

# Master's Dissertation

## What this handout is about

This handout provides a definition and an outline of the main components of a dissertation.

## Definition

A Master's dissertation or thesis represents the culmination of a postgraduate programme of study. Completing a dissertation requires you to work independently under the supervision of an academic with specific expertise in your chosen field of study.

In essence, completing the dissertation demonstrates that you are a competent researcher with advanced knowledge of a specific subject area.

## Successful Completion of your Master's Dissertation

To complete your Master's dissertation successfully you are required to show proficiency in skills which demonstrate the following:

- Ability to develop an in-depth understanding of the subject area
- Identify and research a specific topic
- Competent in using an appropriate research methodology
- Formulate a credible research proposal
- Evaluate and cite literature, from a variety of sources pertinent to your research objectives (books, journals, web sources, conference proceedings)
- Use a standard referencing style such as Harvard style of referencing, or American Psychological Association (APA) citation style
- Identify (and justify) how you will collect (and analyse) your own research data
- Carry out your own empirical research
- Discuss and analyse your findings
- Provide a conclusion to your research work

## Steps for Writing your Research Aims

Step 1: Think of your research area in terms of one word or label.

Step 2: Add other words to help clarify the context/focus of your research.

Step 3: Connect these words to form a sentence.

Step 4: Convert this sentence into a formal research statement. For example: 'The overall aim of this research is to identify/assess/evaluate/explore/examine/investigate/determine...'

## Research Proposal and Research Methods

The first stage in your dissertation requires you to submit a research proposal to your supervisor. A research proposal should contain background information on your subject of interest, leading you to justify why you want to study this subject (with reference to appropriate literature for supporting evidence), as well as identifying your overall aim and specific objectives. In addition, it should also include information on how you will research your chosen field of study and provide an outline of your research method(s) i.e. how you intend to carry out your research by reviewing relevant literature and/or collection and analysis of empirical data.

## **Preliminary Dissertation Components**

Title Page

Declaration (page numbering starts here using Roman Numerals)

Abstract (Max 350 words)

Acknowledgements (optional)

Abbreviations (optional)

Table of Contents

Table of Figures (Roman Numerals page numbering ends here)

## **Introduction**

The Introduction to your dissertation ought to:

- Provide preliminary background information to contextualise your work
- Clarify the focus and scope of your study.
- Specify your overall research aim and individual objectives.
- Point out the value of your research
- Provide an overview of your dissertation structure

The overall aim of the introduction is to situate the reader as to your dissertation's topic, its purpose and relevance. You are trying to engage the reader, to explain the context for your study and the relevance of your study within that context.

## **Literature Review Chapter**

The purpose of completing a literature review is to assess the current knowledge of your topic, in relation to your research aim and objectives. It requires you to read widely, and in depth, and to develop the necessary skills to both interpret and evaluate the literature.

A good literature review is characterized by the following features:

- It lays out what research has been done by others relevant to your research aim/objectives
- It provides evidence of in-depth critical evaluation
- It highlights pertinent/emerging issues
- It draws connections between sources by identifying themes, patterns, gaps
- It cites a variety of relevant sources properly

## **Methodology Chapter**

The methodology chapter describes the methods that you used to implement your research and, importantly, explains the reasons behind your choices. An appropriate structure would cover: research strategy, data collection techniques, approach to data analysis, and acknowledged limitations of your work. Your aim is to convince your reader that this is the best approach to conduct research in this area.

## **Findings Chapter**

In this chapter, you inform the reader that you will partake in three main types of intellectual activity: a simple description of your results; discussion about what you found; and, finally, an integrative analysis of your empirical data against your Literature Review findings (i.e. synthesis).

## Conclusion

A comprehensive concluding chapter could comprise the following:

Introduction	Refresh the reader's memory about your research objectives and give a quick run-down on the content of your concluding chapter
Research Objectives	Inform the reader of your findings and offer a view on what your research is telling you
Summary of Findings and Conclusions	Answer the following questions: 'As a result of your Literature Review and empirical research (if you did both), what did you find out in relation to your individual research objectives?' and 'What conclusions have you come to?'
Recommendations	Address two types of recommendations: recommendations linked to your conclusions and suggestions for future research. Explain your recommendations and offer advice on how to implement your recommendations.
Contribution to Knowledge	Emphasize your contribution by comparing and contrasting your work/findings against the work of other researchers.
Limitations	Qualify your research work with reference to perceived limitations, e.g. lack of time to do more (in-depth) research, restrictions on access to research subjects, language barriers, etc.
Self-reflection	Reflect on two questions: 'What advice would you give to other students' and 'If you had to do it [your dissertation] again what would you do differently, if anything?'

## Appendices

Appendices may be used to provide relevant supporting evidence for reference but should only be used if necessary. Students may wish to include in appendices, evidence which confirms the originality of their work or illustrates points of principle set out in the main text, questionnaires, and interview guidelines. Only supporting material should be included in appendices. Students should not assume that Appendices will be read by Examiners in detail.

## Useful Resources

Biggam, John. *Succeeding with your Master's Dissertation: A Step-by-Step Handbook* (Third Edition). Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2015. (Available in DIT Libraries)

Furseth, Inger. *Doing your Masters Dissertation: From Start to Finish*. London : SAGE, 2013. (Available in DIT Libraries)

Rudestam, Kjell Erik. *Surviving your Dissertation: A Comprehensive Guide to Content and Process (Fourth Edition)*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014. (Available in DIT Libraries)

Williams, Kate. *Planning your Dissertation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. (Available in DIT Libraries)

Dublin Institute of Technology, "Dissertation Guidelines," accessed November 6, 2018.  
[http://mscdissertations.lucalongo.eu/index.php/Structure\\_and\\_formatting\\_guidelines](http://mscdissertations.lucalongo.eu/index.php/Structure_and_formatting_guidelines)