AIT BUSINESS SCHOOL

Research Project Manual

Guidelines for completing a Master’s Research Project

Master of Business

Year 2016/2017
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8. APPENDIX 1 PROJECT TEMPLATE
1. INTRODUCTION

In partial fulfilment of the Master of Business programme at Athlone Institute of Technology, students are required to complete and submit a research project of 18,000 words. This research project will account for 15 credits out of the 90 credits required to gain the Master’s degree.

The research project provides an opportunity for students to develop their interest in a particular area of study and to demonstrate their ability to carry out independent academic research. In researching and writing the project for submission, students demonstrate that they have developed intellectual insight into the topic of interest, as well as the ability to critically evaluate and integrate other published research in their chosen area.

Responsibility for completion of the project resides with the student. Support is available from formal lectures, workshops, and individual supervision of the research process. However, the scheduling, researching and writing of the research project is ultimately the student’s responsibility.

This document does not attempt to explain the research process or various research methodologies in any detail, as these are covered in the Research Methodology module. Instead it provides an overview, including the project requirements, the role of the supervisor, and guidelines on the layout, structure and referencing a written academic project at this level.

1.1. Submitting the Research Project

Two bound copies and a soft copy (on disc) of the research project are to be submitted to the office of the Head of Business School on or before Thursday 24th August 2017. No submission should exceed 18,000 words (excluding references and appendices).

The project must be the student’s own work. Copying from any other source, without acknowledgement, constitutes plagiarism. If, in the opinion of the examiners, the work has been plagiarised it will be failed and the student will be subject to the disciplinary procedures of the Institute. For more on plagiarism, please see section 4.99 of this document. Students should also consult the Institute’s Student Handbook for additional references to plagiarism before writing up the project.

Students are asked to confirm that the research project is their own work. A suitable pro-forma for doing this is included later in this manual at section 3.3.
1.2. Late submission

Research projects submitted after the closing date of 24th August 2017 will incur penalties in marking, as per the Institute’s regulations. For information, students should refer to the Student Handbook.

1.3. Deferrals:

A deferral may be granted to an individual student in exceptional circumstances, which must be notified to and approved in advance by the Business School.

1.4. Who will assess research project?

The Research Project will be assessed by at least two members of academic staff before a sample of marked projects is presented to the external examiner. The first will be the supervisor. The second will be another internal examiner who will act as peer mentor.

Viva Interview

In addition each student will be required to attend a Viva or interview which will be assessed by a panel assembled from internal or external examiners. The student will be asked questions on the content of their thesis and the research process. This will also be used as a verification that the thesis is the student’s own work. If the Viva examiners are not satisfied that the student is adequately able to both defend their work and prove that it is their own work, this will then be discussed at the exam board meeting.

What happens if you fail?

Failure to reach the required standard in the research project will entail a resubmission by the student. The maximum mark obtainable for the resubmitted work is 40%.

1.5. Research Support

The Research Project involves the carrying out a self-managed piece of research. However, the student’s own efforts will be supplemented by a formal programme of support in the form of lectures and workshops, in addition to advice and encouragement from an academic supervisor.
The support which the student receives is divided into three main aspects.

- The student will receive formal lectures in research methodology during the first semester of the Master’s programme. The Research Methodology module is specifically aimed to enhance the student’s knowledge and understanding of alternative research methodologies and techniques, and to enable the student to develop skills appropriate for undertaking a research project. **As part of this module, each student will submit for approval a research proposal outlining a proposed research topic and the suggested research methodology.**

- The student will receive taught classroom guidance for the research project in the second semester. This is specifically aimed at further developing the student’s research skills and preparing the student for the chosen project.

- The student will receive individual supervision for the research project conducted by an academic member of staff. This supervision will assist the student to progress the work through to completion.

2. SUPERVISION

Each student will be allocated an individual supervisor to advise on the research project. Regular contact with, and feedback from, the supervisor will be a major factor in ensuring successful completion of the research project. For this reason, it is recommended that the student should meet with the supervisor at the earliest possible stage in the process to agree on a timetable for submission of progress reports and for arranging scheduled feedback meetings.

Please remember that it is the student’s responsibility to make initial contact with the designated supervisor, and to keep to the timetabled plan of activity as closely as possible. Supervisors will not be responsible for contacting students who choose not to establish or maintain contact. The maximum duration allocated for direct contact between the supervisor and the student is 15 hours.

2.1. Roles and Responsibilities: The Supervisor

Please remember that the research project should be regarded as a self-managed piece of work. The role of the supervisor is not to complete the project for the student, but to give advice and encouragement. In particular, the supervisor may be able to steer the student towards fruitful areas of research and offer suggestions for directing the project.

The final project is a written document. So, from an early stage, the student should prepare written material for discussion with the supervisor. Supervisors provide more meaningful
feedback when students are well prepared and have sent documentation in advance of scheduled meetings. A record of each meeting will be kept by the supervisor.

Supervisors are not obliged to read every draft of each chapter. It is reasonable to expect the supervisor to read and comment on the first draft of chapters. It is not usually reasonable to expect the same for the second or later versions. Typically, supervisors will read and comment on ‘well-developed’ drafts of the literature review, methodology, research findings and analysis. **They are not required, however, to comment on the Abstract/Executive Summary and the Conclusion chapters.**

The role of the Supervisor is to:

- guide and advise the student
- read any work the student sends in advance of meetings
- provide general feedback on draft chapters
- be familiar with what constitutes an acceptable Master’s project.

