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Trinity Saint David

MSc Applied Psychology

Part II:

DISSERTATION HANDBOOK

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Introduction

This document has been put together to help you navigate the process of conducting your research as part of your MSc. You will present your research in the form of a written dissertation and an oral presentation. Everything you need to know will be in this document or signposted throughout.

Conducting your own research can be both rewarding and frustrating. Learning about an area in detail, exploring the answers to questions you are interested in as well as contributing to understanding of an area. The frustrations that are felt when conducting research are not only felt by first time researchers, but also by the most experienced investigators.

Firstly, being uncertain is part of the process. This handbook is not going to remove that – every project brings different challenges, and because research is about finding things out yourself, there won't be anyone who has all the answers for you.

Realistically, the most enjoyable phase– data collection and/or data analysis– is a small amount of time relative to the time it will take to submit and receive ethics approval, and recruit. Take care not to underestimate how long it will take to prepare documents to gain the approvals that you need before you can start collecting data.

This guide attempts to anticipate many of the questions you may have – and highlight questions you may not have thought of but should ask. Remember though, that for many of these questions there is not a single answer but it will depend on the project, the target population, and recruitment method etc.

Useful contact details

Supervisor Contact Details:

Name	Email
Dr. Ceri Phelps	Ceri.phelps@uwtsd.ac.uk
Dr. Paul Hutchings	Paul.hutchings@uwtsd.ac.uk
Dr Lymarie Rodriguez	Lymarie.rodriguez@uwtsd.ac.uk
Dr Kate Williams	Kate.williams@uwtsd.ac.uk

You will be assigned a supervisor on successful completion of your research proposal. Ideally, you will have had contact with a potential supervisor to discuss your idea and to make sure it fits within their area of supervision.

Other academic/support staff contact details:

Name	Email
Zoe Cooke	Zoe.cooke@uwtsd.ac.uk
Sam Scoulding (Academic & Digital Skills Manager covering PG students)	Samantha.scoulding@uwtsd.ac.uk
Alison Evans Academic Liaison Librarian (IEH)	Alison.evans@uwtsd.ac.uk

Aims of this module

- To develop higher order research skills by identifying and undertaking a piece of primary research related to applied psychology, which demonstrates scientific and ethical rigour in all respects.
- To enable students to demonstrate self-direction, autonomy, and originality in identifying, tackling and solving issues of relevance to an applied research question in social and/or health psychology.
- To provide students with the ability to demonstrate a professional standard of presentation skills through the presentation of their work at an internal conference.

In order to pass the Part II Dissertation you must demonstrate the ability to:

- ✓ Conduct an in-depth systematic literature review critically appraising the evidence-base relevant to the dissertation topic.
- ✓ Design a research project identifying appropriate hypotheses/research questions and research methodology.
- ✓ Carry out primary data collection using appropriate tools and methodology in compliance with relevant legal, ethical and data requirements.
- ✓ Analyse data using appropriate quantitative and/or qualitative methods.
- ✓ Interpret and critique the project results and findings and report them in the required format.
- ✓ Reflect on the research process and methods, demonstrating clear understanding of ethical and research frameworks and lessons learned for future research/practice.
- ✓ Present and discuss your work appropriately to an academic audience.

Assessment

The dissertation module is worth 60 credits towards your MSc and is a formal record of the research undertaken. The dissertation will be assessed via two components:

Assessment Component 1	Assessment Component 2
30 minute individual presentation (25%) Students are required to present their dissertation to peers at an in-house mini conference. Students will be assessed based on: • Presentation skills • Engagement • Ability to demonstrate understanding of their research	Written dissertation (75%) Students will be required to write up their research and submit a 12,000 word written thesis following standard psychology reporting conventions through three core chapters preceded by a brief summary of the thesis. The thesis structure should follow: • Plain English summary (500 words) • Systematic literature review (4,500 words) • Research paper targeted at appropriate journal (4,500 words) • Reflective chapter (2,500 words)

In the classification of 'Distinction', 'Merit' or 'Pass' as a final grade for your MSc degree, your dissertation mark contributes 50% to the total weighting, with the taught modules contributing the other 50%.

Approval Process & Timescales

There are suggested deadlines that you should aim to achieve to ensure you stay on track and produce a robust dissertation by the final deadline. Some of them you may have already achieved or made a start on.

