

**Department of Social Sciences**

**Dissertation Handbook: Guidelines for final year undergraduates and taught MA students**

**This document is online at: http://www.dit.ie/socialscienceslaw/socialsciences/studentresources/**

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### INTRODUCTION

This handbook has been designed to help you to structure your dissertation according to the appropriate academic convention (the **APA style**). It applies to all final year projects and dissertations in the Department of Social Sciences. It also details supervision arrangements and information about how your dissertation will be assessed.

### 1.1 STRUCTURE OF DISSERTATION

You will find it a great help to have a framework of chapters or sections with indications of the proposed contents. This can be refined and modified as the work proceeds. A typical dissertation will have five or six chapters.

You are strongly advised to read a number of completed theses to appreciate the scale and quality required. Taught MA students can find full-text postings of a range of theses with high 2.1 and 1st classifications at: http://arrow.dit.ie/aaschssldis/

Carefully plan your dissertation. Give it a beginning, middle and an end. Type a draft (with the spelling and grammar checker turned on), then re-read and edit multiple times before typing the final version. Ask yourself if what you have written makes sense. Allow time to read a complete print-out of your work. It is easier to spot errors on paper than on screen. Such revisions will improve structure, syntax and expression. Professional writers will frequently draft their work a dozen times! Blaise Pascal, the 17th century French mathematician, famously identified the difficulties in writing in a concise, legible style when he observed

“I have made this [letter] longer than usual, only because I have not had the time to make it shorter.”

Your final text will consist of the following components (although structure may vary around this theme, from project to project):

* + 1. **Title Pages**

These include the title page itself, acknowledgements, table of contents page, lists of table and figures, abstract.

These pages should be in roman numbering (i, ii, iii etc.) (except for the title page, which is not numbered). Arabic page numbering (1, 2, 3 etc.) should begin on the first page of your ‘Introduction’.

See appendix one for sample lay-out of these pages.

**1.1.2 Introduction**

Briefly outline to your reader what you intend to do.

Why are you doing it? What exactly is the research question? What is the possible importance of the research?

Although the introduction is the first thing that a reader will read, the introduction is, in fact, usually written last.

**1.1.3 Literature Review**

What have others said, written or researched about your topic? What theories illuminate your topic? How does the literature relate to your research questions? What are the most important/controversial issues at present?

**1.1.4 Research Methodologies**

How will you approach the empirical work? What style and techniques have you chosen? Why? What samples tests, observations, and measurements will be needed? What are the advantages/constraints of the chosen method?

**1.1.5 Data Analysis**

What data have been found? What is your interpretation of it? Do they support or refute a hypothesis?

**1.1.6 Discussion & Recommendations**

Discuss your results with reference to your hypothesis and your literature review chapter. Are there any actions or recommendations to take? What future areas of research would be relevant?

**1.1.7 References**

Use APA style (see below).

**1.1.8 Appendices**

Are there any extra details that the specialist reader could refer to if necessary?

* + 1. **Binding instructions**

You are required to submit two copies of your dissertation (at least one of which must be hard bound).

The front board should contain: title of dissertation, your name, course title, year of submission.

The spine should contain: your name, year of submission, course title.

* 1. **TYPING AND PRESENTATION FORMAT**

###### Typing Format

1. Use Times New Roman, Font size 12.
2. Use one and half spacing with adequate margins.
3. Page numbers begin on first page of text. Title page is not numbered.
4. There is no space before a full stop. Text resumes two spaces after a full stop.
5. There is no space before a comma, colon, or semi-colon. Text resumes one space after commas, colons, and semi-colons.
6. Abbreviations and Acronyms. Abbreviations such as “e.g.”, “etc.”, “i.e.” are not acceptable. One must write in full “for example”, “and so on” and “that is.” Acronyms are acceptable if one has previously indicated the full meaning of the acronym. Thus, to use “DIT”, one must have initially used Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT).

**Presentation Format**

1. Use A4 size paper
2. Margins: at least one and a half inches on the left hand side, and at least half an inch on the other three sides.
3. Number the pages (bottom centre)
4. Print only on one side of the page
5. Before submitting any completed piece of work, it should be photocopied and a reliable back-up file should be made
6. Gender-specific language is to be avoided. Avoid using he, she, him, her, his, hers. Instead, where possible, use the neutral “one.”

