

Guidelines for Master's Thesis Examiners

Date Last Modified: December 2022

How many examiners are there, and who are they? There are two independent thesis examiners. One examiner is external to the University of Canterbury. The other examiner will usually be an academic staff member of the University but cannot be the Senior Supervisor and will not normally be a member of the supervisory team, unless there is no other member of the University qualified to act as examiner. If no suitable examiner can be identified at the University then two examiners external to the University may be appointed.

Who appoints the examiners? The Dean of Postgraduate Research, after considering the recommendations from the relevant Department/School.

Who knows who the examiners are? Prior to the nomination of examiners, the Head of Department/School must inform the candidate of the names of the proposed examiners. The candidate has the right to make a case to the Dean of Postgraduate Research that a particular person not be appointed as an examiner.

With whom can the examiners communicate? Prior to grading the thesis, examiners may communicate only with the Dean of Postgraduate Research (directly or via the Postgraduate Office). There should be no contact with any other party (e.g., student, supervisors, the other examiner). The Departmental Postgraduate Coordinator may contact examiners after the examiners' reports have been received, in order to reach consensus over the recommended grade for the thesis.

How should I submit my report on the thesis? Examiners are asked to report on the thesis independently, in writing (see guidelines below). Reports should be sent electronically to Te Kura Tāura | UC Graduate School (graduateschool@canterbury.ac.nz) within six weeks of receiving the thesis. A written report (commentary) usually consists of 2-4 pages. The examiners shall not require, nor allow, substantive revision or correction of the thesis and must recommend a grade for the thesis as submitted. Examiners may recommend that, as a condition of the award of the degree, minor editorial corrections or amendments (e.g. correction of typographical errors) be made to the thesis. The examiners reports and recommended grades will be released to the student and supervisor after the examination process has been completed.

The Master's grading system at Canterbury University. You are asked to provide a recommended grade for the thesis. **Please provide only a single grade for the thesis.** Passing grades are A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C and C-. Failing grades are D and E. Details of the grading system is provided in Table 1 below.

How long is taken to write a thesis for Master's, and are there size restrictions on the thesis? The time that students are allowed to take to complete a Master's thesis may differ according to Faculty, but is typically between one and two years of full-time study. There are no university-wide restrictions on size, though some Departments/Schools impose restrictions, which you should be informed of separately from these notes. Notwithstanding any time or word limits, the thesis should comprise a body of work which could, in the given discipline, be completed in the equivalent of one full calendar year of full-time study (i.e., 1 EFT), unless otherwise notified.

Will there be an oral examination? Examiners may recommend that the candidate attends an oral examination prior to determining the grade to be awarded to the thesis, but this would be a very exceptional situation.

What happens if the examiners disagree on the result of the examination? The final grade for a thesis is determined as follows.

- Where there is a just one grade between the grades recommended by the two examiners the higher grade shall normally be awarded (e.g., if examiner recommendations are a B+ and a B, the student will be awarded a B+). The relevant Department/School Postgraduate Coordinator can apply to the Dean of Postgraduate Research for this normal process not to be followed under exceptional circumstances.
- Where there is a discrepancy of two grades, the mid-point grade shall be awarded (e.g., if examiner recommendations are a B+ and a B-, the student will be awarded a B). The relevant Department/School Postgraduate Coordinator can apply to the Dean of Postgraduate Research for this normal process not to be followed under exceptional circumstances.
- If there is a discrepancy greater than two grades (e.g., a B and an A) the Department/School Postgraduate Coordinator (or in the College of Education the Associate Dean of Postgraduate Studies in Education) will contact the examiners to facilitate a discussion to see if a consensus can be reached as to a final recommended grade. In contacting the examiners the Postgraduate Coordinator will share each examiner's report with the other. The Postgraduate Coordinator may communicate separately with each examiner, set up a round-table discussion/conference call, or allow the examiners to discuss the matter between them and report the outcome and rationale to him/her. If, after such discussions, a consensus has not been reached, then an adjudicator will be appointed by the Dean of Postgraduate Research based on recommendation from the relevant Department/School. The Adjudicator will examine the thesis and consider the examiners' reports, and make a decision which will be final.

Will the candidate see the examiners' reports? Yes. The student and supervisor are sent a copy of the examiners' reports and recommended grades by Te Kura Tāura | UC Graduate School after final grade determination.

What can the candidate do if he or she doesn't agree with the examiners? The examiners' decision is final, unless the candidate can demonstrate the examination process has been affected by procedural errors, bias or inappropriate practice. A student who believes that there has been such a violation can make an informal academic appeal to the Dean of Postgraduate Research. If the student is not satisfied with the response from the Dean, he or she can formally appeal to the University Grievance Advisor.

The examiners usually retain their copies of the thesis. Unless there are special reasons such as highly sensitive/confidential/offensive material in the thesis, the examiners are welcome to keep the copies sent for examination. They can approach the department to get a revised copy if they so wish.

Confidentiality and embargoes. All theses are considered to be confidential during the examination process. After examination, theses containing confidential and/or commercially sensitive material may be embargoed for up to two years. More information on the University's policies on these matters can be found in the University's Intellectual Property Guide (<http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/ucpolicy/index.aspx>).

Grading Guidelines

1. Candidates for Masters degrees are expected to demonstrate critical insight and a capacity to carry out independent research/scholarship in their chosen discipline. A candidate has succeeded in this when the thesis demonstrates insight in a critical appraisal of the literature, excellence of presentation, appropriate analyses, and good integration of the candidate's work with prior work in the relevant discipline.
2. The thesis should contain a critical review of the literature on the subject. It should set out clearly the aims and the objectives of the research. The materials and methods used should be set out in sufficient detail to meet the standards of the discipline. Tables, graphs and figures should be well presented, accurate and concise. Suitable techniques should be used to evaluate the results. Conclusions should be clear, precise, comprehensive and well justified. A final discussion should be included covering previous work, the present results, and further research needs.
3. The thesis should be clear, accurate, cogent, and concise. It is to be free of typographical, spelling and grammatical errors.
4. Relevant work by previous researchers should be suitably documented and citations should be consistent and correct in every detail and comply with the conventions of the discipline.
5. Examiners will evaluate the thesis as a whole rather than giving specific weighting to different aspects of the thesis.
6. Written presentation will be of secondary importance although poor presentation may result in a lower grade.
7. Having assessed a thesis, an examiner will allocate a grade in accordance with the criteria in Table 1.