**It is NOT the supervisor’s responsibility to:**

- tell the student how to do the research
- tell the student what he/she should be reading, except in general terms
- check grammar and spelling, other than tell the student that the work contains errors
- correct mistakes on page numbering, section numbers, tables etc
- deal with problems concerning references, other than in general terms
- follow up on students who choose not to establish or maintain contact
- contact students who do not submit agreed drafts of work.

### 2.2. Role and Responsibilities: The Student

The student’s role and responsibilities will be agreed with the supervisor, but should be along the following lines:

The student will be expected to:

- ensure that an appropriate amount of time and effort is applied to the research project
- agree with the supervisor on a timetabled schedule of work
- keep in regular contact with the supervisor, in accordance with agreed schedules
- send an agenda of issues for discussion, together with any relevant work, before meetings
- be receptive to advice from the supervisor
- be honest when reporting progress
• properly acknowledge text, material and ideas created by others
• communicate to the supervisor any problems likely to affect the quality and timeliness of the work.

Ultimately, it is the student’s responsibility to:
• carry out the research
• write up the complete research project
• present the research project in an approved form
• defend the completed project, as required, before an examination panel which will normally consist of two or more of the following: Head of Department/School, an internal examiner and an external examiner.

2.3. Managing the Relationship with your Supervisor

The overall relationship between the student and the supervisor should be based on professionalism and mutual respect. There is also a large degree of common sense involved in making the relationship work.

In meeting with the supervisor, each student will have the benefit of a module on research methods. This module is a fundamental part of the process. The supervisor will assume that the student has completed this module and will not spend time addressing the basics of what has already been covered and should have been learned. The student will also have the content of this manual, containing details on the requirements and organisation of a research project including word count, layout, structure, proper referencing, format etc. Each student will need to study this before meeting with the supervisor. It is frustrating for a supervisor to have to answer simple questions which have already been covered in this manual or elsewhere within the curriculum.

Although a research project is of key importance to each student, it is only one of a range of priorities for the supervisor. Reading a research project draft is time consuming. A supervisor may also be supervising other students, as well as having a heavy teaching load. It is not usually appropriate to knock on the supervisor’s door and expect him/her to be either in or available to immediately deal with a query. Also, if a student requires a supervisor to read a draft chapter it should not be e-mailed on a Friday afternoon with feedback expected on Monday morning. Normally one should expect comments within about 10 days – beyond that, it is worth sending a reminder to the supervisor.
Please bear in mind that the supervisor will be taking holidays during the year, at Easter and after mid-June. The student should discuss this in advance with him/her and work around these dates. In particular, the summer will coincide with the period for completing the project.

With this in mind, it is necessary to manage time effectively throughout the whole academic year. Plan ahead. The student should not send a draft of a chapter and then wait around until feedback is received. Move on to the next chapter and then revise the earlier one when the comments come back.

As indicated above, the student normally has limited access to a supervisor’s time so it should be used wisely.

3. ORGANISATION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

A research project is primarily an exercise in organisation. While the content and logic of the research are of paramount importance, the organisation and style elements are critical to the acceptance of the research project by readers and examiners. It is essential to avoid an informal, chatty style, and slang must be avoided. Each research project, regardless of the topic, should include an introduction, literature review, research methodology, findings, analysis, and conclusions. An effective way to proceed, is to answer the following questions:

- What is the topic and problem? Answer: the introduction and literature review
- How is the topic and problem to be studied? Answer: the research methodology
- What are the results? Answer: the findings
- What do the findings mean? Answer: the analysis
- What importance does the research have for theory and practice? Answer: the conclusions

A recommended outline for the completed research project is as follows:

- Title page
- Signed statement
- Acknowledgement or dedication (optional)
- Table of contents
- List of tables and figures
- Abstract/Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Literature review
- Research methodology
• Findings and analysis
• Discussions
• Conclusions
• List of references
• Appendices (anything not included in the main body of the project and which may be of benefit to the reader, such as additional tables, illustrations, graphs, glossary).

3.1. Title

Many people will read the research project title, while only a few will read the entire report. An appropriate title should adequately describe the content of the research project in the fewest possible words. It should be concise, understandable and focused so as to reflect the body of work which it represents.

3.2. Title Page

The title page should include the following:
• Full project title, and subtitle, if any
• Full name of the author, followed, if desired, by any qualifications
• Details of the research project:
  o “This research project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the (Degree of Master of Business) at the Athlone Institute of Technology.”
• Name of the School
• Name of the research supervisor
• Month and year of submission

3.3. Signed Statement

After the title page, the following statement is to be included on a separate page:

I have read the Institute’s code of practice on plagiarism. I hereby certify this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of (Master of Business) is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, only to the extent that such work has been cited within the text of my work.

Student ID Number:
Name of Candidate:
Signature of Candidate:
Date:
3.4. Acknowledgement

This is optional. The student may wish to include an acknowledgment page. This will allow you to thank individuals and organisations responsible for assisting you with your research work.

3.5. Table of Contents

The student should include a table of contents, giving chapter and section headings and page references. A list of figures, such as diagrams and tables should also be included, after the contents page.

