Academic Writing – Project Report

Hints and tips for writing a thesis manual

Academic Writing

Overview

- Academic Writing
- Source Citation and Referencing
- Spelling and Grammar
- Document Structure
- Plagiarism

Why is academic writing importantfor my project??

- Your thesis document is a record of the process you followed in completing your project.
- For anyone reading the document it must be very clear what is being done, the approach you have taken and why you have taken this approach.
- It shouldn’t be a struggle for the reader to understand the project and the process you have followed.
- A well written document should be easy to read and understand. This usually happens from working on the document over the duration of the project and refining it on an ongoing basis.

Source Citation and Referencing

- Harvard Referencing Guide (DIT Library Kevin St)
- Have a look at the guidelines on the Library Website

Spelling, Grammar and Language

- It is very important that your reader can clearly follow the content of your document.
- Typos and spelling mistakes really impact on the quality of a completed document.
- The reader should not have to try to figure out what exactly is going on. A well written document should be easy to read and explain exactly what is happening.
- Get someone to proof read your document. This can really help to improve the quality of your document and make it more readable.

Writing in the third person??

- First Person: I, me, we, my etc…
- Second Person: you
- Third Person: he, she, it, they, him, her, them
- Academic writing favours reports being written in the Third Person.
- In writing a report it is important to show that research has been carried out in the given problem domain. Personal opinions shouldn't echo through. Research should answer any questions that may arise. The document can discuss/compare/contrast different aspects based on your research.

Document Structure

- Overall Structure – Explaining the process from the start to the finish. (Sample Below)
  - Introduction
  - Background research into problem domain
  - Requirements Gathering
  - Process to be followed
  - Implementation / Experimentation
  - Results
  - Conclusion

General Document Content

- A paragraph or section of the document should contain the following traits:
  - General Topic Information
  - Critical Discussion
  - References and Quotes
  - General Conclusion of the topic.
- This can be good to evaluate the content in a given section, to ensure all relevant material is included.

General Considerations

- Make sure to describe the exact details of your project.
- It should be very obvious to the reader what your project is about, what process you will follow and what the outputs of the project are.
- Try to stay on topic. It is very easy to drift off topic and loose the reader. (Proofreading can help with this problem!!)
- Transitions between sections and chapters are very important. A lead in and out makes your document more readable.
- Try to be neutral and objective in your writing. Evaluate your findings and discuss with respect to your background research.

Appendices

- What goes into the Appendices??
- Anything that seems to be too detailed or may ruin the readers experience can be included in the Appendices.
- The document can refer the reader to a specific Appendix if they require more detailed information.

Screen Shots and Large Images

- Images can be a very effective method to portray an idea or concept to your reader.
- It is important not to include too many large images consecutively in your document. This can break the flow and readability of the document.
- Some images or screenshots etc could be included in the Appendices.

Table of Content

- The table of contents sets out the chapters and sections of the document.
- These should be numbered.
- The reader should be able to use this to find any content or section easily.
- If you are using Word please ensure there is no issues with your table of contents, this looks very bad as this may be the first this your reader looks at when reading your document.

Table of Figures

- All figures and illustrations should be labelled and included in your table of figures.

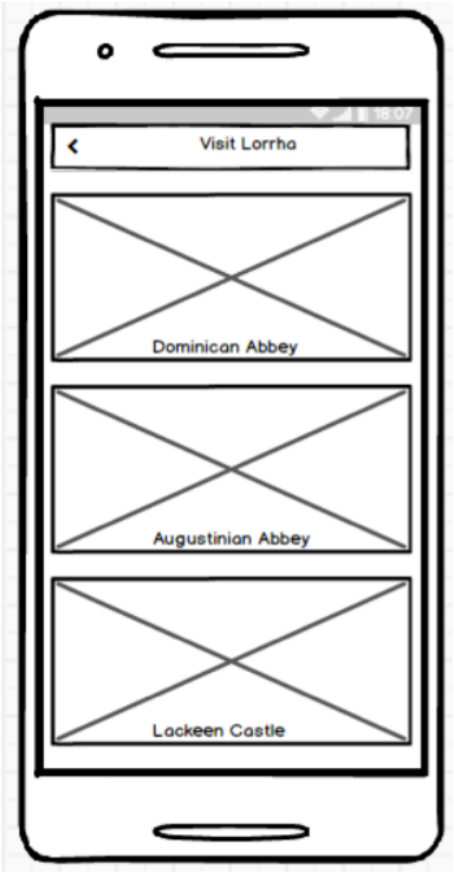

Figure 11 Visit Lorrha List of Attractions

Referencing and Plagiarism

- The DIT library has detailed documentation on referencing and plagiarism, please have a look at these resources and apply this to your project document.

Finding Useful Sources

- Try to understand what **type of sources** our readers (examiners) expect to see
- Try:
  - Primary sources for evidence (Theses, dissertations, journal articles, government reports, conference proceedings etc....)
  - Secondary sources to learn from others (research/projects/etc – this can be a summary or interpretation of primary sources)
  - Tertiary sources (textual consolidation of primary and secondary sources)

Recording your Sources

- For your reader to get an understanding of the work and research that has been put into a project they will need to see evidence of the reading conducted as part of this project.
- This is provided to the reader through the sources included in the thesis document. This is the evidence of the quality of reading conducted as part of the background research and is the foundation for all of your “informed decisions” later in the project lifecycle.

Recording your Sources

- Pick a Citation Style
  - Vancouver referencing style (numerical)
  - Harvard referencing style (name of the authors and the year of publication)

- Zotero will definitely help with this!!
  - In-class example of Zotero in operation….

The search for sources

- What do I need to reference in my project?
- Do I need to reference everything?
- Should I reference the references?
- Who ate my lunch???

- These are all good questions, we will try to answer these questions on the next slide.

The search for sources

- Everybody's project is different, we will generalise a standard project into:
  - Well rounded functionality
  - Complexity
- The well **rounded functionality** can encompass the general functionality and implementation (architecture) needed for the project. These reference types could be a mix of primary/secondary/tertiary sources. Anything we choose or adapt in our project should be the basis of an “informed decision”. The different approaches should be researched and referenced in the manual and this will be referred to when decisions are made etc…

The search for sources

- Our project **complexity** is the piece of the project that is not straightforward / basic functionality / something we have done before. This will test our research/development skills to showcase what we have learned in our 4 years in DIT / TU Dublin.
- The referencing for this needs to be of a high standard.
- Follow bibliographic trails to find more similar research.
- Try to evaluate the relevance/reliability/suitability of the sources.
- We should be looking for a combination of both primary sources and secondary sources.

Drafting your Manual

- Avoiding Plagiarism
  - No copy/paste. Rewrite (summarise) the content in your own words
  - Use quotes is the text is taken from another source
  - Never use some one else's work to try pass off as your own
  - Use plagiarism checkers

Managing your Word Document

- Step 1: Get the FYP Template
- Step 2: Only use the template (no sub-documents etc)
- Step 3: Setup Zotero
- Step 4: Setup Page Numbering
- Step 5: Setup Table of Contents (ToC)
- Step 6: Setup Table of Figures (ToF)
- Step 7: Setup Table of Tables (ToT) if needed
- Step 8: Each major section starts on a new page

Questions