

CSC3031: Project Proposal Marking Guidelines

CSC3031 (Research and Project Skills) is assessed with the following components:

1. Presentation 25%
2. Project Proposal 75%

This document provides marking guidance for the Project Proposal.

Structure

Page Limit: Four pages of A4 plus references

Font size: 11pt throughout

It should consist of the following sections:

- **Motivation and rationale:** Why is the project worth doing? What is the problem it is trying to solve? Which need is being addressed?
- **Aim (or hypothesis) and objectives:** What will the project try to accomplish? Which key objectives will need to be achieved in order to realise the overall aim or prove/disprove your hypothesis?
- **Background:** a table summarising key background sources and identifying their relationship to the project at hand
- **Diagrammatic work plan:** a diagram (e.g. Gantt chart, timeline) detailing how the project will be carried out, e.g. which activities/tasks will be carried out when
- **Brief explanation of the work plan:** What has been done so far? Why is the plan structured as it is?
- **References:** a list of references that were used so far (which must include all sources used in the background section), correctly cited

Guidelines on length of each section:

The length of each section may vary but as a guideline, the first two (Motivation, Aims & Objectives) could together take up one page. The Background section could run to one and a half pages. The diagrammatic work plan and its explanation together could also fill a page and a half. There is no limit on the number of references being cited but try to be selective so that you identify those most useful to your project and not simply everything you have read.

Marking Scheme

The marking scheme used here corresponds with Faculty guidelines on marking criteria and degree class descriptors for undergraduate programmes.

Each section will be marked separately, and an overall mark will be computed from all the section marks according to the following weighting scheme:

Motivation and rationale	10%
Aims and objectives	20%
Background	30%
Diagrammatic work plan	15%
Explanation of work plan	10%
References	10%
Structure and form	5%

Each section will be assessed as one of the NESS categories given in the table below:

Ness Category + Mark Range	
<i>Outstanding</i>	80 - 100%
<i>First</i>	70 - 79%
<i>Upper Second</i>	60 - 69%
<i>Lower Second</i>	50 - 59%
<i>Third</i>	40 - 49%
<i>Borderline Fail</i>	30 – 39%
<i>Fail</i>	0 – 39%
<i>Missing</i>	0

The evaluation will take into account the level of difficulty of the proposed project. The level of the objectives will be setting a (virtual) cap on the maximum mark achievable – a proposal describing a straightforward project very well will not guarantee an ‘outstanding’ mark.

In order to help you characterise the sections of the proposal more accurately, here are some brief descriptors of what needs to be included in order to get “Upper Second” or better. Note that these are just examples and might vary depending on the nature of the project. For example, it would not make sense to mention software lifecycle models in project investigating the impact of a technology on a specific group of users.

Motivation and rationale

This should clearly motivate the project in terms of which specific need it addresses, what problem it solves and who will benefit from it.

An “upper second” section of this type would also identify specific points where the proposed project will go beyond existing work and discuss the reasons why this is desirable. You can include some personal motivation (why this project is attractive to you) but focus on the wider benefits.

Aim (or hypothesis) and objectives

This should be a list of bullet points concisely and precisely identifying the overall aim or hypothesis and resulting objectives of the project. Objectives can include both technical and (at most two) personal objectives, and if all achieved, should result in the overall aim being realised.

An “upper second” section of this type will define objectives fully and sensibly, identifying success criteria that are measurable as well as clearly linking objectives to the overall aim and the project. Ideally your objectives should be “SMART”, although it is not essential that all of them are. Avoid listing tasks but focus on what you want to achieve. For example, instead of saying that you will “research into X”, state that you will “identify six main attributes of X from the literature” (if that is a desirable outcome of the research). Your objectives will form the criteria for success for your project. It is therefore essential that you can measure the extent to which you have satisfied them. If your objectives are clear and measurable then you will be able to scope and focus your project and it will make your evaluation much easier to define. In contrast a poorly defined aim and objectives often lead to a poor project outcome.

Background

This should be a table summarising the key sources that have been identified so far. Each entry in the table should consist of three elements: a citation of the source (which will be included in detail in the list of references), a sentence or two summarising the source, and a brief explanation why this source is relevant to the project.

An “upper second” background section should contain a sufficient number of sources from all areas relevant to the project, provide summaries for each that clearly state the key point of the source, and a concise explanation of how it is relevant in the context of the project. Do not include so many sources that you must reduce content to fit them in. A general guideline would be at least 4 but no more than 8. The emphasis should be on the quality of explanation, not the quantity of sources.

Diagrammatic work plan

This should provide a detailed overview of how the project has been and will be carried out. The plan is there to help you and your supervisor structure your project and track your progress. It therefore needs to include sufficient detail to identify activities at a weekly to bi-weekly level, so that at any point in time it should be possible to identify what you should be doing and what you should have achieved. It should include a breakdown of tasks to be completed that are well specified in terms of their estimated starting/end time as well as the effort expected to carry them out.

An “upper second” plan will identify relationships and dependencies between individual tasks and incorporate contingency measures. Make sure that the plan is clearly legible, and that deadlines and task durations are clearly displayed.

Explanation work plan

An “upper second” explanation will clearly link the work plan to the objectives, identify risks associated with key tasks and outline contingency measures included in the plan.

References & Form

References and citations should consistently follow one of the standard schemes and include all relevant bibliographical information. The list of references has to include all sources discussed in the background section. The proposal itself should be a pleasure to read, nicely presented, well-structured with very few spelling mistakes or grammar mistakes, proper use of figures, etc. The document should make appropriate use of whitespace, have consistent margins (at least 2cm) and avoid cluttering. The text should be 11pt throughout (incl. within diagrams and tables) and the document should not run to more than 4 pages plus references.

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