



MRS Accredited Masters Award
Award Guidelines

With members in more than 60 countries, MRS is the world's leading authority on research and business intelligence.

MRS Masters Awards Guidelines
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Introduction

The Market Research Society (MRS) extends recognition to Masters degrees in market and/or social research via the MRS Accredited Masters Scheme. The aim of the scheme is to provide professional recognition of the work carried out by those studying on the relevant Masters courses and, on successful completion, these students become eligible for Full Membership of MRS (providing they meet work experience requirements).

As part of this scheme, MRS offers an annual award, for the best dissertation by a student studying on an accredited Masters programme.

Purpose of award

The purpose of the award is to recognise excellence in research-based dissertations carried out by students undertaking Masters' degrees accredited by MRS.

Scope

The award is open to dissertations from students undertaking or who have completed (academic year prior to the award year) a Masters degree which is accredited by MRS. The dissertation should be between 5,000 and 10,000 words in length, be research based and include an element of primary research (either qualitative or quantitative). In addition each dissertation must include at least two of the following:

- Critical review and appraisal of research literature
- Analysis of datasets
- Theory building

All dissertations submitted for the MRS Accredited Masters Award must have been assessed within the framework of a Masters programme accredited by MRS. Only dissertations which have been confirmed as passing a University's assessment requirements may be submitted for the award.

Submitting dissertations

All dissertations submitted to MRS must come via the accredited centre. It is the responsibility of the centre to select eligible dissertations and then submit to MRS. MRS is unable to accept submissions from individual students.

A maximum of three separate dissertations may be submitted per year from each accredited Masters programme. Each submission should include:

- 2 copies of the completed dissertation
- a completed *Dissertation Submission Form* (see page 14), confirming that this is the candidate's own, original work and that all relevant requirements of the MRS *Code of Conduct* have been adhered to during the completion of the dissertation
- the dissertation requirements or guidance documents published by the academic centre

To be considered for entry for the Award, dissertations must be submitted to MRS by the deadline given on the annually circulated *Call for Entries*.

Review process

MRS has an Awards Panel, comprising of at least one member of the MRS Professional Development Advisory Board and Fellows of MRS, to assess the dissertations submitted for the award. Each dissertation will be reviewed by a minimum of 2 members of the panel, using the published *Assessment Criteria* (see page 10). Following this initial review the panel compiles a shortlist of potential candidates for the Award. The shortlisted candidates are required to attend a viva. Attendance at the viva is an integral part of the review process.

The viva gives the review panel the opportunity to explore issues within the candidates dissertation more fully and to seek clarification on areas that may not seem explicitly apparent, whilst also giving the candidate the chance to promote their research knowledge, skills and experience.

The viva is approximately 45 minutes long, normally held at MRS offices. Candidates are required to answer a range of questions based around:

- their choice of dissertation topic
- how the research was conducted
- the way they have presented the findings/conclusions
- the implication of the findings
- any recommended actions based on the research findings

MRS does recognise that on occasion it may not be possible for a shortlisted candidate to attend a face-to-face viva. Therefore, depending upon the individual circumstance it may be possible to arrange a telephone viva as an alternative. Candidates need to be aware that where possible they should attend the viva face-to-face, as whilst candidates are not intentionally disadvantaged by having their viva conducted over the telephone the viva format is best suited to face-to-face.

Award applications submitted to MRS are treated with the strictest of confidence. The information contained within the applications and any discussion during the viva will only be used for the purpose of evaluation of the dissertation and the selection of award winner. Copies of dissertations which receive the MRS Accredited Masters Award may be entered into the MRS Library, only once permission from the author has been received.

The decision of the review panel will be final and the panel will not enter into any correspondence about their decisions.

MRS reserves the right not to award the prize if none of the dissertations submitted meet the required *Assessment Criteria*, detailed on Page 10.

Winning the Award

The Award is presented to the winner at the prestigious *MRS Excellence Awards Lunch*. This event an intimate Summer lunch and drinks reception open primarily to MRS Fellows, senior practitioners and academics, highlights the exceptional work of members attaining Fellowships and those receiving awards for adding substantially to the body of market research knowledge – the MRS Silver Medal and *IJMR* Award for Collaborative Research.

