

# Social Research Dissertation Workshop

## Part II: Navigating the Process

Dr Chao-Yo Cheng



# Today's workshop is for

- ▶ MRes Global Politics/Politics/Public Policy and Management
- ▶ MRes/MSc Social Research



# Plan for today

- ▶ Overview of the dissertation process (again)
- ▶ Action points before the deadline (**15 September 2023**)
- ▶ Available support and tips
- ▶ Discussion and Q&A



# Dissertation process: An overview

- ▶ Term 1 (2022): Prepare your **dissertation proposal form**; talk to the program director and/or your potential supervisor (if there is one)
- ▶ Terms 2 and 3 (2023)
  - January: Submit your proposal form by **20 January 2023**
  - February to early March: Supervisor allocation; the Department sends a confirmation email about your dissertation supervisor
  - March to June/early July: Supervision in progress; submit an ethics proposal (if necessary)
  - July-August: Supervision ends (typically); complete your dissertation
  - September: Submit your dissertation by **15 September 2023**
- ▶ After September 2023: Extension and deferral



# Action points once you have a supervisor

- ▶ Meet and work with your supervisors
- ▶ Prepare and submit the ethics proposal (covered by **Dr Barry Maydom**)
- ▶ Complete your research and dissertation
- ▶ Deferring your dissertation (if necessary)



# Action point 1: Meet and work with your supervisor

- ▶ Min **three** meetings before the end of Term 3 (Summer)
  - It is your responsibility to arrange meetings and keep in good contact with your supervisors
  - **Supervisors can:** Offer guidance and support (but not necessarily direction); advise you on approach, scope, questions to be asked, and the outline structure and research design and methods
  - **Supervisors may not:** Comment on drafts and meet you during the summer break



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- ▶ Read through the following documents for more information
  - "Guidelines for MRes and MSc Social Research Dissertations"
  - "Policy on Supervised Dissertations for Taught Students"



## Action point 2: Prepare and submit the ethics proposal

Covered by Dr Barry Maydom.





## Action point 3: Complete your research and dissertation

- ▶ Working with yourself
- ▶ Working with your peers
- ▶ Additional support activities



# Action point 3: Complete your research and dissertation

## ▶ **Working with yourself**

- Pay close attention to personal wellbeing
- Manage your time and make weekly plans for your writing

## ▶ Working with your peers

## ▶ Taking advantage of additional support activities

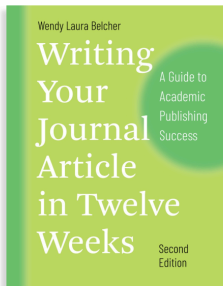


► Self-care checklist

- Get good sleep
- Nourish and move your body
- Do something fun
- Give yourself credit
- Connect with others (see the next part)

► Visit <https://www.bbk.ac.uk/student-services/counselling-service> for more information.





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# Action point 3: Complete your research and dissertation

- ▶ Working with yourself
  
- ▶ **Working with your peers**
  - Why you need writing groups
  - Different forms of writing groups
  - Planning your writing group(s)
  
- ▶ Taking advantage of additional support activities (Term 3)



- ▶ Why you need writing groups
  - Accountability: Regular progress checks
  - Social: Collegial support and fun
- ▶ Writing groups can take different forms
  - Accountability groups
  - Peer review groups
  - "Write-along" groups
- ▶ Writing groups take some careful (but not difficult) planning/moderation: **Size, frequency, subject areas and/or methods, and format** (online or in-person)



# Dissertation & Thesis Support: Writing Groups and Resources

Marilyn Gray, PhD  
Graduate Writing Center

**UCLA** Graduate Writing Center

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tuy33l4jgDg>



## Action point 3: Complete your research and dissertation

- ▶ Working with yourself
- ▶ Working with your peers
- ▶ **Taking advantage of additional support activities (Term 3)**
  - Masterclass in Social Research: "Pieces-of-Craft" workshops and Dissertation Fairs
  - Dissertation bootcamps and other workshops organized by the College's Study Skills team







A preview of the Masterclass.



## Action point 4: Deferring your dissertation

- ▶ Students who wish to defer must complete the mitigating circumstances (MCs) form online via **My Birkbeck**
  - Obtain the approval from your program director
  - Submit your request at least two weeks prior to the deadline
  - Send any inquiries to the Department/School admin team
  - (Ideally) you should also have the consent from your dissertation supervisor and have a clear plan to complete your dissertation before the next deadline
- ▶ Students can submit their deferred dissertation by either **15 May** or **15 September** of the following year (i.e., 2024)



# Concluding remarks (until I see some of you in the Masterclass)

- ▶ There is no perfect dissertation; there is only finished dissertation
  - A master's dissertation resembles a peer-reviewed journal article, consisting of **Introduction, Theory/Literature Review, Research Design, Data and Methods, Results and Discussion, and Conclusion**
  - Use **Appendix** to present additional (and yet not essential) information about your work
  - Make sure you are aware of what to avoid and the assessment criteria (available in the Guidelines)
- ▶ The key is to establish your identity as an independent researcher



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- ▶ There is no perfect dissertation; there is only finished dissertation
- ▶ The key is to establish your identity as an independent researcher
  - Use the uploaded articles and dissertation samples as your guide
  - Use literature review to inform us of the significance and originality of your research (e.g., Moreno et al 2019)
  - Use research design to establish **a sense of presence/existence** in the field – avoid unnecessarily tedious and apologetic textbook-style justification and refrain from being too obsessed with jargon and terminology (e.g., "document" analysis)



# Key contacts

- ▶ Your dissertation supervisor
- ▶ Your program director
  - For MRes students in Politics: Dr Barry Maydom  
([b.maydom@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:b.maydom@bbk.ac.uk))
  - For MRes/MSc Social Research students: Dr Chao-Yo Cheng  
([c.cheng@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:c.cheng@bbk.ac.uk))
- ▶ Department admin team: [politics-admin@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:politics-admin@bbk.ac.uk) (include your **student ID number** in the subject line of your email message)





Thank you!



# Assessment criteria

- ▶ The research question is well-defined, and contextualized
- ▶ An argument is specified, coherently presented and supported by evidence
- ▶ Alternative/rival arguments are analysed
- ▶ The approach is critical, not descriptive
- ▶ A relevant, suitable methodology is employed
- ▶ Relevant sources (data and literatures) have been consulted; knowledge of relevant literature, issues and debates is demonstrated
- ▶ The style and presentation is clear and careful, and appropriate academic conventions have been observed



- ▶ WK1: Designing your plan for writing
- ▶ WK2: Advancing your argument
- ▶ WK3: Abstracting your article
- ▶ WK4: Selecting a journal (X)
- ▶ WK5: Refining your works cited
- ▶ WK6: Crafting your claims for significance
- ▶ WK7: Analyzing your evidence
- ▶ WK8: Presenting your evidence
- ▶ WK9: Strengthening your structure
- ▶ WK10: Opening and concluding your article

