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**Dissertation Report**

**Guidelines and Template**

**(By: Dr Nicholas Ioannides)**

The Final Year Dissertation / Project Report is a major work that students are required to undertake in order to complete their degree. This will be the largest piece of work that a student is expected to produce as an undergraduate. The outcome will not only be the production of a sizeable piece of work to add to their portfolio, but will also guide the student towards achieving greater self-direction, autonomy and personal satisfaction.

The aims of this exercise are to extend the students in a particular field of interest related to their studies, to develop critical faculties and to produce training in research methods. The project should provide the students with the opportunity to bring together the academic knowledge and skills acquired from the previous study.

Through the project, the students are expected to:

* Demonstrate depth of understanding of a broad range of skills and knowledge.
* Explore an idea, problem or area of study that is of special interest to them.
* Gain an insight into the complexities of real-world problems.
* Develop new skills.
* Demonstrate independent learning and self-management.

**Dissertation Report Specification**

The Dissertation must be compiled in the following way:

* Length: 10,000 to 11,000 words long (excluding References and Appendices).
* Line spacing: 1.5 lines.
* Font type: Calibri, Arial, Helvetica, Verdana, or Times New Roman.
* Font size: 11.
* Text Alignment: Justified.
* Page Margins: top 2.5 cm, bottom 2 cm, left 2.5 cm and right 2 cm.
* 1 empty line must be left between paragraphs
* Each chapter must start on a new page.
* Use page numbers with the font size set to 10.
* Name the file as: StudentID-Surname-Firstname-Dissertation
* Upload the Dissertation Report on Moodle (Turnitin submission)

**Sectioning the Final Year Project Report**

The report must be presented in sections, each one identifying a major part of the report. It must be obvious where each section begins and ends, and which sub-section is connected to which major section. Thus, headings must be linked in form and layout to a notation system which is itself logical and easy to use.

Headings within the organization of the report must be as specific as possible in order to be useful. The logical linking of headings is shown by notation, most commonly decimal notation (easy to produce and follow, and it is widespread). As far as possible, headings should match numbering in importance, so that the visual impact of major headings is correlated with the major notation. Lower down the ‘hierarchy’, this correlation may break down, but it should certainly be followed for first and second level headings.

The font size of the headings must be set to 11 and must be the same as that of the text (font size 11). Also, the headings must be justified left. The headings pattern which must be maintained throughout the report is this:

For Chapter 1:

**1.1. MAIN HEADING (bold … font 11 … justified left)**

**1.1.1. Lesser Heading (bold … font 11 … justified left)**

1.1.1.1. Small Heading (not bold … font 11 … justified left**)**

For Chapter X:

**X.1. MAIN HEADING (bold … font 11 … justified left)**

**X.3.2. Lesser Heading (bold … font 11 … justified left)**

X.4.6.1. Small Heading (not bold … font 11 … justified left**)**

APPENDICES should be distinguished from the main text by letter, and if necessary decimal notation after the letter. For Appendix A:

**A.2. APPENDIX (bold … font 11 … justified left**)

**A.2.4. Appendix (bold … font 11 … justified left**)

A.2.4.3. Appendix (not bold … font 11 … justified left**)**

The blank lines preceding the headings should be arranged as follows:

* Each **MAIN HEADING** must have two (2) blank lines preceding it and one (1) below it.
* Each **Lesser Heading** must have one (1) blank line preceding it and one (1) below it.
* Each Small Heading must have one (1) blank line preceding it and one (1) below it.

The dividing of material in this way serves several purposes. From a purely visual point of view, space on the page helps the reader, and there should be clear and adequate spacing between sections. Major sections, at least in long reports, should start on new pages. Also, readers can identify and isolate particular sections which are relevant to their interests.

**Writing a Good Dissertation Report**

When writing your Final Year Project Report, always bear in mind that a good report is easy to recognise:

* The title is precise and informative,
* The layout and format are well organised.

Reading a well-written report is pleasurable:

* The style is accurate, fluent and concise, with headings to indicate the content of each section.
* The diagrams, which can include non-verbal material such as tables and graphs, are well presented and clearly labelled.

