

Dissertation Support Sheets

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Tip: In our handouts we use **QR codes**. These small boxes are **short cuts** to **websites** and can be scanned with your mobile phone or tablet camera; you may have to **download a free app** to do this.



Finding A Viable Topic

Think about the following:

1. Is there current research and information available?
2. Is there a topic, which interests you?
3. Is the topic achievable within the time frame?

Many students choose inappropriate subjects about which there is little research or information, or select areas that are too general to investigate in any depth.

Try to state your topic as a question:

'To what extent do on-line retail websites offer after sales service?'

This will enable you to identify the key words and focus of your topic. Test the key words or concepts by looking them up in the appropriate background sources.

Initially refer to your [subject guides](#) on the library website.

<https://tinyurl.com/y6uzkbnr>



Or use the library's [Discover](#) search engine:

<https://tinyurl.com/ydfcy6ee>



Use the internet to:

1. Help you select a topic
2. Find and evaluate resources
3. Guide you through the research process
4. Find material using key words or concepts as search terms

Tip: if you use Google scholar (<http://scholar.google.co.uk/>) the results will show peer reviewed journal articles, books and websites that are more reliable, than the results using the standard Google search.

University of Newcastle
Dissertation Guide
<http://libguides.ncl.ac.uk/dissertations>

University of North Carolina
Writing Centre
<https://tinyurl.com/y9ez5ete>



Dr Levine's Dissertation
Writing Website (English, Spanish,
Arabic, Portuguese)
<https://tinyurl.com/5c8ryb>



However, if you find too much information and too many sources, you may need to narrow your topic.

For help contact Your Librarian at
<https://tinyurl.com/y6uzkbnr>



Dissertation Structure

Dissertations are usually structured in numbered sections, under the following subheadings:

1. Abstract
2. Introduction
3. Literature Review
4. Methodology
5. Findings (Analysis)
6. Discussion
7. Conclusions (Recommendations)
8. References
9. Appendix

Abstract

Gives an overview of the whole dissertation; summarises the aims, key findings and conclusions. Usually two paragraphs and best written on completion of the dissertation.

Introduction

1. Background to study
2. Rationale of study
3. Aims and objectives

YOU MIGHT ALSO OUTLINE

1. The hypothesis to be addressed
2. The problem/issues to be considered
3. How the dissertation is structured

TIP

- A. **Not all** dissertations involve **primary research** (collecting data through interviews, tests or lab work), **but all** will require a **literature review**
- B. In **some dissertations** the **introduction** and **literature review** are **combined**, because the main focus is the primary research/investigation

Literature Review

1. Outlines relevant literature
2. Discusses findings, proposals and developments in detail
3. Compares findings from literature
4. Comments and interprets findings
5. Directs the reader to the issues to be considered
6. Links to the primary research, if undertaken

Methodology

1. Explains and justifies the study design
2. Cross references to the relevant literature
3. Describes in detail how the study was conducted
4. Includes any problems or limitations

Findings

1. Details and explains findings from primary research
2. May include graphs/tables etc.

Discussion

THIS IS WHERE YOU ARE EXPECTED TO **DEMONSTRATE YOUR ANALYTICAL SKILLS AND CAN ACCOUNT FOR 25% OF THE MARKS.**

Tips for Your Discussion

If you have carried out **primary** and **secondary** research, you must:

1. Analyse the results of your primary research
2. Compare these with those from the literature
3. Identify areas of agreement / disagreement
4. Identify emerging topics / issues of interest
5. Consider implications and application of research

If undertaking **only literature review**:

1. Analyse and compare findings from different chapters
2. Comment on and interpret these findings
3. Consider the implications and applications of the literature to your understanding of the topic

Depending on the **nature** of your study you might also consider:

1. Implications for future practice
2. Possible modifications
3. Possible areas for future research

Conclusions/Recommendations

This section should **not** introduce new information or evidence but summarise the information and findings of the study. If appropriate, recommendations for the organisation, for future development or implications for future practice, based on the conclusions, can be made here.

Appendices

The appendices are used for information not directly required in the main sections. For example, in constructing a questionnaire you may wish to include this in the appendix. Anything included in the appendix must be appropriately labelled and referred to in the study.

