
Academic Research a Guide for the Perplexed

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Contents

Contents	i
I The Scope	1
1 Planning your work for Stage 1	7
1.1 Milestones, deliverables and tasks	8
1.2 A project plan for Stage 1	9
1.2.1 Key practices for managing your time efficiently	10
2 Identifying the research problem	13
2.1 Choosing a topic for your project	13
2.1.1 Qualification fit	14
2.1.2 Professional fit	15
2.1.3 Personal fit	16
2.1.4 Organisational fit	16
2.2 What is a research problem	17
2.2.1 The context and phenomena of interest	19
2.2.2 The knowledge gap	21
2.2.3 The justification	22
2.2.4 Problem formulation	23
2.3 Types of research problems	24
2.3.1 Descriptive problems	24

2.3.2	Exploratory problems	26
2.3.3	Explanatory Problems	28
2.3.4	Predictive Problems	33
2.3.5	Evaluative Problems	34
2.3.6	Design problems	36
2.4	Masters-appropriate research problems	41
2.5	Formulating your initial research problem	44
3	Setting research aim and objectives	45
3.1	Articulating your research aim	46
3.2	Choosing a title	47
3.3	Articulating your research objectives	48
4	Reviewing the literature	51
4.1	The role of the literature in research	51
4.2	How to access the literature	52
4.3	How to read an article	53
4.4	How to review the literature	56
4.4.1	Searching and gathering	58
4.4.2	Processing	64
4.4.3	Assimilating and analysing	70
4.4.4	Synthesising	76
5	Ethics and regulations	84
5.1	The rights of human participants in your research	84
5.2	Personal data in research	86
5.3	Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in research	90
5.4	Research involving animals	93
5.5	Intellectual property	94
5.6	Use of generative AI in research	96
5.7	Bias in research	98
6	Managing risk in Stage 1	101■

6.1	Research project risk	102
6.1.1	Technical skills	102
6.1.2	Study time	103
6.1.3	Resources	104
6.1.4	Ethics and regulations	104
6.2	Summarising your project risk	105
7	Reflecting	107■
8	Reporting	110■
8.1	Putting your research proposal together	110
8.2	Assessing and Iterating	112
9	Stage 1 Takeaways	115■
IIThe Literature		117
10	Writing a full draft of your literature review	124■
10.1	Key skills for synthesising	125
10.2	Core practice for academic writing	131
10.3	Develop your arguments!	139
10.3.1	The BCW model	139
10.3.2	Arguments and narrative	141
10.3.3	Logical fallacies and cognitive bias	145
10.4	Developing your literature review from your theme summaries	147
10.4.1	Developing the main body of your literature review	147
10.4.2	Choosing headings and sub-headings	153
10.4.3	Writing your review introduction and critical summary	153
10.5	Assessing your literature review	154
10.5.1	Your own assessment	155
10.5.2	Getting others to help you	156
10.6	Widening your literature review	157

11 Research design foundation	160■
11.1 Researcher mindsets	162
11.1.1 Positivist and post-positivism	162
11.1.2 Anti-positivist (interpretivism)	163
11.1.3 Constructivism	164
11.1.4 Critical Theory	164
11.1.5 Indigenous	165
11.2 What's your mindset?	166
11.3 Research strategies	168
11.4 Developing the research design	169
11.4.1 Types of evidence and data	169
11.4.2 Classes of research methods	171
11.5 Developing your understanding of research design	173
11.5.1 Research methods	173
11.6 Research strategies	175
11.6.1 Summary of research strategies	175
11.7 Understanding research methods and strategies in articles you have reviewed	176
12 Managing risk in Stage 2	179■
13 Reflecting and reporting in Stage 2	180■
14 Stage 2 Takeaways	184■
III The Research	186
15 Defending your claim of new knowledge	192■
15.1 Weaknesses and ways to deal with them	194
15.1.1 Where to defend your claim	195
15.2 Approaches to address weaknesses	197
15.2.1 Triangulation	197
15.2.2 Reflexivity	200
15.2.3 Returning to the literature	202

16 Your research strategy candidate list	203■
16.1 Survey research	207
16.1.1 Knowledge contribution	207
16.1.2 Data generation and analysis	207
16.1.3 Evaluation	208
16.1.4 Is this strategy right for me?	209
16.1.5 Further reading	210
16.2 Design science research	210
16.2.1 Knowledge contribution	210
16.2.2 Data generation and analysis	211
16.2.3 Evaluation	211
16.2.4 Is this strategy right for me?	212
16.2.5 Further reading	212
16.3 Experimental research	212
16.3.1 Knowledge contribution	213
16.3.2 Data generation and analysis	213
16.3.3 Evaluation	214
16.3.4 Is this strategy right for me?	214
16.3.5 Further reading	215
16.4 Case study research	215
16.4.1 Knowledge contribution	215
16.4.2 Data collection and analysis	216
16.4.3 Evaluation	216
16.4.4 Is this strategy right for me?	217
16.4.5 Further reading	218
16.5 Action research	218
16.5.1 Knowledge contribution	218
16.5.2 Data generation and analysis	219
16.5.3 Evaluation	219
16.5.4 Is this strategy right for me?	220
16.5.5 Further reading	221
16.6 Ethnography	221
16.6.1 Knowledge contribution	221

