THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
School of Biological Sciences

MSc Research Project/Dissertation Guidelines 2023-2024

Your dissertation should conform to the guidelines set out below. Please read through these carefully before writing your dissertation.

Early in the preparation of the dissertation you should consult your supervisor, as their advice will be invaluable in ensuring the best way of presenting your data.

Deadline

The dissertation is due by 2pm on Friday 16th August 2024. Late submission will be subject to the usual penalties, as detailed on the [Extensions and Late Submissions webpage.](#) Earlier submission is permissible and encouraged, do not leave it until the last minute.

Submission deadline extensions are NOT permitted for dissertations unless you have an approved Schedule of Adjustments which allows this, and you have specifically requested it.

This is your project, and it is your responsibility to ensure that you manage your time and resources efficiently, following the guidelines and utilising any help, training, resources and guidance provided.

Useful Resources: [Web Links included]

- Your supervisory team, programme staff, your peers.
- [Dissertation and Project Planner](#)
- [Travelling for your Research Project](#)
- [General Project Enquiries](#) (email link)

Skills Training and Support [Registration Links included]

- [Mindful Learning & Resilience Skills Training & Lunch – 23rd May 2024 : 11.00-14.30](#)
- [Institute for Academic Development (IAD) - Open Workshops for Project/Dissertation](#)
- [1-1 Academic Writing Tutorial](#)

Drafts

Your supervisor is allowed to discuss the dissertation and provide limited advice on the presentation and content of ONE DRAFT ONLY. The supervisor may point out any fundamental flaws in the approach and the methods of data analysis but will not be expected to provide guidance on multiple drafts. You should meet with your supervisor to discuss your draft dissertation at the latest by the start of August.

Word and page limit

Your research dissertation should be approximately 10,000 words, with an **absolute maximum of 12,000 words**.

The word limit includes everything **apart from** figure legends, tables, appendices, and references. This should generate a dissertation of around 50 pages, excluding appendices.

Anything after 12,000 words will not be read or marked, except for your reference list.

Your **title page** should include the total word-count for the main body of the dissertation (i.e. not including legends, tables, appendices, and references).

Your writing should be concise, whilst explaining your thoughts clearly: **quality is more important than quantity**. Having a target of 10,000 words allows you ample space to explore your findings and ideas about the work you have done over the summer.

Many dissertations will not require appendices. If you need to provide supplementary data or code in an appendix, it should be assumed that these **will not** be read by the markers, so **do not** include any additional analysis in your appendices. Your choice of figures should be judicious, and their inclusion justified by scientific merit (i.e. only relevant figures should be included).

Format

All dissertations should be word processed, clearly legible, and look professional.

Font and Margins

Your write-up must be submitted as a PDF document, using Arial 12 font, linespacing of 1.5. Ensure that all text, figures, and tables fit within normal page margins.

Page numbers

Page numbers should be continuous throughout and located in the same place on each page.

Diagrams, figures and tables

Diagrams and figures must be numbered and wherever possible should be placed **near to the appropriate text.** They must have clear and legible explanatory legends so that they can be interpreted without reference to text elsewhere.

All figures need titles and legends, and they must be referenced in the main text.

Tables should be given a number and a title and placed near the relevant text.

Tables should **not** be used to extend the word limit. Adjustments should be made to make full use of the available space and wide tables may be inserted as landscape.

Example of Structure of Dissertation

In the absence of alternative programme-specific content directions from your Dissertation Course Organiser, your dissertation should include the following sections (if relevant to your project). Some projects will have greater focus on different sections; there is no specific word limit for any section of the main content.

- **Title page:** An example can be found below. Your Dissertation Learn page will contain the actual cover sheet for use.

- **Abstract/summary** (maximum 300 words).

- **Introduction:** The introduction should concentrate on the current state of research in the particular area and should be used to demonstrate that a question exists and that the work will try and answer that (given the short nature of the project, the question to be answered might be relatively simple). If a hypothesis is part of the question it can be discussed here.

- **Methodology:** Should be an adequate description of the methods used with sufficient detail to allow someone skilled in the field to replicate the procedure. It should include any developments to methods made in light of the quality of results they produced.

- **Research Data Management:** Should detail all record keeping, including lab book, storage and archiving of data and/or reagents produced.

- **Results:** Should describe the outputs of each procedure. Marks will be awarded for i) clarity of description and ii) quality, appropriateness of figures and tables used

- **Discussion:** This presents you with the chance to advance ideas about the work you have done. Naturally there will be a thematic overlap between this and the introduction. You may also advance more complex ideas about what the work means in the context of the literature and illustrate an understanding of how realistic these might be. In short, the discussion allows you to demonstrate your understanding what the project means, even if the final data do not definitively prove your hypothesis.

- **Conclusion:** A short conclusion section may or may not be appropriate.

