

STUDENTS PLEASE NOTE: The following guidelines are used by examiners when assessing honours and minor theses within the School of Social and Political Sciences and Melbourne School of Government.

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## School of Social and Political Sciences

### **THESIS EXAMINATION GUIDELINES**

**Examiners** address the following criteria when awarding marks and writing thesis reports:

- Clear statement of research question(s) / hypotheses
- Critical engagement with and understanding of the relevant literature
- Clarity and appropriateness of method and research strategy
- Use of evidence and sources
- Clarity and development of argument
- Originality of argument and approach
- Logic of organisation of the thesis (chapters, pagination)
- Presentation: spelling, grammar, punctuation

**1.** The minor thesis is designed to give students exposure to the theoretical, technical and practical problems of empirical research. Empirical research can be interpreted broadly and may include a range of primary and secondary data sources. Literature-based theses are also acceptable, however the depth of analysis of these theses is expected to be higher given the lower time constraints for literature based theses.

**2.** Students ideally should demonstrate an ability to mount a sustained line of enquiry throughout the thesis. There should be a clear statement of the problem or issue to be addressed and the thesis should develop this central concern clearly and systematically.

**3.** The theoretical skills required for empirical work are the ability to derive and apply hypotheses/research questions drawn from relevant literature to a specific problem or question and to draw appropriate inferences from the data being analysed. For all theses it is expected that a discussion of relevant literature will take place independently of the data or material to be analysed.

**4.** It is not expected that minor thesis students should push back the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge. However, they should demonstrate an ability to write intelligently about the relevant theoretical and empirical literature. Students may or may not identify with a specific theoretical tradition but they should ensure that they address relevant objections to and problems with it.

**5.** The technical skills required are the choice of an appropriate method to analyse the information used, intelligent use of that approach and sensitivity to its strengths and weaknesses. Qualitative and quantitative approaches are equally acceptable, as well as approaches which deny the validity of such a distinction. However, the thesis should be accountable in the sense that the reader should feel confident that they understood how the method was relevant in answering the research questions/hypotheses, how the data was gathered, and how the analysis was undertaken.

**6.** The data used may be primary or secondary, i.e. that collected in the course of another research project, or a re-analysis of existing data. The time frame for data collection, indeed for the thesis as a whole, should be taken into account when assessing the sufficiency of the data collected.

**7.** The conclusions should link in to the thesis as a whole. They should bring together the major concern(s) of the thesis with the insight of the analysis and assess its disciplinary significance.

**8.** The practical/professional skills include the ability to find and put together relevant information, identify and track down the appropriate literature, and present the thesis in a readable, plausible and professional format.

**9.** The style should be consistent throughout. There is no single set of agreed standards for the style and format of a thesis but they should conform to one of the models in frequent use in academic research in the social sciences.

**10.** Penalties are strictly applied for excessive length. References and appendices are not included in the word limit, but data (including quotations from interviews, for example) are.

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## **Guidelines for Assessment of Coursework Theses**

### **HONOURS I**

90%+ Outstanding First Class quality demonstrating independent thought throughout, a flair for the subject, and research achievement of a kind that produces at least some work of PhD standard or of potentially publishable standard in a serious academic journal.

87-89% Excellent First Class quality (as defined below), showing a command of the field both broad and deep, independent intellectual argument and a significant degree of original thought.

83-86% Good first class quality (as defined below) but with greater evidence of intellectual independence and more originality of thought.

80-82% Clear but bare First Class quality, comprising general excellence in subject area without major errors; breadth of knowledge; clear familiarity with and ability to use appropriate methodologies and theories; clear evidence of some independence of thought in the subject area. Superior written style, clarity and creativity.

### **HONOURS IIA**

78-79% Demonstrates breadth and initiative in research and reading, complex understanding and some original analysis. Makes good attempt to 'get behind' the evidence and engage with its underlying assumptions, takes a critical,

interrogative stance in relation to argument and interpretation. Properly documented; written characterized by style, clarity, and some creativity.

75-77% Sound grasp of subject area, with extensive reading and research; ability to use methodology and theory, evidence of careful and thorough discovery and original use of appropriate sources; competent analysis and evaluation of material; ability to present material clearly and succinctly with a well-thought out argument.

### **HONOURS IIB**

70-74% Adequate reading, research, understanding and presentation of subject area, relevant theories and methodologies. Some evidence of ability to think theoretically as well as empirically, and to conceptualise and problematise issues. Weaknesses include gaps in research, important unresolved problems and inconsistencies within the argument, deficiencies in clarity, and stylistic lapses.

### **HONOURS III**

65-69% Work barely adequate at Honours standard, with significant defects in several of the qualities expected at this level. Examples of such defects include insufficient or too narrowly focused research, unpersuasive interpretation, argument that suffers from weaknesses in clarity or structure, and writing that exhibits serious problems with grammar and expression.