Bibliographic References

A list of all sources used – commonly Harvard Referencing; **but please check your module guidelines on My Caledonian**:

- Breach, M (2009) Dissertation writing for engineers and scientists Harlow. Pearson/Prentice Hall (on order)
- Dawson, C W (2005) Projects in computing and information systems : a student's guide Harlow. Pearson Education Ltd.
- McMillan, K. (2011) How to write dissertations & projects reports Harlow: Pearson/Prentice Hall
- Naom , S. G. (2007)Dissertation Research and Writing for Construction Students. Oxford. Butterworth-Heinemann

How to Approach a Literature Review

- First select your source material.
- Read abstracts to identify relevant research before accessing full text.
- Make sure you accurately record the title, author, publisher and date of all print sources used.
- Create a source bank on disc or memory stick of quotes/ notes taken from texts, together with source details. These can be stored and then later used as required. Remember if using other peoples' ideas you must acknowledge them in the text (Dallores 2006) even if you have used your own words.
- Read through the material, highlighting or noting down main research findings and conclusions.
- Try to organise the information under topic areas or headings, collating research on similar areas together.
- Alternatively organise the information in chronological order as this may show how research has developed over time.
- The important thing is to show evidence of reading across the subject noting any contrasts, similarities or developments in this field of study.
- To start writing you could give an overview of the topic. This can take the form of a definition or explanation, which leads the reader into the key issues.

How to Approach the Methodology

The methodology section should tell the reader

1. Exactly what was carried out
2. How the methodology was carried out
3. Why this approach was chosen
4. With whom the study was conducted
5. The instrumentation used
6. The type of data: how it was collected and collated

This should be detailed in such a way that the research method can be replicated and validated.

TYPICAL SUB HEADINGS MIGHT INCLUDE:

RESEARCH DESIGN

Explain and justify research protocols, philosophy, approach and study design. Use literature on how to undertake research to support approach taken.

ETHICS

Detail how permission to carry out the study was gained; consider issues of data protection, consent and confidentiality.

SUBJECTS

State who the subjects were and how they were selected. Detail selection criteria such as age, gender, ethnicity, medical conditions (as appropriate).

INSTRUMENTATION

Detail what instruments were used to carry out the study; cross reference to the literature to explain validity and reliability of instrumentation. If a questionnaire, survey or restricted response questions were used, describe and justify construction.

PILOT STUDY

Used to test the validity and viability of proposed instrumentation Outline what the pilot showed and whether any changes were made.

PROCEDURES

Describe how the study was carried out in sufficient detail that it could be reproduced if necessary. If the procedure is based on the work of other research, state this.

REPRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Detail how your findings will be analysed and presented in terms of charts, graphs, percentages etc. Detail what software, statistical analyses were used.

EXAMPLE OF DISSERTATION MARKING SCHEME

AREA OF ASSESSMENT UNDERGRADUATE	AREA OF ASSESSMENT POSTGRADUATE	POSSIBLE MAXIMUM MARK	
		Undergraduate	Postgraduate
<p>Abstract</p> <p>Succinct, covers all points, clear and well written statement of the study.</p>	<p>Abstract</p> <p>Clarity of objectives and clear identification of problem, issues or hypothesis addressed, summary of findings and conclusion</p>	5%	5%
<p>Introduction & Literature Review</p> <p>Sets the scene with clear achievable aims and objectives. Wide ranging synthesis of the literature.</p>	<p>Introduction & Literature Review</p> <p>In-depth synthesis of literature , demonstrating clear understanding of existing scholarship and debates. Clear justification regarding the position of work in relation to previous research</p>	20%	20%
<p>Research Methodology & Data Collection</p> <p>Defines and expands on the Who, What, Why, Where and How with methodology and theory. Systematic, precise and relevant data collection.</p>	<p>Research Methodology & Data Collection</p> <p>Well defined research methodology with robust justification. Systematic and relevant data collection.</p>	20%	25%

<p>Analysis and Discussion of Information & Data Collection</p> <p>Significant and substantial discussion and analysis of the data relative to the size and degree of difficulty of the problem.</p>	<p>Analysis and Discussion of Information & Data Collection</p> <p>Excellent analysis with judgement based on evidence. Significant and substantial relative to the size and degree of difficulty. Novelty and uniqueness.</p>	25%	25%
<p>Conclusions, Recommendations & Reflection</p> <p>Robust set of conclusions which are linked back to the original aims and objectives. Imaginative recommendations which inform policy or further research.</p>	<p>Conclusions, Recommendations & Reflection</p> <p>Incisive/weighted conclusions. Some conclusions demonstrate original thought supported by analysis. Recommendations inform policy.</p>	15%	15%
<p>Structure, Presentation, Grammar & Use of Referencing</p> <p>Logical and well presented. High precision formatting and appropriate use of diagrams. Wide ranging references with follow precisely referencing conventions.</p>	<p>Structure, Presentation, Grammar & Use of Referencing</p> <p>Lucid and high precision. Excellent use of diagrams. Appropriate use of appendices. Excellent use of referencing conventions.</p>	15%	10%
<p>Total</p>	<p>Total</p>	100%	100%