- **Bibliography and references:** See information below.

- **Acknowledgements (optional):** If you choose to add them, these should be brief, no more than one page, and should not identify you.

Research Project Proposal:

Relevant only to students who submitted a research project proposal

Please refer to the Taught Assessment Regulations regulation 30 (Academic Misconduct) regarding using material from your proposal in your dissertation (https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/taughtassessmentregulations.pdf).

Whilst the research proposal and the research dissertation may sometimes be expected to have similar content, the dissertation must be an entirely new piece of work. You cannot submit the same material from your proposal to be assessed again in your project. This could be considered plagiarism of your own work and will certainly be picked up by Turnitin.

If there is a figure or table from your proposal you feel is imperative to include within your dissertation, then you may formally acknowledge that and apply appropriate referencing.

Bibliography and referencing

You should reference your work correctly to acknowledge works you have read and used to support your arguments. These should be journals or specific technical resources. You should **not** use resources such as Wikipedia. Peer-reviewed sources are preferred in most cases.

There are various referencing styles and you should choose one and use it consistently throughout. Information on the commonly used Harvard reference system can be found at https://www.citethemrightonline.com/home
References should be cited in the text. There are many available automated referencing systems that link with common word processing packages, and we recommend you use one of these.

The bibliography is an ordered list (usually ordered alphabetically by first author) of all sources (e.g. books, journal articles, newspapers) that you quote in, or consult for, your assignment/essay. It is advisable to record bibliographical details as you take your notes, this will save you backtracking later to find them.

Submission Procedure

You must submit an electronic version of your dissertation via the **Turnitin**[1] Dropbox located on the Dissertation Learn Ultra page in the Assessment folder. You will have access to a test Dropbox.

Further information on the University's guidelines on plagiarism can be found on the Assessment Regulations and Academic Misconduct webpages:
https://www.ed.ac.uk/biology/current-students/postgraduate-taught/exams-assessments/assessments/assessment-guidelines

Final Submission Checklist

Please ensure that you follow all the steps in this checklist, ensuring that you
- Allow ample time for submission.
- Save a copy of your submission receipt.

If you experience any issues or excessive delays with your upload, please email: **mscprojects.sbs@ed.ac.uk** for support.

1.	My figures are of good quality and appropriately sized	☐
2.	My word and page counts adhere to the limits stipulated	☐
3.	My page numbering is consistent	☐
4.	My formatting is consistent	☐
5.	**Cover Page**	
	- I have added my full project dissertation title	☐
	- I have added my student exam number	☐
	- I have selected my MSc Programme title	☐
	– I have completed the Declaration	☐
	– I have added my total word count	☐
6.	I have converted my dissertation to **pdf** format	☐
7.	I have re-checked that the formatting has not corrupted	☐
8.	I have named my upload file as: **Exam No-Programme** (for example: **B121212-Biochemistry**)	☐

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[1] *Turnitin is a software package used by the University to identify similarities between submitted assignments and previously published works held in their databases. This tool allows us to detect and identify potential cases of plagiarism for investigation.*

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Marking Schemes

For information, a full set of the Project Dissertation Guidelines for Markers is made available to you.

The table below conforms to the **University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Common Marking** Scheme and will be used to determine the mark awarded.

Grade	Mark	Description
A1	90-100	An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction
A2	80-89	An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction
A3	70-79	An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction
B	60-69	A very good performance
C	50-59	A good performance, satisfactory for a masters degree
D	40-49	A satisfactory performance for the diploma and certificate, but inadequate for a masters degree
E	30-39	Marginal fail
F	20-29	Clear fail
G	10-19	Bad fail
H	0-9	Bad fail

A dissertation presented as a part of the assessment for a taught postgraduate master's degree may be judged satisfactory, as presented and without alteration, for the award of the degree despite containing small deficiencies and editorial imperfections.

Any candidate who fails to reach the standard required for the award of MSc but who satisfies the requirements for the award of a postgraduate diploma may, on the recommendation of their Board of Examiners, be awarded the postgraduate diploma.

Dissertations or project work must not include work submitted for any other degree or professional qualification unless (i) a clear statement is made as to the precise extent of the work so included, and (ii) the inclusion is approved by the project supervisor.

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SAMPLE COVER SHEET

Dissertation Title
Click or tap here to enter text.

Student Exam Number:	Click or tap here to enter text.

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in
Bioinformatics
of the University of Edinburgh 2023-2024

Name(s) of Supervisor(s):
Click or tap here to enter text.

Declaration	
I **have/have not** used Generative AI-based methods (e.g. ChatGPT) in the preparation of this Dissertation. **Note:** School policy forbids its use unless permission is granted by your Course Organiser.	Choose an item.

Word Count*	Click or tap here to enter text.

*The word count should <u>not</u> include figure and table legends, appendices, and references. Text contained within tables are included in the word count.