16.6.2	Data generation and analysis	221
16.6.3	Evaluation	221
16.6.4	Is this strategy right for me?	222
16.6.5	Further reading	223
16.7	Systematic research reviews	223
16.7.1	Knowledge contribution	223
16.7.2	Data collection and analysis	224
16.7.3	Evaluation	224
16.7.4	Is this strategy right for me?	225
16.7.5	Further reading	226
16.8	Grounded theory	226
16.8.1	Knowledge contribution	226
16.8.2	Data collection and analysis	226
16.8.3	Evaluation	227
16.8.4	Is this strategy right for me?	227
16.8.5	Further reading	228
16.9	Phenomenology	228
16.9.1	Knowledge contribution	228
16.9.2	Data generation and analysis	229
16.9.3	Evaluation	229
16.9.4	Is this strategy right for me?	230
16.9.5	Further reading	230
16.10	Simulation	230
16.10.1	Knowledge contribution	231
16.10.2	Data generation and analysis	231
16.10.3	Evaluation	231
16.10.4	Is this strategy right for me?	232
16.10.5	Further reading	232
16.11	Mathematical and logical proof	233
16.11.1	Knowledge contribution	233
16.11.2	Data generation and analysis	233
16.11.3	Evaluation	233
16.11.4	Is this strategy right for me?	234

16.11.5 Further reading	234
16.12 Mixed methods research	234
16.12.1 Knowledge contribution	234
16.12.2 Data generation and analysis	235
16.12.3 Evaluation	235
16.12.4 Is this strategy right for me?	236
16.12.5 Further reading	236
17 Choosing and drafting your own research strategy	237■
18 Managing risk in Stage 3	240■
19 Reflecting and Reporting in Stage 3	241■
20 Stage 3 Takeaways	242■
IV The Data	243
21 Raw data	250■
21.1 Sampling: what, who (and how) to choose	251
21.2 Modern standards	254
21.3 Managing raw data	254
22 Data generation methods	256■
22.1 Observations	256
22.1.1 Procedural considerations	258
22.1.2 Other things to think about	259
22.1.3 Further reading	260
22.2 Questionnaires	260
22.2.1 Procedural considerations	262
22.2.2 Other things to think about	262
22.2.3 Further reading	264
22.3 Interviews	264

22.3.1	Procedural considerations	266
22.3.2	Other things to think about	268
22.3.3	Further reading	268
22.4	Focus groups	269
22.4.1	Procedural considerations	270
22.4.2	Other things to think about	272
22.4.3	Further reading	272
22.5	Delphi	273
22.5.1	Operational considerations	273
22.5.2	Other things to think about	274
22.5.3	Further reading	274
22.6	Journaling	275
22.6.1	Procedural considerations	275
22.6.2	Other things to think about	276
22.6.3	Further reading	277
22.7	Fieldwork	277
22.7.1	Operational considerations	278
22.7.2	Other things to think about	279
22.7.3	Further reading	280
22.8	Documents	280
22.8.1	Procedural considerations	282
22.8.2	Other things to think about	283
22.8.3	Further reading	283
23	Modelling methods	284■
23.1	Computational thinking	285
23.1.1	Procedural considerations	285
23.1.2	Other things to think about	286
23.1.3	Further reading	287
23.2	Mathematical thinking	287
23.2.1	Operational considerations	288
23.2.2	Other things to think about	289
23.2.3	Further reading	290

23.3	Statistical thinking	290
23.3.1	Procedural considerations	290
23.3.2	Other things to think about	291
23.3.3	Further reading	292
23.4	System thinking	292
23.4.1	Procedural considerations	293
23.4.2	Other things to think about	294
23.4.3	Further reading	295
24	Data analysis methods	296■
24.1	Using tables to analyse data	296
24.1.1	Further reading	301
24.2	Statistical analysis	301
24.2.1	Descriptive statistics	302
24.2.2	Inferential statistics	310
24.2.3	Further reading	319
24.3	Qualitative analysis	319
24.3.1	Coding qualitative data	320
24.3.2	Presenting qualitative data	322
24.3.3	Further reading	323
25	Writing up your analysis	324■
26	Managing risk in Stage 4	326■
27	Reflecting and reporting in Stage 4	327■
28	Takeaways	332■
V	The End	334
29	Completing your research	340■
29.1	Interpreting and evaluating data	341

