Honours Project

Report Template

*Postmortem*

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# How to use this template

This template provides guidance to those students who are following the **Design Research** honours project brief. The template consists of recommended sections for your project report, inclusive of guidance on how you might want to approach each section, the content you might want to include, and the length of each section in terms of potential word count.

Note that your honours project supervisor will offer guidance and direction that is specific to your project and the research you conducted. This may include recommendations for a different structure or different word counts for each section. Please do take direction from your supervisor and use this template as general guidance on how you may approach your project report.

You should prepare your project report within a new document. **Do not write directly into this template file.**

Regardless of the type of project report that you are writing, all reports must include text that presents your **research questions** (in a form appropriate to the project), **method(s)**, and **literature review**. All project reports must also include full references following the guidance available from the Library.

This template will help you to understand how to approach a postmortem, but it is not the only guidance document that you will need to consult. The **Library support** page on My Learning Space provides direct links to additional support, including:

• **Abertay style guide** (additional detailed guidance that you should consider)

• **Project template** (which you may use as the basis for your report)

• **Referencing**

Remember to review the Assessment for ART410 before planning your project report. Additionally, ensure that you review the Assessment Rubric at the bottom of the Assessment. This includes criteria that relate directly to what you will be marked on for your project report submission.

# Postmortem: basic information

Your postmortem should serve to **contextualise** and **critically evaluate** your design research project.

The approach assumes that your research questions are design-based, driven by identified challenges or problems to solve. Your postmortem must demonstrate appreciation of existing design knowledge, theory, and practice as part of a process of situating your work within a wider design context. The method of analysis is the postmortem itself, whereby you summarise the project, its successes, and its failures, framed by the existing knowledge base.

The postmortem is about your practice-based research this year and should be considered the written element of your wider project. The proposed word count is **4,000 words (+/- 10%)**, representing a 25% overall weighting within the Honours Project Portfolio assessment (against a 75% weighting for your Project & Presentation).

# Planning the structure of your postmortem

## Opening sections

The following sections apply to all project report types. None of these sections count towards the total word count of your project report.

### Title Page

The title page should provide the following information:

* The full title of your project report
* Your full name
* The qualification being sought, e.g. BA (Hons) Computer Arts or BA (Hons) Game Design and Production
* School of Design and Informatics
* Abertay University
* The current month and year of submission

The university library provides a project template that includes an example title page, but there is no requirement to present this in a particular fashion. Simply include the information above on its own page, styled in a manner that you are happy with. You are welcome to include an image on your title page that is representative of the practical work you completed, so long as this is your work and that it does not interfere with the above required information.

### Table of Contents

A full table of contents for all sections of the project report. If working with Microsoft Word or equivalent, use a Table of Contents manager to help you maintain an accurate and updated contents list. Consult the Abertay style guide for support on how to do this effectively within Word using Heading styles.

### List of Figures

All images included within your project report should be styled as Figures, which means each image should have a caption underneath labelling the figure number and providing information on what the image shows. If you use captions to do this, you can automate a List of Figures much the same way as you can automate a Table of Contents. See the Abertay style guide for support.

### List of Tables

You can create a List of Table in the same manner as the List of Figures. Each Table should also be numbered in order of appearance.

### Acknowledgements

This is an optional section

### Abstract

You should write the abstract last. An abstract is not an introduction to the project report. Instead, the abstract is a synopsis of the complete project report. It should identify the research aim, the core research questions/problems/provocations, the broad field of existing knowledge the research drew upon, the nature of the research that was conducted, and a brief statement on what the outcome of the research was. It can be easier to write this last, as you can use each of the main sections of your body text as a basis for each point the abstract covers.

## Body text

The following sections represent your postmortem body text. Only these sections count towards your total word count

It is advised that you use a numbering system to help manage the structure of the body text, e.g.

1. First main section (i.e. Introduction)
   1. Division level 1
      1. Division level 2
2. Second main section (i.e. Research context)

Only the sections of the body text should be numbered. Do not number the sections listed as Opening sections (e.g. abstract) or End sections (e.g. references)

### 1. Introduction

For your postmortem, it is recommended that you use your Introduction to establish the following:

* Introduce your topic and provide some explanation of why this is an interesting topic for design research. Consider identifying exemplars from your field that would provide a lay audience with an understanding of the state of the art, and/or which act as examples of the design problems you are interested in.
* An outline of the key research questions, design problems, or challenges.
* Your agreed aim & objectives
* Your method(s), which for a design research brief should be practice-based. For a postmortem, it is suggested that you discuss your practice-based methods here in the introduction, following on from your aim & objectives. Provide clear detail on how you went about your research practically, the tools/materials you used, and what the final artefact/portfolio was intended to be.

It is recommended that you try to keep your introduction concise and focus on setting up the remainder of the Project Report. Be careful to avoid diving too deeply into the literature or related research/practice at this stage, as that is the focus for the next section. Also be careful to avoid over explaining your project beyond the general method, as your third section is intended to focus on an analysis of the project. Overall, your introduction is likely to total **fewer than 500 words**.

### 2. Research context

The second section is your analysis of existing literature and knowledge, which you may choose to title the research context, project context, contextual review, literature review, background, critical framework, theoretical framework, or equivalent.

This is the section in which you draw upon a wide range of appropriate authoritative sources to develop the critical framework and theoretical foundation for your design practice. As a design research project, it is anticipated that you will be drawing upon relevant design and media theory to establish the criteria and concepts that apply to your project. You may also draw on relevant knowledge from adjacent fields, such as psychology, sociology, business, etc. that help contextualise the work you are doing and provide criteria that you have applied in your design work. The discussed literature should relate to the general research questions, problems, or challenges that you have identified in the introduction. Ultimately, these sources will serve to frame your postmortem. In addition to (but not in place of) key texts related to your research questions, problems, or challenges, you may also incorporate discussion and critique of existing design practice developed and disseminated by leading practitioners/studios in your field.

