

School of Psychology & Neuroscience



PS5002 Research Project Handbook 2019-20

Key Facts

Supervision: Supervisors allocated during the first week of Semester 1. Following this a minimum of one tutorial per month with supervisor during semester 1 and 2; more frequent contact while the research is being implemented

Assessment: Research project report with a maximum (not a target) of 15,000 words

DEADLINE for submission: 18th August 2020 at 5PM via MMS

Credits: 60

Module PS5002

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Overview

Most of the Master's programme has been designed around taught modules in which the emphasis is conveying information and learning by undertaking various research-related exercises. However, it is arguable that students learn as much about research by actually conducting a research project. Thus, the goal of this module is to provide students with the experience of designing, conducting, analysing and presenting a research project. In some sense the module can be seen as the definitive demonstration of research competence imparted by the Master's programme.

For further detailed information the University's policy for Master's research project modules can be found at: <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/teaching-and-learning/policies/final-module-pgt.pdf>.

Module aims

- (1) to provide the student with structured contact with an active, experienced researcher who will guide the development of the research project.
- (2) to provide the student with the practical experience of conducting research from the inception of a project to its completion.
- (3) to reinforce proper scientific conduct and scholarship

Learning outcomes

In the research report each student should be able to demonstrate of knowledge of:

- (1) the existing literature on the topic of their research thesis
- (2) the justification for the particular data acquisition and data analysis approach used in the study
- (3) the practical processes involved in conducting research
- (4) the legal and ethical issues that arise from the research project

- (5) the limits to the research that has been undertaken and possible avenues of further productive research

Transferable skills

The module will provide you experience in the following practical skills:

- (1) integrating individual research reports into a coherent structure on which future research can be built
- (2) evaluating the feasibility and utility of alternative research approaches to a given scientific problem
- (3) engaging in problem-solving as it relates to performing research
- (4) performing data analysis to answer a given research question
- (5) presenting technical information in a structured document
- (6) keeping accurate and clear records
- (7) communicating technical information verbally with colleagues (e.g., with the supervisor)

Module structure and assessment

The module will consist of series of tutorials with your supervisor that usually begins informally in the first semester so that the groundwork for the research is fully prepared by the end of the second semester. These tutorials can cover any topic relevant to your research proposal, such as the selection of the research topics, the design of research, discussions of the background literature, data analysis and presentation of research findings. Your supervisor has the authority to select the topics of these tutorials, but it is your responsibility to provide your supervisor with possible topics that you believe would be helpful.

The Master's thesis should follow the general format required by the University (see below) and should conform to standard scientific structure for research reports.

Thus, each project should include a title page and the following sections:

- Abstract,
- Introduction,
- Methods,
- Results,
- Discussion,
- References;
- Acknowledgements and
- Appendices.

Note that it is a requirement that any **relevant letters of ethical approval be attached as appendices** to your Master's thesis. In addition, all data and supporting documents (SPSS or other data analysis files and output, spreadsheets, video or photographic files, interview transcripts, records associated with the research, etc.) should be handed into the School office (with Matriculation information and Course code), or given directly to the Project Supervisor. In the latter case, you should attach as an appendix a letter from your supervisor that they have received and stored the relevant files.

Students are required to conform to the University's policy prohibiting plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct such as data fabrication. Your supervisor is allowed to comment on **one draft only** of the Abstract, Introduction, Methods, Results and Appendices sections of the project thesis, but is not allowed to comment on the *Discussion* section. This is to allow you a chance to demonstrate in the *Discussion* the degree to which you have developed independence as a researcher.

The module is assessed by a research project report that has a *maximum* of 15,000 words (excluding references and appendices). The maximum word limit is precisely that: an upper limit and **not** a target. Bear in mind that this word limit is standard across the

university (including arts and humanities) for this number of credits at masters level, and that within psychology most reports will be considerably shorter. Writing at greater length than necessary can risk undermining the clarity and coherence of your writing. Your supervisor will be able to advise in the appropriate length for your specific project and methodology.

