sub-headings, unless the work is a very long one
- Do not number your paragraphs
- Do not include long lists of points and 'bullet points'
- Dissertations must be submitted via VLE as per stipulated deadline/s.
- There are 2 forms that need to be submitted with the dissertation - the submission form and the authenticity form. Refer to Appendix.

1.1 The Dissertation

The main objective of a dissertation is to provide students with an opportunity to conduct an in-depth and focused study on a subject of your choice. A dissertation is a `reasoned argument'. It is not a `thesis' the term used for extended research carried out for a doctorate neither is it a `project' or `long essay'. In the dissertation students are expected to work with `received information' but one should aim to add something to the body of knowledge which already exists. Students as researchers are encouraged to critically examine existing knowledge on your chosen subject. This will enable you to identify gaps in the literature wherein you can make your own contribution. This is a unique opportunity for the student to exercise the learnt research methods and also an opportunity to examine in depth a selected area while understanding the relationship between theory, empirical research and practice.

Students reading for the B.A. (Hons) degree in Criminology will author a dissertation (7000 - 9000 words), equivalent to 12 ECTS. In view of the Master in Probation Services, the

dissertation is equivalent to 30 ECTS thus the world limit is between 15,000 to 20,000 words. Also, the dissertation for the Master of Arts in Criminology equates to 80 ECTS, so students are to present a dissertation of 30,000 to 35,000 words. In view of word limit, it is noted that such excludes footnotes, references and appendices.

Students are advised to use this link for further information:

https://www.um.edu.mt/services/administrativesupport/apqru/assessment/

These general guidelines may not cover all circumstances but put particular emphasises on major generic issues that students encounter in the process. It is imperative that students consult their supervisor for specific advice and guidance on matters pertaining to the design, content of their research study and the dissertation in its entirety. **Students are advised to discuss the content of this booklet with their respective supervisor/s.** The dissertation is a process that requires discipline, enterprise, originality and commitment. It allows students to choose an area of research for in-depth study. Supervisors will guide the students throughout the research process. However, it is the students' responsibility to read academic literature, to research material, to collect data, to write up the report and to meet the deadlines.

Important Note: Dissertation proposals must be accepted and cleared as suitable by the Department's Dissertation Committee, and cleared as ethically sound by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC). It is your responsibility to meet with your supervisor (either in person or through confernece calls via zoom or via email) and discuss the research progress and the ethics of your research. Once you and your supervisor are certain that your proposed research is ethical you should then complete the online URECA ethics form (https://www.um.edu.mt/socialwellbeing/students/researchethics/). You will be informed of the decision of FREC after the submissions of your ethics form. This online form needs to be completed, endorsed by your supervisor and accepted by FREC before you can begin any fieldwork. You should inform your supervisor once you have received ethics authorisation. All research, even that which has no ethical issues needs to have FREC authorisation.

1.1.1 Proposal Stage

The Dissertation Proposal

Students are to select a research topic and contact a potential supervisor.

An extensive list of research themes (grouped into different categories) is available in PDF format in your VLE dissertation portal. In the PDF, each theme is associated to a corresponding expert supervisor. Once a research theme is located, students are to contact the corresponding expert to request potential supervision. It is advisable to select more than one research theme and have a Plan B. It might happen that an expert is already supervising a number of students and cannot act as your supervisor. Therefore, it is advisable to have alternative options to avoid time wastage.

Once an expert accepts to act as a *potential supervisor*, students are to fill in a dissertation proposal form, which is available from the same above-mentioned VLE. It is advisable to liaison with the *potential supervisor* for the compilation of the form and, in general, during the whole process of your research. It is the dissertation committee which confirms or otherwise the supervisor. In view of BA dissertations students are to submit the filled dissertation proposal form via VLE.

More importantly before starting any data collection, all students are to submit the **University Research Ethics Committee form** and seek ethical clearance.

