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## UT/ITC Module 11: MSc Research Skills

### Assignment 3: Argumentation and technical writing

#### Grading guidelines

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Only the final draft is graded. This is necessarily subjective; the following points are indications.

- Essays are between 500 and 1000 words; lengths outside this receive zero (0) and are not further examined;
- The essay should bring out the **importance** of the research topic, leading to its main **objective**, i.e. the author should have made a **strong and well-reasoned argument**;
- The **structure** should lead the reader through a coherent argument;
- Each **paragraph** should be **coherent**, with a **topic sentence**; following sentences should be **related** and **strengthen the argument**;
- English **grammar, spelling, punctuation** should be correct; if the essay is otherwise understandable, deduct maximum 2 points for this. If the errors in English reduce comprehension, points are deducted via the 'coherent argument' clause.
- **Citations** should be relevant to the argument, properly-placed in the text, and properly-formatted in the list of references.

The essays should be marked up two ways:

1. Standard proofreading marks<sup>12</sup> for grammar, spelling, and other "local" problems;
2. Marginal comments for larger issues in the above list.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/mw/table/proofrea.htm>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_proof.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_proof.html)

3. Checkmarks in the list of references for properly-formatted, and crosses for poorly-formatted entries.

Grading should be **strict** since the aim is for students to be able to polish a text by rewriting and editing. If they did the assignment properly, the product will show evidence of revision and careful editing. A hastily-put-together draft with poor argument and many editing flaws will typically fail.

**Assign points using the following criteria, and display on the marked paper** (or as a list in the feedback to students on Blackboard) with the overall grade so the student can see where s/he has problems:

- 10 points: Appropriate length;
- 20 points: Clear description of the importance of the topic leading to the research objective(s);
- 20 points: Coherence of the structure and the flow;
- 20 points: Coherence of each paragraph, flow between the sentences;
- 20 points: English (readability, no grammatical errors, typos, etc.);
- 10 points: Citations and references (correct style, format, etc. as in Exercise 1) .

So for example a paper with excellent argument but poor English could receive an 80. A student is not overly penalized for problems in one aspect of the assignment.