

Professional Skills for Global Agri-food Scientists 4

Dissertation Handbook

2022-2023

Contents

Welcome and Dissertation Overview.....	3
Course descriptor.....	3
Learning outcomes	3
Assessment Details	4
Assessment 1: The Final Dissertation Plan	4
Assessment 2: Presentation on Final Dissertation	4
Assessment 3: The Dissertation	5
The Dissertation.....	5
Requirements for your dissertation	6
Options for your dissertation.....	6
Ethical Considerations.....	6
Planning and managing your workload	7
Supervision	8
Your supervisor	8
Working with your supervisor	8
The supervisory relationship.....	9
Difficulties in the Supervisor/Student Relationship	11
Structuring the dissertation	12
The review stage	14
Writing your Dissertation.....	15
Stage 1: The first draft	15
Stage 2: Redrafting and Reviewing	15
Stage 3: Final polishing.....	16
Regulations	16
Submission of your dissertation plan, presentation and dissertation.....	17
Plagiarism.....	17
Health and Safety.....	18
Appendix A: Title Page example.....	19
Appendix B: Statement of Personal Contribution	20

Welcome and Dissertation Overview

You are now about to undertake your dissertation course, which provides you an opportunity to dedicate time to a topic that really interests you. It involves a lot of work and commitment on your part, but it can be immensely rewarding, as you will choose the topic and have the opportunity to study it in considerable depth.

The courses you have already taken provide a base from which to move into this final stage. You will receive further guidance through Semester 1 of Professional Skills 4 to help you to undertake your dissertation. This will include teaching on research methods, dissertation planning, and including issues of ethics and health and safety.

You will have a project supervisor (or supervisors) who will provide you with individually-tailored guidance and give you regular feedback on your progress. Your supervisor will help you refine your topic choice and support you throughout the research process, providing expertise relevant to your planned project. This will help you remain on track, meet your personal deadlines for the completion of each part of the research, and submit your dissertation on time. The dissertation is your project, and an opportunity to develop your own thinking and skills. It is therefore your responsibility to manage the coordination of the work, that is the design, work plans, data management plans, and scheduling of meetings with your supervisor.

Course descriptor

The dissertation course is designed to develop your analytical skills and ability to generate and/or utilise evidence relevant to Agriculture and Food Security. The dissertation project is designed to develop your understanding of the processes and planning involved in undertaking research, evidence gathering and synthesis, and to develop analytical, written and oral communication skills.

Students can choose to carry out an experimental or desk-based research project, strategic policy or business planning exercise. Depending on the format this can include: analysis of published literature; a research proposal; experimental design (where appropriate), data collection and synthesis, statistical analysis and interpretation; ethical analysis and interpretation; a review of evidence to develop policy, together with a policy position paper; a business plan in support of a new agri-food business, innovation or product; or similar projects approved by the Course Organisers. The results will be presented in the format of a dissertation, paper or similar manuscript in the style of publications in the field.

Learning outcomes

The learning outcomes for this course are:

- To demonstrate your ability to plan and organise a research experiment or study, policy or business planning exercise, and use appropriate analytical techniques
- To demonstrate the use of suitable skills to conduct the study
- To identify ethical and procedural concerns and address them
- To critically analyse their findings and report them using appropriate forms of communication and narrative.
- To communicate using oral and written skills

Assessment Details

The assessments for this course are:

- Assessment 1: Final dissertation plan (10%)
- Assessment 2: Presentation on final dissertation/report/paper (10%)
- Assessment 3: Dissertation (80%)

Assessment 1: The Final Dissertation Plan

By the end of Semester 1 you will have submitted, and received feedback on, your draft dissertation plan. Based on this draft plan and the feedback received, you will be required to submit a final dissertation plan in Week 5 of Semester 2. This assessment accounts for 10% of the marks awarded in this course.

You will be assessed on:

- Your response to feedback from your Full Dissertation Plan from Professional Skills 4.
- A clear and robust time and risk management plan for conducting your dissertation

It will also be necessary to submit completed ethical review forms as required at this time although this will not be assessed.

Assessment 2: Presentation on Final Dissertation

The oral presentation accounts for 10% of the marks awarded in this course and demonstrates your ability to communicate using oral and written skills as covered in Professional Skills 4. You will provide a 15-20 minute presentation to the class which will be assessed by the course coordinators.