29.2	Assessing your research	342
30	Completing your dissertation	344■
30.1	Drafting an abstract for your project	344
30.2	Finalising and submitting your dissertation	345
30.2.1	Finding and dealing with gaps	348
30.2.2	Revising your draft for compliance to requirements	349
30.3	Final check before submission	353
31	How your dissertation will be assessed	355■
32	Managing risk in Stage 5	358■
33	Stage 5 Takeaways	359■

Stage V
The End

<p>Stage 5 will see you completing your research project and writing up your full dissertation, ready for submission.</p> <p>This stage assumes that you have made good progress with your data generation and analysis and on the interpretation of your findings. This has given you a contribution to knowledge that aligns[•], and that you're ready[•] to put it all together into a single narrative which you will complete in this stage.</p> <p>With reference to our 5-stage framework, the activities which are in focus in Stage 5 are summarised in Part V, which also provides some guidance for your interaction with your supervisor during this stage.</p>		<div><div>Add summary of what has been achieved.</div><div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• More or less, there'll be opportunities for fine tuning later! If you don't feel this is the case, there'll also be opportunities to return to specific parts of previous stages.• You could be almost ready; most of the way towards your goal.</div></div>
Table 28.1: Stage 5 Research Activities (15% of project length)		
<div><div>Deliverable</div><div>Identifying the research problem</div><div>Research problem statement, refined as needed</div></div>	<div><div>Writing Outcome: by the end of this stage you will</div><div>be able to assess and improve your research problem statement</div></div>	
<div><div>Effort/ Supervisor Interaction</div><div>1%</div></div>		
<div><div>Deliverable</div><div>Reviewing the literature</div><div>Full literature review</div></div>	<div><div>Writing Outcome: by the end of this stage you will</div><div></div></div>	<div><div>Effort/ Supervisor Interaction</div><div>1%</div></div>
<div><div>Deliverable</div><div>Setting your aim and objectives</div><div>Finalised aim and objectives, appropriately broken down into tasks</div></div>	<div><div>Writing Outcome: by the end of this stage you will</div><div></div></div>	<div><div>Effort/ Supervisor Interaction</div><div>2%</div></div>
<div><div>Deliverable</div><div>Developing the research design</div><div>Complete account of your research design</div></div>	<div><div>Writing Outcome: by the end of this stage you will</div><div></div></div>	<div><div>Effort/ Supervisor Interaction</div><div>2%</div></div>
<div><div>Deliverable</div><div>Generating and analysing data</div><div></div></div>	<div><div>Writing Outcome: by the end of this stage you will</div><div></div></div>	<div><div>Effort/ Supervisor Interaction</div><div></div></div>
		Continued on next page

Table 28.1: Stage 5 Research Activities (15% of project length) (Continued)

Deliverable	Writing Outcome: by the end of this stage you will	Effort	Supervisor Interaction
Data appropriately presented and analysed, with extracts from raw data in dissertation appendix, if needed; remaining raw data appropriately stored	be able to organise and store your raw data; be able to apply appropriate data analysis methods; be able to present your data in a concise and effective way	40%	Appropriateness of data analysis and presentation
Interpreting and evaluating findings			
Critical summary and evaluation of findings	be able to derive findings from your data analysis and critically assess them in relation to research aim and objectives	20%	Critical and logical thinking
Reflecting and reporting			
Full dissertation, including an assessment of the whole project	be able to assess entire research; be able to complete your dissertation to the expected presentation standards	35%	Depth of critical thinking, quality of academic writing, and conformance to standards
Planning work and managing risk			
Review of work from previous stage and project risk, with adjustment to work plan for Stage 5	be able to assess risk and revise a work plan	1%	Any major adjustment required to complete the project

Table 28.2: Stage 5 Research Activities (15% of project length)

Part/Structure	● Guidance		
Part/Structure	● Guidance		
Title	● After completing your work for this Stage, finalise your title		??
Continued on next page			

Table 28.2: Stage 5 Research Activities (15% of project length) (Continued)

Part/Structure	● Guidance		
Abstract <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Background ● Research Outline ● Research Design ● Knowledge contribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● After completing your work for this Stage, finalise your abstract 		??
Chapter 1: Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Background to the research ● Justification for the research ● Definitions ● Outline of the dissertation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● After completing your work for this Stage, finalise your introduction by adding an outline to it to assist the reader in understanding its logical structure 		??
Chapter 2: Literature review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review of existing relevant knowledge ● Critical summary, including knowledge gap to be addressed by the research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read and make any minor modifications with your literature review 		??
Chapter 3: Research Definition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Problem statement ● Aim, objectives, tasks and deliverables ● Knowledge contribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read and make any minor modifications with your research definition 		??
Chapter 4: Research design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Data Generation ● Research strategy and methods ● Research procedures ● Ethical, legal and EDI considerations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read and make any minor modifications with your research design 		??
Continued on next page			

