

# Writing your Dissertation or Thesis

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

One of my recommendations (which works particularly well for PhD students) is to start writing your Dissertation or Thesis 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 40 to go!* I also recommend writing your Dissertation or Thesis linearly: Title page, Abstract, Contents List ...

## Dissertation Structure

A typical Masters Dissertation comprises one experiment and a PhD Thesis three experiments with the following structure:

Masters or BSc Dissertation	PhD Thesis
Title Page	Title Page
Abstract	Abstract
Contents List	Contents List
1. Introduction	8. Introduction
2. Background & Literature Review	9. Background & Literature Review
3. Design	10. Experiment 1
4. Implementation	3.1 Design
5. Test	3.2 Implementation
6. Assessment	3.3 Test
7. Conclusions & Future Work	11. Experiment 2
	4.1 Design
	4.2 Implementation
	4.3 Test
	12. Experiment 3
	5.1 Design
	5.2 Implementation
	5.3 Test
	13. Assessment
	14. Conclusions & Future Work

## Abstract

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

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

This Thesis investigates ...

This research is important because ...

The research comprises Experiment 1, Experiment 2 and Experiment 3

### Design/Experiment 1

Description of the work ...

### Implementation/Experiment 2

Description of the work ...

### Test/Experiment 3

Description of the work ...

Your contributions to science ...

The Abstract sets the theme of your Dissertation and Thesis 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"*

### 1.1 Motivation

### 1.2 Design

### 1.3 Implementation

### 1.4 Test

### 1.5 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 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 a bank, regulator or retailer – then try and find a 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'.

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 Supervisor 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.