You will be assessed on the delivery of a clear and informative presentation. Marks will be allocated as follows: Background (15%), Aims and Objectives (15%), Methods (15%), Results and Interpretation(20%), Clarity of Presentation (15%), Handling of Questions (20%).

Guidance on presentation writing and delivery can be found here.

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/study-hub/learning-resources/presentations>.

Assessment 3: The Dissertation

The dissertation accounts for 80 % of the total marks awarded for this course

Dissertations are expected to be between 9,000 and 11,000 words. The maximum word count of 11,000 words includes all sections of your dissertation, for example: abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, results, and discussion, but not reference lists, tables and figures, contents and title pages or appendices. Any words over this limit are penalised with a matched reduction in the total mark for each percentage over the word count. As such, exceeding the word count by 5% will result in 5% being removed from your total grade for the dissertation.

Assessment will be based on a weighted score of the different sections of your dissertation. Details of the different sections relative to the format choice are given below.

	% of total marks		
	<i>Academic style</i>	<i>with Policy Analysis/brief</i>	<i>with mini-business plan</i>
Project planning and execution	10	10	10
Title, Abstract, Introduction	10	10	10
Literature review	10	10	10
Methods	15	15	15
Results	25	20	Product description 5
Discussion	20	25	Market Research 10
			Competitor analysis 10
			Strategy 10
			Cashflow 5
			Growth plans 5
Presentation of written dissertation	10	10	10
Total	100	100	100

Two independent markers will be assigned by the course organisers.

More information about your dissertation is provided below.

The Dissertation

Within the dissertation you will have the opportunity to study in depth a topic chosen on the basis of your own interests, the staff available to supervise, and the feasibility of the topic proposed in light of the resources and time available. The dissertation is distinguishable from assessed course work by the greater depth of investigation, analysis, level of comprehension required and the critique demonstrated. A high standard of work is expected to achieve a high grade, and so for this you should anticipate producing outputs

suitable, say, for publication in peer review journals or to an equivalent professional standard that could be presented at national or international conferences.

Requirements for your dissertation

Your dissertation should be a research based project. This means it should, at the minimum, include an Abstract, Introduction, Literature Review, Methods , Results, and Discussion (including Conclusions), and References.

Options for your dissertation

Depending on you chosen topic, and your own interest, you may choose between three options for the Results and Discussion sections within your dissertation.

Option 1: Standard Academic reporting style

Option 2: Incorporating a Policy Analysis or Brief

Option 3: Incorporating a Business plan for a new product or Innovation

You are encouraged to begin to explore possible ideas for your dissertation with potential supervisors at the start of Professional Skills 4. At this time, there may be some projects for students to choose from, however, you are also encouraged to develop your own project ideas. Nothing needs to be set in stone at this stage since your choice can be revised as you proceed through the early parts of the first Semester of Professional Skills 4.

You will receive training to support your choice in Professional Skills 4. By Week 6 of Semester 1 you will be expected to have identified your final dissertation topic and chosen dissertation format with your supervisor.

As your topic develops into a research proposal, you should keep in mind that this proposal should include a plan of work that must be capable of being adequately addressed within the constraints of time and other resources which will be available to you. Be realistic about what can be done and to assess these demands against other competing calls on your professional and personal time. The normal process of deciding on a topic is one of 'progressive focusing', in partnership with your programme director/co-ordinator and your supervisor, whereby you may begin with only an outline dissertation plan, and end up with a precise plan that specifies not only the aims of the research but also the practical steps required to pursue those aims. In Semester 1 of Professional Skills 4 you will receive content to help in terms of *Planning a dissertation project, Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods, and Ethical review Processes*.