1. Chose a topic before the end of Part 1

- a. Something you find interesting and worth pursuing
- b. Suitable for an MSc project

2. Make a start on your literature review as soon as possible

- a. The more informed you are about your area of interest the better
- b. You will need to have a good understanding before starting your systematic literature review
- c. Document all of your searches, noting the search terms and where you found them

3. Submit your final proposal no later than 30th September 2021*

- a. From your initial review of the literature, and in discussion with your supervisor, you should now be in a position to formulate a justification for your research, a methodology, and a plan for how the research can be conducted within the time and cost constraints of a Master's-level research project.
- b. You will be given the opportunity to submit your proposal to your supervisor for comment if submitted seven working days prior to this deadline, and this will be returned in time for refinement before final submission of the completed protocol

**Please note that it is the absolute latest you can submit a proposal form to your supervisor, in most cases proposal forms have already been looked at and reviewed before this date and this date usually applies if you have had no prior contact with a supervisor*

4. Work towards a submission for Ethical Approval by September in the first instance*

- a. Based on your prior learning it is expected that all students should recognise the requirements for a thorough ethics application

- b. Your supervisor will provide comments on a draft of the ethics form if submitted in good time prior to the deadline
- c. It is your responsibility to ensure that you meet the deadlines set out by the Faculty Ethics Committee, as the School has no control over timings of ethics boards.

*Working towards a submission for the September ethics committee meeting allows you more time if it does not get accepted for any reason. The ethics board sits monthly and the later you submit, the later you will be able to start collecting your data. Check the moodle page for ethics submission dates

Supervision

In accordance with Academic Quality Handbook, each student is entitled to a maximum of **10 hours** of supervision (which will include group supervision, individual supervision, and significant email exchange). This must be recorded on the Supervision Record and maintained by the student.

What you can expect from your supervisor:

1. Commenting on the appropriateness of, providing constructive criticism and making suggestions for improvement and development for the research question and proposed methodology.
2. Providing support throughout the ethical application process
3. Providing support and encouragement during data collection, management and analysis of data
4. Assisting in the write-up of the research. This includes **ONE** reading of each section and ensuring the report meets UWTSD regulations for the degree fulfilment

What your supervisor will expect from you:

1. To stick to the agreed timescales unless notified appropriately
2. To come prepared to supervision meetings with an idea of what you would like to get out of it
3. To submit any work for feedback in the agreed timescales to allow your supervisor sufficient time to read through and provide feedback
4. To read through the feedback and respond accordingly
5. Good communication, including communicating any difficulties or struggles you may be experiencing

You can read more about the supervision agreement and find the formal supervision record on your dissertation moodle page, documents GA30 and GA19.

Keeping your research ethical

Here are a few things you will need to be familiar with when completing your ethics form and conducting your research.

- ❖ You **must not** collect any data until you have received full ethical approval from the university ethics committee.
- As a student who is conducting research within the Discipline of Psychology and Counselling, you are bound by the ethical requirements of the university **and** the British Psychological Society (BPS) code of conduct.

Within your ethical application, you will be asked to cite the relevant documentation relating to ethical practice. It is important that you read these documents and cite the relevant information for your research in order to demonstrate your understanding of ethical research practice.

The Code of Human Research Ethics:

<https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/BPS%20Code%20of%20Human%20Research%20Ethics.pdf>

Guidelines for Conducting Internet Mediated Research:

<https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/ethics-guidelines-internet-mediated-research>

UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice

<https://www.uwtسد.ac.uk/media/uwtسد-website/content-assets/documents/research/research-ethics-integrity-code-practice.pdf>

Data Protection, Storage and Management

Primary data: the actual data that you collect. This is likely to be in the form of either (a) audio recordings of interviews or (b) data collected on paper or online questionnaires. The University is responsible for storing your primary data (audio files and completed questionnaires), **not you, the student – indeed, you are not permitted to keep this data after the end of the project.**

This is required under the *Research Governance Framework* to ensure that research data is not falsified, and the primary data must be stored for a stipulated length of time. The University retention periods for research data (in the absence of any stipulations from funders) are documented at <https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/>

Secondary data: (interview transcripts, questionnaire responses in SPSS/Excel) should be stored in anonymised (de-identified) form with a key to indicate which identifier corresponds to which participant. You can keep the anonymised data, but you must ensure that any data that you keep protects the confidentiality of your participants.

When completing your ethics form you will be asked to consider whether you are collecting ‘*personal data*’ and ‘*special category data*’. These terms are explained in full on the ethics form but it is important to consider whether you **need** to collect this data, and how you will protect the anonymity of participants.

Once you have either (a) transcribed your audio files and anonymised the transcript or (b) input your questionnaire data into SPSS or Excel, you **must** pass the primary data (audio files and completed questionnaires) to the programme team for storage. Once that is done you must delete any identifiable data from your computer and only store anonymised transcripts or anonymised SPSS files.

Structuring your thesis

The following information sets up how you should structure your thesis. From the title page to the bibliography. Please check your moodle page prior to submission for specific instructions regarding the presentation and format of your submission e.g. online or hard copy.

Specific guidance relating to writing up APA style dissertations can be found in the APA Publication Manual: 7th Edition, and the Psychology and Counselling: UWTSD House Rules which can be found on your moodle page.