There are no absolute rules about the details of report production. Every report must be totally adapted to the needs of its reader. However, the IEE in its ‘Technical Report Writing’ guide suggests the following:

1. The reader is the most important person.
2. Keep the report as short as possible.
3. Organise for the convenience of the report *user*.
4. All references should be correct in all details.
5. The writing should be accurate, concise and unobtrusive.
6. The right diagram with the right labels should be in the right place for the reader.
7. Summaries give the whole picture, in miniature.
8. Reports should be checked for technical errors, typing errors and inconsistency.
9. The report should look as good as it is.
10. The reader is the most important person.

## Writing the Report

The writing should be accurate, concise and unobtrusive! If the objectives of the report have been clarified, the writer will know the appropriate level of technical language and the correct tone for the readership. The style will be formal because reports are formal documents, but the exact degree of formality will have been decided with the writer/reader relationship in mind.

The accuracyof the document is the responsibility of the writer. Most students word-process their own reports, but as they are not usually trained typists, careful checking is essential. When the student has completed a section of the report, it should be checked for spellingand typing errors. Most of these will be picked up by the computer dictionary / spell-checker, but there are some problem areas.

Examples of creating an unintended / wrong word are shown below:

‘NOT’ and ‘NOW’:

* The car is *now* in a safe condition to be driven.
* The car is *not* in a safe condition to be driven.

Technical words should be added to the spell-checker rather than avoiding the use of this facility. The use of new technical or semi-technical words (such as online, workstation) not yet appeared in a dictionary should be guided by the technical press.

Punctuation matters because it aids accurate reading and also because it may affect the meaning. Compare the following sentences:

* ‘The engines, which were in perfect running order, had been tested previously.’

(meaning: all the engines were in perfect running order and all had been tested.)

* ‘The engines which were in perfect running order had been tested previously.’

(meaning: only the engines which were in perfect running order had been tested.)

The correct choice of words is not simply a matter of the right word as opposed to the wrong word. The effect on the reader is again important, and words have both meanings and overtones:

* ‘substantial’ and ‘excessive’ might mean the same thing from different points of view.
* Overworked words such as ‘basically’ should be avoided unless they mean precisely what they say.
* ‘Empty’ words and phrases which give an impression of vagueness (rather, quite, fairly, in due course) should also be avoided.

Sentences, like paragraphs, should be kept under control. Good style involves variety in sentence length as well as in paragraph length. Short sentences produce a clear, easily-read style for factual material. Long sentences should be avoided.

Paragraphs should have unity of content, but they also have a psychological effect on the reader. Several paragraphs on a page, with the resulting spaces, encourage reading, while one long block of print is disheartening.

Above all, writers must say what they mean. Readers should not be left in doubt about the meaning of, for instance, an abbreviation, or about the writer's intention, or about the information presented.

Brevity is also very important. Some reports are too long because they contain a great deal of important information. Others are too long because the writer has explained the same point more than once, or has taken a long time to come to the point. Avoid the use of clichés and jargon phrases since they tend to be wordy.

Reports are formal and report writers frequently feel, therefore, that the language used has to be not merely formal, but grandiose. Formal writing simply means writing in full (*it is*, not *it's*), avoiding slang or colloquialisms, and using words correctly. It does not mean that simple words are unacceptable. The reader can also be unobtrusively guided in the right direction by ‘leading’ words and phrases: ‘At the same time’, ‘On the other hand’, or ‘Bearing this in mind’, makes the writing flow easily, and the reader’s attention is drawn to the supplementary or contradictory information which follows. In the Conclusions of a report, when the reader is assessing the argument, these pointers can be especially helpful.

## Illustrating the Report

The right diagram with the right labels should be in the right place for the reader! Diagrams (tables, graphs, charts, etc.) are an essential part of many technical reports, in some circumstances giving a great deal of information more easily than continuous prose could do. Clarification of the general situation or of complex details is often most readily accepted by the reader if it is presented in a way which is both visually attractive and easy to use.