The research context section is a very important section of your postmortem. It is directly referred to in the assessment rubric for the module (assessment category: *research context*). As an honours student, there is an expectation that you will demonstrate critical engagement with existing knowledge. The research context section of your report is the part of the overall submission where that evidence should be most prominent. To that end, it is recommended that your research context section should total around **1,500 to 2,000 words.**

You may want to consider breaking down your research context section into sub-headings (i.e. 2.1, 2.2 etc) if this is appropriate, for instance if your review covers a few different themes. However, avoid fragmenting your review with too many sub-sections. If you break down your review into too many sub-sections you might find that each sub-section forms little more than a paragraph, which would likely result in overly descriptive and less substantive, analytical writing.

You are encouraged to include figures within your research context section where you refer to existing art or media projects.

### 3. Research project

Which you may title research project, design project, practical project, or project postmortem (as this is the section that should be written in the style of a postmortem). You may also give it its own unique descriptive name reflecting the project you carried out or use the title of your design project.

This is the ‘findings’ section of your postmortem, where you will now focus on the design project that you carried out and the learning that you gained from it. Remember that the learning here is with reference to your research questions/problems/challenges and the wider aim of your academic research. Your focus should not be on your own personal development, but instead on the learning that is valuable to other designers in your field. Try to imagine your target reader is not a tutor who will mark your personal development, but instead another designer who could be interested in reading about your design project and what happened when you set out to tackle your research questions.

Your postmortem should be written critically, by which we mean drawing upon the existing knowledge base and ideas (discussed in the research context) to frame and ground your analysis. It is expected that your analysis will not be written as a personal reflection, nor should it be written subjectively. Strive to write an objective postmortem in which you focus on a substantiated evaluation of the elements of the design project framed by the knowledge gleaned from your research context. Given that your design project was also guided by research questions, remember to structure your postmortem with these questions/problems/challenges in mind, and provide an evaluation that offers some insight into how your project addressed them.

You should discuss your approach with your supervisor, but a suggested structure for the postmortem is:

* **3.1** **Project details** (providing a brief description of the final work)
* **3.2** **What went right (**evaluating the strengths and successes of the project, with reference to the research questions)
* **3.3** **What went wrong** (evaluating the difficulties or new problems that arose, again with reference to the research questions)

Alternatively, you may structure the postmortem by theme, where each sub-section deals with a different theme or concept that the project explored. In this case you might expect that the themes would be the same themes discussed in the research context section.

As with the research context, the research project section is very important and referred to directly within the assessment rubric (assessment category: *critical evaluation*). As an honours student you must demonstrate an ability to analyse and present the findings of your research, which is what this section guides you to do. It is therefore recommended that the research project section should be approximately the same length as your research context section, at around **1,500 to 2,000 words**.

It is expected that you will use figures throughout this section to illustrate the work you carried out. As an design practitioner, your postmortem is as much a visual document as it is a textual one. Consider including figures that show both design works in progress, as well as final works. Use figures to add value to your writing and ensure that when you use a figure you refer to it in the text (e.g. ‘see Figure 1 for an example of…). The aim should be to use figures and text in tandem to best evaluate and critique your work. Where you find yourself overly explaining a piece of work, consider if your writing could be made more efficient and less descriptive by using a figure to show what you mean. At the same time, try to avoid saturating your postmortem with too many unnecessary figures, to the point that it disrupts the flow of your text.

### 4. Conclusion

Which you may title conclusion, summary, or equivalent.

Try to keep your conclusion concise. This is not a place to introduce new ideas or content, particularly where this can lead to a relative reduction in word count in the research context and research project sections. Your conclusion may be between **250 and 500 words**, erring towards the former.

## End sections

The following sections apply to all project report types. None of these sections count towards the total word count of your project report.

### Appendices

You may optionally include appendices, but appendices are not required. Remember that your project report is the accompaniment to the project, as part of the same Honours Project Portfolio. Therefore, you do not need to append additional work showing the project.

Where you have conducted research with participants (User Research or Critical Research briefs only), you may consider including your questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group schedules, survey questions, template participant information sheets, and any other (non-sensitive) documents pertaining to your user research methods. Do not append any materials that reveal participant identity or that embed sensitive data.

Please avoid putting additional research sections (e.g. case studies, for a Critical Research project) into your appendices. If you are conducting research such as case studies, they should be embedded within the body text.

### Glossary

An optional section to include if you feel that you are using specialist terminology or abbreviations throughout the body text that you need to define.

### Ludography / Filmography

If you have cited a range games or films within the body text of your project report, you may choose to include separate Ludography and/or Filmography sections. All cited works should be styled following the guidance on referencing. You may choose noy to include separate lists of games or films, and instead fold these citations into the References. This may be appropriate where you have not cited a long list of games or films.

### References

This should list **all** the references that are cited within the project report. This can include all source types, including not only journal articles, conference papers, books, chapters, and reports, but also web resources, videos, talks, games, films, artworks, and other media. Be sure that all references follow the prescribed guidance.

### Bibliography

It is advised that you **do not include a bibliography**. Typically, a bibliography is a list of literature that was consulted during the research, but which was not cited in the text. If you have consulted literature and this has impacted on your research in some way, please cite it within your body text in the appropriate section. If a source is cited in the body text, this would then appear in your References section.