Dissertation Template

Section 1: Dissertation template structure

Most dissertations follow a similar template structure in terms of their chapter/section format and are designed to present your work in a clear and logical manner.

# Abstract

The abstract provides a summary of the issues that have been researched and an overview of its findings. Generally, it is expected to be within the region of 250-300 words, which means it is important to keep it brief and to the point. Due to its content, the abstract should be the last part of the dissertation that you right.

# Table of contents

# List of figures

# List of tables

The three above sections are self-explanatory. However, one of the mistakes often made is a failure to update these details once the dissertation has been completed. If you have access to Microsoft Word or another similar software programme, it is recommended that you use the automatic table of contents and list options, which in the Microsoft 365 version of Word are found in the Table of Contents group and Captions group on the References ribbon within the document. Note that “Insert Table of Figures” in the Captions group is also used to insert a list of tables. The advantage of this approach is that, providing you have accurately applied the style format throughout the dissertation, the lists can be automatically updated, rather than having to spend time trying to do it manually.

# Chapter 1 - Introduction

As suggested, this chapter provides an introduction to the subject matter being researched. It should begin with a brief overview of the subject and the reasons and justifications for why you have chosen the particular subject or issue to study. This should be followed by subsections, which can include the following:

1. Research rationale - where you will be outlining the questions/hypotheses you are seeking to resolve.
2. Aims and Objectives - containing the main aim of the study and an outline of the objectives that will help you to achieve this goal. It is important to ensure that the aims and objectives are closely focused upon the issue you are to study and not so wide or diverse that they detract from its value.
3. Dissertation structure - This is a brief overview of how the remainder of the dissertation has been formatted and a brief explanation of the content of each section. For example, ‘chapter two is the literature review…’

# Chapter 2 - Literature review

Chapter two is intended to contain a critical review of existing literature related to the subject matter being researched. It is important for the review to be presented in a clear and logical manner. For example, begin by defining the subject matter terms, next proceed to review the important theories and finally review the literature that relates specifically to the subject matter you are investigating. If you are studying FDI in China for instance, you would define the term FDI, outline the relevant economic theory then provide an overview of the development of FDI in China, its challenges, and the benefits/disadvantages it has for the nation’s economy.

# Chapter 3 - Research methodology

The method being used for the study is one of the most important chapters. You would commence this by briefly discussing the available methods and philosophies e.g., qualitative and quantitative research, positivism etc., and then more fully explaining the reasoning behind the approach(es) that you have selected. The next sections focus on the data collection methods that you have employed in the research (secondary, primary or both). This will be followed by sections that provide greater depth related to these collection methods, how you ensure the reliability and validity of the data included, and the process you used for analysing the data. The section would conclude with outlining any potential limitations.

# Chapter 4 - Research findings

In this chapter you will present the findings from your research to the reader. Again, it is important for this to be presented in a focused manner. If you have used both secondary and primary data, use relevant subsections for these. With primary data findings, it is important not to overdo the amount of data that you include in this chapter. For example, if you have used a survey, you should not include all of the details of the questionnaire and the results at this point. Use a statistical analysis programme such as Excel to convert the findings into charts and other forms of diagrams with the detailed information, such as the format of the questionnaire, being provided as an appendix. Similarly, if you have conducted interviews with say seven people, do not include every response in this chapter. Only include the occasional direct comment or quote that is relevant to the point that had been raised in the question. Full transcripts of the interviews can again be attached in the appendices.

# Chapter 5 - Discussion and analysis of findings

The discussion and analysis within this chapter should explain two aspects of the research. Firstly, it should identify to what extent, if any, the findings have satisfied the main aims and objectives of the study. In other words, has it provided a positive or negative result to the research question? Secondly, the findings MUST be related back to secondary research data that has been critically examined in the literature review. For instance, you could say that ‘the findings concur with the conclusion of the research conducted by ABC’, or ‘confirms the existence or impact of XYZ theory’.

# Chapter 6 - Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter draws together all the main aspects of the dissertation into a conclusion. Based upon the findings of the research it is also likely to contain a section of recommendations, which will possibly highlight the implication of these for organisations or other stakeholders involved in the subject area. Equally, there is likely to be a section recommending further research. In this case, future research recommendations may result from important issues that have been raised by the study, which in your opinion require further examination. Furthermore, it is commonplace to recognise the limitations of your study, such as the small scale of the sample population used for primary data collection. You may recommend that similar research on a larger scale be conducted to confirm whether these findings are representative in a more general sense.

# References

This contains a list of the sources that you have used within the dissertation. It is important to ensure the referencing is presented in the required format (e.g., Harvard style) both in the reference list and when sources are cited within the main body of the text.

Remember, a reference list is not a bibliography. It only contains details of those sources you have actually used in the dissertation. A bibliography is also likely to include other research data you have studied but not specifically referred to.

# Appendices

The purpose of the appendices is to provide attached information that may add value to the understanding of the research that has been conducted. As previously noted, this is likely to include the raw data resulting from the primary methods used, such as surveys and interviews. Other information pertinent to the study can also be attached within these appendices. For example, if you were saying that Ryanair carried the most passengers, in addition to mentioning and referencing this within the dissertation, you could provide a league table of the world’s airlines in the appendices. Each and every appendix must be labelled appropriately e.g., Appendix 1: passenger league table.

Section 2: Other notes and advice

Just a few final notes for you to consider:

1. *Presentation* - It is important to remember that presentation can account for between 5 and 10% of your final marks. Therefore, attention needs to be paid to this aspect of your dissertation. For the sale of quality, make sure the dissertation is presented clearly. Start each chapter on a new page and clearly identify each subsection, preferably in numerical sequence. Use 1.5 or double line spacing consistently and finally, leave a space between each paragraph or, alternatively, indent the first line of each new paragraph.
2. *Spelling and grammar* - Checking your spelling and grammar in the completed dissertation are equally important parts of presentation and clarity for the dissertation. Consistent errors distract the reader and therefore will be penalised. Equally, lengthy sentences can make reading the dissertation more difficult.
3. *Writing style* - The dissertation is an academic study. Therefore, the use of slang terms or colloquialisms will be unacceptable. Similarly, avoid over elaborating any of the points you are trying to make. In other words, do not use ten sentences when the same information can be provided in one.

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And finally…

We hope that this dissertation template and guide has provided you with valuable help in preparing and presenting your important dissertation and achieving the grade you desire. If you require assistance with other forms of research project structures, such as systematic reviews, PhDs etc., or if you need help with any other aspect of your studies, please feel free to contact a member of our customer service team, who will be happy to assist.