Dissertation Committee

The proposal form will be reviewed by a committee. The committee shall:

- evaluate the research as described in the proposal form

- approve the research topic

- (if necessary) provide suggestions in case the proposal needs changes/amendments

- confirm the supervisor (or, if necessary, assign a different one)

- propose assessors

All recommendations of the Dissertation Committee are subject to the endorsement of the Faculty Board.

CHOICE OF TOPIC

The topic must relate to a significant substantive issue in criminology. Before choosing a topic, students are expected to seek advice from the selected supervisor (see the 'Dissertation Proposal' paragraph above).

As detailed above students are first to submit a BA (Hons) Dissertation Form with the proposed subject matter to be researched/studied and a preliminary research question/purpose. The dissertation committee may not accept a proposed topic on the grounds of insufficient relevance to criminology, supervisory arrangements or other relevant matters.

PLAN B

ALWAYS have an Alternative Topic ready when presenting your proposal. Should your first choice not be chosen for ethical, logistical, safety or any other reason, your Plan B topic will help you to avoid time wastage.

A draft proposal countersigned by the proposed supervisor must be submitted by the given deadline. Once the proposal is accepted, **students are to submit the Ethics URECA form. All research projects are required to undergo this process.** This form will need to be submitted via the URECA protal to SWB FREC. For more details kindly check SWB FREC's website https://www.um.edu.mt/socialwellbeing/students/researchethics/
Submissions of the URECA form must be done not later than the dates given in the website. The form must be endorsed by the supervisor. No research is to start before FREC has given approval.

Submission Date

Dissertations must be submitted by a set deadline. No dissertation will be accepted after the set deadline. For valid motives students can request an extention of the deadline by filling these forms a month before the original deadline:
Undergrad extention:
https://www.um.edu.mt/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/333869/extensionformUG.pdf
Postgrad extention:
https://www.um.edu.mt/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/333864/extensionformPG.pdf

All students must submit their Dissertation **electronically through VLE** for it to be assessed for plagiarism, by Turnitin software or any software that the University might from time to time employ. Students are to submit the Authenticity form and the submission form, found on the Disseration VLE protal.

Examination Stage

A Board of Examiners for each student shall be appointed by Senate. A chair will be appointed for each Board of Examiners. In the case of BA dissertations, the dissertation will be assessed by the supervisor and an assessor nominated by the Faculty Board. They will evaluate the work of the student independently, write separate reports and propose a grade for consideration by a chairperson, who will issue the final result.   The Board of Examiners is responsible for awarding the assessment grade to each dissertation so as to ensure comparability of standards. In accordance with the University Assessment Regulations 2009 (Clause 20 (1) "*The Senate shall normally appoint External Examiners, either on a visiting or a non-visiting basis, for programmes of study in degree Courses. When appointed, External Examiners shall be members of each Board of Examiners of compulsory final year Study-Units of an undergraduate programme of study*." In view of the Masters in Criminology students are requested to sit for a viva voce exam (Please refer to guidelines as per link provided below).

Examiners' expectations

The dissertation will allow you to develop and demonstrate to the examiners your research skills, powers of critical analysis and ability to write. A well-executed dissertation will:

- ask interesting questions
- investigate clearly thought out themes
- make thorough use of available resources
- adopt a valid and feasible methodological design
- reach thoughtful and relevant conclusions
- be well written; and
- be clearly structured

What you have studied so far on the course has been structured by academics who have set the questions and provided the necessary materials to enable you to answer them. The dissertation element of the course has different and additional demands. Although through your research journey the student is supported by a dissertation supervisor, students are expected to:

- design their own research problem
- collect their own data
- find and review relevant existing literature
- identify weaknesses in existing research and theoretical work
- select appropriate methodologies; and
- analyse and interpret the research data

Clearly the demands of a dissertation place a greater responsibility upon the students to take control of their own academic work. In the dissertation, academics as examiners expect you to examine academic debates critically and demonstrate your ability to interpret your data and relate them to a research problem.

