

PIR Dissertation Marking Grid

(Explanations below)

	80+%	70-79%	60-69%	50-59%	40-49%	39-% (fail)
Argument and understanding	Highly effective and sustained argument, demonstrating a detailed and impressive level of understanding of the topic and associated issues, concepts and debates.	Thorough and articulate argument, demonstrating a high level of understanding of the topic and associated issues, concepts and/or debates.	Coherent and clear argument, demonstrating a good understanding, i.e. adequate coverage, of the subject matter.	Largely clear and coherent argument, evidence of engagement with relevant issues, but gaps in knowledge and understanding.	Argument employed is flawed; some understanding of the topic and relevant knowledge but key elements are missing; weak grasp of key issues and concepts.	Limited, unclear, incoherent argument; very poor understanding of the topic, key issues and concepts.
Use of information to sustain argument	Excellent use of information gathered to support argument.	Very good use of information gathered to support argument.	Good use of information gathered to support argument, but some weaknesses in the integration of evidence.	Use of information gathered to support argument but with significant weaknesses.	Limited use of information gathered to support argument.	Very limited or no use of information to support argument.
Originality	High degree of originality that by far exceeds normal expectations.	Evidence of independent and original thinking throughout the dissertation.	Evidence of independent thinking in large parts of the dissertation.	Evidence of independent thinking but with inconsistencies.	Limited evidence of independent thinking.	No evidence of independent thinking, e.g. solely reproduces an existing publication.
Critical thinking	High degree of criticality that by far exceeds normal expectations.	Evidence of critical thinking throughout the dissertation.	Evidence of critical thinking in large parts of the dissertation.	Evidence of critical thinking but with inconsistencies.	Limited evidence of critical thinking.	No evidence of critical thinking.
Research question and design						
Formulation of research question	Clearly formulated analytical and highly relevant research question.	Clearly formulated analytical (or academically highly relevant descriptive) research question.	Clearly formulated, but rather descriptive, research question.	Engagement with a research question, which however is not clearly enough formulated, e.g. too broad.	Limited engagement with a research question that lacks in clarity.	No clear research question.

Relevance of the question	Academic relevance is explained with reference to relevant theories or debates in the subject area.	Relevance is convincingly explained, but not necessarily with reference to its academic contribution.	Relevance is explained, though not comprehensively enough to be completely convincing.	Relevance is only implicitly referred to.	Relevance is not explained.	(relevance cannot be explained if there is no clear research question)
Approach to answer the question	The question is convincingly and consistently addressed in a way that is close to publishable standard.	The question is convincingly and consistently addressed throughout the dissertation.	The question is addressed in a plausible manner, however, with some minor weaknesses.	The question is addressed in a largely plausible manner but with weaknesses.	The question is addressed, but in a flawed manner.	failure to address the question
Reflection on approach	Elaborate methodological approach that is comprehensively explained and outstandingly reflected upon.	The approach used is clearly explained and well reflected upon.	The approach used is explained but with weaknesses, e.g. in the use of correct terminology, or missing relevant information.	Only limited evidence of reflection on the approach used.	No explanation of the approach used.	no evidence of reflection on the research process
Engagement with academic literature	Evidence of extensive research using an impressive range of appropriate and up-to-date sources, including books, journal articles and, if appropriate, internet sources and primary data.	Evidence of extensive research using a large range of appropriate and up-to-date sources, including books, journal articles and, if appropriate, internet sources and primary data.	Evidence of a good range of reading, including academic sources, such as books and journal articles.	Limited engagement with the academic literature, but still sufficient range of sources and evidence of research.	No engagement with academic literature, but there still is sufficient evidence of research (e.g. internet resources).	No engagement with the academic literature and hardly any evidence of research.
Engagement with theoretical (or relevant background) literature	Extensive grounding in theory: evidence of critical awareness and use of relevant theoretical approaches, concepts and debates.	Engagement with relevant theoretical approaches, concepts and/or debates (or - if not appropriate - the relevant background literature); effective connection with the analysis	Engagement with relevant theoretical approaches, concepts and/or debates (or background literature), but not effectively linked with the analysis	Only limited engagement with relevant theoretical approaches, concepts and/or debates (or background literature), and not linked with analysis	Focus on (empirical) analysis without any engagement with relevant theoretical approaches, concepts and/or debates (or background literature).	(see above)

