

These are the HISS criteria, used at Chalmers for the assessment of bachelor-project reports

These we will use for the assessment of the final report of the DAT096 course VT 2012.

Assessment of written presentation reports – HISS

Following discussion of the assessment process by course leaders on 5th December 2006, it was clarified that undergraduate reports will constitute one of several pieces of work to be assessed, and that these will be judged on the performance of the group. In consequence we propose a set of criteria which can help examiners, supervisors, and students make concrete the strengths and weaknesses of a report. Examiners and supervisors can thus use the criteria to relate their assessment to the different communicative aspects of the report. In doing so, a preliminary assessment can be either confirmed or questioned.

We propose four assessment levels for written reports. From discussions with supervisors we have isolated two key aspects that are expected in a text, namely understanding of **content** as well as a clear **structure**. In addition to these two aspects, the criteria pay attention to **language**, and the fact that a text gives an immediate **overall impression**, which influences the reader. With these key aspects as a starting point, we have chosen to call the criteria ‘HISS’¹.

The four aspects are closely related to each other and from discussions with supervisors we have learnt that **content** is usually viewed to be more important than the other aspects. Thus we propose that the criteria’s weighting correspond to the views held by many supervisors:

Criteria	Weighting
Overall impression	20%
Content & understanding	40%
Structure	20%
Language	20%
Combined grade	100%

All aspects of the report should demonstrate sufficient capability, in the same way that separate parts of the report must achieve minimum marks.

As understanding of content requires subject-specific theoretical knowledge, we have tried to express criteria about subject knowledge in terms which can apply across different disciplines. Thus some phrases may not be optimal for specific subject areas. In our suggestions for criteria and the basis for these, we have on a number of occasions also made a distinction between levels, by using the terms ‘discussion’ or ‘commentary’, where ‘discussion’ relates to a more considered and better report. Thus ‘commentary’ reflects a more superficial and more fragmented discussion.

¹ The acronym is based on the Swedish terms for the four main aspects.

Assessment Criteria – HISS

Note that the overall impression is something that can be assessed quickly during the first reading, based on the first impression the text gives. This impression, which also covers understanding and knowledge of the subject, is confirmed or reassessed afterwards during a more careful examination of the text where the HISS criteria are applied. Note also that the detailed analysis of references is not included in the overall impression, even though many readers check the references directly after reading the title, abstract, and perhaps the conclusions or introduction. Assessment of references is covered instead under **Structure**.

Overall impression			
	Purpose and structure	Topic presentation	Adherence to guidelines
5	The reader can easily understand the text's purpose, structure, and content from a clear contents page, an informative abstract, an informative title, effective figures and tables, and headings that are clearly linked to the theme of the text.	The presentation of the topic is very good with an analysis of the results which is easy to understand and well connected to the purpose and conclusion. The relevant topic areas are covered and described in a clear fashion. Additionally, the choice and depth of material is clearly related to the study's purpose and content, and delivered in a cohesive and coherent report.	The report's length and form adheres to the guidelines and are well suited to the task. Presentation of form strengthens the reading of the report.
4	A clear understanding of the text can be obtained, even though the title, contents page, abstract, and headings do not give a clear picture of the text's purpose, structure, and contents. Figures and tables do not provide sufficient support.	The presentation of the topic is good. Many important areas are covered but the description in some respects is too narrow or too broad, which points to a choice of material not clearly linked to the study's purpose and content. There are only isolated examples of poor presentation of results, with the analysis and report overall giving a coherent impression.	The report's length and form mainly follow the guidelines but are not always appropriate and affect reading. For example, some headings may be insufficiently informative.
3	It is difficult to obtain a clear understanding of what the text is about from the title, abstract, heading, contents page, tables, and figures. This could be that the abstract or summary does not describe the purpose and the result, or that the title and headings are too general and thus do not reflect the specific focus of the text.	The presentation of the topic covers some relevant areas but has also marked problems due to unclear descriptions of several topic areas and/or that in some respects the description is too narrow or too broad. The results and analysis are insufficiently linked together and not related to the purpose and conclusion. Lack of coherence in the report negatively influences the reader's understanding.	The report's length and form partly follow the guidelines but certain failures are evident, for example concerning the contents page, layout and/or page numbering.
U	Title, abstract, contents page, headings, tables and figures do not give sufficient direction to allow the reader to understand the text's purpose, structure, or content.	The presentation of the topic is clearly lacking as important areas have not been described. The results and analysis are not easily available on the first reading. The choice of material is poorly linked to the purpose and content, and the coherence of the report is clearly wanting.	The report's length and form do not follow the guidelines and clear failures are evident, for example concerning the contents page, layout and/or page numbering.