Structure

Title page

- Title of thesis.
- Author's name.
- Name of degree
- University of Wales Trinity Saint David School of Psychology
- Year of presentation.

Declaration

On the first page (after the cover), you must include a signed declaration of the following:

- That the dissertation does not include work accepted for any other degree or professional qualification (unless a clear statement is made as to the precise extent of the work so included).
- That the dissertation has been composed by you and is your own work.
- An example layout will be provided for you to include in your thesis

Acknowledgements

The acknowledgement page should recognise those people who have helped you in either carrying out your research, making your research possible or have given you advice and support during the project.

Table of contents

- The contents page should list each section and main headings within each section. Numbered sections can make reading the thesis easier. A page number for each should be given.
- The same format should be given for tables, graphs and diagrams.
- Note that Microsoft Word has the capacity to convert headings into an automatically generated table of contents – making this much simpler.
- Use the 'Heading' levels and navigation pane within Microsoft Word to help manage this.

Chapter 1: Plain English Summary (500 words)

This short chapter will outline the content in which the research idea was developed and should provide a lay synopsis of the research. The plain English summary is different to an abstract because it is written for a lay audience. Communicating your research to different audiences is a great skill to have and will have been developed throughout your time on the MSc.

What to include:

- The research problem, what it is and the context
- Where the research took place
- What the study aimed to find out
- How it was done
- What it found
- Any conclusions and recommendations

What to consider:

- Use lay language that anyone could understand
- Avoid using jargon or abbreviations
- Headings and bullet points if appropriate
- Asking a family member/friend to read it and give feedback

Please check your moodle page for further resources on how to write a Plain English summary

Chapter 2: Systematic Literature Review (4,500 words)

Systematic literature reviewing is another key research skill. The literature review examines the main themes that have been pursued by other writers. It should be a critical review, rather than simply describing who has said what. Where there is not a large body of literature on the topic, you may need to look more broadly at the literature, for example at research studies of other conditions where there may be findings and implications that are relevant to your topic.

Points to note:

- Outline in the introductory paragraph what the aims and objectives of the literature review are, to give the reader a clear picture of what literature you are going to review and why. Please also include
 - A short section (couple of paragraphs) on the methods used, which can cover how the literature search was done e.g. (1) what databases were searched (2) what search terms you used (linking these with the aims and objectives of the literature review) (3) what time period the search covered.

- A main section of the literature review which will be the results and include a short paragraph at the beginning of this outlining how many papers were identified by the search, and how decisions were made about which papers to include in this review.
- Conclude the lit review with a section on what the current research literature DOES NOT tell us (thereby making a case for YOUR research project!).
- Ensure the papers and topics included are relevant to your project, and that the literature you cover aligns well with the aims and objectives of the literature review. This chapter of your dissertation is in effect the beginning of an argument supporting the need and relevance of your project, rather than demonstrating simply that you have read widely.
- Use primary references and be sure that you have read and critically evaluated them. Your examiners are likely to have a good knowledge of the literature.
- Evaluate, rather than simply describe. At MSc level, your literature review MUST demonstrate both critical appraisal and synthesis of the research literature (See general tips for academic writing)
- Take care (in all dissertation chapters) to avoid duplication of content across chapters. This can be achieved with appropriate paraphrasing and summarizing, which are key research writing skills. In addition, take care that key phrases are used once only; thereafter, paraphrasing and summarizing is important. Your examiner will easily spot repetition of key phrases so do avoid this.
- Summarise the main points emerging from your review of the literature at the end.

Research Questions and Project Aims:

Following your summary of the literature reviewed, make sure you clearly state the following:

- (a) the gap in the literature that your project aims/aimed to fill
- (b) your research and the aims of your study.

Remember – At this point in your MSc, you have already conducted a systematic review as part of one of your assessments. Go back to your assessment submission and ensure you apply the feedback given when conducting this review.

Chapter 3: Research Paper (4,500 words)

This chapter will take the form of a draft manuscript prepared with a view to submission for publication in a specified journal, and following the journal's specific "Instructions to authors". Please identify the journal by name, in a single sentence at the start of this chapter: "This manuscript has been written for submission to [journal name] following that journal's Instructions to Authors."

The student's supervisor may wish to recommend a journal better suited to the student's project, and to the supervisor's own field of research. The target journal should be agreed with your supervisor. Following dissertation submission for examination, this chapter may require some revision prior to submission for publication in the target journal, for example if the chosen journal has a maximum word count less than 4,500 words. Whilst not part of the assessment, the expectation is that all students will submit this article for publication in the specified journal within one year of completion.

Most journals will specify a structure that includes abstract, introduction, methods, results and discussion.

Abstract. The research paper should start with an abstract setting out the topic area and aims of the project, a summary of the methods used, a couple of sentences on your main findings and conclusions or implications of your work. This may be either structured into headings (e.g., aim, method, results, conclusions) or unstructured. This abstract should be up to 250 words.