Table 28.2: Stage 5 Research Activities (15% of project length) (Continued)

Part/Structure	Guidance			
Chapter 5: Analysis and interpretation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summary and analysis of data Summary of key findings Interpretation in relation to aim and objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read and make any minor modifications with your analysis and interpretations 			??
Chapter 6: Evaluation and conclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation against aim and objectives Evaluation against related work in the literature Implications for practice Validity of the research Further work Personal reflection on your experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At this stage you should be able to evaluate your findings against your aim and objectives based on all research conducted You should also evaluation your findings in any way in which they have added to the body of knowledge in your field of study, including whether they support or otherwise findings already known from the literature you have reviewed If relevant, you should reflect on ways in which your research may be relevant to professional practice, including how it could lead to change and improvement You should assess your research against the indicated criteria for your chosen research strategy. This will include research triangulation, validation and consideration of biases You should discuss aspects of your research problem or related research problems which you did not have the time to explore in your project, but which may be the subject of future research that can build on the work you have done You should discuss your reflection on what you have learned from a personal standpoint in relation to thinking and behaving as an academic researcher 			????? ??????
References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You should complete and check for references for correctness and completeness 			??
Appendices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your appendices should be used to illustrate various aspects of your research including... 			??

Activity: Understanding the effort needed in this stage	#1
Consider Part V carefully, paying particular attention to the entries in the ‘Effort’ column. Make a note of the activities which are most prominent in this stage and what their deliverables and learning outcomes are.	
Discussion	
In this stage, generating and analysing data and interpreting your findings will constitute your major effort (around 60% of your study time), although considerable effort (35%) will also be needed in assessing your research overall and completing your dissertation. You shouldn’t underestimate the time needed to complete and polish the dissertation so that is ready for submission, which is why the framework assume a significant effort in this stage.	

Chapter 29

Completing your research

Building on Stage 4, in this stage you will complete your work on generating and analysing data, on their interpretation in the context of a contribution to knowledge. This will give you a substantial start of the presentation of your findings in your dissertation.

{ch:CompletingYourResearch}

Activity: Completing your data generating, analysis, and interpretation

#2

Complete your research on generating and analysing data, and the interpretation of your findings in terms of your aim and objectives. Expand on your analysis and summaries from your Stage 4 report.

Guidance

Ensure you continue to manage your raw data carefully, and that your report presents all your data/data, findings and their interpretation in a clear and rigorous manner.

This activity is likely to take up to 40% of your study time, assuming you were able to make good progress with your data collection, analysis and interpretation in Stage 4. If that's not the case, you should discuss with your supervisor what you will be able to achieve realistically in the remaining time for your project, for instance whether it would be possible to reduce the scope of your research or apply alternative, more time-efficient research strategies and methods. Ensure that any changes are appropriately accounted for in your work plan for this stage.

29.1 Interpreting and evaluating data

Having generated and analysed a certain amount of data and evidence, it is time for you to start interpreting your findings in relation to your aim and objectives, and generally evaluate them in terms of their contribution to knowledge and possible limitations. This is a process you will repeat and complete in Stage 5, the concluding stage of your project, ending with your dissertation submission.

Interpreting your findings signifies addressing the following questions:

- What conclusions have you drawn from your data analysis?
- How do they relate to your aim and objectives?
- How do they relate to what you know from the literature?
- How do they relate to professional practice? (if applicable)
- Which new knowledge do they contribute?
- What do they fail to achieve?

Activity: Interpreting and evaluating your findings

#3

Consider your data analysis and based on it, address each of the above questions. Write down your responses, ensuring your arguments are well-formed, with explicit reference to evidence.

Guidance

Your interpretation and evaluation of findings will be, of course, limited by the data/evidence you have generated and analysed up to this point. You will revisit and expand this work in Stage 5 in order to complete your project.

{sect:intevaldata}

29.2 Assessing your research

Once you have completed your work on generating and analysing data, and interpreting your findings, it is time for you to reflect on your whole project, evaluate what you have done and draw some overall conclusions. These will form the body of the concluding chapter of your dissertation, for which you are asked to think critically about each of the following:

