Grading of Master’s theses in the MDP in Human-Technology Interaction

1. Grading criteria

Examiners consider the following when evaluating a Master’s thesis:

1 Use of source literature. Does the thesis demonstrate that the author has familiarised himself/herself extensively with the literature relevant to the topic? Are references used correctly?

2 Familiarity with the topic. Does the approach and the results the author has chosen to present show that the author has studied the topic thoroughly and understood the subject matter well?

3 Use of methods. Does the author know how to apply the necessary methods?

4 Consistency. Does the thesis form a consistent whole? Are the topics considered relevant? Is the thesis well outlined and balanced?

5 The results and their significance. Are the results relevant and possible to generalise? Does the thesis contain ideas that could be published on a scientific or professional forum?

6 Originality Is the presentation original and perhaps clearer than in the source text? Is the source material reviewed critically? Does the author use original examples to illustrate content? Does the thesis contain original observations or even scientific results or ideas that could be applied in practice? Is the author able to analyse his/her own findings in relation to known literature?

7 Presentation and linguistic form. Do the linguistic form, written form and structure give a well thought-out and finished appearance to the thesis? Is the research topic discussed thoroughly and accurately? Does the thesis form a coherent whole that is pleasant to read?

Theses can vary greatly in terms of their nature. For example, a thesis could be a review of the topic that is based on the source literature. At the other end of the scale, a
thesis could be an original piece of research or a description of the outcome of software development or other design project.

Regardless of its nature, a thesis must always include a review of the background of the research question and of field-specific literature. This is an important section of the thesis, even when the primary focus of the thesis would be on the results. On the other hand, the amount of independent and original work always affects the grading of the thesis. Below are some examples of how an independent approach can manifest in the thesis:

The author shows his/her familiarity with the topic by combining source literature in an original way, or by examining the question from a novel point of view. The author presents algorithms or other findings of the source literature in a particularly clear way, or generalises, combines or applies this information to new situations. The minimum requirement is that the author uses notations consistently throughout his/her thesis regardless of the notation technique used in the source literature. The author demonstrates that he/she masters the methods and techniques he/she presents in the thesis in a constructive manner, e.g. by writing software or conducting an evaluation. The author produces a practical solution to a concrete design or research problem.

Solving a design or research problem and presenting a solution is not enough, however, unless the author also demonstrates a good command of the topic and related literature. The author must also be able to place his/her thesis in the right context and examine it critically.

2. Grading

The grading scale for Master's theses is as follows: excellent (5), very good (4), good (3), satisfactory (2) and sufficient (1).

A thesis is graded good (3) if it meets the aforementioned evaluation criteria, is well-written and does not have any substantial mistakes.

A thesis is graded satisfactory (2) if it fails to meet some of the criteria but has other compensating merits that demonstrate the author’s maturity. The grade can be lowered from good to satisfactory if, for example, the conclusions are illogical, the thesis is poorly structured, the arguments are badly reasoned, the work is not independent or the general impression is sloppy.

A thesis is graded very good (4) if it is better, more in-depth or more extensive than an average thesis, and has enough original content. A very good thesis may not have mistakes or be sloppy; it must be critical, evaluative and analytical. The grade very
good can be granted if the thesis is written on a fairly demanding topic, has a well-developed methodological or theoretical approach, and includes a notable amount of original content.

The other grades (sufficient (1) and excellent (5)) will be granted if the shortcomings or merits of the thesis are so considerable that the grade satisfactory cannot be given, or the grade very good is simply insufficient. The grade excellent will usually only be given if the thesis is exceptionally good in all aspects and demonstrates that the author is familiar with the research conventions governing the topic; typically these theses will produce publishable scientific results or develop some practical method in an extensive manner.

Below are some examples of typical features of theses that are granted a specific grade:

**Sufficient (1)** = The approach of the thesis is poor, the data is insufficient, or the thesis is too constricted. The thesis may include substantial factual errors or structural defects, but it nevertheless fulfils the criteria for a scientific thesis and is written reasonably well.

**Satisfactory (2)** = The scientific approach is superficial, or the thesis is in some other way inadequate or inappropriate. The author cannot see the significance of the results, and the thesis relies heavily on sources. There is very little original content.

**Good (3)**: A good thesis that fulfils the criteria for a scientific thesis. It is well-written, proceeds logically and concludes with clearly stated results, and the author is also able to comment on previous research. There are no notable deficiencies in form or language.

**Very good (4)** = The thesis is better, more in-depth or more extensive than the average thesis, and it is solidly grounded in previous research. Its methodological or theoretical approach is well-developed and mature, and it includes a notable amount of original content. The thesis is pleasant to read: it forms a coherent and logical whole, and the presentation is polished and immaculate. Layout and the use of source literature are both faultless.

**Excellent (5)** = The results of the thesis could be published, they have notable significance at a practical level, or the thesis has other exceptional merit.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of source literature</th>
<th>Sufficient (1)</th>
<th>Satisfactory (2)</th>
<th>Good (3)</th>
<th>Very good (4)</th>
<th>Excellent (5)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevant sources are missing. The author does not have sufficient command of the literature. The use of references is shaky.</td>
<td>The sources are at least partly insufficient. The choice of sources is not fully successful.</td>
<td>The references section is reasonably extensive. The author is fairly familiar with the literature in the field.</td>
<td>The references section is extensive. The author is familiar with the literature in the field.</td>
<td>The references section is extensive. The thesis demonstrates that the author is very well familiar with the literature.</td>
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| Familiarity with the topic | The thesis may contain notable factual errors or structural defects. | The thesis has inconsistencies. | Correct standard thesis. | The author has good command of the material he/she is presenting. The thesis is well-structured. | The author has excellent command of the material. |

| Familiarity with methods | Methods are not used at all or they are used in the wrong way. | There is room for improvement in the use of methods. | Methods are used reasonably correctly and the methods are appropriate for the thesis. | The author has a good command of the methods, and they are appropriate for the topic. | As in a very good thesis; the use of methods may be exceptionally skillful. |

| Balance and consistency of the presentation | The structure of the thesis is shaky. | The thesis is not balanced and does not form a coherent whole. (e.g., it contains side-tracked or repeats itself). | The structure is clear. | The structure is clear and well balanced. | The structure of the thesis is exceptional; for example, the structure could open up a new perspective on the topic. |

| The significance of the results | The thesis does not contain any results. | The thesis does not contain any notable results. | The results are correct, but they cannot be generalised. | The thesis contains approaches that are interesting from the practical or scientific point of view, and the author recognises this. | The results are significant from the practical point of view, or they could be published, and the author recognises them as such. |

| Original content, independence, self-assessment | The thesis relies solely on sources, and the author has not been able to combine them into a coherent presentation. The author also struggles with assessing his/her own thesis. | The thesis relies heavily on sources. The author may also struggle with assessing his/her own thesis. The author has not managed to place his/her own thesis in the larger context particularly well. | The sources and the thesis form a coherent and logical whole. The author is able to link his/her own thesis to the literature. | The thesis contains a notable amount of original content which is at least at some point better than the presentation in the sources. | As in a very good thesis, but the amount of original content is even greater. |

| Language, style and finishing | The thesis is unfinished and its style is incoherent. | The thesis may have wordy language, unjustified arguments and grammatical or spelling mistakes. | The thesis is easy to read and has concise language that is almost immaculate. The pictures used are clear. | The thesis is pleasant to read, and its presentation is smart. Pictures and tables are used in a well thought-out manner. | As in a very good thesis, but the thesis is very elegant. |