Diagrams must be presented when and where the user needs them and NOT be put into an appendix at the end of the report. Labels on diagrams must be presented horizontally, so that the report does not have to be angled to enable them to be read. Conventions for diagrams also exist and must be followed. The format chosen for a diagram should be appropriate to the information which it presents (tabular form, bar charts, graphs, etc.). Clarity in diagrams is as important as clarity of text.

Tables are the most common form of diagram in technical reports. Tables can give a great deal of accurate information if they are effectively presented. Vertical and horizontal rulings can be untidy and confusing: the use of space is a much more successful alternative. To give more vertical space in a table, units and powers of ten should be put into the column heading.

Graphs are used either to show trends or to give accurate technical information. All graphs must be clearly labeled, and scales identified. If graphs are to be compared, the same scale must be used for each; as before, the detail needed by the reader must be included, and not necessarily all that is available to the writer.

Diagrams of all types must be numbered and clearly referenced in the text (Figure 3.7 is the seventh diagram in section three of the report). Titles for diagrams should be appropriate but brief, and always positioned in the same place relative to the diagram. When a diagram is completed, the report writer should sit back and look at it, asking the following questions:

* Does it give the required information?
* Does it reproduce faithfully the information intended?
* Is it easy to use?
* Does it look attractive?

If the answer in each case is yes, the effect of the report is enhanced by its diagrams.

## Checking the Dissertation Report

Reports should be checked for technical errors, typing errors and inconsistency! The first level of checking is provided by the computer spell-checker which will identify spelling and typing errors that do not produce a different word. It is not a substitute for human checking, however, as there are some mistakes which only a reader will notice. Ideally, at least two people should check a report: a technical expert and a complete non-expert who is patient and meticulous in checking the typing. Immediate checking is almost useless; leaving the report for at least 48 hours will improve the checking greatly. Numbers must always be checked digit by digit. Consistency is important for the impact of the report: using different abbreviations for the same thing gives an impression of carelessness which worries the reader.

## Appearance of the Dissertation Report

The report should look as good as it is! The reader is attracted or repelled initially by the look of the report. Overcrowded pages, small margins, information disappearing into the binding, too small a typeface, headings which merge with the text - all these put readers off and may even prevent their becoming readers. Good print and layout are attractive, and the reader is encouraged to tackle even the dullest subject if the pages can be dealt with quickly because they contain a good ration of blank space. Ring binders or spiral bindings are often used for in-company reports, and they are pleasant provided that there is enough space at the left hand margin.

The ‘title page’ is the first page of the report proper which the reader will see. It should contain the title and author's name, the report reference number and date, its classification (`confidential', etc) if appropriate, the company's name and logo if desired, and no more.

The report is checked, its appearance is pleasing, it is easy to handle, `interesting' and `readable'. If the technical content is as good as the organization, writing, illustration and finishing, then the report should delight the reader.

**Dissertation Template**

Use the following pages as a *template* for your dissertation and follow the *guidelines* provided in each chapter / section. The intention is to help you plan your dissertation report and present it in a structured and logical format.

*Once the dissertation report is ready you must delete the specification’s pages  
so that the cover page becomes the front / first page of your dissertation report*.

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| --- |
| **Insert the title of your Project**  **(font 16 & bold)** |

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| Insert your Title, Name and Surname (font 14) |
| Insert your UoR ID number (font 12) |
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| Insert your supervisor’s QA email address (font 12) |
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| A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment  of the requirements of Roehampton University for  the degree of Bachelor of Science in Computing Technologies |
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**Abstract**

Abstracts are intended to bring together the report and prospective readers, and to guide readers who might not necessarily consider that a particular report is relevant to their needs. Abstracts are very short and very precise and should never exceed 150 words.

The abstract selects the areas of interest covered by the report. This may be done by a list of ‘key’ words, which can be stored in and picked up by a computer. Readers who are hunting for material will find the report when they produce a key word common to their interest and the report itself; summary reading for further information will often follow. Abstracts and summaries are different from each another, are used in different ways, and are often confused.

**Acknowledgements**

If the writer wishes to acknowledge the contribution of specific people or groups of people this is where this should take place.

**Contents**

The Table of Contents should be entered here.

**List of Figures and Tables**

The List of Figures and List of Tables should be entered here.