3.6. Abstract/Executive Summary

This is one of the last things to be done. The abstract should appear at the front of the research project, and is usually one to three pages long. The abstract serves as a summary of the whole project, and is suitable for a wide readership. It provides an overview, by outlining clearly the research question(s) and principal research objectives, describing the methodology employed, summarising the findings of the research, and, most importantly, by stating the principal conclusions drawn (and any recommendations). The abstract is not a place for elaborating upon any of the main themes. In writing the abstract, eliminate detail, omit references to previous work, and avoid lengthy discussions of in-depth knowledge gained through the research. The purpose is to convey the content of the research project in a clear, concise and summarised manner.

3.7. Introduction

The introduction should provide the rationale for the study and sufficient background information to allow the reader to understand the focus of the research project. It is critical that the research aims and objectives of the research project are made explicit. The student should begin by clearly providing the research question and research objectives, as well as the nature and scope of the topic investigated. The student is expected to continue by providing a context for the investigation within the literature, and to follow by outlining the method of investigation (survey, observation, experimentation etc.), as well as the reasons for selecting particular methods. Thus, the introduction provides a brief overview of each subsequent chapter within the research project.
3.8. Literature Review

Literature reviews should summarise current academic thought or the key literature on the area of interest. These provide a context for the research and demonstrate that the student has read and understood the literature. However, the review is not meant to be a definitive, exhaustive record of all the publications read during the course of the research. Thus, the student must choose references carefully to provide the most salient information and to establish their relevance to the work, rather than an exhaustive summation of the topic.

The literature review is mainly conducted using the resources of the Institute Library accessed both online and in person. Methods to be used are reading books and journal articles by the leading experts. Online journals and conference proceedings are also rich sources of information together with Google Scholar to source other relevant articles.

Questions to ask yourself while writing this chapter

- How widely/deeply have you read his subject area?
- Have the key seminal texts been mentioned?
- Has there been critical engagement with the literature?
- You need to give your opinions/commentary on the literature?
- Do you agree with what the literature is saying? It is ok to disagree.
- To what extent is the text adequately referenced?
- Is there a separate list of references?
- Are there a reasonable number of recent references?

It is vital that this chapter contains a critical evaluation and discussion of the relevant literature. Within the critical review, it is necessary to put together different authors’ ideas and methodologies, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of these ideas, and to form your own opinion and conclusions. A common mistake with critical literature reviews is that they become uncritical listings of previous research, often becoming little more than a descriptive list of ‘who said what’, and bibliographies. It is not enough simply to list and describe that which has been previously undertaken by researchers. It is essential to summarise and compare the pieces of research to see how these differ in their approaches, research methods and findings, and to explore whether common themes emerge.

The literature review should relate directly to the research question and be organised by theme, trend, argument, or by comparison and contrast of theoretical positions. Typically, the main themes in the literature form the main headings of the literature review. The structure of
the main headings of the literature review is important, as these headings will be used continuously throughout the research project. The main themes will be used as the structure for the main research questions, and again in reporting the findings and in writing the conclusions.

The review of the literature will act as a background against which the student can carry out and report on his/her own research. In locating material for the literature review, remember to obtain the full reference for each data source, whether it is a journal article, book, monograph, industry report, or an electronic source. **Never cite references that have not been read.** Identify base-line material, as well as including current sources. In every field there are seminal articles on which many other sources ‘piggyback’. Students get credit for identifying those seminal authors and their work. Students earn credit for exhibiting the ability to identify passages that make a controversial or exceptional argument and do so in a manner that is striking, pointed, or persuasive. In reading articles, it is necessary to pay particular attention to the section which outlines ‘suggestions for further research’ (usually towards the end of the article). This is a useful way of identifying topics in a research area. Moreover, the author may suggest the need for replicating his/her study in another jurisdiction, country, market or time period.

During the literature review process, most students wish to know when they should stop looking for material. Ultimately, the student decides. However, a good indication that the literature search is sufficient is when the same key authors appear repeatedly in the references of new sources obtained. Hence, it is likely nothing new is being added to the debate. A related concern is the breadth of the literature review. Again, the student must judge the scope. The review does not have to cover every article on the topic. Yet it does require a critical mass of material to enable the student to isolate perspectives, note trends and spot divergences. In gathering material for the literature review, the following questions are helpful in assessing each source:

- What is the significance of the data in the journal article in relation to the research topic?
- In what way does the journal article contribute to an understanding of the research topic? What are its strengths and weaknesses?
- Has the author of the journal article evaluated the literature relevant to the research question? Does the author include literature with which s/he does not agree?
- Is there an objective basis for the author’s reasoning, or is the author merely proving what s/he already believes?
• Is it possible to deconstruct the logical flow of the author’s argument to identify whether (or where) it breaks down?
• What methodology did the author use? What type of research instruments do key authors use in investigating this topic?

3.9. Research Methodology

3.9.1. Introduction

The purpose of the research methodology section is to show how the research was conducted and to allow for the research to be validated. This section is often one of the weakest in research projects. The major source of weakness is that, very often, the chosen research methods are not linked together into a research strategy which is linked to the focus of the work being undertaken. The methodology needs to be justified in terms of the research questions posed.

A common mistake is to include the research findings in the methodology section. Another oversight is failure to include the research limitations, which refers to boundaries of the data. In other words, to outline the extent to which the information may be used in addressing the topic and answering the research question. Methodology chapters are expected to outline the answer to these questions:

• Have you provided an overview of the alternative business research methods available?
• Have you justified your research strategy?
• Have you justified your choice of method(s)?
• Have you critiqued / explained the limitations of his chosen method(s)?
• How appropriate is the research method to the aim and objectives?
• If a questionnaire was used, what kind of sample was chosen, how were the recipients determined, how was the sample size determined etc?
• Has the data collection tool (e.g. questionnaire) been designed appropriately to measure what it set out to achieve?
• Have you considered using triangulation to prove enhanced validity to your findings?

