**Your MSc Dissertation**

I have graduate 40-50 PhD students and thought it might be useful to share some insights on successfully completing your Dissertation, as my observation is that most students throw away marks by leaving it to the last moment.

One of my recommendations (which works particularly well for PhD students) is to start writing your Dissertation as soon as possible. This has the benefit of acting as a roadmap for your research, allows your Supervisor to assess accurately the progress you are making, and boosts your chances of submitting. *Wow I’ve written 40 pages, only another 20 to go!* I also recommend writing your Dissertation linearly: Title page, Abstract, Contents List …

## Project Supervision Labs.

Ideally each of you should find an external company with whom to undertake your Masters project. Daniel and Sarah will support you but you should drive the process.

To help you with writing your dissertation, we will be arranging Project Supervision Labs, where we will give you advice on writing your dissertation and also review your content.

## Level of Difficulty

One of the biggest challenges is assessing the level of difficulty of your Masters project. A number of you are rightly concerned about this. What I recommend is trying to write the Abstract and then show this to Daniel or myself. Writing the Abstract will also show whether you understand the project or need more details from the Client.

## Dissertation Structure

A typical Masters Dissertation comprises one experiment and hence your dissertation might have the following structure:

|  |
| --- |
| **Masters Dissertation** |
| Title Page  Abstract  Contents List   1. Introduction 2. Background & Literature Review 3. Data Set used (optional) 4. Model Design 5. Model Implementation 6. Testing & Results 7. Conclusions & Future Work |

## Abstract

Your Abstract is hugely important as the Markers will form an opinion of your Dissertation (and the Marks) from a detailed reading of your Abstract.

A typical Abstract comprises a factual description of the research without discussion:

This dissertation investigates …

This research is important because …

The research comprises: Data Set, Experiment 1, Experiment 2 and Experiment 3

**Data Set used**

The data set comprises …

**Model Design**

Description of the work …

**Model Implementation**

Description of the work …

**Testing & Results**

Description of the work …

Your contributions to science …

The Abstract sets the theme of your Dissertation and can be quickly rewritten if you change direction. It’s not set in stone. Writing your Abstract after you have written the Dissertation is nonsense!

## Introduction

Students often find it difficult to know how to start a chapter, so I recommend what I call a ‘Micro Abstract’

**Introduction**

*“This chapter introduces the motivations for the research, briefly describes the design, implementation and test, presents the structure of the Dissertation, and lists the contributions to science”*

* 1. **Research Motivation**
  2. **Research Objectives**
  3. **Model Design**
  4. **Model Implementation**
  5. **Testing and Results**
  6. **Structure of the Dissertation**

**Chapter 2 …**

**Chapter 3 …**

**Chapter 4 …**

**Chapter 5 …**

## Choosing your Research Topic

It’s easier to get a high mark if your Dissertation topic is more mathematical/technical than if it is qualitative or (for example) an online system.

Although you will be working on your Dissertation fulltime during June, July and August, it is good to start early (say) in January or February and work on the project for a half/day a week so you fully understand what is required and have all the data etc.

In addition, the Dissertation project is a good way into a job or even a further degree. So if you are seeking a career in retailer, healthcare or finance – then try and find an appropriate company with whom to collaborate.

## Proof Reading your Dissertation

The presentation of your Dissertation: the fonts and size of the text, the layout and grammar are all extremely important as it shows you have taken trouble in preparing your Dissertation. Even the wrong font size can give the impression your Dissertation was prepared by a ‘child’. A good format/style to follow is that of a PhD dissertation so that it looks ‘academic’ rather than a glossy sale brochure.

For many of you English is your second language and therefore you need to get someone to proof-read the contents; ideally someone who understand the work. The simplest way is to get class mates to comment on the **structure**, **grammar** and **content** of your Dissertation. You can help each other get good marks. When someone asks you to comment on their Dissertation, first look at the *structure* (is this the obvious way to present the material), secondly is the *grammar* correct (are their missing ‘a’, ‘the’, ‘s’), and thirdly is the *content* easy to understand.

## Getting Feedback on your Dissertation

There is a strong correlation between how often you see your Academic and Industry Supervisors and the marks you get for the work. If you are seeking a Distinction then you should see your Supervisor every week. You need to chase your Supervisor and ask them for feedback on your Dissertation. Equally if you are happy with 51% you can wait till the Supervisor chases you or see them once a month, or not at all. You need to drive the process.