**Abbreviations**

Abbreviations used in the report should be shown here collectively along with what each letter stands for even though they may also be identified within the report. In this way the reader may consult this section at any point through the reading of the report. An Example is shown below:

EU: European Union

GIF: Graphics Interchange Format

IP: Internet Protocol

LSEP: Legal, Social, Ethical and Professional

OFDM: Orthogonal Frequency Division Multiplexing

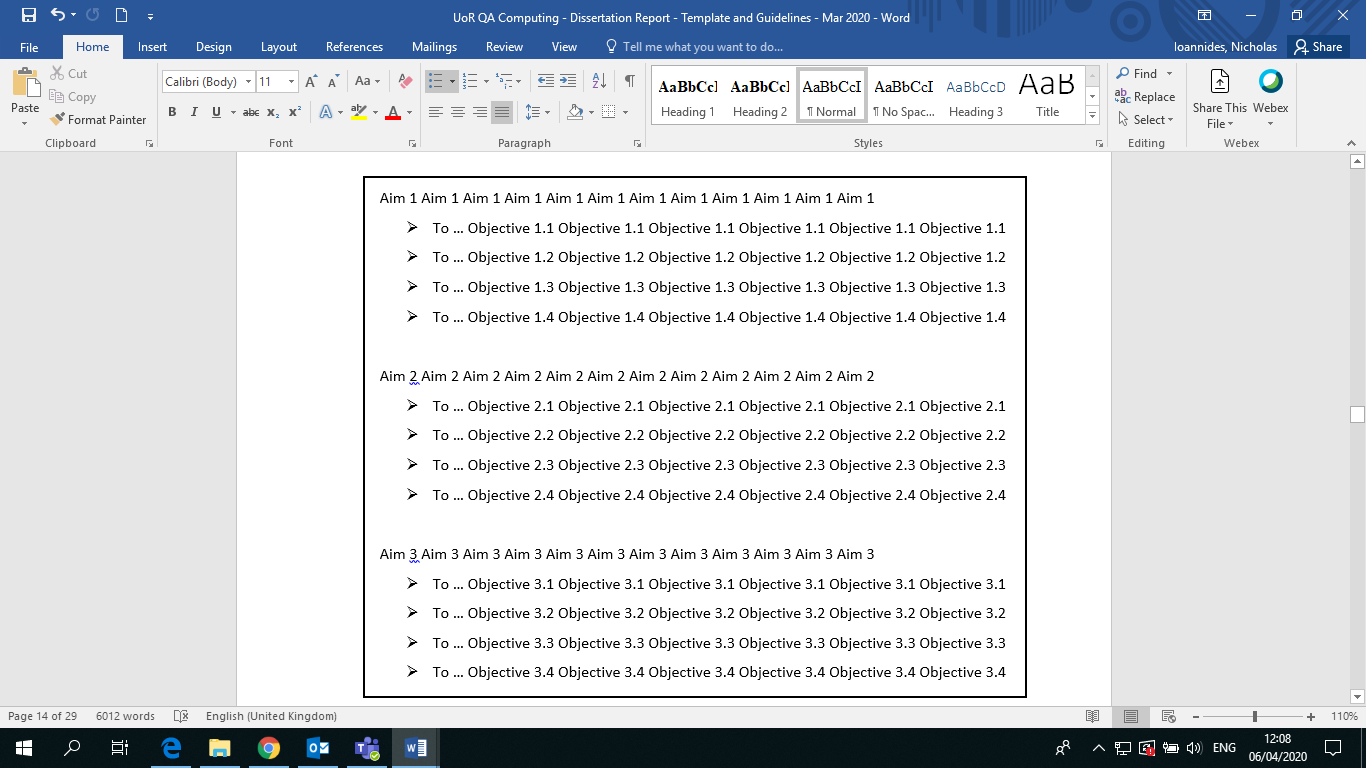
WDM: Wavelength Division Multiplexing

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

The introduction is the part which clearly introduces the project report, the direction that it will take and the reason why it is being produced. This section could be adapted to include parts from the project proposal.