There are a number of distinct elements through which your dissertation will be judged. These include:

- the exploration of the relevant literature
- a critical and focused in-depth examination of the literature
- the construction of research aims and objectives, and the clear definition of the research problem
- data collection
- the analysis and interpretation of the data collected within a framework chosen by you and showing a clear understanding of your findings
- the development of your own argument through your new understanding of your chosen topic. You should aim to use the material gathered to question and possibly modify your original framework or even develop a new one according to your findings. This will clearly require a critical approach particularly at Masters level
- a demonstration of the validity of your argument and your competence as a researcher. Your findings may even persuade others to think in a new way or to re-examine an issue in a fresh light

Students are encouraged to read through these guidelines for the respective degrees thoroughly.

BA (Hons) Criminology:

https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/governance/regulations/course/socialwellbeing/BachelorofArts(Honours)inCriminology.pdf

Master by Research in Criminology:

https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/governance/regulations/course/socialwellbeing/MasterofArtsinCriminology.pdf

Master in Probation Services:

https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/governance/regulations/course/socialwellbeing/MasterinProbationServices.pdf

1.2 Research: Where do I begin?

Where should I look for information? What types of sources are available?

Before you begin your research, you should ask yourself some questions. These will help narrow your search parameters.

What kind of information are you looking for?

Do you want facts? Opinions? News reports? Research studies? Analyses? Personal reflections? History?

Where would be a likely place to look?

Which sources are likely to be most useful to you? Libraries? The Internet? Academic periodicals? Newspapers? Government records?

How much information do you need?

How many sources of information are you looking for? Do you need to view both sides of the issue?

Online vs. Print Publications

An important distinction when doing research is the difference between traditional publications and Internet resources. **The Internet may be the most convenient place to begin your research, but it is not always the best**.

Internet Sources: Anything published exclusively online in a variety of digital formats. Material includes: web pages, PDF documents, e-books, multimedia.

Traditional Publications: This includes anything that has been published in print form and is widely available at libraries and bookstores. Material includes: books, textbooks, newspapers, popular and scholarly journals, and magazines.

NB: With the advent of new technologies, many traditional resources are now available online (including newspaper articles, magazines, book chapters, and journal articles). Be careful, see whether the source you have found is an online-only source or if it does have a print component as well.

1.2.1 Types of Sources

Traditional Print Sources

- Books and Textbooks: Books come in a multitude of topics. Because of the time it takes to publish a book, books usually contain more dated information than will be found in journals and newspapers.

- Academic and Trade Journals: Academic and trade journals provide up to date information and research in industry, business, and academia. Journal articles come in several forms, including literature reviews which overview about current and past research, articles on theories and history, or articles on specific processes or research.

- Government Reports and Legal Documents: The government releases information intended for its own use or for public use. These types of documents could be an excellent source of information. An example of a government report is the Malta Census report. Most government reports and legal documents can now be accessed online.

- Press Releases and Advertising: Companies and special interest groups produce texts to help persuade readers to act in some way or inform the public about some new development

- Flyers, Pamphlets, Leaflets: While some flyers or pamphlets are created by reputable sources, because of the ease in which they are created, many less-than-reputable sources also produce these. They are useful for quick reference or for very general information.

- Multimedia: Printed material is certainly not the only option for finding literature. Also consider media sources such as radio and television broadcasts, interactive talks, and public meetings.

- Newspapers: Predominately covering the latest events and trends, newspapers contain up to date information. Newspapers report both information that is factual but also share opinions and consequently are not bias free. This being said, crime particularly violent crime generates a lot of emotions and thus it is easily sensationalised in a way that could pave way to moral panic.

Internet-Only Sources

- Websites: Most of the information on the Internet is distributed via websites. Websites vary widely in quality of information and validity of sources.

- Weblogs / Blogs: A rather recent development in web technology, weblogs or blogs are a type of interactive journal where writers post and readers respond. They vary widely in quality of information and validity of sources. For example, many prestigious journalists and public figures may have blogs, which may be more credible of a blog than most.

- Message boards, discussion lists, and chat rooms: Discussion lists, chat rooms, and message boards exist for all kinds of disciplines both in and outside of the university. However, plenty of boards exist that are rather unhelpful and poorly researched.