3.9.2. Data Collection methods

• What data is necessary to answer the research question? Answer: the research objectives
• Who has the information to answer the research question and will they agree to provide it? Answer: sample
3.9.3. Outline of chapter

A suggested outline for the research methodology chapter is as follows:

- Introduction - provide an overview of the chapter.
- Research question - state research question clearly and concisely. The research question represents an area of study, which is then translated into individual objectives (sometimes also framed as questions) or hypotheses (educated hunches).
- Appropriate research methods - outline and discuss the research methods that could be reasonably used, given the research question.
- Choosing a research method - discuss and explain why the particular method or methods was/were used. It is also appropriate to explain limitations in access which may have narrowed possible research methods.
- Detailed description of the research method used - detail how the research was carried out, using the selected method. For example, if a survey was used, explain to whom it was sent, how were these people chosen, the structure of the questionnaire, and the check for non-response bias.
- Limitations - outline the inherent limitations to the research methods selected and in their application.
- Conclusion - summary of the main arguments in the chapter.

A note to the student: Think ahead! The type of analysis you wish to perform will dictate what kind of data needs to be collected and the way in it will be collected. This is because the kind of data you collect, and the particular way in which you gather the data, will inevitably place some constraints on the manner in which you conduct your analysis. Too often, students make the mistake of collecting data only to discover that the data collected cannot be analysed for the purpose of answering the research question(s). So, think about how you will analyse the data before you collect it.

3.10. Analysis of Findings

This chapter presents the findings. The following questions should be asked while writing this chapter

- Have you clearly explained the methods used to analyse the data?
- Is there an explicit data analysis strategy and reporting?
• How well does the analysis address the research objectives?
• Have you captured the more salient findings?
• You do not discuss the findings you merely state what the data collection found.

The findings section is a significant part of the research project, as it shows the transformation of data into knowledge. Often, it is useful to begin by providing an overall description of the findings, or the ‘big picture’, and to then present and analyse the data. Most importantly, on the basis of the primary research carried out, the findings should address the research question and each of the research objectives. If the research question has its origins in the literature, the findings should have some bearing on the literature.

There is a considerable difference between handling data and being overwhelmed by data. Credit is given to students who allow themselves enough time after data collection to stand back and organise it in a manner that most effectively and concisely communicates the findings. Avoid redundancy in the results. Focus on presenting representative data rather than endlessly repetitive data.

The compulsion to include everything demonstrates a lack of discrimination rather than proving that one has unlimited information. Only meaningful results should be presented, i.e. those which either support or reject the hypotheses proposed. Also, it is important to describe the negative aspects of the research and to state what was not found. Essentially, the findings should be presented with clarity.

3.11. Discussion

Usually, the discussion of the findings is conducted as part of the narrative in which they are presented and described. However, sometimes a topic is best handled by separating the presentation of the findings from a discussion and analysis of the data findings.

The following questions should be asked while writing this chapter:

• Have you discussed the findings and how they link to the research objectives?
• Have you attempted to link the literature to the findings?
• Have you provided critical discussion of findings?
• Do your findings agree or disagree with the literature?

The following guidelines will facilitate the writing of robust analysis of the findings:
• Present the principles, relationships and generalisations shown by the data. An appropriate discussion analyses the data rather than simply reiterating the findings from the data.

• Indicate any exceptions, identify unsettled issues, and provide tentative reasons for such unexpected findings.

• Show how the findings and interpretations agree or contrast with previous publications.

3.12. Conclusions (and any recommendations)

The aim of this chapter is to present the conclusions and to outline possible areas for further research. Often students do little more than rehash the findings in this section. Instead, you should *explain what the findings mean and what judgements can be formed on the basis of your findings*. It is the conclusions that will demonstrate whether you have addressed the research question and the degree of insight which you should have shown in reaching the conclusions. It is essential, therefore, to allow sufficient thought to the extent to which the research question has been answered and the research objectives have been met.

The following questions should be asked when writing this chapter:

• Have you provided a personal reflection on the year and the project in particular? (do not quote theory it is your learning that is of interest)

• How closely do the conclusions address the objectives?

• How well do the conclusions meet the overall aim?

• Are the conclusions consistent with the analysis of findings and discussion?

• Have you acknowledged any limitations?

• Have you provided a framework for possible future research?

The following guidelines will facilitate the writing of a strong conclusion:

• Discuss theoretical implications of the findings, as well as any practical applications. Given the findings and conclusions, how may the area of study be viewed differently? Were there any surprising findings that may warrant further investigation?

• Highlight shortcomings in the data. With the benefit of experience, how could the research be done differently? Are there other variables to examine, other people to interview? Were the objectives too broad, would a different/modified research tool be better? The reflective learning process will be significant here.

• State each conclusion clearly and summarise the evidence for each conclusion.

• Outline how you or another researcher might build on the research project’s findings and conclusions.
3.13. Appendices

Appendices are bound with the research project and include any materials which are not central to the research project but which may enhance a reader’s understanding, such as: an example of the questionnaire, list of questions used for probing during in-depth interviews or a broad list of quotations organised by theme or organisation. Refer to appendix items within the main body of the text. Number each appendix item and preface each item with a title page. Just as for tables and figures within the main body of the report, tables and figures within the appendices should be explained fully and sourced.