Chapter 1 should include the following sections:

* Project Introduction: Introduction to the project, choice justification, why it is important, who will benefit, if there is a specific purpose behind it, any background which may exist. If the project is undertaken for a client then a brief background of the client and what the client is expecting this project to achieve should be given.
* Scope, Aims and Objectives, Deliverables:
* Scope: Identification and explanation of the overall Scope,
* Aims and Objectives: Outlining of the Aims and Objectives of the project as prepared in the Project Proposal and updated according to the feedback received by the supervisor. There should be 4 to 6 Aims with each aim followed by a list of objectives specifically focusing on that particular aim, as shown in Figure 1.
* Deliverables: Follow the Aims and Objectives and clearly state what the final outcome of the project is or was intended to be and how/why the final deliverables may be different from the ones intended.
  + - Approach: A short discussion on the type of project (Research-based or Applied / Practical) and how it was approached, and what methods were followed to satisfy the Aims and Objectives and deliver the final outcome.
    - Dissertation Overview: A quick introduction / preview of what each chapter will be dealing with.



**Figure 1:** The structure of Aims and Objectives

**Chapter 2: Literature Review / Client Requirements / Other**

(Choose appropriate title specific to the contents of this chapter)

The focus of Chapter 2 will be on understanding the main area upon which the project will be based. The type of project (Research-based or Applied / Practical) will determine how the chapter is approached and the direction that it will take. The chapter should start with an overview of the main theme, and followed by zooming in on the specific focus / concerns of the topic and research done on the same area by other researchers. Legal, Ethical, Social and Professional (LESP) Issues specific to the topic must also be discussed.

Chapter 2 should include the following sections:

**If Research-Based:**

* + - Introduce this chapter and its focus.
    - Introduce and discuss the generic area upon which the research is focusing on, and establish its importance and any potential issues or concerns.
    - Discussion on the important areas that the project has intended to research as per the Aims and Objectives, focusing on the issues of concern, their importance and impact on the theme.
    - Discussion on the importance and impact that a potential solution that you have been researching on would have on the issues of concern as per your Aims and Objectives.
    - Discussion on alternative solutions that other researchers have been working on.
    - Legal, Social, Ethical and Professional (LSEP) Issues: Specific to the literature review concerning both the generic area covered in this chapter and the area that the project has been focusing on.
    - Summary of the important parts of this chapter (5-10 lines)

**If Applied / Practical-Based:**

* + - Introduce this chapter and its focus.
    - Introduce the entity behind this work, ie the client, opportunity or practice.
    - General Analysis: Discuss the normal procedure on the way things are done currently followed by an evaluation of any shortcomings and lost opportunities / efficiencies due to the current process.
    - Requirements Gathering: Discuss features required to improve procedures and efficiencies, and capitalise on opportunities.
    - Market Research: Undertake market research to establish whether there are any existing off-the-shelf solutions available and their fit to the desired features / requirements.
    - Legal, Social, Ethical and Professional (LSEP) Issues: Specific to the requirements of the client identified in this chapter and the developed artefact that the project has been focusing on.
    - Summary of the important parts of this chapter (5-10 lines)

**Chapter 3: Requirements / Problem Statement / Methodology**

(Choose appropriate title specific to the contents of this chapter)

This chapter focuses on the research methodology and project management part of the dissertation and intends to explain how you have chosen to undertake the various tasks based on the initial requirements (Aims and Objectives) and expected deliverables. Be specific and avoid bland statements that apply to all projects.

The approach will also depend on the type of project (Research-based or Applied / Practical):

* + - **Research-based**: Focusing on the research methodologies and approaches that you have chosen to follow in order to satisfy the Aims and Objectives set.
    - **Applied / Practical-based**: Focusing on the design, development and testing / troubleshooting of the artefact / solution that you have undertaken to develop as per the Aims and Objectives set.