Ethical Considerations

An important part of your dissertation plan will be a consideration of ethics. If your study is based on empirical work it may involve working with animals or humans who have rights that need to be respected and defended. Consequently, approval from one of the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies ethical review committees is required prior to you conducting any research that involves the use of animals or humans, and appropriate licenses may be required. If you are doing any study that involves animals directly (videoing

and observing behaviour for example) or indirectly (using videos taken by someone else) you should fill in and get approval from the Veterinary Ethical Review Committee (VERC). If you are doing any study that involves surveying, questioning or interviewing humans (students, school children, the public in general, veterinarians etc.) then you need to fill in and get approval from the Human-subject Ethical Review Committee (HERC, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/vet/veterinary-medical-education-division/human-ethical-review-committee-herc>). The HERC committee also need to sign off any survey or questionnaire prior to you sending out to 'real' people. Obviously there could be some studies which will require approval from both committees.

Ethical review is an essential part of your dissertation plan which must not be overlooked. As such, time will be dedicated in Professional Skills 4 to guide you through what is needed. The review process may include an ethical approval form (available to download from Learn), to be completed and submitted after your proposal has approval from the programme committees. The forms must be submitted prior to end of Semester 1 and ideally before you submit your first draft dissertation plan.

Planning and managing your workload

For any extended but time-limited undertaking, it is essential to plan effectively. This involves mapping out and sequencing your activities, both as a guide to future action and as a check on the practical feasibility of your initial plans. You should establish a timetable for your research at an early stage, with milestones and checkpoints, and this plan should be practical and realistic. Establishing clear timelines for the sequencing and duration of all component tasks entailed in carrying out your research and writing up will be invaluable to delivering your final dissertation. The resulting timetable will point the way ahead, providing a template for the setting of realistic deadlines and a yardstick by which to measure your progress.

Producing a realistic timetable is a task which should not be underestimated. There is guidance for this – including planning tools such as a dissertation project planner here, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/study-hub/learning-resources/time>. It is important, not only to estimate how long the various activities will take and how much effort they will require, but also to understand which tasks depend on the successful completion of others (co-dependencies) and where any unplanned delays may occur (risks to completion). You should recognise that whatever timetable you work to, is, to some extent, provisional and will have to be implemented flexibly. You should consequently also incorporate some 'slippage time' or "slack" in your projected timetable to cover any changing circumstances or unforeseen difficulties.

You will need to plan forwards in identifying and ordering the tasks, and backwards from the due date in order to slot each of the tasks into appropriate time frames. This must be reconciled with your other personal and professional commitments, and decisions made as to how you are going to make sufficient space for the work required for your dissertation. This is likely to involve making some compromises between what you might want to do in

an ideal world, what is necessary to satisfy the assessment criteria, and what is practically manageable. While the amount of detailed planning that can be achieved prior to starting will depend somewhat on the predictability of the likely course of your research project and on your own individual circumstances, it is worth persevering and drawing up a timetable for your work as far ahead as you sensibly can. In doing this, you will also need to consider what time segments are already 'blocked out' for yourself (and your supervisor) by work and other commitments.

Discussing and drafting out a project timetable – with the assistance of your supervisor – is, in fact, often very helpful in clarifying your thinking about the key issues. It helps in evaluating the relative merits of alternative methodological approaches, obliging you to consider these in some greater depth before embarking on serious data generation. You will also need to decide what overall time balance to strike between the research and the writing aspects of the dissertation, so that the end product (the account by which your work will be judged) really can do justice to your research activities.

You should include in your timetable allowance for writing your dissertation. This writing process will differ in a number of ways from the assignments which you have submitted for your taught courses. These differences are partly due to inherent differences in length and content but also to the shift in this final stage towards more independent study and more critical thinking. Whatever process you elect, it makes very good sense to start drafting parts of your dissertation from the earliest possible stage, so that you can receive feedback and support from your supervisor on your writing style and quality. No matter how well you may have carried out the research, it is how it is reported on paper that will count in the final analysis, as it is the written dissertation that is assessed. In addition, the process of writing and interpreting your findings is also a reflective exercise, allowing you to identify issues in your analysis, which may be refined or addressed at an early enough stage to improve the quality of your research and final dissertation. It is always unsatisfactory to submit work that you knew could have been better.

Supervision

The dissertation supervisor plays an important role and it is important that students and supervisors work effectively during the dissertation project.

Your supervisor

Your supervisor will be appointed in discussion with you and, if appropriate, your course organiser. You will need to have confirmed your supervisor when you submit your draft Dissertation Plan in Professional Skills 4, although you may do this any time before that.