* Photographs and diagrams:All photographs and/or diagrams should be firmly fixed or printed on the appropriate page and should be provided with legends. Where possible graphs and diagrams should be printed in colour.
* Footnotes and indented quotations may be single line spaced. The footnotes in each chapter should be numbered consecutively, at the end of the page or chapter. Please note that for some disciplines (for example, psychology) the use of footnotes is not allowed. Your supervisor shall indicate whether the use of footnotes is appropriate.
* Quotations should be used sparingly and judiciously. A useful rule of thumb is to include only those quotations that succinctly and comprehensively make a point in a way that you feel cannot be bettered.
  1. **REFERENCING**

Academic writing requires that you read and cite the work of others. Any material that is not your own must be sourced to the original author. Every book, article, thesis and all electronic material that has been consulted and cited should be included in the bibliography. Only material which is publicly available should be cited so lecture notes, for example, should not be referenced. The use of quotations and references in the text is followed up by a list of references, alphabetically presented at the end of the work, which is known as the References. There are specific guidelines that you must follow for referencing in the text and in the References section. The referencing system adopted by the Department of Social Sciences is the American Psychological Association Style, or APA Style. What follows is a summary outline of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th Edition. An outline tutorial can be found at:

http://flash1r.apa.org/apastyle/basics/index.htm

* + 1. **REFERENCING FORMAT (IN THE TEXT)**

**a)** After a summary of an author’s work, or a reference to his/her work you must insert the author’s surname and the date of publication.

(Murphy, 2010).

In the case of two authors, both are listed: (Wilson & Thomas, 2009).

In the case of three to five authors, all authors should be listed the **first time** the work is cited:

(O’Brien, Smith, Horgan, White & Dunphy, 2009).

As listing five authors would become quite cumbersome, after the first citation you need only name the first author, followed by *et al.* (from the Latin, meaning ‘and others’): (O’Brien *et al*., 2009).

When citing an author who has published two or more works in the same year, use lower case letters (a, b, c) with the year to distinguish them:

The Department of Education and Science (2012a) has reported that …

**b)** If you are including the author’s name as part of your sentence you can put the date in brackets after it as follows:

Murphy (2010) has argued that …

**c)** A straight forward quotation:

However, it has been noted that “this is a phenomenon which is not unique to Ireland” (Murphy, 2010, p. 12).

**d)** When you are summarising someone else’s ideas:

Murphy (2010) has argued that it is not just Ireland that has experienced such difficulties; other countries including Finland have also faced similar economic problems.

If you are citing a number of works to support an argument or position, they should be listed alphabetically, separated by a semi-colon:

A considerable number of researchers have reported similar findings (Barry, 2006; Doyle, 2008; Zacchus, 2004).

**e)** Let’s say you are reading a book by Smith, and in Smith’s book there is a quote from another book by Jones. You decide that you would like to include the quote by Jones in your essay, but you haven’t read Jones’ original source. You present this kind of material as follows:

More evidence to support this assertion has been presented by research in North America, which concluded that 23% of women are likely to choose not to have children for a variety of reasons (Jones, as cited in Smith, 2012, pp. 254-256).

The page number given is the page number from the book by Smith from where you got the quotation from Jones. Your bibliography will contain the book by Smith.

**f)** If referencing from a newspaper, follow the same format as above. If there is no identifiable author, use the name of the newspaper, the date and page number if required:

(The Irish Times, 19th January, 2010, p. 6)

**g)** Quotations

A short quotation of less than a line may be included in the body of the text in quotation marks but if it is longer (typically, 40 words) start a new line and indent it. All direct quotes must be single spaced and indented. This makes it easier for the reader to establish what is sourced work and what is your own work. Include the page number if using a direct quote:

Russell’s (1997) work on incest in South Africa confines itself to white incest survivors. She notes:

a few women have made valiant efforts to bring this problem to public attention over the past decade, but the handling of this crime [incest] is still in the dark ages in South Africa compared with most Western nations … [and] no adequate studies of the prevalence of incestuous abuse have been conducted in South Africa (1997, p. 9).

**h)** Referencing Internet sites or online journals.

The suggested format for WWW page entries in the text is Constructor (person or organisation), year, page no. [if given]:

Department of Health and Children (2006, p. 8).

Many webpages do not contain page numbers. Try to include a marker to help your reader find the relevant passage, for example a paragraph number:

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2009, para 121).

