

**Objectives:**

The students will have an idea on how the style of dissertation writing is structured. The latter will be manifested by examples of previous graduate students.

## Introduction to Dissertation Writing

-The dissertation topic and question should be sufficiently focused that you can collect all the necessary data within a relatively short time-frame.

- You should also choose a topic that you already know something about so that you already have a frame of reference for your literature search and some understanding and interest in the theory behind your topic.

### **- Writing Style**

Dissertations and academic articles used always to be written in the third person, and in the passive voice.

- **The Role of your Academic Supervisor:** the role of your supervisor is to supervise your work. It is not to do it for you, nor to tell you how to do it.

**Formatting and Templates:** if your university has a required format for a dissertation, and particularly if they supply a template, then use it. You will also need to format the references in the university's preferred style. It is easier to do this as you go along. If the format is MLA, APA or Chicago, you can use Google Scholar to format it for you: search for the article title, then click on 'cite'.

### **Structure:**

- a. Title page
- b. Acknowledgements
- c. Abstract
- d. Table of Contents
- e. List of Figures and Tables
- f. List of Abbreviations
- g. Glossary
- h. Introduction
- i. Literature review / Theoretical framework
- j. Methodology
- k. Results
- l. Discussion
- m. Conclusion
- n. Reference list
- o. Appendices
- p. Editing and proofreading

## General Guidelines: Writing the Dissertation

- 1- The reader is the most important person. Reading a well-written and well-presented report is a pleasure.
- 2- Reading papers in the area of your project is a good way to develop a good writing style.
- 3- Writing a dissertation is a fairly time-consuming process. It is in your interests to make an early start.
- 4- Start on it - do not wait until you have finished all the practical work before starting writing.
- 5- Produce a plan showing the division into chapters and sections, with possibly a sentence or two indicating how you intend to cover the material in each chapter or section, and discuss this with your supervisor.
- 6- Produce a draft for each chapter in turn and follow each up with a discussion with your supervisor.
- 7- Plan your project time so that the supervisor has time to read drafts and make comments, and you have time to act on your supervisor's comments.
- 8- Your supervisor is not a copy editor. They will comment on structure and content, but will not correct a multitude of grammar and spelling mistakes. That is up to you.
- 9- Proof read your dissertation, then proof read it again. A spell checker alone is not adequate.
- 10- Every chapter but the introduction and conclusions should have an introductory section that sets the scene for the chapter, i.e. explains the reasoning behind the chapter's structure.
- 11- Think carefully before you use the first person singular. Thus you should not write "I wrote a program...", but rather "A program was written...".
- 12- Write in clear, readable English, avoiding the two extremes of either writing notes, or long winded sentences with lots of subordinate clauses.
- 13- The reader is probably a busy person. "Padding" irritates busy readers, so be concise.
- 14- It is important to make clear which points are original and which parts are taken from the literature.
- 15- Do not even think of passing off other people's writing as your own. This type of cut-and-paste plagiarism "is as easy to detect as a Xeroxed banknote" (Watt, 1998). For instance, if you have any doubts about the dividing line between a thorough literature review and plagiarism, then discuss it with your supervisor. This holds for illustrations also - other people's illustrations that you have scanned in or obtained from the web can only be used both with their permission and with an appropriate reference.
- 16- Where possible, all figures should be created using appropriate software tools.
- 17- If you use abbreviations or acronyms they should be defined where they are first used. For example: A common type of abbreviation is the Three Letter Abbreviation (TLA). Using too many TLAs can make your work hard to understand. If they are used throughout the dissertation, a glossary should be provided as an appendix.
- 18- It is sometimes useful to refer readers to additional material in an appendix (for example, the full text of a questionnaire you may have issued for user-testing purposes). While examiners usually read the appendices, they are not formally required to do so, so make sure your dissertation makes sense even if the appendices are not read.

## Developing an argument

An important aspect running through your dissertation will be your argument for:

why this specific topic is worth researching; why this is a good way to research it; why this method of analysis is appropriate; and why your interpretations and conclusions are reasonable.

You will refer to the work of others as you make your argument. This may involve critiquing the work of established leaders in the field. While it is important to be respectful in the way that you discuss others' ideas and research, you are expected to engage directly, and even openly disagree with existing writing.

In Taylor's (1989) book on writing in the arts and social sciences, he suggests that the following different approaches offer a range of academically legitimate ways to engage with published work.

- i. Agree with, accede to, defend, or confirm a particular point of view.
- ii. Propose a new point of view.
- iii. Concede that an existing point of view has certain merits but that it needs to be qualified in certain important respects.
- iv. Reformulate an existing point of view or statement of it, such that the new version makes a better explanation.
- v. Dismiss a point of view or another person's work on account of its inadequacy, irrelevance, incoherence or by recourse to other appropriate criteria.
- vi. Reject, rebut or refute another's argument on various reasoned grounds.
- vii. Reconcile two positions that may seem at variance by appeal to some 'higher' or 'deeper' principal.
- viii. Develop an existing point of view, perhaps by utilising it on larger or more complex datasets, or apply a theory to a new context (Adapted from Taylor 1989:67)

**It is important that you are assertive about what you are arguing, but it is unlikely that, in a dissertation project, you will be able to be definitive in closing an established academic debate. You should be open about where the gaps are in your research, and cautious about over-stating what you have found. Aim to be modest but realistic in relating your own research to the broader context.**

**References:**

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