Working with your supervisor

It is essential that you keep in regular contact with your supervisor and make efficient use of their expertise at all stages in your research. Your supervisor has the experience to alert you to important factors to consider in your research design, and can enable you to incorporate these in sufficient time to avoid unnecessary problems arising. In particular your supervisor can help you through the process if ethical reviews are needed.

It is inherent to the nature of research that unpredictable difficulties can sometimes arise. Few are likely to prove to be insurmountable given sufficient additional thought by yourself and some well-informed advice from your supervisor.

Your supervisor can also provide you with the encouragement you may need at times when your research may not be going as smoothly or as quickly as you might have hoped. It is not unusual for even the most able of students to encounter spells where they feel insufficient progress is being made, to begin to harbour doubts about their approach, or to worry over how to interpret their data. Should you encounter any period where you think you are having significant difficulties, there are two important things to bear in mind:

- you are very far from the first person to feel this way
- most students do successfully submit their theses on time

You will need to work out with your supervisor the best way of managing your contact with each other, whether it be face-to-face or online. Simple email exchanges may work, but you shouldn't hesitate to seek out real-time chat if you feel it would help.

The importance of organising regular meetings with your supervisor, and agreeing times for you to hand in a drafts of your dissertation (or sections of it) for their comments/advice, cannot be over-emphasised. Please do not leave handing in first drafts until the last minute as a) this does not allow your supervisor enough time to read through it and b) you may not get comments back if time does not permit. Remember that your supervisor may not be available at all times due to travel, holidays, or other commitments so it is important to plan meetings and feedback in advance around such periods.

[The supervisory relationship](#)

While you have the responsibility for carrying out your research and producing the dissertation, your supervisor is there to assist you through the process: to guide you in focusing your study, to advise on relevant literature, to monitor your progress, to read and comment on drafts and, where appropriate, to advise on any ethical or safety implications.

The supervisors do not mark the dissertation. Two independent and appropriate markers will be assigned by the programme co-ordinator although the supervisor will be asked to provide comments on the student's performance during the dissertation project, which will be considered during the marking process.

The supervisor is neither expected nor allowed to comment on multiple versions of the dissertation sections. The supervisor may comment on one draft of each section of the final dissertation but is not there as a co-author and therefore should not be expected to be involved in iterative improvement of the respective sections. In addition to comment on the each section once, they are permitted to review and comment on one final version of the dissertation.

Within this, both students and supervisors have rights and responsibilities, and each pairing must establish a mutually satisfactory and effective working relationship. **Students** need to correspond with their supervisors regularly and to hand in material at agreed times.

Supervisors should respond promptly and appropriately, making constructive suggestions at each of the different stages: the outline dissertation plan, the full dissertation plan, the literature review, and the dissertation itself.

The following provides guidance on the student's role:

- It is the responsibility of the student to request supervisory meetings, and to hand in material at agreed times.
- The dissertation must be the student's own work, and he/she has the responsibility for its eventual success or failure. The supervisor's role is to guide, criticise, suggest solutions, and give encouragement. Students must be aware that criticism by a supervisor is not the same as examination of the dissertation, and approval by a supervisor does not guarantee the success of the final version. The student may accept or reject the supervisor's opinion, and in any event must take responsibility for the content and presentation of the dissertation.
- The student should feel free to bring any problem; both academic and non-academic, to the attention of the supervisor, especially if the problem is interfering with his/her work, and should also advise the Programme Coordinator. If for any reason a student feels unable to confide in his/her supervisors, he/she should see the Programme Coordinator. All staff will treat such approaches, which should be made as soon as the problem arises, with complete confidentiality
- Students should not live with a problem and expect the supervisor to notice after something has gone wrong.

It is the supervisor's role to:

- Provide guidance in focusing the study and ensuring that the work envisaged is suitable for a dissertation.
- Meet with the student online or face-to-face when appropriate (a guideline is 3-5 times over the course of the dissertation activities).
- Offer advice on relevant literature and, where appropriate, on methodology; monitor progress against an agreed plan.
- Read and comment on no more than one draft of the relevant sections as they are written, and one full draft of the final dissertation.
- Advise on ethical and safety implications of the work where relevant.