3.14. List of References

Here, a complete list of all work cited in the research project should be included. A range of conventions is used to reference the material of other writers’ work cited. We recommend that you use the Harvard System of Referencing. For details on the Harvard System of Referencing, please see section 4.10 below in this manual, as well as the research project guidelines in the AIT Master’s degree Handbook.
4. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH PROJECT

4.1. Research project Length

As indicated earlier the research project length should be approximately 18,000 words (excluding appendices and lists of references).

Formatting and Style

The text should be printed, in double spacing, on one side only of each A4 sheet. The recommended font is Times New Roman in font size 12. Margins should be appropriate for binding purposes and presentation. Page numbering should begin on page 1 of chapter 1. Page numbers should be located in the centre or on the bottom right hand corner of each page. Ensure all fonts and formatting are consistent and that headings match the table of contents. To indicate the hierarchy in topics, paragraphs within chapters should be numbered as shown below.

1.0 CHAPTER 1 TITLE IN BOLD CAPITALS
   1.1 Major Headings in Bold Upper and Lower Case
       1.1.1 Subheadings in Bold Italics Upper and Lower Case
           1.1.1.1 Further Subheadings in Italics Upper and Lower Case
           1.1.1.2 Further Subheadings in Italics Upper and Lower Case

2.0 CHAPTER 2 TITLE IN BOLD CAPITALS
   2.1 Major Headings in Bold Upper and Lower Case
       2.1.1 Subheadings in Bold Italics Upper and Lower Case
           2.1.1.1 Further Subheadings in Italics Upper and Lower Case
           2.1.1.2 Further Subheadings in Italics Upper and Lower Case

4.2. Tables and Figures

The number and title of the table or figure should appear above the table or figure. Tables and figures should be numbered consecutively within each chapter. For example, Table 1.1 refers to table one in chapter 1 and Figure 1.1 refers to figure one in chapter 1. If the table or figure is taken from a referenced source, then the full citation, in the normal referencing style, should appear below the table or figure. A list of tables and a list of figures should be included after the table of contents.

4.3. Abbreviations

Name of organisations, government agencies, long technical names, and names of techniques should be abbreviated if they occur frequently in the research project. However, they should be spelt out when first used and followed by their abbreviations in parentheses, for example, just-in-time (JIT), corporate social responsibility (CSR), fast moving consumer goods
(FMCG). Thereafter, only the abbreviation is used without parentheses. If numerous abbreviations are used, a complete list of these abbreviations and their meanings should be provided in an Appendix.

4.4. Footnotes

The use of footnotes should be kept to an absolute minimum. Do not use footnotes for citations. Acknowledgement of help from an unpublished source such as an interview or speech can be made in a footnote. Footnotes should be numbered consecutively throughout the research project with superscript numerals. They must be placed at the bottom of the page on which the footnote refers.

4.5. Writing Style

The aim is to communicate clearly and concisely. Do not try to impress with unnecessarily complex means of expression when simple words would do. Please use spell checks and grammar checks to identify errors. Proof read carefully, as presentation is important. One way to proof read is to read the document aloud, noticing difficult passages that may require revision. Another suggestion is to have someone else proof read the document. Note that grammar, sentence construction, language, word choice, structure and flow of arguments will be considered in determining the final research project mark.

4.6. Sentences and Sentence Construction

Avoid one-sentence paragraphs. Clear, concise sentences are preferable to lengthy, complex ones. If one word will suffice, do not use two, unless it enhances clarity. Please do not use a list of bulleted points to present a cohesive argument. Arguments and analysis should be presented in paragraph form. Avoid redundancy. More specific points with respect to sentence construction include:

- Do not begin a sentence with a numeral. Rather than “12 schools of thought were discussed by Sheth et al. (1988)....” please write, “Twelve schools of thought were discussed by Sheth et al. (1988)....”
- Conditional sentences use the construction “If marketing were considered a science ...” rather than “If marketing was considered a science ...”
- Do not end sentences with prepositions, such as to, from, with, and after. Correct trailing prepositions by recasting the sentences. Rather than “Which school of thought should marketing scholars subscribe to?” please write, “To which school of thought should marketing scholars subscribe?”
4.7. Language and Word Choice

Avoid colloquial language. Rather than feel or hope use the word believe. Do not use personal pronouns I or we. Instead, use the passive voice or impersonal nouns, such as: one, the researcher or the author of this analysis. Do not confuse their with they’re, or there. Similarly, do not confuse its with it’s, and to with too or two. The words that and very are overused and are often not required to enhance meaning. Moreover, when the word this is used, particularly at the beginning of a sentence, ensure to clarify to what this refers. Eliminate trite, meaningless phrases, such as: it is clear that, it is presumed that, because of the fact that, in the field of marketing, offer an observation, make an application, in the first place, in a few instances, at present, and at that time.

4.8. Grammar and Punctuation Convention

Please abide by the rules of grammar. Possession is demonstrated using an apostrophe followed by the letter ‘s’. Hence, “Hunt’s arguments aim to demonstrate that marketing, as an area of study, may be considered a science.” is preferable to “Hunts arguments aim to demonstrate that marketing, as an area of study, may be considered a science.” There are no spaces before a comma or a full stop. There is one space after a comma, and two spaces after a full stop. A colon (:) introduces a series of items, where as a semi-colon (;) is used to connect independent clauses and indicates a closer relationship between the clauses than a period.