Please note:

Understanding and knowledge of the theoretical subject is also demonstrated through discussion, which is primarily assessed on the combined impression of the categories on the next page: Choice of theory and methodology, Analysis of the results, Links between analysis and theory/methodology, Critical discussion of the results, and Literature review.

Content and understanding			
	Rationale	Links between aim, analysis of results, and discussion (the key thread)	Discussion
5	The aims of the study are clear and well defined.	The conclusions are clearly linked and properly related to the analysis of results and the aims of the study.	The discussion is impartial, well structured and well balanced. It is underpinned by accurate content and relevant references, and supported by clear examples from the analysis of the results.
4	The aims of the study are clear but are either too wide or poorly defined.	The conclusions are clearly linked to the analysis of results and the aims of the study but partly have another focus to what is given in the aims or purpose.	The discussion is impartial but lacks structure as well as support for the given arguments. The discussion is however sufficiently strong to make clear the key arguments.
3	The aims of the study are somewhat unclear and not well defined.	The conclusions are only indirectly linked to the analysis of results and aims of the study and links are insufficiently explained for the reader.	The discussion is impartial but lacks clear structure and would need to be clearly underpinned by the results analysis in order to be effective. There are some unsupported claims.
U	Clear formulation of the aims and definitions are missing.	No or very weak links are made between conclusions and aims. Alternatively, the aims stated in the introduction differ from those discussed in the discussion and/or conclusion.	The discussion is poorly underpinned and lacks support. Too many unsupported claims are made.

Content and understanding					
	Choice of theory and methodology	Analysis of results	Links between analysis and theory/methodology	Critical discussion of the results	Literature review
5	The author adopts a critical position to choice of theory and methodology through considering its suitability to the current study	The analysis of results is accurate and well executed. The choice of figures, tables, and examples is well considered and credible.	The analysis of results discusses interpretations and reflections relevant to the choice of theory and methodology, as well as other studies.	The author adopts a critical position to the results of the study by discussing their relevance and potential implications. The author also discusses unclear and unexpected results as well as the relationship between their study and the extant literature.	A thorough, high quality literature review is presented. The credibility of sources and their relevance is high and sources are primarily scientific publications.
4	The author discusses choice of theory and methodology but the conclusions are lacking or insufficient.	The analysis of results is accurate and well executed but minor errors influence the overall impression and the credibility of the text. Furthermore, links between the text and tables and figures are occasionally incomplete.	The analysis of results comments on the results in relation to choice of theory and methodology and/or other studies.	The author comments on the relevance and implications of the results but only partly discusses unclear and unexpected results, as well as links to existing studies.	A good literature review is presented but it is of varying quality and scope (though with only rare and limited deficiencies).
3	The author comments on choice of theory and methodology but draws no firm conclusions on this.	The analysis of results is poor and in a few cases inaccurate. The analysis is not easy to follow. Both the overall impression and the credibility of the text are left in doubt because several readings are required to understand the analysis. Links between the text and tables and figures are often incomplete.	In the analysis of results, the choice of theory and methodology is mentioned but explicit discussion of the links between results and theory, method, or other studies is lacking.	The author comments on the results but does not fully reflect on their relevance and implications and does not cover unclear or unexpected results, or links with existing studies.	A good literature review is presented in some respects but it also demonstrates clear deficiencies. This can be due to a single use of unsound sources, or that an important area is insufficiently described owing to use of poor sources.
U	The author does not reflect on choice of theory and methodology.	The analysis of results is incomplete or inaccurate with frequent deficiencies or errors, which are not limited to poor links between the text and tables and figures.	There is no attempt to analyse the results in relation to theory, method, or other studies.	The author does not discuss the relevance or implications of the results. Unclear or unexpected results, or links with existing studies, are not mentioned.	Only a few sources are used. Alternatively, the literature review is of insufficient quality due to reliance on internet sources of low credibility.