A productive relationship between student and supervisor depends on openness and trust on both sides. It usually helps if at the outset expectations are made explicit and appropriate ground rules are discussed, as this sort of clarity helps prevent any future misunderstandings. Some of the questions you may find helpful to discuss at an early stage, for example, include:

- What are your general feelings about the project and what are your initial ideas on how to tackle it - intellectually and practically? What obligations do you and your

supervisor have to each other, and what are the time and effort implications for both of you?

- How are you planning to pace your work on the dissertation and do the time frames seem sensible? What do you see as the most demanding sub-tasks that lie ahead and how does this square with your supervisor's perceptions?
- Which specific aspects of your research project is your supervisor willing and able to help with, either directly or indirectly, in what ways and to what extent?
- How does this fit with the amount and type of support you are expecting to need and hoping to get?
- How and how often do you plan to communicate?

Some difficult judgements must be made by the supervisor – not just about how much attention and assistance to offer an individual student at different times during the dissertation, but also about how to treat all students in an equitable fashion. It can also be helpful to remember that your supervisor is not your sole source of academic and personal support. Sometimes he or she will refer you to someone else in the Global Academy or elsewhere if that person is better equipped to provide with the particular information you are currently seeking. You may also have academic or professional contacts of your own that it would be sensible to capitalise on. Other people's perspectives and experience can greatly enrich your thinking. Discussions with interested colleagues can also often provide additional reassurance that your research questions are indeed relevant, that your approach is sensible, and that you are on the right track to provide information that will be useful to others in your field.

It is also worth keeping in touch with other dissertation students so that you can share experiences, talk through ideas, and identify options – either before or after consulting with your supervisor. Such discussions will not only clarify matters: they can also help put things in perspective by making it evident that your particular issues or concerns are not only being experienced by others, but may well be simply part and parcel of the challenge of doing a dissertation.

Difficulties in the Supervisor/Student Relationship

An important function of the supervisor is to provide constructive criticism. When a student is making inadequate progress, an over-friendly and uncritical attitude may delay conflict but it will not ultimately prevent it. Open discussion from the outset can reduce conflict, or prevent it arising. Supervisors may also find it helpful to record mutually agreed minutes of their discussions with their students. A supervisor who believes that progress has been consistently unsatisfactory should notify this view in writing to the student, after discussing the problem with him/her, and to the Course Organiser.

Occasionally the relationship between the student and the supervisor will break down. In such a case the parties should refer to the Course Organiser who may refer it to the Director of Teaching, Susan Jarvis, and if Susan is your supervisor, then Programme Director, Alf Gathorne-Hardy

Structuring the dissertation

Putting the right information together, in the right place, and in the right sequence, is essential. You need to be particularly alert to the fact that while you are very familiar with your research and its aims, the reader has no way of knowing what you did, with whom or why until you tell them. Each dissertation is an individual piece of work and the ways in which different students choose to write up their work varies. While many elements of your dissertation will vary depending on your chosen format and the research methodology you adopt, all dissertations should contain:

1. A title page including: Title, Author's name, Name of degree, University of Edinburgh, Year of submission. *See Appendix A*
2. A contents page (a clear and chronological list of the dissertation content with page numbers)
3. Statement of personal contribution to the dissertation. *See Appendix B*
4. Abstract
5. Introduction
6. A review of Literature
7. Methods
8. Results
9. Discussion
10. References
11. Acknowledgements (optional)

The below table outlines the content of the main dissertation sections across the three format options. Approximate suggested word counts are given **in bold**, which are appropriate for a well-balanced dissertation, although some flexibility is permitted in terms of section lengths. Remember though, that the overall word limit for the Dissertation is 11,000 (excluding reference lists, tables and figures, contents and title pages, and appendices) and penalties will be applied if this is exceeded. That is, any words over the 11,000 limit are penalised with a matched reduction in the total mark for each percentage over the word count. As such, exceeding the word count by 5%, for example, will result in 5% being removed from your total grade for the dissertation.