- **Evaluation against aim and objectives:** you should reflect on the extent your research has met its stated aim and objectives. The interpretation of your findings against aim and objectives is a good starting point to draw these summary conclusions. While your interpretation may be deep and detailed, with reference to specific data, here you are expected to highlight key conclusions based on such an interpretation. If, in the cold light of day, your research hasn't fully met your aim and objectives then you will need to establish for the reader what you have achieved: in this section you need to make a critical assessment of what your research has actually achieved.
- **Evaluation against the academic body of knowledge:** this requires you to assess the extent your findings have added to the body of knowledge in your field of study, including whether they support or question findings already known from the literature you have reviewed. You should show awareness of how your own research relates to the wider academic context.
- **Implications for practice (if any):** here you should reflect on ways in which your research may be relevant to professional practice, if applicable, including how it could lead to change and improvement. If your research is purely theoretical, then you can skip this section, and focus on the previous two items instead.
- **Validity of the research:** this requires you to assess your research in terms of construct, internal and external validity. You should refer back to Stage 3 materials to refresh your understanding of validity.
- **Further research:** your research may have shed light on aspects of your research problem, or highlighted other related research problems, which you did not have the time to explore in your project. This is the place for you to discuss those of more relevance and to indicate how future research can build on the work you have done.
- **Personal reflection on your research experience:** whether or not your research project is your first experience of academic research, you should reflect on what you have learnt from a personal

{sect:assessment}

standpoint in relation to thinking and behaving like an academic researcher. You should address how your mindset and skills have changed, or how you would do things differently should you start anew, and any other relevant thoughts you may have.

Activity: Assessing your research overall

#4

Assess your overall research in relation to the above points, and write appropriate summaries of each for inclusion in your dissertation.

Guidance

For each point above, consider the related guidance to help you assess your research overall. Note that this assessment should consider all the work you have conducted in your project.

Chapter 30

Completing your dissertation

30.1 Drafting an abstract for your project

An abstract is a common way to summarise academic research. Abstracts are an integral parts of all published academic articles – you will have encountered many abstracts while reviewing the literature. They are also very common in academic dissertations, therefore it is highly likely you will be required to include one at the beginning of yours.

An abstract provides a short summary of the whole research written for a specialist audience, that is you can assume that the reader has good knowledge of the topic and field of study. It should be a stand-alone item, so that it can be understood without reference to any other part of your dissertation.

Its content should convey succinctly the research problem, how and where it arises and its significance, the research aim and research design, key results obtained by the research, their evaluation and their implications for further research or professional practice.

Writing an abstract for your research is a good exercise, even if one is not needed for your dissertation, as it gives you an opportunity to write a logical argument that connects all key elements of your research. This can help you check that all the pieces fit together in a coherent manner. It is also something you can share with your supervisor and critical friends to communicate succinctly the essence of what you have done and achieved.

{ch:CompletingYourDissertation}

{sect:abstractdraft}

Activity: Drafting your abstract

#5

Write a draft abstract for your project, which should reflect your research progress to date.

Guidance

You should go back to some of the articles you have reviewed to consider the content and structure of their abstract. Choose a structure which may fit your project and write up your draft abstract accordingly. As your research is yet to be completed, you will not be able to write up the full abstract, but you should end up with a draft that you can easily complete by the end of your project.

30.2 Finalising and submitting your dissertation

It’s getting exciting – you now have all the data, evidence, and arguments in a form you need to complete your dissertation. You may have nigh-on one hundred pages of carefully written prose that looks very good on your screen. It’s now time to finalise your dissertation for submission.

Your dissertation should extend your Stage 4 report by covering the work you have carried on in this stage. The structure and content we recommend are indicated in Section 30.2.

Table 30.1: Dissertation structure and guidance

Dissertation tem-plate	Guidance
Title	Your title should capture succinctly your research problem and aim
Abstract	Your abstract should providing a succinct account of your research

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{sect:final+submit}

Table 30.1: Dissertation structure and guidance (Continued)	
Dissertation template	Guidance
Chapter 1: Introduction 1.1 Background to the research 1.2 Justification for the research 1.3 Fitness of the research	This chapter should provide an introduction to your research topic in its wider context (as background) and your justification of why the research is worth pursuing. Its purpose is to introduce and justify your intended research in overview, before entering the detailed work of the subsequent chapters. It should be well argued and supported by appropriate citations. In this chapter, you should also argue how the research fits within the scope of your qualification, and meets any other personal, professional or organisational criteria.
Chapter 2: Literature review 2.1 Review of existing relevant knowledge 2.2 Critical summary, including knowledge gap to be addressed by the research	Your review should provide a critical account of your in-depth engagement with the academic (and other) relevant literature, including identifying key trends, ideas and possible knowledge gaps. Most of your citations should point to academic articles. Your critical summary should highlight key insights from your review and provide a strong justification for your proposed research. Both coverage and depth of your review matter. You should ensure that your review is well structured, with a logical narrative flow and your arguments are well supported by data
Chapter 3: Research definition 3.1 Problem statement 3.2 Aim, objectives, tasks and deliverables 3.3 Knowledge contribution	You should ensure that your research problem is well articulated and appropriate for your course and your personal and professional circumstances, that your aim and objectives are consistent with research problem, that tasks and deliverables break down your objectives appropriately and are clearly related to your chosen research methods, and that the intended knowledge contribution of your research is clearly articulated
Continued on next page	