<p>Presentation and organization</p> <p>Quality of writing</p>	<p>Exceptional work of the highest quality, demonstrating accuracy and excellent presentation skills, close to publishable standard.</p>	<p>Clear use of formal language, free of typing and spelling mistakes as well as grammatical errors.</p>	<p>Clear use of formal language with minor errors.</p>	<p>Clear use of language with some errors and some informal language.</p>	<p>Mostly clear use of language but with significant errors and too much informal language.</p>	<p>Unclear language with serious errors.</p>
<p>Structure</p>	<p>Exceptional work of the highest quality, demonstrating excellent organization skills, close to publishable standard.</p>	<p>Logical structure that clearly supports the argument; paragraphs are used in a clear way to support reading comprehension.</p> <p>Begins with an introduction that clearly introduces the reader to the topic, question, aims and approach of the study, and provides an overview of the structure of the dissertation.</p> <p>Ends with conclusions that provide a clear summary of the findings, are linked back to the question and aims of the study, and discuss academic and/or political implications of the findings, or derive recommendations.</p>	<p>Logical structure that supports the argument, but with minor weaknesses.</p> <p>Begins with an introduction that appropriately introduces the reader to the dissertation, though with minor omissions.</p> <p>Includes conclusions that summarize findings and link them back to the original question, but do not discuss implications or derive recommendations.</p>	<p>Mainly logical structure, but with weaknesses.</p> <p>Includes an introduction that, however, omits relevant information.</p> <p>Includes conclusions that, however, omit relevant information.</p>	<p>Partly flawed structure.</p> <p>Weak introduction.</p> <p>Weak conclusions.</p>	<p>Completely illogical structure.</p> <p>No introduction.</p> <p>No conclusions.</p>
<p>Referencing</p>	<p>Fully and appropriately referenced throughout.</p>	<p>Very good referencing, i.e. complete and correctly cited in text and bibliography.</p>	<p>Generally well referenced with minor weaknesses.</p>	<p>Competent referencing but some inconsistencies.</p>	<p>Poorly referenced.</p>	<p>No references.</p>

Explanatory guide

Argument and understanding:

An argument is a statement (or a series of statements) that is used to persuade the reader of a claim or conclusion, or to present reasons for accepting a conclusion. Students are expected to develop an argument that is plausible, logical, free of internal contradictions, and supported by evidence. It does not have to finally persuade the reader but the reader should be able to understand what the author of the dissertation wants to say, i.e. what s/he argues. The development of a clear and coherent argument requires a good understanding of the subject matter. In order to find out what the own argument actually is, it often is helpful to think about a concluding statement that begins with ‘I argue that...’.

Originality:

Students are expected to develop and articulate their own ideas, questions and arguments. They should avoid mere reproduction, thus, duplication of somebody else’s work. That does not mean that students do not refer to the work and ideas of other authors, to the contrary, but these just provide the evidence that is needed to support the own arguments and findings.

Critical thinking:

Students are also expected to demonstrate the ability and willingness to critically discuss and scrutinize ideas and arguments developed and made by others, rather than just describing them.

Research question:

The formulation of a clear research question is an absolute requirement of a focused and consistent dissertation. Students should be able to formulate their question in one sentence that ends with a question mark.

There are analytical and different forms of descriptive (procedural, evaluative, critical) research questions which start with ‘why’ and ‘how’ respectively. In undergraduate dissertations, analytical questions that seek to explain something are often favoured but descriptive questions can yield high marks as well if students gather information on something that is normally not easily accessible (e.g. by conducting interviews or analysing primary data, such as official documents or statistics).

Students are expected to explain the relevance of their question, either by drawing on academic literature (e.g. gaps in the literature, contribution to a debate, etc.) or on the political significance of the question (e.g. new phenomenon, current, very urgent question, etc.).

Research design / approach:

In order to arrive at a plausible answer to the research question, students have to choose an approach through which they can consistently and convincingly address the question. The most appropriate approach will differ from dissertation to dissertation and primarily follows from the research question. It can focus on just one single case study, on the comparison of a few cases, the analysis of many cases, combined with a process-orientation or the analysis of just one point in time. Choosing an approach also includes the selection of sources of information that the analysis will be based on, e.g. secondary literature, official documents, websites etc., and the methods used to collect and analyse these data. On the last point: Most undergraduate dissertations rely exclusively on secondary literature. In that case an elaborate methodology is not required.

Students are, furthermore, expected to explicitly explain their approach (e.g. case selection, sources used, etc.) and to reflect upon its advantages and limitations.

Engagement with academic literature:

A very good dissertation is situated in the relevant academic literature. It does not only analyze and discuss its specific subject but also establishes a connection with previously existing knowledge (which is sort of 'stored', or 'archived', in the academic literature). The review of the relevant literature is furthermore necessary to collect data, which can be analysed, and evidence, which supports the argument and findings (data, however, can also come from other sources, such as reliable websites, documents, etc.).

Students are therefore expected to use academic literature (journal articles, books, book chapters) for their research. They are, furthermore, requested to engage with the theoretical literature or the relevant background literature that goes beyond the specific case(s) analyzed. This can include, for example, the definition and discussion of relevant theoretical concepts, engagement with theories, consideration of relevant debates, or the reflection on similar cases, phenomena, or events. Theoretical or background literature is effectively connected with the analysis if, for instance, hypotheses, expectations, or evaluation criteria are derived which then guide the subsequent analysis, or if findings are discussed in light of existing knowledge, or if the literature review is used to identify a relevant research question, etc.

Presentation and organization:

Academic writing is expected to be clear, formal (i.e. no informal and colloquial language), and accurate (in terms of spelling, grammar and punctuation).

The dissertation has to have a clear and logical structure which helps to support the argument. That means that the dissertation is divided into chapters and sections which focus on different aspects, aim at providing part of the answer to the question and construct the overall argument. All chapters and sections should build on each other and be internally coherent. A clearly structured dissertation begins with an introduction, which introduces the reader to the dissertation, and ends with conclusions that summarize the findings in light of the research question and discuss the academic and/or political implications of these findings.

To avoid plagiarism, all academic writing must be thoroughly referenced throughout.