Dissertation Sections	Academic format	Including Policy Brief	Including mini-Business Plan
Title, Abstract (400) , Introduction (600)	The introduction should include your Aims and Objectives	The introduction should include your Aims and Objectives, including the Policy Focus	The introduction should include your Aims and Objectives, including your Business Innovation
Literature review	Should place your planned study in the context of existing studies, and convey the originality of your work (3,000)	Should place your planned study in the context of existing studies, and convey the originality of your work (3,000)	Should place your planned study in the context of existing studies, and convey the originality of your work (3,000)
Methods	Should contain a description of the methodological approach you take to acquiring data to address your aims and objectives. If a meta-analysis approach is taken this may be integrated into the Literature review. You should try to include sufficient detail that another could repeat your approach. (1,500)	Should contain a description of the methodological approach you take to acquiring data to address your aims and objectives. If a meta-analysis approach is taken this may be integrated into the Literature review. You should try to include sufficient detail that another could repeat your approach. (1,500)	Should contain a description of the methodological approach you take to acquiring data to address your aims and objectives. If a meta-analysis approach is taken this may be integrated into the Literature review. You should try to include sufficient detail that another could repeat your approach. (1,500)
Results	Should include your treatment and analysis of the data with appropriate use of graphs and tables, etc (2,500)	Should include your treatment and analysis of the data with appropriate use of graphs and tables, etc (2,000)	Should be broken down into Product Description (500) and Market Research (1,000) Sections
Discussion	Should include your synthesis and critical evaluation of your study, including the significance of your study in relation to other published material (2,000) .	Should include your synthesis and critical evaluation of your study, including the significance of your study in relation to other published material. (1,500) . Should include a dedicated Policy Brief (1,000)	Should include Competitor Analysis (750) , Strategy (750) , Growth Plans (750) , Cash Flow Projections (750) .

Statement of personal contribution: You must state which parts of the dissertation were your work, and which was the work of others or a collaboration. For example, many students have projects where some data have already been collected by someone else. This is not in itself a problem but a clear statement of contribution is required to understand this.

Formatting: adopt the following guidelines for your dissertation.

- Paper Size: A4 , double-space line interval (except for tables and figures)
- Margins: minimum 2.5, 3, 2.5 and 3 cm for top, left, bottom and right margins respectively
- Fonts: Arial (not Arial Narrow), Verdana, Calibri, Helvetica
- Font Size: No smaller than 12 pt.

Good practice general guidance for creating accessible documents can also be found here <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/help-consultancy/accessibility/creating-materials/word-documents>

References: All references cited in the text must be included in the reference list using Harvard referencing. The following link may be useful: <https://www-citethemrightonline-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/Basics>

Appendices: These may contain any work, figures, illustrations or text that is not appropriate for inclusion in the main dissertation. Students are advised to keep appendices to a minimum. This is usually where any surveys can be displayed.

The review stage

A literature review stage is an essential component of your dissertation which serves; (i) to expand your knowledge of the subject area for your dissertation topic, and, (ii) to provide a context for the reporting and discussion of your own research findings. For a research dissertation this will help you avoid duplicating others' efforts; for a business proposal it will help ensure your product is innovative and has market potential; for a policy analysis or brief it will allow you to frame your recommendations around what has been successful and unsuccessful before. As you become more familiar with what has already been produced, you will find new information, ideas and methods that will help you focus your own study and determine the detail of your chosen approach.

Since the amount, type and coherence of the pertinent literature will vary depending on your chosen area and dissertation choice, it is important to get a broad feel early on for what is available and what is not. Identifying significant gaps in knowledge and understanding in your particular area can be as important as demonstrating familiarity with published findings. You may be faced with an embarrassment of riches and have to be quite selective or, equally challenging, have to work very hard to ferret out sufficient material to put your own research into some meaningful context. Either way, you will need to be systematic and consistent in the way you conduct and record the results of your literature search.

Although the formal review comes near the beginning of a dissertation and is likely to be a relatively early undertaking, you need to remain on the lookout throughout the rest of your dissertation period for anything new that appears or which you overlooked in your initial trawl. As your research and ideas develop, you may find that shifts of focus occur, meaning that certain materials decline in significance, while others enter the frame. Remember there is inevitably going to be some fluidity over time in what constitutes 'the literature' for your dissertation topic. In view of this it may be sensible not to immerse yourself too deeply in the literature until you have a clear sense of what you want to extract from particular items and the bearing they will have on your own research efforts. Always keep your specific topic in clear focus and be realistic about how deeply you immerse yourself in the literature at this level of study. Remember that your review needs to be in proportion to the rest of your dissertation. That is, typically between about 2,500 and 3,500 words (not including reference list).