- Multimedia: The Internet has a multitude of multimedia resources including online broadcasts and news, images, audio files, and interactive websites.

1.2.2 FAQs in writing

Which tense should I use past or present?

- Past tense – when describing procedures, you have carried out and observed

  o *The temperature was recorded at 10-minute intervals*

- Present tense – when writing about general principles or your own conclusions

  o *Increases in temperature generally occur when this reagent is added*

Sentences: Vary length of your sentences. If more than 20-25 words split in smaller sentences.

Abbreviations / Acronyms: Use standard abbreviations when you can. Define other abbreviations the first time you use them. It is recommended that a Glossary is created where a dissertation is being drafted.

Paragraphs: A paragraph is a collection of related sentences dealing with a single topic. Present this in an organised fashion or you will lose your readers. Keep one idea to one paragraph **with several bits of supporting evidence.** The entire paragraph should concern itself with **a single focus**. If it begins with one focus or major point of discussion, it should not end with another or wander within different ideas. **AVOID ONE SENTENCE PARAGRAPHS**. A topic sentence is a sentence that indicates in a general way what idea or thesis the paragraph is going to deal with. Regardless of whether you include an explicit topic sentence or not, you should be able to easily summarise what the paragraph is about.

1.3 Referencing & Avoiding Plagiarism

Academic scholarship is premised on the meticulous use of other people's work and there is an **absolute imperative to show where material came from and how your reader can gain**

access to it. Think of this as offering your reader a complete 'map reference' or GPS position – so they can go to the initial source and check things out for themselves.

When you have quoted someone else's work directly or paraphrased it, you will **have indicated the source in the text – the surname, followed by the year of publication and the page number(s).** This information on its own, however, is not sufficient for your reader to go to a library and look up the original source. You need to provide more information at the very end of your assignment in a section called References, presented alphabetically, where full details of the works cited are presented.

The emergence of AI tools like ChatGPT in essay writing, as elucidated on Turnitin (https://www.turnitin.com/blog/chatgpt-essay-writing-how-to-talk-to-students-about-ai-and-integrity), brings forth a crucial discussion on academic integrity. Misusing these tools by allowing AI to compose your dissertation obscures your true understanding and engagement with the coursework. For instance, relying on AI to write a piece on Shakespeare's plays deprives you of the rich analysis and personal insights you could have developed through individual effort. Moreover, over-reliance on AI curtails the growth of your critical and creative thinking skills, pivotal for your academic journey. For example, if AI is used to resolve a complex mathematical problem, the opportunity to wrestle with the problem, develop problem-solving strategies, and learn from any mistakes is lost.

Additionally, be aware that tools are available to discern whether a text is AI-generated, human-generated, or a mixture of both, which further underscores the importance of maintaining honesty in your academic submissions. It's imperative to acknowledge the ethical boundaries when employing AI writing aids, thereby ensuring you uphold the tenets of originality and intellectual honesty in your academic pursuits, preparing you for a fruitful and authentic learning experience.

1.3.1 References vs Bibliography

The reference list should be provided at the end of an article wherein the author provides the information necessary to identify and retrieve each source. Choose references judiciously and include only the sources that you used in the research and preparation of the article.

References usually come at the end of a text (essay or research report) and should contain **only those works cited within the text**. So, use the term 'References' to cover works cited, and 'Additional Bibliography' to refer to works read as general background. A **Bibliography** is any

list of references at the end of a text, whether cited or not. It includes texts you made use of, not only texts you referred to in your paper, but your own additional background reading, and any other articles you think the reader might need as back-ground reading. You are to provide a bibliography only if requested by lecturer/s.

Both References and Bibliography must be in alphabetical order; and each entry must be laid out in a strictly ordered sequence. Please refer to the University guidelines in view of APA 7th referencing:

https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/112018/1/APA_7_referencing_guide.pdf.

Students are advised that the Department of Criminology accepts only APA referencing as outlined in the guidelines (use the link provided).

How many references?