4.9. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is primarily defined as ‘copying or paraphrasing another person’s work, be it published or unpublished, without acknowledging it’. Hence, plagiarism is the act of presenting the work of another writer as if it were one’s own.

Plagiarism may happen intentionally when a student deliberately attempts to pass someone else’s work as their own. However, it may also happen unintentionally if you are unaware of the rules concerning this matter, or are unfamiliar with the correct forms of referencing. To avoid accusations of plagiarism, ensure that you fully cite and reference materials you use.

You are free to quote directly or indirectly from any publication, provided that you provide a reference for the author. If you fail to acknowledge your sources, you run the risk of being accused of plagiarism which is an academic offence.
It is the responsibility of the student to ensure written documents are appropriately referenced.

Three steps are necessary to avoid any suggestion of plagiarism.

- First, always put quotation marks (“ ”) around someone else’s words, credit them to their source in the reference, and give page numbers where specific quotations are used.

- Second, in borrowing the ideas of another writer, state this clearly. Borrowing ideas is a perfectly acceptable aspect of academic work, provided appropriate acknowledgement is made.

- Third, every reference cited in the text must appear in the list of references and must contain all the data necessary for identification. All references should be complete to the extent that if a reader wants to find a particular reference, they can do so easily. References are to be listed alphabetically by author at the end of a written document. If there are two articles by the same author, or authors, then these should be presented in ascending chronological order of date of publication.

To summarise:

- It is legitimate to summarise articles and journal material, provided you use your own words.

- If you do wish to use phrases or paragraphs from sources, make sure that these are properly referenced.

**4.10. References and Referencing**

References should be used throughout the text, as appropriate, and listed alphabetically at the end of the project.

Referencing is important as a means to:

- Acknowledge the work of others
- Attribute a quotation
- Provide justification for a statement
- Lend support to arguments presented
- Demonstrate knowledge and scope of the literature consulted
- Allow readers to trace arguments presented
- Avoid being accused of plagiarism.

As mentioned at 3.13 above it is recommended that you use the **Harvard System of referencing** in writing the research project. For more on the Harvard System of referencing, please refer to the AIT Student handbook and to the research project guidelines in the Masters Manual. Below is a brief summary of the Harvard System of referencing.
4.10.1. Referencing Ideas and Opinions within Text

To cite references to the single author of a work within the text of an assignment, use the surname of the author followed by a comma and then the year, all enclosed in brackets. For example:

Concurring with Keller (2003), Bowers (2004) believes revitalisation is more applicable for the fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) market where purchase decisions are made instantaneously.

When a citation has two or three authors, cite both surnames in the reference:

Unpaid work has received little research attention, yet is found to be of increasing importance (Noon and Blyton, 2002).

One significant criticism of marketing as an area of study is that it does not have a robust general theory (Sheth, Gardner and Garrett, 1988).

When a citation has more than three authors, cite the surname of the first author and follow it with the phrase ‘et al.’ the Latin abbreviation for ‘and others’. For example:

“As the world spins through the first decade of the twenty-first century, dramatic changes are occurring in the world of marketing.” (Kotler et al., 2005, p. 20).

In the list of references included at the end of the documents, list all of the authors in the order given on the publication e.g.


In referring to more than one publication by the same author from the same year within the same document, use a lower case letter after the date (working through from the beginning of the alphabet) to distinguish each publication in the order in which you cite them. For example, assume in one part of the document reference is made to Jeffrey Pfeffer’s book The Human Equation, published in 1998, and in another part of the same document, reference is made to an article by Pfeffer on variable pay, published in the same year. Two sentences from different parts of the document might therefore read:

Among passionate critics of variable pay, two noteworthy contributions to the debate are Kohn (1993) and Pfeffer (1998a).

‘Best practice’ versions of HRM incorporate the notion that there is a single definitive set of HR practices which will yield positive effects on business performance for all organisations in all circumstances (Pfeffer, 1998b).

In the list of references, list Pfeffer’s works thus:


References of **more than one author/publication** for the same piece of evidence or idea should be separated by semi-colons. For example:

The term ‘network’ has become an umbrella term for all kinds of relationships, which develop between the organisation, its suppliers, customers, competitors and other entities (Hakansson, 1987; Scott, 1991; Baker, 1992; Doz and Hamel, 1997).

### 4.10.2. Referencing Quotations within the Text

When quoting the exact words of an author, report, or a research finding in detail, place a colon before the quotation, enclose the words used in a single set of inverted commas and include the page number in the reference within the assignment text. Long quotations of more than two lines need to be indented in a separate paragraph. For example:

Associative networks are defined as “private forms of governance of economic interest” (Lindberg et al., 1991, p. 14).

According to Peppers and Rogers (1997, p. 78), managing relationships is crucial for survival. They note that:

“In this new age of interactivity, success will be largely determined by an organisation’s ability to manage the relationship with an individual constituent – effectively. This shifts the focus from managing products and services to managing relationships. Organisations will anticipate the personal requirements of valued and well-understood donors, members and volunteers.”