* + 1. **REFERENCING FORMAT TO BE USED IN ‘REFERENCES’ AT END OF THESIS**

‘References’ is a list of all the sources you quoted or paraphrased to prepare your paper. You should arrange entries in alphabetical order by the author’s last name or, if there is no author, by the first main word of the title. It should start on a separate page at the end of your essay; label the page ‘References’, centred at the top of the page.

Use **hanging indent paragraph style** (align the first line with the left margin, and indent all subsequent lines one tab space from the left margin). Type all authors’ names with the surname first, separated by a comma. Use only initials for the first and middle names, and an ‘and’ before the last author's name.

###### Examples

### (a) Books

The title of the publication should be *italicised*. Capitalise only the first word, the first word after a colon and proper nouns.

Charleton, M. (2007). *Ethics for social care in Ireland: Philosophy and practice.* Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.

Kessler, S. & Bayliss, F. (1985). *Contemporary British industrial relations*. London: Macmillan.

Where an organization is the author,

Department of Education and Science. (2009). Etc.

### (b) Edited books

Where a book has been edited you must insert (ed.) (if there is only one editor) or (eds.) (for two or more editors) after their names:

O’Connor, T. & Murphy, M. (Eds.). (2006). Social *care in Ireland: Theory, policy and practice*. Cork: CIT Press.

### (c) Contributions in edited books

When quoting the work of a contributor to an edited book the following format should be used:

Kitchen, R. & Bartley, B. (2007). Ireland now and in the future. In B. Bartley & R. Kitchen (Eds.), *Understanding contemporary Ireland* (pp. 301-07). London: Pluto Press.

### (d) Journal articles

Labbé, J. (2005). Ambroise Tardieu: The man and his work on child maltreatment a century before Kempe. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 29(4), 311-324.

### (e) Newspapers

Bloggs, J. (2008, September 1). Government at crossroads. *Irish Times*, p. 1.

### (f) Websites and Online Journals

Online citation

Irish Council for Civil Liberties (2009). ICCL Submission on the (Retention of Data) Bill Nov 2009. Dublin: Irish Council for Civil Liberties (http://www.iccl.ie/Justice-publications.html).

# Online Journals

As with any published reference, the goals of electronic references are to credit the author and to enable the reader to find the material. Where possible, cite the DOI (digital object identifier). If there is no DOI, use the webpage URL.

For example, with a DOI:

Tobin, C. (2006). Tips to remember about allergy, asthma and immunology [Online]. *American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology*, 24, 225-229. doi:

10.1037/0728-6133.24.2.225

Another example, no doi, so the URL is used instead:

Hemingway, E. (2007). The future of Irish social policy. *Irish Journal of Social Policy*, 99, 423- 455. Retrieved from http://www.makeyupeywebsite.ie

### (g) Theses

Ajax, J. (2004). *The marketing of tulips in 17th Century Holland.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Utrecht University, Utrecht.

**1.4 SUPERVISION AND OTHER MATTERS**

Your supervisor will work with you to define the purpose and scope of your study so that you know exactly what is required. He/she will also try to ensure you can complete the task in the time available without neglecting your other studies or interfering with your preparation for examinations. It is important that you choose a subject in which you are already interested and which will complement and support your other studies. It is important to note that the dissertation is fundamentally **your** responsibility; hence you must not place excess pressure on the supervisor or expect unreasonable assistance. Remember, a dissertation is a show case piece of work designed, carried out and written-up by a final year student.

Structured supervision will be scheduled at regular intervals and should proceed for approximately half an hour. It is vital that you prepare for each tutorial by listing the areas that need discussion and the precise points that should be cleared up as they arise. If advice is sought about a particular chapter or section ensure that your supervisor has been furnished with a draft copy in advance. Always try to space tutorials and amounts submitted; it is unreasonable to expect supervisors to deal effectively with thousands of words at short notice.

It is useful to use log-books to record meetings and to assess progress from week to week, for both the student and the supervisor. If for some reason you are unable to attend your meeting you should inform your supervisor as early as possible, either by leaving a note in his/her post-box or alternatively leaving a message on his/her voice-mail or e-mail.

* + 1. **Plagiarism**

To plagiarise is to pass off the thoughts, writings, and work of another as one’s own. For example, inserting extracts from a textbook into one’s essay, without acknowledging the source; buying an essay from the internet and submitting it as your own.

