Dissertations: getting started

Student & Library Services
Learning outcomes

By the end of this workshop you should be able to:

• Understand the key aspects of preparing for a dissertation or project

• Identify issues to consider in your planning, organisation of work and time management

This workshop is intended to help you get started and plan your dissertation.
Why is this important to you?

• Personal satisfaction
• Demonstrate academic abilities and expertise
• Improve employment prospects
• Lead on to further study
• Impress family and friends
What have you been asked to do?

Whether it is called a dissertation, final project or improvement plan

Start by checking the requirements for:

- Format and word count
- Supervision
- Primary research / literature review
- Ethics
- Deadline and submission
How will you do it?

Planning your dissertation
Important stages

• Choose a topic
• Create your plan
• Conduct research / literature review
• Write it up
Choose a topic

- Specific and realistic
- Personal ability and interest

- Think of it as a question – What are you trying to prove or investigate?
What goes into a dissertation?

- **Abstract** – summary
- **Introduction** – aim; overview of literature; Why are you researching this topic?
- **Literature review** – key points, background & context
- **Methodology** – Why is it appropriate? How did you do it?
- **Results** – analysis and critical appraisal of data
- **Discussion** - What is your evidence? Strengths & weaknesses
- **Conclusion** - What did you learn? Future recommendations
- **References**
**Where to start?**

Don’t start at the beginning. You can not introduce something that you haven’t written yet.

**Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature review</th>
<th>Findings/Data analysis</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(3000 words)</td>
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Literature review

• Background for your research
• Key issues, key writers, current context, theories and terminology
• Ideas on how your work extends, challenges, fills a gap
• How has it been researched before?
• What methods have been used and were they effective?

• Succeed@Tees workshop on Writing a Literature Review
Plan your search strategy

• Saves you time
• Helps you to keep track of your searches
• Allows you to search the same way in many sources – consistency
• Allows you to piece together more relevant results
• Structured searches – PIO, PICO
Start organising your ideas early

Group your topic areas –

• develop themes
• similarities and common issues
• differences or contradictions
• reorganise if necessary
When will you write it up?

- When is your hand in date? Work backwards
- Don't think of it as 10,000 words - break it down
- Be realistic – How long does it usually take you?
- Life doesn’t stop – make allowances for all elements of your life
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>November</th>
<th>December</th>
<th>January</th>
<th>February</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Group presentation</td>
<td>25&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Christmas</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; – New year’s Day</td>
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<td></td>
<td>31&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; - New Year’s Eve</td>
<td>15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Essay deadline</td>
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<td>28&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; – Report deadline</td>
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<td>30&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; – Practical exam</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; – Birthday</td>
<td></td>
<td>21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; - Hand in date for dissertation!!</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;- 16&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;- 21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; – Weekend away</td>
<td></td>
<td>Exam revision Assignment deadline</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Assignment deadline
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
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</table>
| November  | Literature searching  
16th - Group presentation                                                  |
| December  | Write literature review  
25th - Christmas  
31st - New Year’s Eve                                                  |
| January   | Do primary research  
1st – New year’s Day  
15th - Essay deadline  
28th – Report deadline  
30th – Practical exam                                                   |
| February  | Write primary research findings/ discussion chapter                     |
| March     | Write methodology chapter  
18th – Birthday  
19th- 21st – Weekend away                                                |
| April     | Write Introduction and Conclusion                                       |
| May       | Proofread final draft  
21st - Hand in date for dissertation!!  
Exam revision  
Assignment deadline                                                     |
| June      | 1st- 16th - Exams                                                       |
Working smart

- Set up accounts and alerts
  - http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/up_to_date

- RefWorks
  - http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/refworks

- Resources from other libraries
  - http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/ILL
Keep calm and carry on

• Celebrate when you tick something off your list
• Do something rather than nothing
• Ask for help if you’re struggling
Other resources


• Academic Phrasebank - [http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk](http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk)

• **Succeed@Tees** LibGuides  
  [http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/literature_search](http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/literature_search)  
  [http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/literature_review](http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/literature_review)
More help

Remember lots of help is available:

• Your supervisor
• Academic Library team
• Learning Hub and Succeed@Tees
• Student Support teams
This workshop is part of the Succeed@Tees programme