The winner receives:

- a trophy
- a winners certificate
- complimentary ticket to attend the Lunch

It is also a great opportunity for academic centres to raise their profile. Academic centres can also publicise the achievement via their website, with links to key pages on the MRS Website.

Previous Winners

“Winning the MRS Accredited Masters Award has helped me in a number of different ways. It was a motivational incentive for the continuation of my studies but it also gave me substantial recognition within the market research industry, giving me the opportunity of networking with professionals interested in understanding how my research could be relevant for day-to-day work.”

PAOLO ANTONETTI

Doctoral Candidate
Cranfield University –
School of Management



“Receiving the MRS Accredited Masters Award was an honour, and the awards ceremony was great fun. After completing the degree, I worked as a freelance researcher and lecturer at the University of Westminster, and the MRS award really boosted my credibility with clients and students alike. After some time spent agency-side, I founded the Research Academy in 2013, which offers professional qualification courses to people in the market and social research sector.”

MIA LORENZ

Managing Director
The Research Academy



Advice from the Awards Panel to student submitting a dissertation

This guidance has been compiled by the MRS Masters Award Panel to assist MRS Accredited Centres and candidates, undertaking Masters' degrees accredited by MRS, in the preparation of research-based dissertations, which are to be submitted for the MRS Masters Award. MRS is aware that the dissertations are not written primarily with the aim of being submitted as an MRS Masters Award submission but are written as part of the Masters degree and so, in accordance with this, have a structure to follow and academic requirements to meet.

MRS is delighted to receive submissions from students for its Masters Award, building bridges between research practice and academia. Since the award was introduced in 2002 we have had many excellent submissions and Award winning candidates have gone on to enjoy successful careers in market and social research, in part as a result of their success with the Award. Submitting for the MRS Masters Award has been a valuable foundation to building a research career.

We are keen to see as many submissions as possible. It is in the light of this that these guidelines have been prepared in order to give more guidance on what is looked on favourably and how students may maximise their chances of winning the MRS Masters Award.

Best Practice

The panel are looking for, if not original thought, then certainly creativity in students' thinking. The panel recognise that students are limited in the fieldwork they can undertake. However, it is important for students to demonstrate an understanding of best practice in research methodology e.g. questionnaire, sampling, design and data collection methodology. Therefore, students should include a discussion of what they think would have been a best practice research design, if the time and resources had been available, in order to produce a more robust set of findings. This would present a sense of the student's ability to weigh up pros and cons and would demonstrate a full understanding of research design considerations.

MRS Code of Conduct

The panel expect all students submitting dissertations to demonstrate that they have knowledge of the MRS Code of Conduct, and are able to apply it. Some past submissions have included little awareness of, or consideration of, the MRS Code of Conduct. Similarly, there has been virtually no reference to other Codes of Conduct such as ESOMAR's or to other relevant issues such as data protection or other legislation.

Operating within the MRS Code of Conduct is fundamental to good research practice, and is one of the critical 12 standards that candidates are assessed against when being considered for Full Membership of MRS. The lack of reference to any Code of Conduct is a key failing when discussing research methodologies, research approaches or general research issues.

MRS Code of Conduct and associated guidelines are fully accessible on the MRS Website www.mrs.org.uk/standards

References

The panel recognize that dissertations are also being submitted as papers towards a Masters degree, and as such will follow a particular set style, as determined by academic centres; nonetheless it is felt that more attention needs to be paid to referencing.

Often, references are too broad: a point is made and a source cited in brackets immediately afterwards. The reader is left not knowing what was actually stated by the author(s) of the book or paper, what the student has taken from it, and what the specific relevance is at that point. The panel are likely to be more impressed by the quality of a good reference than the quantity that they are often faced with.

In addition, references are sometimes far too basic, considering the level at which the dissertations are being examined. At this level, candidates should present their own arguments: the rationale should appear in the text, not require being sought in a textbook. Similarly, there should be no need at this level to source and present definitions of basic elements, which would be used in everyday language by researchers; for example the panel would not expect to see a discussion on the definition of the word "brand" but they would expect a succinct discussion for more applied concepts such as "brand equity".

