

THE DISSERTATION: RESEARCH PROPOSAL

What is a Dissertation?

The Level 6 Dissertation is a major piece of work undertaken by the student on an individual basis. The stated aim of the Dissertation is to:

‘...enable the student to produce a substantial body of work which has been instigated, developed and produced as a consequence of their own initiative and will allow an opportunity for independent research. The dissertation normally arises from individual interest or from the professional placement period, but will require the student to undertake an independent research investigation. In this context it will also aim to allow the student to apply a range of analytical skills and techniques and to develop research based skills by undertaking structured and methodical research’.

What is a Dissertation?

- Each student is allocated to an individual Dissertation supervisor for guidance & monitoring of progress of this *self-directed* work.
- There will be occasional lectures from the Dissertation coordinator to provide generic support, particularly with regard to research methods.
- The Dissertation is worth 40 credits (1/3 of the final year credits) and a student's performance in the Dissertation has a substantial influence on the class of degree awarded.
- The Dissertation documentation should normally be approximately 10,000 words in length.

The Dissertation learning outcomes

	Upon the successful completion of this module the student will be able to:	
	Appraise critically the literature pertaining to a problem domain.	
	Evaluate, select and apply relevant research techniques in both primary and secondary fields.	
	Analyse rigorously the evidence gathered.	
	Generate and justify appropriate conclusions based on the previous analyses, demonstrating awareness of the limitations of the research.	
	Produce an organised and structured document that adheres to academic convention.	

Typical chapters (but can be adapted)

	DISSERTATION	Suggested word count
1	Introduction	500
2	Review of Literature	3,500
3	Research Methods	2,000
4	Analysis of Results	2,500
5	Conclusions & Recommendations	2,000

Research proposal for Dissertation

- Identify an area of study, relevant to your degree pathway, in which you would like to conduct your own research for your BA final year research Dissertation.
- Produce a research proposal in which you introduce and justify your chosen research

Purpose of Proposal

- Essentially, the purpose of the Dissertation proposal is to establish exactly what is to be achieved by the Dissertation and to establish a plan to do this.
- It should be regarded as a sort of contract between you and your supervisor.
- The proposal should be approximately 1,500 words in length

Key questions:

- WHAT are you trying to achieve (objectives)?
 - ▣ To analyse...
 - ▣ To evaluate...
 - ▣ To compare critically...
- WHY? What is the background rationale? Brief literature review.
- HOW will you do it – research methods to test a hypothesis or achieve the objectives
 - ▣ e.g. To conduct a questionnaire survey to identify computing students' attitudes towards software piracy
- WHO will you question, WHAT resources will you need, WHEN (timescale)?

What topic to research?

- Where can I get ideas?
 - ▣ Your strengths and interests
 - ▣ Your modules
 - ▣ Past Dissertation titles
 - ▣ Lecturers' ideas
 - ▣ The literature
 - ▣ Fit with career ambitions
- Must be rooted in academic theory (you'll compare your findings with previous studies & the academic literature)

Getting Ideas for Dissertations

- Pick a subject area you are interested in researching
 - ▣ Find a book &/or read a research paper on that topic (check the references/bibliography for more sources)
 - ▣ It is perfectly legitimate to duplicate the research but you could change the context e.g. a different application, environment or scenario
 - ▣ Or consider a new angle on the topic
- Analyse a “real-world” situation or scenario provided to you by a company
- Compare two methods or techniques
- Think of a problem you might attempt to solve
- EASY WAY -- Choose a Lecturer's title
- PICK SOMETHING YOU ARE INTERESTED IN !!!

Structure of research proposal

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- Title of Research
- Research Question, Hypothesis or Aim
- Objectives of Research
- Research Rationale
- Literature Review/Contextual Analysis
- Proposed Research Methodology, including justification for ;
 - ▣ strategy chosen
 - ▣ data collection methods
 - ▣ sampling framework and selection criteria
 - ▣ data analysis tools
- Research Ethics and Risks
- Research Plan:
 - ▣ resources required
 - ▣ Timings

Research context

- Where applicable, specify the context of the research. For example:
 - ▣ Are you using a case study organisation? If so, introduce the company and give some pertinent information about it and where it sits in its industry (a little competitive information, size, products, market share, etc).
 - ▣ Is your work targeted at a certain type of industry or customer/client?
 - ▣ Are you limiting your research to a geographical area?

Research question/aim or hypothesis

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WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO FIND OUT?

- What are you trying to prove or disprove?
OR
- Statement regarding the focus of the research
- Specify ONE broad aim – the overarching thing that you want this Dissertation to achieve (usually same as title).
- This provides a purpose and focus for your research

Introduction: research objectives

- Then break the aim or hypothesis up into objectives – smaller, more precise and measurable things that you want to achieve (typically 3 or 4 objectives).
- The objectives represent the main investigations that direct your activity, i.e. to break down the study into identifiable sub-tasks.
- The objectives should indicate WHAT you will achieve not HOW.

Example 1

- Note that the objectives state WHAT will be achieved not HOW. We describe HOW we conduct the research later (section 2) e.g.
 - Objective 1: gather data using secondary research
 - Objective 2: implement web design techniques, prototyping
 - Objective 3: gather data using questionnaires, a focus group &/or observation

Research methods:

This *may* include:

- Research philosophy and approach (positivism or phenomenology? Induction or deduction?)
- Research strategy (action research, experiment, case study, survey, etc.)
- The study population and sample (who are they, do you have access?)
- Data collection methods for each objective (interview, questionnaire, observation, document review, etc.).
- Reliability and validity

How will you analyse your data?

For example:

- Manual tallies/spreadsheet analysis/SPSS
- Typed up transcripts of interviewee responses
- Data matrix

- Will you use any statistical tests (e.g. mean, median mode, chi square, etc.)?
- Cross tabulations?
- Graphs/charts/tables for presentation?

Research methods – ethical risk

- Have you considered all the ethical implications of your research?
- Identify risks/limitations/ethical/legal issues and ways that you might deal with those risks.
- You must also complete and append an UWTSD 'Ethics Approval Form' (not part of the word count)

Resources & planning

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HOW WILL YOU PLAN YOUR TIME?

- How will you organise your time=time plan
- what are your research deadlines and interim deadlines
- what will you complete when?

A diagrammatic time chart will suffice here (e.g. A Gantt chart)

Identify any **resources** required

Gantt chart for a research Dissertation