Structure				
	Chapters and sections	Paragraphing	Referencing	Tables and figures
5	The whole report is divided into clear and coherent chapters, sections, and paragraphs.	Paragraphs are properly used to express one thought or idea per paragraph, with each one containing a clear central meaning.	Referencing of tables, figures, and sources is correct and does not affect reading. Any paraphrasing is properly presented.	Tables and figures are placed in appropriate places in the text, are accompanied by clear and informative headings, and are properly commented on.
4	The report is mainly divided into clear and coherent chapters, sections, and paragraphs but some chapters are much shorter or longer thus influencing the balance between the different parts of the report.	Paragraphing is good but some are shorter and poorly integrated within the flow of the text and/or some paragraphs contain several themes and lack a coherent central meaning.	Referencing is good but there are some faults with adherence to referencing guidelines. There are many examples of clear paraphrasing but this is in addition to proper referencing.	Tables and headings are placed in suitable places in the text but table and figure heading are somewhat unclear. There are some tables and figures which are insufficiently discussed in the text.
3	The report is partly divided into paragraphs, chapters, and sections but the structure lacks coherence. For example, some paragraphs, sections, or chapters are much shorter, thus affecting the balance between the different parts of the report.	The text is divided into paragraphs but there are some shortfalls concerning form and content. The use of paragraphs is not consistent. Furthermore, some parts are divided into many short paragraphs, or the text comprises paragraphs where each contains several themes and lacks a coherent central meaning.	There are references to table, figures, and sources but these are poorly presented, for example a single source is missing in the references/bibliography, or that the references/bibliography does not adhere to guidelines. There are many long quotations and/or examples of paraphrasing.	Tables and figures are not suitably placed in the text. Furthermore, table and figure headings are somewhat unclear. There are also cosmetic figures and tables whose function is unclear or unnecessary.
U	The report is poorly divided into chapters, sections, and paragraphs. The extent of the different parts of the report, and the relation between them, lack coherence.	The use of paragraphs is poor concerning both form and content, and in many cases affects the clarity of the paragraph, section, or chapter.	There are major deficits with referencing. For example, referencing of tables and figures is missing, and/or several sources are missing in the references/bibliography. Thus plagiarism occurs.	Tables and figures are incorrectly placed and/or are missing headings. Additionally, explanatory comments in the text are often missing.

Please note:

The criteria for language and style do not mention the notion of ‘flow’. This abstract feature of writing is the result of language and style fruitfully combining with structure and content to create a smooth and effective experience for the reader. In consequence, where there are problems with ‘flow’, one can look more closely at which factors or aspects are affecting the flow of the text. It is our hope that problems with ‘flow’ can be confirmed or avoided through a closer reading of the text using the HISS criteria.

Language and style				
	Sentence structure	Word choice and concept use	Style & tone	Proof-reading
5	Sentence structure is accurate, appropriate, and effective (there are no incomplete sentences). Only a few sentences contain structures too complex to understand (incomprehensible sentences).	The report is characterised by accurate word choice and the concepts used are well suited to the type of text as well as used in a consistent manner.	The style is even and does not shift between formal and informal tones. The report is characterised by a good awareness of the demands of tone.	The report has been carefully proof-read and at the most contains few or no errors in sentence meaning, structure, or spelling.
4	Sentence structure is good and there are only a few examples of inaccurate or otherwise problematic sentences. In some sections there are incomprehensible sentences.	Word choice and use of concepts are employed in an appropriate manner, and are suited to the type of text.	The report’s style is at the appropriate level and the author handles issues of tone with few or no exceptions.	The report has been proof-read and contains a few mistakes with words and sentences.
3	Sentence structure is acceptable despite several cases of inaccurate or incomprehensible sentences.	The report reads sufficiently well in respect of word choice and use of concepts. The report is largely appropriate for the expected audience and type of text.	The report’s style is somewhat uneven but meets current stylistic guidelines, with respect to tone.	The report has been proof-read but contains mistakes with words and sentences which affect understanding.
U	The text contains many cases of inaccurate or incomprehensible sentences. For example, sentences without a subject and/or sentences which only comprise sub-clauses.	The report is inconsistent in respect of word choice and use of concepts, and these are not sufficiently suited to the type of text.	There are clear deficiencies with the report’s style. The tone is uneven and there are many marked examples of stylistic errors.	The report has not been proof-read and in general contains so many spelling and grammatical errors that understanding the text is made difficult.