In academia plagiarism is a serious offence and may lead to disciplinary action, for both students and lecturers. For example, in Spring 2005 a Professor George Carney of Oklahoma State University was forbidden by his university to teach as he “stole passages from a slew of authors over the years, sometimes taking entire paragraphs word for word” (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 4th March 2005). In another high profile case in 2002 at the University of Virginia, 45 students were expelled and three had their qualifications revoked for plagiarism (details at www.cnn.com/education).

Of course, students are expected to read the ideas of others and use them in their essays. However, the work must be fully referenced.

1.4.1.1 **Safeassign**

The Department of Social Sciences commenced use of a plagiarism-detecting website in September 2005. All students will be required to submit their dissertations (and other assignments) to Safeassign which will compare your text with all pages printed on the Internet, and all other assignments submitted by students in the thousands of other colleges using Safeassign worldwide. Where substantial matches occur, a plagiarism investigation will take place. Students who author their own work and properly reference their sources will not be penalised. Where plagiarism is confirmed, a student should expect to receive zero marks for that specific piece of work. Additional penalties may also be applied.

The purpose of the Department’s plagiarism policy is not to catch students out. Rather, it is to teach you the proper academic conventions of referencing and acknowledging your sources and to ensure that the work you submit is your own.

**1.4.2 Deadlines**

It is crucial that you submit your dissertation on or before the scheduled date. Theses submitted after this date will only be accepted at the discretion of the supervisor.

**1.4.3 Assessment**

Your supervisor and another internal examiner will examine the dissertation. A selection of theses is subject to assessment by the external examiner.

**1.4.4 Confidentiality**

All names in the dissertation should be changed. No participant should be identifiable in the write-up of the dissertation. Agency details will ordinarily be changed to ensure confidentiality of the organisation.

**1.4.5 Marking format (as per DIT’s General Assessment Regulations)**

BA (Hons.) Level 8

> 70% First class honours

60 - 69% Second class honours, Upper division

50 - 59% Second class honours, Lower division

40 - 49% Pass

**1.4.6 Dissertation assessment guidelines**

Since projects vary to such an extent it is not possible to outline a single marking scheme which can be applied satisfactorily to all projects. Such a marking scheme could prove too restrictive or inadequate and there is a danger that it might be applied too rigidly. The following Guidelines are, therefore, set out to assist tutors in arriving at objective assessments of Dissertations.

1. The normal criteria against which the assessment should be made are:
2. General presentation – organisation and structure. Style. Power of expression. Illustration. Clarity. Grammar. Spelling.
3. Research – Quality and extent of research. Design. Control. Methodology. Bibliography.
4. Analysis – Treatment of the evidence. Evaluation of the results.
5. Conclusions – Merits of conclusion drawn. Discussion of findings.
6. Objectives – Extent to which objectives have been realised.
7. Recommendations – Merits of recommendations and suggestions for further study.
8. The initial assessment based on the criteria at (1) should be to determine the range of mark into which the assessment should fall e.g.

Low Pass 40% - 44%

Good Pass 45% - 49%

Low 2.2 Hons 50% - 54%

Good 2.2 Hons 55% - 59%

Low 2.1 Hons 60% - 64%

Good 2.1 Hons 65% - 69%

Hons First 1.1 70% +

A further refinement is obtained by deciding whether the mark merited by the project falls in the lower or upper part of the range.

1. To obtain 1st Class Honours a project should be exceptional, indicate fairly extensive research, ability to analyse and evaluate the results and to present the report with concrete recommendations. The stated objectives should be met and writing style should be clear with sophisticated arguments.

A project merits 2nd Class Honours when it is well organised, involves in-depth research, the data is competently organised and analysed and presentation is above average and the objective met.

A pass mark indicates that an adequate attempt has been made to gather and analyse the relevant material, that the student has an understanding of the data and makes an acceptable presentation.

In all cases it is important to bear in mind the level of student carrying out the project and that it is an undergraduate piece of work carried out as part of the final year programme of studies with the many demands on time that this entails.