Students still need to demonstrate that they understand the basic elements of research design and the differences between qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The frequent and very broad referencing to literature often detracts from the flow of the argument rather than adding, and at times can lead to confusion for the reader.

The balance of academic sources to practitioner sources is weighted too heavily to the former. For example, there is often little, or no, mention of the International Journal of Market Research (IJMR), although this is recognised as a publication of authority with a strong learning towards research in practice. Whilst we appreciate it can be difficult for students to access other sources of practitioner best practice, course directors might be able to obtain access for students to this body of knowledge. A wider frame of references with more up-to-date literature references would be very welcome in the dissertations. Regular review of reading lists by academic centres is recommended to ensure that they reflect the latest current thinking and practice. In referring to case studies, it is strongly recommended that real case studies are used. References should be made to brands and propositions from the real world wherever possible (see 'Market Research Best Practice - 30 Visions for the Future', ESOMAR, 2007, **ISBN: 9780470065273**, which contains best practice case studies).

For good examples of relevant academic articles visit the IJMR Website www.mrs.org.uk/ijmr. Also, the paper written by Agnes Nairn et al, 'Learning from giants: exploring, classifying and analysing existing knowledge on market research', IJMR Vol. 49 Issue 2, 2007, describes how to undertake a structured literature review in the field of marketing research.

Quality of Written Language

Dissertations should be written in a style which is accurate, clearly ordered, using terminology appropriately and not imposing unnecessary strain on the reader. In recent years a number of dissertations have been poorly written, convoluted and difficult to

grasp, with no spell check appearing to have been used, which at times has placed unnecessary strain upon the reader.

The Awards Panel hope you find this guidance helpful and we look forward to receiving your submission – Good Luck.

Assessment criteria

The dissertation	The research component	Presentation/Transferable Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> addresses a research issue of importance within the context identified provides a clear and convincing rationale for choice of issue to be addressed demonstrates a thorough understanding of the chosen subject, in both breadth and depth demonstrates a thorough knowledge and understanding of relevant principles, key concepts, issues and theoretical approaches draws selectively and appropriately on a range of sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides an explicit statement of research aims which are clearly linked to the purpose of the dissertation where appropriate, provides a clear explanation of the derivation of any pre-existing data sets which have been used within the research component where appropriate, provides a clear description and rationale for the methods used in conducting original research. The rationale should justify the fitness for purpose of the chosen methods given (i) the objectives of the research and (ii) the resources available adheres to relevant ethical and legislative requirements governing market and social research practice, in particular to the MRS Code of Conduct and relevant data protection legislation shows convincing evidence of clear and original thought and critical thinking provides explanations and conclusions which are based on a chain of reasoning which is cogent and coherent evaluates the research, identifying any limitations and biases, assessing any uncertainty and error. In particular, any plausible counter-arguments should be examined and convincing justification should be given for ruling these out. demonstrates a high level of awareness of the wider social, environmental, political and/or business implications of the research which has been undertaken 	<p>where appropriate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> makes effective and appropriate use of specialist terminology demonstrates a well-developed ability to interpret and/or present data in a variety of forms and in a critical and constructive way. presents arguments and information in a logical, coherent and creative way in order to assist the reader's understanding provides clear, consistent and accurate referencing is written in a style which is appropriate to the task and puts no strain on the reader.

Summary of Standards for MRS Full Membership

You will need to demonstrate that you have knowledge, understanding and experience of the following 12 key standards.

STANDARD 1: Ethical and legal considerations governing the conduct of MRS members

Specification:

You may have had problems to solve which raised ethical issues or you may have been responsible for ensuring compliance with the MRS Code of Conduct. You may have had to intervene to ensure that research was undertaken in accordance with MRS Regulations and guidelines. You will need to demonstrate your understanding of the relevance of the MRS Code of Conduct to your work.

STANDARD 2: Research within its broad political/economic social/ technological context

Specification:

You may have been involved in a research project which demanded an understanding of the broad political / social / economic / technological context of the research topic or you may have needed to set the findings in one or more of these contexts.

Alternatively, you may have an understanding of the wider issues relating to a specific aspect of the research sector (e.g. field, operations etc.)