The research project report is uploaded electronically in MMS. Typically, the first marker will be your project supervisor and the second marker will be assigned by the module coordinator. The markers will consider any adverse circumstances that might have place constraints on the scope of thesis, such as technical difficulties in performing the research that were beyond your control. However, the markers can only assign a mark appropriate for the submitted thesis. All marks assigned are preliminary until scrutinised by the external examiner, officially submitted by the examinations board and approved by the University. The form that is used by internal markers in assessing the thesis is attached.

University regulations regarding the project thesis, including the format and required student declaration, can be accessed at: <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/teaching-and-learning/policies/final-module-pgt.pdf>.

Suggested schedule

There is considerable flexibility in the scope of the module to distribute the workload as the student and supervisor see fit. However, if the work is left too late, it causes stress and precludes adjusting plans if problems arise during data collection. Thus, a **suggested** schedule is given below. The schedule should be considered a rough guideline only, for some types of research require more time to set up than others, others are constrained with respect to when data can be collected, and some students take more time than others to decide on their project. Please note that during the

summer the supervisor might be unavailable due to holidays or scientific conferences. The supervisor should arrange with the student in advance alternative supervision.

Date	Suggested milestone
Semester 1, week 2	Introductory meeting with supervisor
Semester 1, week 7	Delineation of the area of research topic (week after Independent Learning Week)
Semester 1, week 14	Delineation of the general research design (final week of classes in Semester 1)
Semester 2, week 8	Ethical approval submitted (week following Spring vacation)
Semester 2, week 11	Ethical approval obtained
Semester 2, week 16	Research resources in place & initiation of data collection (week following the end of examinations)
End of July	End of data collection
Two weeks before deadline	Draft report sent to supervisor
One week before deadline	Supervisor returns comments on draft
Deadline	Research report due in MMS by 5PM

Support

The primary support for this module will be your supervisor, but all members of staff endeavour to support postgraduate students in their research. If the supervisor is not available in St. Andrews (e.g., due to research leave), then a local member of staff will be nominated to help the students with practical issues in St. Andrews. However, the primary responsibility for the student remains with the supervisor.

Please contact your module controller if you have any questions about the structure or the administration of the module.

General criteria for assessment

Grade	Class
16.5 – 20.0	Distinction
13.5 – 16.4	Merit
10.5 – 13.4	Pass
7.0 – 10.4	Marginal Pass
4.0 – 6.9	Fail (right to reassessment)
0.0 – 3.9	Fail (no right to reassessment)
Grade & Descriptor	Key Characteristics of the Work
16.5 or more Distinction at 5000 Level	Excellent work at 5000 Level. Work in this category will meet all of the requirements for a Merit and at least one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exceptional knowledge and understanding beyond the core issues. • demonstrates a very high level of critical awareness. • excellent structure and sophisticated argument. • takes an independent or original approach appropriate to the given task.
13.5 to 16.4 Merit at 5000 Level	Strong work at 5000 Level. Work in this category will show all of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very good knowledge and understanding of the core issues. • demonstrates a high level of critical awareness. • clear structure and consistent argument. • fully addresses the given task.
10.5 to 13.4 Pass at 5000 Level	Competent work at 5000 Level. Work in this category will show three or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reasonable knowledge and understanding of the core issues. • demonstrates reasonable critical awareness. • adequate structure and argument. • mostly addresses the given task.
7 to 10.4 Marginal Pass at 5000 Level	Adequate work at 5000 Level. Work in this category will show one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited knowledge and understanding of the core issues. • demonstrates only basic critical awareness.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• weak structure or inconsistent argument.• does not fully address the given task.
4 to 6.9 Fail with right to re-assessment	Inadequate work at 5000 Level. Work in this category will show one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• very limited knowledge and understanding of the core issues.• seriously deficient in critical awareness.• lacks structure and logical argument.• does not address the given task.
0 to 3.9 Fail without right to re-assessment	Inadequate work at 5000 Level. Work in this category shows one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• no serious, demonstrable, attempt to carry out the task assigned.• no attempt at analysis and very little understanding or knowledge demonstrated.

A more detailed criteria sheet will be available on MMS in semester 1.

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