

# WRITING UP YOUR DISSERTATION/PROJECT

## Note on content of this material

This hand-out was written primarily for final year undergraduate students undertaking the Honours Project module at Edinburgh Napier University under the supervision of Hazel Hall. Everyone's dissertation/project is different and all the advice given in these pages does not necessarily apply to everyone. Check with your supervisor if you are unsure about any aspect of the process of writing up your work.

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## The completed work

This hand-out assumes that you will end up with at least five chapters:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: Literature review
- Chapter 3: Methodology
- Chapter 4: Results and discussion
- Chapter 5: Conclusion

At the end of the whole work there should be a full bibliography. Any appendices should come after the full bibliography.

The longest chapters will be the Literature review and Methodology. The Introduction and Conclusion chapters will be short.

Some students find that they need to include additional chapters. For example, a student writing about a specific industry may need to provide a separate chapter on that industry for context setting before discussing the specifics of the research work.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Make sure that the readers of your work will be able to find the answers to these questions in Chapter 1:

- What was the purpose of the research?
- How was the topic chosen?
- What were the main aims and objectives of the research?
- What is the scope of the research project? (If your dissertation/project is focussed on one particular client, industry or technology you might include introductory remarks about this here.)
- What were the limitations of the work?
- How is the text arranged in the dissertation/project?

- Is there anything particular to note that will make it easier for the person reading your dissertation/project to follow the work (e.g. about the format of referencing, layout of charts etc.)?

If you wrote a good proposal you should be able to use this as a basis for Chapter 1.

Remember that this is the introduction to your project, and not an introduction to the topic of your project.

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## Chapter 2: Literature review

You will be rewarded for:

- providing an introductory paragraph which explains what is discussed in the chapter and why it is necessary to include this as part of the dissertation/project
  - demonstrating that you conducted a *thorough* literature search and have read *widely*
  - demonstrating that you have read *up to date* material
  - summarising what you have read *thematically* (and not author by author)
  - highlighting *trends* in the discussion of your topic, for example over time; by geography; by sector
  - commenting on the *value* of what you have read (without discussing the actual topic)
  - organising your findings from the literature review to fit in with the *main themes* of your research project
  - identifying *gaps* in the literature
  - demonstrating that you *assimilated and understood* what you have read and what you have written
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## Chapter 3: Methodology

The Methodology chapter is used to justify the choice of methods employed during the research project. You need to demonstrate that you understand that there are various options for conducting research. For this reason you will need to refer back to the notes you took in any research methods classes that you have attended, as well as text books and/or articles on research methods. Although much of this chapter focuses on data collection, it is also worth acknowledging the techniques used for the other activities related to the research project: literature searching; sampling or case study selection; and data analysis.

NB These hints were originally written by Hazel Hall who supervises students working on studies that are largely qualitative using data collected by survey or interview. Check with your supervisor if you are unsure as to whether all the hints given below apply to your project.

Make sure that the answers to the questions below can be found in Chapter 3:

### **Introduction to Chapter 3**

- What does this chapter discuss?
- Why is it necessary to include this discussion in the dissertation/project?

### **Discussion of literature search technique**

- Which secondary sources were used to identify material for Chapter 2?

### **Discussion of data required**

- What was the purpose of collecting and analysing the data?
- Why was it interesting/useful to look at this topic?
- Can you summarise the basic questions the research set out to answer in a few straightforward statements?
- What role did the findings of the literature review have in determining the data collection requirements?
- Did you need to collect quantitative or qualitative data? Why/why not?

### **Discussion of alternative methods of data collection**

- Which methods might have been appropriate for data collection (e.g. observation, questionnaire etc.)?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each of these methods of data collection with reference to your own research project? (This may be best summarised as a table.)

### **Discussion of the question content and data required**

- For each of the basic research statements given in "data required" explain how questions asked of the sample generated the data required.
- Can you use elements of the literature review to strengthen your arguments for using certain questions (e.g. because there are gaps in the literature)?
- Did you take any decisions to limit the scope of data collection and, if so, why?

### **Discussion of the format of the questionnaire(s)/interview(s)**

- Why were the questions presented in the order you chose?
- How did the design of the research instrument help/impede data collection for you as the researcher?

### **Discussion of the phrasing of the questions**

- Why is it important to take care in phrasing question?
- What methods did you use to ensure that the phrasing of questions was effective in eliciting useful replies?

### **Discussion of the response formats**

- How many different response formats did you use? Why did you use them?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each response format you used in your questionnaire?

### **Discussion of data collection method**

- How were the interviews conducted/questionnaires distributed and returned

### **Discussion of sample**

Note that this applies if you distributed a questionnaire or have based your work on case studies.

- What is sampling theory?
- Why is it important to research design?
- What are the different methods of sampling? What are their advantages and disadvantages?
- Which sampling method did you use for this survey?
- Why did you choose this method?
- How did you determine the size of your sample?

### **Note on data analysis technique**

- Were the data collected analysed manually or by computer?
- If analysed by computer, which package was used?

### **Review of the methodology used for the research**

- Did you encounter any problems with the methodology implemented? What were these?
- How could you have avoided these problems?
- If you were to run the project again what improvements would you make to the methodological approach adopted?
- How did your method rate for reliability and validity?

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## **Chapter 4: Results and discussion**

You will be rewarded for:

- providing an introductory paragraph which explains what is discussed in the chapter
- discussing your results with reference to the findings of the literature review. This will necessitate a degree of repetition, which can be minimised by good cross referencing. The reader expects you to match your own results against what was established in the literature review. From this you should make comments and draw conclusions.
- writing thematically. In the majority of cases this means following a structure determined by the arrangement of themes in the literature review (and replicated in

Chapter 1 in the section on the aims and objectives of the research, and the basic questions given in Chapter 3 in the discussion of data required.) *It is not very sophisticated to take each questionnaire question and summarise the results the answers give you. Your questionnaire was designed so that the surveyed population was able to answer the questions: it was not designed to provide you with a thematic framework.*

- adding value to the results with your own comments
  - highlighting and providing analysis of any new themes that have emerged from your own research
  - recommendations
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## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

This should be a conclusion to the whole project (and not just the research findings). Check that your work answers the following questions:

- Did the research project meet its aims (check back to introduction for stated aims)?
  - What are the main findings of the research?
  - Are there any recommendations?
  - Do you have any conclusions on the research process itself?
  - Where should further research be focused?
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## **Bibliography**

Your bibliography should be set out following a recognised standard, e.g. APA.

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## **Appendices**

Appendices follow after the bibliography. These should be used for genuine purposes, for example to provide a copy of the research instrument. Appendices should not be used as a dumping ground for material that you have not managed to incorporate into the main text.