STANDARD 3: The role of research in decision making within an organisation

Specification:

You may have used research results to make recommendations that influence strategic decision-making, for example, in relation to products, services, marketing or planning.

You may direct or play a role in a research business or a division of a larger organisation, public or private sector.

STANDARD 4: Client and supply relationships in research

Specification:

Experience might include establishing and managing relationships with internal and/or external clients and suppliers.

STANDARD 5: Project management (including planning and the use of resources)

Specification:

Experience may include allocation and supervision of people and other resources (e.g. financial, infrastructure, data, technology, panels, etc) and the management of projects.

STANDARD 6: Oral and/or written communication skills

Specification:

You may have given oral presentations to clients or people in your organisation; experience could include project debriefs; formal or informal briefing of research or other issues or presenting at conferences or seminars. You may have written project briefs; research summaries; research reports or debrief documents; formal conference papers or journal articles or non research papers relating to other issues.

STANDARD 7: Awareness and evaluation of research methodologies

Specification:

Experience might include deciding on appropriate methodologies for particular research projects; balancing the ideal method with pragmatic issues, like budget and time; developing new or adapting existing methods to suit particular circumstances and briefing and debriefing on different methodologies evaluating pitfalls.

STANDARD 8: Conducting all or part of a research project

Specification:

You must demonstrate experience within the project life cycle either as a specialist researcher, a provider of operational resources, a buyer of research or as a manager of research functions. This may include demonstration of an understanding of the research process at different stages
e.g.

- Qualification of the problem
- Data analysis
- Reporting or understanding of the whole project

STANDARD 9: A nominated specialist area in research

Specification:

The specialist area may be broad or narrow and may relate to

- methodology (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, online, etc)
- sector (e.g. automotive, financial, international, public policy, etc)
- respondent type (e.g. children, ethnic, seniors, etc)
- management (of operations, fieldwork, data processing or analysis, etc)
- managing a research business
- purchasing research
- knowledge management

STANDARD 10: Quality control and assessment in research

Specification:

You may have understanding of, or experience of ensuring compliance with quality standards that relate specifically to research (e.g. currently ISO 20252, ISO 26362, IQCS, etc)

- or are broader in scope
- (e.g. ISO 9001)
- or which are internal to your workplace. These can relate either to research or specific to your work

STANDARD 11: Commitment to your own personal and professional development

Specification:

This can include formal and informal development: e.g. appraisal or development plans within your organisation; writing articles; attending and/or contributing to conferences, seminars, training courses; reading etc. It may relate specifically to research or to broader skills (e.g. management, business, etc).

STANDARD 12: Commitment to the development of others and or the profession

Specification:

This can include: managing appraisal and/or development of others; writing articles to benefit others; preparing and delivering conference papers; teaching on and/or leading training events and seminars.



MRS Accredited Masters Award

Dissertation Submission Form

You are required to present 2 hard copies of the dissertation in its final form for formal review by the Awards Panel. Both copies must include this *Dissertation Submission Form* – fully completed.

<p>Student Name:</p> <p>University Name:</p> <p>Name of Masters Programme:</p> <p>Date of Submission:</p> <p>Title of Dissertation:</p>
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Declaration of Authenticity (to be completed by student)

Plagiarism is the use of another author's thoughts and ideas and presenting them as your own. This is not acceptable practice, nor is using the work of another student.

I declare that the attached dissertation is all my own work and that that all relevant requirements of the MRS *Code of Conduct* have been adhered to during the completion of the dissertation. I understand that proven cases of plagiarism and/or collusion may lead to the removal of the dissertation from the Awards process.

Signature:
Date:

Confidentiality

MRS recognises that some dissertations may be based on sensitive, real-life projects. Therefore, dissertations will be treated with confidentiality if required. Confidential work will be read only by the appointed Awards Panel and members of MRS qualifications staff and will not be selected for use the MRS Library. If you wish for your dissertation to be treated confidentially you are required to include a covering letter with your submission outlining the reasons why your work must remain confidential.

PLEASE NOTE: All dissertations are retained at MRS for a minimum period of 2 years following submission.

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