### 4.10.3. Compiling a List of References

The list of references, located at the end of the document, incorporates all references, in their expanded form, that were cited in the text. The reference list is organised in alphabetical order of the author's/authors' surname for each reference or the name of the organisation publishing the text, if there is no named individual. All references such as, books, journals, newspaper articles, websites, industry reports are included in the same list. Most importantly, all references included in the body of the document should appear in the reference list, and no references should appear in the reference list, which are not mentioned in the text. To aid reading, a blank line should be left between each item in the list of references. For example:


**Books**

The order of items in a bibliographical reference to a book is as follows:

author, year of publication, title in italics, publisher and place of publication, as shown in the example below:


**Chapter in a book**

For a book chapter, the bibliographical reference is set out as follows: author of chapter, date, title of chapter enclosed by inverted commas, editor of book, title of book in italics, publisher and place of publication, page numbers of start and end of chapter. An example with punctuation is shown below:


**Journal article**

For an article in a journal, the order and components of the bibliographical reference are as follows: author, date, title of article enclosed by inverted commas, journal title in italics, volume and issue number of journal, page numbers of start and end of article. For example:


**References to sources on the World Wide Web**

Include the title of the document, author and date where these are stated, and give the full internet address, (URL or Uniform Resource Locator) using exactly the same punctuation as on the web. For example:


5. **ASSESSMENT**

On the examination of a completed research project, the supervisor and a second reader (peer review) will independently assign a grade. The external examiner will be involved in agreeing the final grade to be assigned to the students.

In general terms, we expect research projects to show evidence of:
knowledge of business and management
comprehension
application of theory
analysis and synthesis
evaluation.

A project will be awarded a **Distinction/First Class Honours (70% or more)** if

- the student shows an excellent grasp of course material and uses it to great effect in the research project; the student demonstrates breadth of knowledge and a critical understanding of at least one core business subject and any conclusions drawn are supported by the argument having considered all major alternatives
- major concepts are handled critically rather than superficially
- recommended texts and readings are referred to where they add support to the case being made; the student includes other sources not directly recommended by tutors and shows evidence that they have thoroughly researched the topic through their critical use of a wide range of relevant and challenging material
- the research project is well constructed with objectives well set out, problems stated, analysis carried out and conclusions convincingly drawn; and limitations are clearly pointed out.
- the research project is well presented in a concise and articulate way; it is well written with tables, graphs and bibliography/references properly laid out; quotes are acknowledged and sources cited
- research methods are explicitly laid out and clearly justified; methodology is appropriately employed; data used is accurately described, methods of use recorded and analysis employed to support the main argument.

To be awarded a **pass grade (40%)** or more:

- the work should be legible and readable with good grammar, spelling and punctuation; tables, graphs and bibliography/references are properly laid out; quotes are acknowledged and sources cited; there is an adequate but not stimulating executive summary
- there should be some use of relevant material
- the general project guidelines should have been followed.
The project will be graded a **Fail (39% or less)** if:

- the research project does not answer the question asked or does not meet its own objectives, or
- presentation is sufficiently poor to prevent communication taking place, or
- vital material is absent, or
- the relationship of the research project to a particular issue is not discussed or is only discussed in a superficial way.

The **criteria** against which your research project will be assessed are:

- Background and terms of reference 10%
- Literature review 20%
- Research methodology 20%
- Analysis of findings 15%
- Discussion of findings 15%
- Conclusions 10%
- Presentation 10%

100%

Students should ask themselves the following questions to help ensure they are meeting the assessment criteria.

**Background and Terms of Reference (10%)**

- *How well does the background set the scene?*
- *How clear are the research aim and objectives?*
- *How compatible are the objectives with the aim?*
- *How adequate does the executive summary synthesise the overall piece of work?*

**Literature Review (20%)**

- *Has there been critical engagement with the literature?*
- *How widely/deeply has the student read his subject?*
- *Have the key seminal texts been mentioned?*
- *To what extent is the text adequately referenced?*
- *Is there a separate list of references?*
- *Are there a reasonable number of recent references?*

**Research Methodology (20%)**

- *How appropriate is the research method to the research aim and objectives?*
- *How extensive is the explanation of alternative business research methods available?*
- *How well has the student justified his choice of method(s)?*
• How well has the student critiqued / explained the limitations of his chosen method(s)?
• Has the data collection tool (e.g. questionnaire, interviews) been designed appropriately to measure what it set out to achieve?
• If a questionnaire was used, what kind of sample was chosen, how were the recipients determined, how was the sample size determined etc?

Analysis of Findings (15%)
• Is there an explicit data analysis strategy and reporting?
• How well does the analysis of findings address the objectives?
• Has the student captured the more salient findings

Discussion (15%)
• Has the student attempted to link the lit review discussed to their findings?
• Has the student acknowledged any limitations to their research findings?
• Has the student provided critical discussion and reflection?
• Has the student provided a framework for possible future research?

Conclusions (and any Recommendations) (10%)
• How closely do the conclusions address the research objectives?
• How well do the conclusions meet the overall aim?
• Are the conclusions consistent with the analysis of findings and discussion section?
• Have the conclusions been stated with an appropriate level of confidence consistent with the research approach?
• How appropriate/feasible are the recommendations?

Presentation (10%)
• Was a detailed List of Contents included?
• Was the dissertation logically structured?
• How easy was it to understand what the student was attempting to say?
• How appropriate was the use and choice of illustrations/charts/tables/figures?
• Was appropriate material shown in an appendix?