Introduction. The introduction section should be a concise summary of Chapter 2 (Literature Review). Although the literature review in the research paper is on the same topic as Chapter 2, you must demonstrate here the skill of condensing a full in-depth literature review into the conventional form suitable for the introduction to a published paper in an academic journal, and at the same time, make a strong case for your project. Take care not to duplicate any sentences or key phrases used in Chapter 2. The aim of this section is to make a case for the research to be presented by clearly and concisely identifying a gap in published research. This section should be limited to communicating the main points made in Chapter 2, and clarifying the aims and research questions at the end.

Method. The method section should include a justification for the approach chosen as well as a description of the recruitment, data collection and data analysis methods. References should be provided for methods and any modifications made described. Cross-referencing to appendices is allowed here. This section should illustrate that you understood what you were doing and made sensible decisions, rather than blindly following a particular method ‘recipe’.

Results. The results section should demonstrate the way that the research questions have been answered. As well as the results of data analysis, a description of the participants, response rate (etc.) should be included. Remember that your sample is a “result” of the sampling method you used to recruit from your target population. The order that the results are presented in should be logical and subheadings may be useful, if allowed by the journal. There is no rigid format for this section and some journals may combine results and discussion in a single section, though this is not recommended at MSc level.

Discussion. No new data should be presented in the Discussion section. Rather, this section places the results in the context of the literature (and/or practice) and elaborates on issues arising from the findings. Avoid the temptation to simply reiterate the findings in an abbreviated form. It is a waste of words. The examiner will be looking for a discussion of the place of your findings in the context of current

literature, strengths and weaknesses (including issues of validity and reliability of your findings), implications of your findings for research and practice, suggestions for further research, and concluding remarks. The conclusion should return to your aims / research questions and demonstrate to what extent these have been achieved / answered. All of the threads of the project should be clearly brought together.

Chapter 4: Reflective Chapter (2,500 words)

This chapter is intended to be a short reflective piece describing what actually happened rather than what the student thought would happen, and what the student learned from the experience. **Your reflective chapter must identify and follow a suitable reflective framework throughout e.g. Gibbs.** Reflection is valuable in research as well as in professional practice, and is a key skill in your research. The examiner will be looking for reflection on the research process including things you might have done differently in hindsight, if you had the chance to do the study again. This should demonstrate your learning through the process of conducting your study, including what you have learned about how to manage a research project. **Importantly, your reflections must be supported by appropriate academic sources (theories, models, frameworks, and empirical evidence throughout).** Think of this chapter as a chance to illustrate for students coming after you what the practical and other pitfalls are in conducting an MSc dissertation project, and how they might avoid any mistakes that you made.

Appendices

- Appendices **are not included** in the 12,000 word limit.
- Appendices should include the ethics approval letter, the information and consent sheets used in the study, full transcript of a sample of interviews (if relevant), questionnaires (if relevant), the interview guide (if relevant) etc.
- For Qualitative data, you should consider including a **section** of coded transcript to illustrate your coding.
- The precise content should be decided by you, bearing in mind what you think is important for readers to be aware of or assess for themselves

Reference List

APA Referencing guidelines should be followed at all times.

Oral Presentation

Assessment component One is a 30-minute presentation of your dissertation thesis to an academic audience, and this makes up 25% of your overall Part II mark.

This presentation should follow the structure of the main sections of your thesis (Systematic literature review, Research paper, and Reflective chapter) in that these will be the key issues that you will want to convey to your audience.

- You will need to convey to your audience what the issue is and the background to your area of research (the type of things you will have covered in your systematic literature review section)
- You will need to clearly explain your methodology, results, conclusions and implications (which you will have covered in your research paper section)
- You will need to reflect upon the research process, including what you have learnt, recognising issues and potential ways to address these (based upon your reflective chapter section).

There are no set timings for each of these sections (i.e., you will not be judged upon spending 10 minutes discussing the systematic literature review, another 10 minutes on the research etc.); rather, it is expected that you will put together an appropriate presentation (with whatever visual aids you feel are necessary) that, in 30 minutes, will address all of the above.

Try practicing your presentation in front of friends and family, test out the technology you are using and ensure you are confident with how it works. Ask your friends and family to pose questions to you about your research, so you feel more comfortable when asked questions during the assessment.

Remember – questions asked during your assessment are not to catch you out, more often than not they are there to help. If we feel you did not cover something in your presentation, we may ask about it, which gives you the chance to cover it.

Final note

This document and the resources on your moodle page have been provided in order to set you up for a successful research experience. If you feel we have not covered something or if you have questions please get in touch with your supervisor.

Remember that this is **your** research and only you can conduct it and write it up.

Mostly, we hope that you enjoy the process and share the passion that we all have for conducting applied research.