Guidance on how to conduct effective literature searches, and on the various tools which you can use to help you may be found here, <https://edinburgh-uk.libguides.com/vet>.

Writing your Dissertation

General guidance on the process of writing a dissertation – from first draft to final draft – may be found here, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/study-hub/learning-resources/dissertations>.

There is no one method of writing up that works for everyone - if you have evolved a successful way of writing assignments - it should be possible for you to adapt this for your dissertation. If so, it might be helpful to reflect on how successful you think your procedure for writing assignments was and what might need to change when writing at a greater depth and length.

As a general rule, it is important to start writing early. Leaving all of the writing until the end of your data collection and analysis can produce unnecessary stresses. Writing is an inherently iterative process, with initial drafts usually substantively improved in subsequent revisions. By starting early, this iterative process is allowed to run its natural course.

Stage 1: The first draft

Your first draft is generally about getting words on the page.

You may start, for example, by sketching out your first thoughts and arguments, and a potential structure. You could create an outline or a flow diagram by writing a list of your main ideas and then adding details such as supporting and contradictory evidence to each of these. You could then use this to check you are focussed on the right topics and questions.

There is no rule that you must draft the sections in your dissertation in the order in which they will appear in your final dissertation. You could, alternatively, begin by writing your research design and methodology. This can also be a good place to begin your writing because it should be familiar and factual, and provide the foundation for any discussion and interpretation requiring deeper thought. The same applies for the literature, although the emphasis placed on particular elements might well shift as you proceed with data analysis and interpretation.

In the earlier stages, your draft may consist of no more than bullet points and comments and disconnected rather than polished text. These will likely need expanding, cutting down or repositioning later, but it's helpful to start building up the component parts of the dissertation early to leave enough time to review and refine later.

This is also a good time to fix your format requirements (e.g. page layouts, references) as it can be frustrating to have to fix these at the last minute prior to submission.

Stage 2: Redrafting and Reviewing

You should allow a generous amount for this stage.

Redrafting is where you expand and refine your ideas and argument. As you are writing the direction of your arguments may change. For example, this could be due to your literature research producing new avenues of thought or your experiments turning up unexpected results. This is a good time to review your initial research questions and whether your arguments or conclusions are still sensible.

Reviewing is where you check all relevant material is included and expressed appropriately. Many students spend insufficient time reviewing and editing their dissertation. Compiling a check-list can be helpful, covering for example, structure, coherence, content, consistency of style, text formatting, and citations and references.

In working up your draft sections you need to switch from the writer's perspective and remember that it needs to make sense to a first-time reader. As the first objective readers, examiners will be checking out the presentational aspects of the dissertation, the structure and relevance of the content, the way the research is integrated into the account and the soundness of the arguments. You should therefore also bear in mind the assessment criteria which will be applied.

Please remember that your supervisor is not allowed to read several drafts of the same section.

Stage 3: Final polishing

It is equally important to make sure that you allow sufficient time in the final stages to proof read your material. You should also check that your presentation, spelling and grammar are appropriate and polished, all your references are included, and you are following the appropriate format guidance. Guidance on proof-reading and editing is provided here, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/study-hub/learning-resources/editing-and-proofreading>.

Typographical errors are easily missed and can make an otherwise perfectly clear sentence into one that is impossible to follow, as well as putting off an otherwise enthusiastic reader. Although spelling and grammar checkers on word processors can assist the proof-reading process, you need to be aware of their limitations and check very carefully those points they do not cover.

Please note that, although your supervisor may review one full draft of your dissertation, it is not their responsibility to proof-read it.

Regulations

The following offers a summary of the key regulations – for the complete list, please refer here: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/policies-regulations/new-policies>.

Submission of your dissertation plan, presentation and dissertation

The Dissertation plan should be submitted via Turnitin in the Learn course by noon on Tuesday 14th February. Feedback by Monday 27th February.

The Dissertation presentation to be submitted via Turnitin by 0900 on Thursday 4th May and delivered on that day to the fellow students and staff. Feedback by Monday 8th May.