Chapter 3 should include the following sections:

**If Research-Based:**

* + - Introduce this chapter and its focus.
    - Discuss and justify why this type of project (Research-based) is appropriate for the requirements as per the Aims and Objectives.
    - Methodology: A Research-based project will be focusing on the collection of data and techniques used towards understanding, explaining and recommending as the main intention. Research choices made must be discussed and be supported by explanations on the suitability of these choices. The following must be covered in this section:
* Research Design: Explanatory, Descriptive or Normative
* Data Collection: Primary or Secondary sourcing of data and approach(es)
* Research Methodology: Quantitative, Qualitative or Mixed analysis techniques
  + - Project Planning Review: The contents of this section have been initially included in the Project Plan of the Proposal but they should be reviewed here to incorporate / reflect changes encountered in the process of undertaking the project. The Project Planning Review should include the following:
* Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) – *Updated* structure of work tasks undertaken.
* Gantt Chart – *Updated* Gantt Chart identifying the true *start* and *finish* dates of the various scheduled project tasks that were undertaken until the end of the project alongside the proposed dates.
* Resources List: The resources and/or tools used during the project and the purpose behind each item listed in order to enable you to progress and complete your project.
* Risks and Limitations: Identify and briefly discuss any limitations and/or risks that you might have encountered and what you did to overcome them. This may include non-availability of resources, tasks overrunning, etc.
  + - Summary of the important parts of this chapter (5-10 lines)

**If Applied / Practical-Based:**

* + - Introduce this chapter and its focus.
    - Discuss and justify why this type of project (Applied / Practical-based) is appropriate for the requirements as per the Aims and Objectives.
    - Methodology: The project will be focusing on the understanding of a particular problem, need or opportunity, with the intention of producing a solution to the problem / need or capitalising on the opportunity. The following must be covered in this section:
* Research Design: Causal, Problem-Solving or Development and Application
* Data Collection: Primary or Secondary sourcing of data and approach(es)
* Project Management Methodology: Waterfall, Agile, Scrum, other, and discuss and justify.
  + - Project Planning Review: The contents of this section have been initially included in the Project Plan of the Proposal but they should be reviewed here to incorporate / reflect changes encountered in the process of undertaking the project. The Project Planning Review should include the following:
* Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) – *Updated* structure of work tasks undertaken.
* Gantt Chart – *Updated* Gantt Chart identifying the true *start* and *finish* dates of the various scheduled project tasks that were undertaken until the end of the project alongside the proposed dates.
* Resources List: The resources and/or tools used during the project and the purpose behind each item listed in order to enable you to progress and complete your project. Any specialist hardware and/or software used should be included.
* Risks and Limitations: Identify and briefly discuss any limitations and/or risks that you might have encountered and what you did to overcome them. This may include non-availability of resources, tasks overrunning, client related issues, etc.
  + - Summary of the important parts of this chapter (5-10 lines)

**Chapter 4: Data Collection and Analysis / Design and Development / Findings**

(Choose appropriate title specific to the contents of this chapter)

This chapter must concentrate on how the specific project work is being implemented / carried out. Any practical / simulation / research arrangements, considerations, detailed designs / investigations must be clearly presented, outlined and explained.

It is also concerned with the experimental / simulation / research results obtained. Detailed designs / infrastructure / system comparisons should be outlined and summaries of results should be presented.

Research-based projects must offer a clear description and explanation of the process followed clearly showing any work done in order to obtain the necessary results. Possible effects on the ideal behaviour of the theme must be investigated by introducing theoretical misbehaviours or unexpected events.

Chapter 4 should include the following sections:

**If Research-Based:**

* + - Introduce this chapter and its focus.
    - Revisit the intention behind the research and the issues that you are planning to confront as per the Aims and Objectives.
    - Classification of research findings, sectioning them based on the requirements set by the Aims and Objectives.
    - Introduce and present findings in appropriate format – text, tables, figures, charts, etc.
    - Analyse the findings presented.
    - Discuss the relevance of the collected classified / sectioned information to a particular Aim.
    - Summary of the important parts of this chapter (5-10 lines)

**If Applied / Practical-Based:**

* + - Introduce this chapter and its focus.
    - Project Specifications: Derived from the Aims and Objectives and focus on the Deliverables.
    - Establishing appropriate development platform based on specifications.
    - Design and Development / Coding:
* Functionality
* User Interface and User Experience
* Components
* Database and data structures
* Interfacing
* Security
  + - Summary of the important parts of this chapter (5-10 lines)

**Chapter 5: Evaluation and Discussion / Testing and Troubleshooting**

(Choose appropriate title specific to the contents of this chapter)

This is one of the most important chapters in the report. Here the writer will indicate through a critical appraisal the meaning of the results, and compare them with any theoretical predictions or with alternative systems. These critical appraisal suggestions will be put forward for improvements to the design of the theme and further / future work which would raise the level and profile of the entity investigated / developed here.