Table 30.1: Dissertation structure and guidance (Continued)	
Dissertation template	Guidance
Chapter 4: Research design 4.1 Data 4.2 Research strategy and methods 4.3 Research procedures 4.4 Ethical, legal and EDI considerations	This chapter should demonstrated your critical engagement with all elements of research design, including a detailed account of the data needed in your research, the research methods and research strategies chosen, with justification, and applied within your project. Your account should be supported by a clear rationale and insights from the related literature, and appropriately justified in relation to your research problem, aim and objectives. It should also demonstrate your careful consideration of ethical and legal matters, and that your research complies with your course and university requirements
Chapter 5: Analysis and interpretation 5.1 Summary and analysis of data 5.2 Summary of key findings 5.3 Interpretation in relation to aim and objectives	This chapter should provide a detailed account of your data generating, analysis, the findings you have derived and their interpretation in relation to your research aim and objectives. It should demonstrate a competent execution of your research design, present appropriate summaries of data, supported by raw data in an appendix if needed. Key findings should be clearly identified and logically connected to data, with good critical reflection on their implications for aim and objectives.
Continued on next page	

Table 30.1: Dissertation structure and guidance (Continued)		
Dissertation template		Guidance
Chapter 6: Evaluation and conclusion 6.1 Evaluation against aim and objectives 6.2 Evaluation against related work in the literature 6.3 Implication for practice 6.4 Validity of the research 6.5 Further work 6.6 Personal reflection on your experience of		In this chapter you should reflect on the extent your research has met its stated aim and objectives, bringing together all your findings from both primary and secondary research work. You should also reflect how it has contributed new knowledge in relation to the literature you have reviewed. You should also assess the validity of your research and consider any implication for further research and, if applicable, for professional practice. You should also reflect on what you have learnt from a personal standpoint in relation to thinking and behaving as an academic researcher.
References		You should include all your references and ensure you apply the required bibliographical style consistently.
Appendix - Raw data		If relevant, you should include a sample of your raw data as an appendix

30.2.1 Finding and dealing with gaps

By now, you should have something to say in each of the chapters and sections suggested in Section 30.2. Depending on your chosen research strategy the material for certain sections may extend to many pages: for an experiment, it may be that there is an extensive sections on reflexivity, triangulation, and validation. These sections may be much shorter if they appear at all, in the mathematical thinking research strategy.

Irrespective of which research strategy you have chosen, however, some sections will always have content. These include:

- list here

Some of these may simply not have been written yet[•] even though you know that they are needed and have things[•] to say – for instance, we recommend leaving the Abstract, Introduction and Conclusions until

{ssect:FindingAndDealing}

[•] Or not written to D1 – the first complete draft.
[•] Or will have!

quite late in the writing process. Others you will complete next.

Activity: Putting your dissertation together

#6

Using your word processor of choice, and starting from your previous report, complete your dissertation by applying the structure and guidance in Section 30.2, and making good use of your notes and summaries from all related activities you have carried out.

Guidance

Although the dissertation structure and guidance we provide is fairly standard, it is possible they don't not match exactly the requirements of your own course, which may provide a different template for you to follow. Indeed you should check and apply your course guidance, and map the structure and guidance in Section 30.2 to what is required in your course of study.

30.2.2 Revising your draft for compliance to requirements

Now that you have a complete draft of your dissertation, you should revise it to ensure it meets your course requirements.

In our experience, a Masters dissertation is usually in the range of 10,000 to 15,000 words. Often, references, abstract and appendices are excluded from the word count, but figure and table captions are included. In general, there is an expectation that the content of your dissertation is balanced across the different chapters, although it is normal for some chapters to be more substantial than others. Our recommended distribution of content across the full body of your dissertation, based on our recommended dissertation structure, is indicated in Section 30.2.2, as a percentage of total. This is not a hard and fast constant, but can provide a baseline for you to get an idea of the relative weight of the different chapters of your dissertation. In adapting it to the needs of your own project and course, however, you should ensure you maintain a good balance across the whole piece.