The final Dissertation is to be submitted via Turnitin in the Learn Course by noon on Thursday 11th May.

Plagiarism

Cheating and plagiarism, which is a form of cheating, are academic offences. Plagiarism can be defined as the act of including or copying into one's own work, without adequate acknowledgement, the work of another. Plagiarism attacks the fundamental principles of scholarship, and the foundations upon which the academic community rests, in denying appropriate credit to the author of the work copied and seeking to secure it for oneself. Plagiarism could also involve the civil wrong of breach of copyright.

Whilst it is perfectly normal in most academic disciplines to make use of another person's ideas and to take factual information from books and articles, the overall structure of the argument being presented, the weighing of the significance of the different points being made, and the final conclusion reached in response to the question posed are all expected to be the student's personal and original work.

All work submitted for assessment by students is accepted on the understanding that it is the student's own unassisted effort. Students are expected to offer their own analysis and presentation of information gleaned from research, even when group exercises are carried out.

The innocent misuse or citation of material without proper acknowledgement can constitute plagiarism without the presence of a deliberate intent to cheat. Examples of plagiarism include: using another person's written work with or without permission; buying or being allowed to copy another person's essay or dissertation; presenting as if they were your own sentences, paragraphs or pages from a paper, book or other published (including electronically published) source; paraphrasing an argument or section of published work without proper acknowledgement of the source; passing off as your own an entire work, or significant part of a work, written by another.

Plagiarism is a serious disciplinary offence. Any failure to adequately acknowledge or properly reference other sources in submitted work could lead to lower marks, or to a mark of zero being returned, or to disciplinary action being taken, which in turn could lead to temporary suspension or permanent expulsion from the University.

Proven plagiarism will seriously harm a student's standing and the action taken by the University will be permanently noted on the student's record.

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/students/conduct/academic-misconduct/plagiarism>

Health and Safety

The Health and Safety at Work Act places upon the University a duty to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of all employees and students whilst at work, and of all visitors to University premises. The University Safety Handbook contains the University Court's Safety Policy Statement, and advice on general precautions as well as on precautions with particular hazards. The successful implementation of the University Policy requires the full support and active co-operation of all employees and students. The Handbook also contains a summary of the scheme of enforcement of the Act, including the fact that the Health and Safety Executive can bring criminal proceedings against the University or any individual for a breach of any duty under the Act. It is necessary for all students to read carefully. Students will be asked to submit a Health and Safety Declaration form when submitting their Dissertation Plan to confirm in writing that they have understood the material handed to them concerning safety matters.

Appendix A: Title Page example

[Title of thesis]

[Exam Number]

Agricultural Science (Global Agriculture and Food Security)



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Global Academy of
Agriculture and Food Systems

Global Academy of Agriculture and Food Systems

University of Edinburgh

[Year of submission]

Appendix B: Statement of Personal Contribution

(to be included immediately after Contents section)

I confirm that all this work is **my own** except where indicated, and that:

1. I have read and understood the University's regulations in relation to academic misconduct (<https://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/policies-regulations/regulations/assessment>);
2. I have clearly referenced/listed all sources as appropriate;
3. I have referenced and appropriately indicated all quoted text (from books, web, etc), making appropriate use of quotation marks;
4. I have given the sources of all pictures, data, etc., that are not my own;
5. I have not made any use of the course work assessment material of any other student(s) either past or present, or colluded with others;
6. I have not submitted for assessment work previously submitted for this or any other course, degree or qualification, with the exception of materials from my Dissertation Plans and Literature reviews submitted in Professional Skills 4 and this course.
7. I have not incorporated any work from or used the help of any external professional agencies, including essay mills, other than extracts from attributed sources and proof-reading agencies whose services comply with University Regulations;
8. I have acknowledged in appropriate places any help that I have received from others (e.g. fellow students, teachers in schools, external sources);
9. I have complied with any other requirements specified in the course and programme handbooks;
10. I understand that the University of Edinburgh and TurnitinUK may make an electronic copy of my submitted work for assessment, similarity reporting and archiving purposes;
11. I understand that any false claim for any of the above will mean that the relevant piece of work will be penalised in accordance with the University regulations.