What is the ideal the number of external sources for a 7,000-word dissertion?. **In any assessed piece of work, you are expected to show that you have read and understood the relevant literature, as well as to show that you can comment critically on it**. Your own thinking must be grounded in existing literature. Part of your intellectual task is to identify and then use **appropriate academic material**.

Your markers will consider the number of references you make, but also the way you understand and use the material, together with their relevance to the argument you develop in your papers. Please refrain from stating that no sources where found as such points towards a lack of scholarly activity and/or inability to carry out your research. Also, make sure that the reference list is plausible.

1.4 Dissertation Layout

Below is a typical outline of the format that a dissertation should have in its final presentation. Obviously, consultation with your supervisor for more specific advice is always recommended. **This will also change according to the TYPE of dissertation you are writing.** There are a

number of reference books which you might need to consult for dissertation writing[1]. In other words, dissertations that adopt a systemic review approach, might adopt a different layout of chapters.

The Abstract

The abstract is written last and appears first! It is the brief summary, which heads your dissertation. In about 300 words, you must summarise the aims of your study, the design and methodology, the key results and findings. It is imperative that the abstract is written in clear and concise terms, which motivates people to read further. It should therefore answer the following questions:

• What does this research set out to do and why?

• How did it seek to do it?

• What are the general findings?

• What do these suggest?

• What conclusions are reached?

• What are the implications of these?

At the bottom of the page, list four (4) to six (6) key words that reflect the content and context of your work.

Dedication

This is optional for studnets who would want to dedicate their work to a particular person/s/

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements are an optional extra for your dissertation report. They usually appear at the beginning of the dissertation, as a separate section after the abstract. They should thank others for their contribution to the work and usually refer to your academic supervisor and people who participated in the fieldwork.

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[1] How to Finish Your Dissertation in Six Months, Even if You Don't Know What to Write (Kindle Edition); Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article: Second Edition (Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing) Second Edition by Howard S. Becker (Author), Pamela Richards (Contributor); Formosa et al. (2011). The research road we make: statistics for the uninitiated. Valletta: National Statistics Office. 9789995729141.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The tasks of this section are as follows:

• Explain and introduce the context of your research

• Show why it is important and how it is relevant to theory practice, policy or social issues

• Set out the broad aims of the study

• Define the research questions and concepts

• Demonstrate how and why you made the decisions you did

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In a dissertation you are expected to provide a critical review of the existing literature (published and un-published) on the topic being studied. The literature search is summarised and presented as an argument, which leads up to and justifies the approach and theoretical stance that you have taken. You must demonstrate that you have read widely and understood the major debates in the literature, the research approaches that have been tried, and the gaps that exist.

Divide the literature review into themes or issues that are related to the issue and questions in your study, and use this structure to justify the approach you have taken. Be critical of what you have read especially if you detect biases or flaws in other studies that influence the results and/or conclusions.

The literature review should be relevant and up to date, the use of recent literature is recommended unless you are referring to classical works in your study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This is the second major section of your dissertation. The different areas that need to be covered could be distinguished by subheadings:

- Design – a summary/overview of how your methodology addresses the research questions. Usually it begins broadly (qualitative/ quantitative) and then narrows down to whom or what you are going to research and what kind of research techniques you will use.

- Population and sample/research participants – Report who the population is that you are researching, how you drew the sample (here acknowledge any limitations in the sampling process) and so on.

- Instrumentation – Describe the tools (e.g. questionnaire, interview schedule, case study, archival data) that you used (this also needs to be included as an appendix). Describe how you developed the instrument.

- Data collection – Describe how the data were collected, where, how long it took and any difficulties you had in doing this and how you overcame them.

- Ethical issues, limitations and strengths of methodology – include a brief description of any ethical issues you anticipated in the research process and how you dealt with this aspect.

- Data analysis – how did you analyse your data. Provide the reader with a "map" of how to read the results you are about to present, and an explanation of how you arrived at them.

- The aim of this chapter is for you to showcase your work and for the research to be repeatable. This is a very important chapter and a weak methodology might jeopardise your work.