{ssect:RevisingYourDraft}

Table 30.2: Breakdown of dissertation content				
Elem Breakdown		Recommended word count dis-tribution	Equivalent for 10,000 word dis-sertation	Equivalent for 15,000 word dis-sertation
Chapter 1 In-tro-duc-tion	Background to the research Jus-tification for the research Defini-tions (if any) Dissertation outline	10%	1000	1500
Chapter 2 Lit-er-a-ture re-view	Review of existing relevant knowl-edge Critical summary, including knowledge gap	20%	2000	3000
Chapter 3 Re-search def-ini-tion	Problem statement Aim, ob-jectives, tasks and deliverables Knowledge contribution	10%	1000	1500
Chapter 4 Re-search de-sign	Data Research strategy and meth-ods Procedures Ethical considera-tions	15%	1500	2250
				Continued on next page

Table 30.2: Breakdown of dissertation content (Continued)			
Elem Breakdown	Recommended word count dis-tribution	Equivalent for 10,000 word dis-sertation	Equivalent for 15,000 word dis-sertation
Chapter 5 Summary and analysis of data Analysis of key findings Interpretation in relation to aim and objectives	30%	3000	4500
Chapter 6 Evaluation against aim and objectives Evaluation against the academic body of knowledge Implications for practice (if any) Validity of the research Further research Personal reflection on your research experience	15%	1500	2250
There is also an expectation that your dissertation conforms to some standard presentation conventions, which we have summarised in Section 30.2.2.			

Table 30.3: Presentation conventions	
Fonts	Use a standard font that is easy to read, e.g. Times New Roman or Arial, with font size 11 or 12
Margins and spacing	Leave appropriate margins on both the left and the right of the page, typically around 2 cm. Use 1.5 line spacing
Your identifiers	Include your name and student identifier, possibly as a header or as part of the title page
Title page	Include a title page containing your research title. Usually the following statement is also required: “A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of <name of degree>”, where you should replace <name of degree> with your own degree title
Table of content	Include a table of content after the title page
Page numbers	Number all pages, including references and appendices. In particular, use lower-case Roman numerals on the preliminary pages – iii, iv, v, etc. – and Arabic numerals starting from page 1 at the beginning of Chapter 1.
Chapter and section numbering	Number chapters sequentially using Arabic numerals starting with 1. Number sections sequentially starting with the chapter number, e.g. 1.1, 1.2, etc. for sections in Chapter 1. Number sub-sections sequentially starting with the section number, e.g. 1.1.1, 1.1.2, etc. for sub-sections in Section 1.1. You should avoid sub-sub-sections, but if needed, number them sequentially starting with the sub-section number, e.g. 1.1.1.1, 1.1.1.2, etc. for sub-sub-sections in Sub-section 1.1.1.
Figures and tables	Number all figures and tables sequentially, starting with their chapter number, e.g. 1.1, 1.2, etc. for figures in Chapter 1. Include appropriate captions positioned after figures and before tables
Lists of figures and tables	List all figures and tables after your table of content. For each include both their number and caption
Continued on next page	

Table 30.3: Presentation conventions (Continued)	
Fonts	Use a standard font that is easy to read, e.g. Times New Roman or Arial, with font size 11 or 12
Citations and references	Apply the required bibliographical style throughout
Verb tense	Your dissertation is an account of what you did in your project, so you should report your work using the past tense throughout

Activity: Reviewing your dissertation

#7

Review you current dissertation draft and make all necessary adjustments to ensure it meets the guidance and requirements above, or similar requirements and guidance from your own course.

Guidance

While our recommendations are fairly standard, it is essential that you ensure they align with your own course requirements and guidance: if not, you should of course apply the latter. Whichever guidelines you follow, you should ensure that your dissertation fits within the overall word count, its content is appropriately balanced, and all required presentation conventions apply.

30.3 Final check before submission

Before submitting your dissertation, you should perform a final check, focusing on the following aspects:

- **Logical coherence:** you should ensure that all research elements of your dissertations are coherent and consistent with each other, so that there is a logical progression from research problem, to aim and objectives, to research design and its execution, to findings and conclusions.
- **Academic writing:** you should ensure that academic arguments are well formed, including being well-supported by secondary and/or primary data, that the language you use is clear and precise, and there is a good balance between description and critical reflection.

{sect:finalcheck}

- **Proof-reading:** you should remove grammatical errors and typos, and ensure that punctuation is correct. You should also check that the narrative makes sense to the reader, for which we strongly advise you ask for help from a friend or family member: even if they are not experts on the topic of your project, they should be able to follow what you have written and get the gist of your work.

- **Conformance to presentation conventions:** you should ensure that your dissertation conforms to the requirements of your course, follows its presentation conventions, its length is within the word limit, and its content is well balanced between chapters.

Activity: Performing your final check

#8

Assess your dissertation draft against each of the points above. Revise and iterate until you are ready to submit.

Guidance

Revising your dissertation for submission is very important as you can lose a substantial proportion of marks should any of these aspects not be addressed carefully and to the expected standards.

You should now be ready to submit your dissertation. You should, of course, follow the instructions for your course of study to do so.

Chapter 31

How your dissertation will be assessed

After submission, your dissertation will go through your university's assessment process, which is designed to ensure that your work is assessed fairly against Masters research benchmarks and your course learning outcomes. The specifics of this process will depend on your own university and course (or programme) of study, something you should investigate carefully.