The oral presentation or viva before a panel of examiners will be used to confirm the validity of the allocated mark. The duration will be approximately 30 minutes. This presentation will be scheduled for a date within the first two weeks of September.
6. RESEARCH PROJECT TIMELINES

The following are suggested timelines for the submission of your research project. The aim of the timeline is to ensure you work on a consistent basis over the full academic year rather than leaving it all to the last few months. The chapters you submit as part of this process will change after you submit the draft. The important part is that you commit to submitting the chapter in draft form by the dates outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background research on your possible subject areas (use the research proposal document to guide your research)</td>
<td>September, October &amp; early November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Proposal</td>
<td>Monday, 9th January 2017 – via moodle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2 Literature Review</td>
<td>Monday, 20 February 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1 Introduction</td>
<td>Mid-March, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3 Research Methodology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>Completed by mid-April, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 Analysis of Findings</td>
<td>Mid June 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Project</td>
<td>Monday 24th August 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viva</td>
<td>Thursday 21st September 2017 or Friday 22nd September 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you submit as per the above timelines you supervisor will guarantee to have feedback to you within 10 working days. Failure to comply with the above dates will lead to delays in obtaining feedback. Please note that Academic staff are on annual leave from June 20th 2017:
7. CONTACT DETAILS

For further discussion on any of aspect of the above, please contact

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APPENDIX 1

PROJECT TEMPLATE

---

Project Title

AUTHOR:

SUPERVISOR:

20XX

This document is a guide to completing your project and as should be viewed as the minimum requirements in terms of format of the project. Please refer to the questions to ask yourself while writing this chapter in each section.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
DECLARATION

I declare that the work described in this dissertation is, except where otherwise stated, entirely my own work and has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other higher education institution.

Signed: ________________________________
PERMISSION TO LEND AND/OR COPY

I agree that Athlone Institute of Technology Library may lend or copy this dissertation upon request.

Signed: _________________________________

Name
Date
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Tables

Figures

List of Abbreviations
ABSTRACT/EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One page providing a high level overview of the project including at least one of the key elements of the literature review and a summary of why you did the research and the findings
CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 - Introduction

1.x - Background to the study

1.x - Rationale for undertaking this research

1.x - Research Aims

1.x - Research Objectives

Questions to ask yourself while writing this chapter

- How well does the introduction set the scene?
- Have you given the background to the study, where the research was undertaken, who you contacted to collect the primary data.
- Why have I chosen this area to research?
- How clear are the aims and objectives?
- How compatible are the objectives with the aim?
1.6. - Project Roadmap

The rest of the document breaks down as follows:

Chapter 2 - Literature Review
Provide a brief explanation of the chapter

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology
Provide a brief explanation of the chapter

Chapter 4 – Analysis of Findings
Provide a brief explanation of the chapter

Chapter 5 - Discussion
Provide a brief explanation of the chapter

Chapter 6 - Conclusion
Provide a brief explanation of the chapter
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. - Introduction

2.x. - Methods
This literature review was mainly conducted using the resource of the library at xxxxxxxxxxx accessed both online and in person. Methods used were reading books and journal articles by the leading experts. Online journals and conference proceedings were also rich sources of information together with use of the Internet and in particular Google Scholar to source other relevant articles. Examples of keyword searches include xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

2.X – Summary

This chapter did XXX and the next chapter will do YYYYY

Questions to ask yourself while writing this chapter

• How widely/deeply have you read his subject area?
• Have the key seminal texts been mentioned?
• Has there been critical engagement with the literature?
• You need to give your opinions/commentary on the literature?
• Do you agree with what the literature is saying? It is ok to disagree
• To what extent is the text adequately referenced?
• Is there a separate list of references?
• Are there a reasonable number of recent references?
CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 - Introduction

4.x - Research Strategy

4.x - Methods

4.x Sampling Strategy

4.x Procedure

4.X Limitations

4.x - Summary

This chapter described the research methodology used xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx. The next chapter details the research findings YYYYYY

Questions to ask yourself while writing this chapter

- Have you provided an overview of the alternative business research methods available?
- Have you justified your research strategy?
- Have you justified your choice of method(s)?
- Have you critiqued / explained the limitations of his chosen method(s)?
- How appropriate is the research method to the aim and objectives?
- Is the sample strategy clear.
- Has the data collection tool (e.g. questionnaire) been designed appropriately to measure what it set out to achieve?
- Have you considered using triangulation to prove enhanced validity to your findings?
CHAPTER 4 – ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

4.1 - Introduction

4.x - Summary

This chapter presented the findings. The next chapter will draw conclusions based on these findings. xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Questions to ask yourself while writing this chapter

- Have you clearly explained the methods used to analyse the data?
- Is there an explicit data analysis strategy and reporting?
- How well does the analysis address the research objectives?
- Have you captured the more salient findings?
- You do not discuss the findings you merely state what the data collection found
CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION

5.1 - Introduction

5.x Discussion

5.x Reflection

5.X Limitations and further research

5.x - Summary

This chapter did XXXXXXXX. The next chapter will do YYYYYY

Questions to ask yourself while writing this chapter

- Have you discussed the findings and how they link to the research objectives?
- Have you attempted to link the literature to the findings?
- Have you provided critical discussion of findings?
- Do your findings agree or disagree with the literature?
- Have you provided a personal reflection on the year and the project in particular? (do not quote theory it is your learning that is of interest)
- Have you acknowledged any limitations?
- Have you provided a framework for possible future research?
CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION

6.1. – Key Conclusions

6.x. – Recommendations

Questions to ask yourself while writing this chapter

- How closely do the conclusions address the objectives?
- How well do the conclusions meet the overall aim?
- Are the conclusions consistent with the analysis of findings and discussion?
- Have you made any recommendations? Are they compatible with the conclusions?
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