**1.4.7 Guidelines for data collection**

All dissertation students are allocated a supervisor who will be able to answer any specific questions that may arise in relation to this project. Students should meet on a regular basis with their supervisor (once a week is recommended but no student should allow two weeks to pass without meaningful contact). The supervisor is there as a resource. All students should ensure to arrange a meeting within the first week of the research process. It is important to discuss the appropriateness, feasibility and ethical issues relating to the study at an early stage. There is evidence to show that those students who use the supervisory support provided are among those who get the highest grades for their dissertations.

Students are encouraged to consider a range of data collection methods such as ***observation, documentary analysis, case studies, interviews***and ***surveys.*** Choice of method should bediscussed with dissertation supervisors. The methodology used must be explained and justified in the dissertation. The methodology used must be explained and justified in the dissertation.

The following are some general guidelines:

1. Observation is a useful method for researching topics in the social sciences. It can be used as a stand alone method or in combination with other methods
2. Documentary Analysis is an examination of key reports or records related to a social care issue/practice.
3. Case Studies can be used to study an organisation, a service/programme, a client, family or an intervention. One could use an in-depth intensive study of a single case or a comparative study involving two/three cases.
4. Interviews can be used in quantitative and qualitative research. It is possible to choose to use a range of short interviews with a larger sample or to use more extended interviews with a smaller number of respondents. It may be desirable to record interviews with a tape recorder. If the interviewee agrees to being recorded you can choose to transcribe the entire interview or to type selected excerpts. Relevant extracts from the interview should be included in the findings and discussion sections of the dissertation. It is not required to submit entire interview texts but it is necessary to include the interview questions in the dissertation (these may be included in the text or as an appendix). If the interviews are not tape recorded you must devise a mechanism for capturing the data, for example by taking detailed notes or using a form of short hand.
5. Surveys can be undertaken by the use of short questionnaires which can be distributed to a reasonably large number of individuals **OR** one can use a more detailed questionnaire involving verbal or written responses distributed to a smaller number of respondents. The questionnaire must be included in the dissertation.

**1.4.8 Departmental policy on publication credit**

In the event of progressing your dissertation to an academic publication, you and your supervisor should discuss authorship as early as possible. There are various conventions and guidelines (for example, the BSA, SAI, APA, as well as guidelines in individual institutions).

The Department of Social Sciences has adopted the following policy:

* The student shall generally be the principal (first named) author.
* The substantial intellectual contribution of the supervisor should be acknowledged by listing him/her as an author.
* During the writing process student and supervisor will collaborate and agree on the final version to be submitted for consideration for publication.
* These arrangements should also apply to Conference presentations/proceedings.
* If work is published from a dissertation, it should be acknowledged that the work was undertaken while studying at DIT.
* Any exception to these arrangements should be discussed and agreed within the supervision relationship.

**1.4.9 Feedback**

If you have suggestions as to how this document might be improved in future editions please post them to Kevin.Lalor@dit.ie

##### Useful References

Barrass, R. (2005). *Students must write: A guide to better writing in course-works and examinations.* (3rd ed.)*.* London & New York: Routledge.

Bell, J. (2010). *Doing your research project: a guide for first time researchers in education, health and social science*. (5th ed.). Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Cotrell, S. (2013). *The study skills handbook.* (4th ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave.

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Murray, R. (2011). *How to write a thesis.* (3rd ed.). Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Rose, J. (2012). *The mature student’s guide to writing* (3rd ed.).Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Swetnam, D. (2009). *Writing your dissertation: How to plan, prepare, and present your work successfully*. (3rd ed.). Oxford: How to Books.

Appendix one: Sample dissertation layout structure

**TITLE OF DISSERTATION**

**Student’s name (any previous qualifications)**

Declaration of ownership: I declare that the attached work is entirely my own and that all sources have been acknowledged.

Submitted to the Department of Social Sciences, Dublin Institute of Technology, in partial fulfilment of the requirements leading to the award of [name of award].

# Word count: xxxx

Dublin Institute of Technology April, 2014

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Acknowledgements page is a means of expressing thanks to those who have assisted in the completion of the work. A common convention is to include your supervisor, other academics who may have had an input (for example, tutor), library and information services, family or other personal acknowledgements.

The acknowledgements should be fairly restrained and dignified. It is not really appropriate to refer to nights out with friends, or the support and inspiration you received from your dog!

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**LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES**

**ABSTRACT**

One page abstract.

# Use single line spacing

This should be a micro-summary, detailing nature of study, methodology and principal findings.