Chapter 5 should include the following sections:

**If Research-Based:**

* + - Introduce this chapter and its focus.
    - Evaluation of research findings presented in Chapter 4.
    - Critical discussion of research findings presented in Chapter 4.
    - Compare with findings from other researchers in the literature working on the same or similar topic.
    - Discuss and reflect on the research process and consider whether the path followed was the appropriate one or if an alternative way might have been better.
    - Discuss problems encountered and contingency plans adopted to overcome these problems.
    - Summary of the important parts of this chapter (5-10 lines).

**If Applied / Practical-Based:**

* + - Introduce this chapter and its focus.
    - Discuss the state of development of the artefact or solution.
    - Discuss the type of testing that will be undertaken and the intention behind it.
    - Identify and evaluate the findings from the testing done (use screenshots to demonstrate findings).
    - Discuss what troubleshooting techniques will be used and justify choices.
    - Apply troubleshooting techniques and discuss the outcome (use screenshots to demonstrate findings).
    - Retest the artefact / solution to confirm that troubleshooting has been successful (use screenshots to demonstrate the different outcome from the initial testing).
    - If appropriate to your artefact, design/develop a ‘Quick User Guide’ (1-page screenshot plus text boxes).
    - Discuss and reflect on the design and development process and consider whether the path followed was the appropriate one or if an alternative way might have been better.
    - Summary of the important parts of this chapter (5-10 lines).

**Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The concluding section must summarize what has been done and what conclusions have been drawn. This is the last opportunity to bring together what has taken place in a form that will tell the reader, ‘this is really what everything has been leading to, and what the writer wants the reader to think at the end of the report’. New material must not be introduced, but lessons should be drawn out from the material in the preceding sections. It is very important for the writer to be self-critical.

The conclusion chapter must (Creme and Lea, 2003):

* + Summarise the ‘answers’ to the questions which the project set out to address, as were signalled in the introduction,
  + Refer back to the question posed in the title and show that it has been answered,
  + Give a ‘sense of the ending’,
  + Point out what has and what has not been answered (as per the Aims and Objectives) ,
  + Show that the writer did what the writer set out to do (as per the Methodology),
  + Put forward the writer’s point of view in the light of the evidence presented (as per the Evaluation),
  + Allow the writer to be positive about the ideas in the report,
  + Point the reader forward to a new related idea (future Work).

This chapter must have the following sections:

* Summary of the work done
* Conclude on the work done
* Recommend
* Future Work

**References**

The Harvard Referencing System must be used. The following guides are provided in Moodle and you must consult the requirements of this system and follow them throughout the writing process:

* Harvard referencing Quick Guide
* Harvard referencing Full Guide

**Appendices**

Appendices should be used to remove from the main text all information which is not needed by the majority of the users of the report. An appendix is a good place for background information which most readers will take for granted but which a few need to be told. It is excellent for supporting statistics, and diagrammatic material which is not needed as the report is read. It is an ideal place for lists of symbols, technical terms and abbreviations which are familiar to some but not all readers (if only few readers know them, then they may be better placed near the beginning of the report). A balance on what is included in the appendix and what in the main text must be reached.

The following must be included in the Appendices:

* + The Ethical Approval Form (signed by both the student and the supervisor)
  + If you are undertaking Primary Research for your dissertation you must include your Information Sheet and Consent Form that you have given to those you approach to inform them of the purposes behind your research and their consent to the use of their responses for the purposes of this research.
  + If you are undertaking Primary Research you must include the Questionnaire and/or Interview Questions you used to collect information.
  + All relevant materials (i.e. configurations, program source listings, test plans, data and results) which will not be included in the main body of the project report should be included.
  + The Student Diary showing the outcome of supervisory meetings.