

# Skills for Learning

## Guide to Planning Your Dissertation

### What is a Dissertation?

A dissertation often has a greater word count than an academic report or essay and so requires more extensive research and reading. A dissertation is a project that gives you the opportunity to study a topic that interests you and enables you to develop and demonstrate skills that potential employers and university admissions particularly value. This includes time management, critical thinking and written communication skills.

There are two main types of dissertation: one involving **primary research** where you gather original data of your own, and another involving **secondary research** where you gather and analyse existing research.

A dissertation project typically contains the following sections:

1. Title
2. Contents
3. Abstract
4. Introduction
5. Main section (this may be further divided into areas such as literature review, methodology, results and discussion)
6. Conclusion
7. Recommendations
8. References
9. Appendices

### Planning

Before you begin planning for your dissertation, make sure that you have considered:

- Your research question.
- How your topic will contribute to existing research.
- The time frame for the dissertation as well as the submission date and word count.

- The format and submission date for the dissertation proposal (if required).
- The presentation and formatting guidelines as laid out in your module guidance on Canvas.
- What level of support your dissertation supervisor can provide from the initial dissertation planning through to project completion.
- Any ethical issues you may encounter which is particularly applicable if you are conducting primary data – you may need ethical clearance for certain topics.
- The potential workload.
- Having a project schedule which will enable you to track your progress.

## Choosing Your Topic

You may seek inspiration for a topic based on a current news event or trends in your subject area or something applicable to a placement or job role. Whatever topic you ultimately settle on, ensure it will sustain your interest and that it can be completed within the deadlines. Consider the following questions when thinking about a topic:

- Is the research topic well defined and can it be completed within the word count and deadlines set?
- Is your overall aim for the dissertation clear?
- Is your approach to the topic appropriate?
- Is the subject interesting to you?



### Cite this work:

Skills for Learning (2024) *Guide to Planning Your Dissertation*. Available at: <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/skills> (Accessed: give date accessed)

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