You should also investigate the assessment criteria applied to your work. Typically, your Masters dissertation will be assessed from the following perspectives, although the specific marking scheme applied within your course may break each further:

- **Research definition and research design:** this refers to an appropriate articulation and justification of the research problem in its wider context, including your critical review of the academic literature to contextualise and justify your research problem and knowledge contribution, a well developed and justified research design, and well constructed academic arguments
- **Data generation, analysis, interpretation, and conclusion:** this refers to a competent execution of your research design, an adequate amount of data gathered and analysed, an appropriate interpretation of your findings, and a critical evaluation of your research overall
- **Presentation:** this refers to how your dissertation is put together, its cohesiveness and logical flow, including abstract[•], and its conformance to conventions, including an appropriate use of tables, figures and diagrams to summarise and present your work.

{ch:HowYourDissertation}

Make this an activity earlier in the process.

And this

Is this earlier too?

- And extended abstract, if needed.

The assessment of your work under these criteria will contribute to your final grade, which will be established by your examiners in relation to Masters level quality benchmarks, including those summarised in Chapter 31.

Table 31.1: Typical grade benchmarks for Masters dissertations, based on UK quality standards

Grade	Quality descriptor
Distinction	All elements of the dissertation are present, including abstract and any required appendix, and are of a high standard. In particular, the dissertation demonstrates: advanced, authoritative understanding and analysis of key issues and complex problems; strong data of a critical approach to own work and that of others; competent use of a wide range of data in support of academic arguments; appropriate and well justified selection of research strategies and methods, applied competently to own research; originality and independence of thought; compelling narrative which is coherently and logically presented; excellent presentation standards; excellent research potential
Merit	All elements of the dissertation are present, including abstract and any required appendix, and are of a good standard. In particular, the dissertation demonstrates: good understanding and analysis of key issues; good data of a critical approach to own work and that of others; good use of data in support of academic arguments; appropriate selection of research strategies and methods, applied reasonably well to own research; some originality; coherent and logically presented narrative; good presentation standards; good research potential
Pass	Some elements may be weak or missing, but all three perspectives above are sufficiently addressed. In particular, the dissertation may data some of: limited understanding and analysis of key issues; limited data of critical approach to own work and that of others; limited use of relevant data in support of academic arguments; some appropriate choices of research strategies and methods, but with limited application to own research; plausible narrative; adequate standards of presentation

Continued on next page

• These are the typical criteria for the UK. Those in your country may vary.

Add source

Table 31.1: Typical grade benchmarks for Masters dissertations, based on UK quality standards (Continued)

Grade	Quality descriptor
Weak fail	Many elements of the dissertations are very weak or missing, and not all three perspectives above are sufficiently addressed. In particular, the dissertation may data many or all of: superficial understanding and analysis of key issues; weak data of critical approach to own work and that of others; gaps in the use of data in support of academic arguments; inappropriate choice or application of research strategies and methods; weak narrative; poor standards of presentation
	(In this case, a course may allow some remedial work and resubmission.)
Complete Fail	The dissertation has critical flaws and omissions, so that is not recoverable via a resubmission. In particular, the dissertation demonstrate many or all of: lack of understanding and analysis of key issues; lack of critical approach to own work and that of others; little or no use of data in support of academic arguments; inappropriate choice or application of research strategies and methods; incoherent and confused narrative; inadequate standards of presentation

Activity: Assessing your own dissertation

#9

Apply the three perspectives above together with the benchmarks of Chapter 31 to your dissertation. Write down your own assessment of your work as a result.

Guidance

Your course of study may provide some detailed guidance on how your dissertation will be assessed. If that’s the case, you should compare that guidance to the advice in this handbook, and apply it in your own assessment of your dissertation. You should only assess the content of the dissertation as is, disregarding all other knowledge you will have of your research which is not reported. You should take an objective stance, considering both strengths and weaknesses of your work. You could also ask a friend or a family member to assess your dissertation, then compare their assessment with yours.

{tab:gradeBenchmarks}

Chapter 32

Managing risk in Stage 5

Trick chapter – there is no risk arising from this stage!

`{ch:ManagingRiskIn}`

Chapter 33

Stage 5 Takeaways

- Completing your project and finalising your dissertation are substantial tasks, so that you must ensure you have sufficient time in your work plan.
- Your overall assessment of your project must address several dimensions, including the extent your aim and objectives were met, any new knowledge generated, its wider significance, the validity of your research and its implications for future work.
- Your dissertation should meet a range of requirements on both coverage, structure, length and presentation convention. You should ensure your work meets the requirements and follows the guidelines provided by your course of study.
- Your dissertation will be assessed following a process defined by your own course of study and university. Grade benchmarks are likely to apply, which may be based on national, or even international, benchmarks.

{ch:Stage5Takeaways}