Chapter 4: Findings

- Think of subheadings which relate to the major themes in your findings.
- Present a description of the people or institutions in the research (the sample)
- You don't have to include all your results when you report your findings
- Extract the findings that directly focus on the relevant issue
- Either explain your findings simply in words, or if necessary use tables
- Report your findings with little comment (this is left for the "Discussion" section)
- Arrange your findings in a sequence, using logic or the order of the interview questions so that the results tell a story.

Chapter 5: Analysis & Discussion

This is the section where results are summarised, explained and interpreted.

- Conduct the discussion in the light of the issues identified in the literature search
- Highlight the contribution of your own results to these debates
- Try to explain any differences between your findings and others you read about and discuss similarities as well as differences
- Discuss implications of findings for current practice, policy and/or theory
- Discuss limitations and provide suggestions for further research

YOU MAY CHOOSE TO PRESENT THE FINDINGS AND THEIR DISCUSSION IN ONE CHAPTER (particularly for BA dissertations).

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

- Conclusions must refocus the issue
- They must be justified in the light of your research design and the limitations of your study
- They must remind the reader about directions for future research
- Follow up with a list of recommendations
- Recommendations may be about practice issues, policy matters, changes to existing services, or advocating the need for new services

References

- Include an alphabetical list of the references, books, articles and other sources of information that you cited in the dissertation
- Consistency and attention to detail is very important
- Use the APA7th system of referencing
- Every source that you cite in your dissertation must be accurately referenced in this section

Appendices

These are additional sections that may include:

- The original questionnaire or interview schedule
- Copies of letters

- Details about other procedural matters

- Extra data which assist in the argument about the research

- The appendix should not constitute dissertation

- **The student must submit FREC clearance documentation here**

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FACULTY/INSTITUTE/CENTRE/SCHOOL_____

DECLARATIONS BY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Student's Name & Surname _____

Course _____

Title of Long Essay/Dissertation
_____
_____
_____

Word Count _____

  (a) Authenticity of Long Essay/Dissertation

I hereby declare that I am the legitimate author of this Long Essay/Dissertation and that it is my original work.

No portion of this work has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institution of higher education.

I hold the University of Malta harmless against any third party claims with regard to copyright violation, breach of confidentiality, defamation and any other third-party right infringement.

(b) Research Code of Practice and Ethics Review Procedures
I declare that I have abided by the University's Research Ethics Review Procedures.

_____   _____
Signature of Student   Name of Student (in CAPS)

_____
Date

L-Università ta' Malta

FACULTY/INSTITUTE/CENTRE/SCHOOL_____

DECLARATIONS BY POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

Student's I.D. / Code _____

Student's Name & Surname _____

Course _____

Title of Dissertation

_____

_____

_____

(a) Authenticity of Dissertation

I hereby declare that I am the legitimate author of this Dissertation and that it is my original work.

No portion of this work has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institution of higher education.

I hold the University of Malta harmless against any third party claims with regard to copyright violation, breach of confidentiality, defamation and any other third-party right infringement.

(b) Research Code of Practice and Ethics Review Procedures

I declare that I have abided by the University's Research Ethics Review Procedures.

As a Master's student, as per Regulation 58 of the General Regulations for University Postgraduate Awards, I accept that should my dissertation be awarded a Grade A, it will be made publicly available on the University of Malta Institutional Repository.

_____   _____

Signature of Student   Name of Student (in CAPS)

_____

Date

Appendix 3: Submission Form

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FACULTY/INSTITUTE/CENTRE/SCHOOL_____

Student's I.D. /Code _____

Student's Name & Surname _____

Course _____

Title of Dissertation/Thesis

_____

_____

_____

I am hereby submitting my dissertation/thesis for examination by the Board of Examiners.

_____   _____
Signature of Student   Name of Student (in Caps)

_____
Date

_____

Submission noted.

_____   _____
Principal Supervisor   Signature
(in Caps)

                                                                   _____
                                                                   Date