

School of Environment, Education & Development

GDI Dissertation Handbook

Taught Masters programmes in 2020-21:

Notes of guidance on dissertation preparation and submission

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1. Introduction

Students on all taught Masters programmes within the School of Environment, Education and Development are required to submit a dissertation, on a topic approved by the Programme Director. Dissertations should contain an element of original research which may be achieved through reflection and reading as well as through the collection of primary or secondary data. They contribute a third of a programme's assessment (60 credits of 180 for a Masters programme) and must be submitted in September of the final year of study (or December for part-time, on-campus students).

Students are free to consider a wide range of topics, subject to approval on the basis of the focus for their Masters programme, the feasibility of the topic within the timescale of the programme, and the extent to which the topic supplements and extends knowledge gained from following the particular programme of study.

These guidelines have been produced to help you with the process of preparing and completing a dissertation. The document sets out the initial objectives and requirements of the dissertation, advises on dissertation preparation, outlines formatting and submission arrangements, and details the assessment criteria. You should use it as an aide memoire alongside your Programme Handbook and the advice of your supervisor.

1.1 Aims of the Dissertation

The overall aims of postgraduate dissertations are to:

- provide students with an opportunity to plan, manage and conduct a programme of research on a topic related to their programme of studies;
- further students' knowledge of a relevant body of literature, and develop powers of critical reasoning;
- allow students to seek new research findings which add to the existing body of knowledge on a particular subject area (noting the majority of dissertations do not involve primary data collection but review or reinterpretation of materials already available);
- develop fully students' knowledge of, and competence in, an appropriate range of research methods, including the development of a focal question or hypothesis, an appreciation of the research methodology and analytical techniques to be utilised, the undertaking of a specific research study, the synthesis and evaluation of findings, and a clear statement of conclusions and recommendations;
- develop students' writing, presentation and bibliographic skills; and
- develop students' experience of developing and managing a specific programme of work through to final submission.

In addition and complementary to those above, the aims of the dissertation are to:

- enable students to demonstrate their understanding of different theoretical perspectives and to assess critically the relevance of their application to a relevant problem;
- develop students' ability to apply critically different analytical techniques and methods that are relevant to their dissertation topic; and
- provide the opportunity to demonstrate the capacity for independent, self-managed learning.

Objectives

On completing the dissertation, students should be better equipped to:

- Conduct literature reviews and secondary research using a range of bibliographic techniques and sources, including those available through the world-wide web.
- Analyse and synthesise relevant concepts and methods, and apply these to a relevant problem.
- Where appropriate and feasible, conduct small-scale primary research activities.
- Manage their own work and learning processes in relation to a research project that can be completed in three months.
- Produce a dissertation conforming to the conventions of academic writing.

1.2 Dissertation Requirements

Dissertation word length

- GDI students should submit a dissertation of 12,000-15,000 words (plus or minus 10%) in length.
- The word count **includes** chapter footnotes and endnotes.
- The word count **does not include** references, interview transcripts and abstracts; however no more than five pages of appendices are permitted.
- Ideally you should aim for 15,000 words plus or minus 10%. Your supervisor will guide you and ensure you are clear on word length requirements and potential implications.

Consequences of submitting a dissertation which has fewer than 10,800 words

Dissertations of fewer than 10,800 words (12,000 - 10%) will not be marked.

This means that you will be required to resubmit your dissertation and your subsequent mark will be capped at a maximum of 40%.

Consequences of submitting a dissertation which has more than 16,500 words

Dissertations which are longer than 16,500 words (15,000 + 10%) will not be marked.

This means that you will be required to resubmit your dissertation and your subsequent mark will be capped at a maximum of 40%.

1.3 Submission Arrangements

You must submit your final dissertation via Blackboard no later than 2 pm on Wednesday, 1 September 2021 (or by Monday, 6 December 2021 for second year part-time students). (Details of dissertation submission procedures will be circulated at a later date). Please see section 3 for more details.

Please be warned that GDI **does not** grant extensions for dissertations. The submission of the dissertation marks the completion of your degree, and we need the time following the deadline in order to mark, second mark, review and process your grades in time for the Exam Board in November and your graduation in December. As with coursework assessment, the Mitigating Circumstances mechanism also applies to dissertations. Any student who considers that their dissertation may be delayed due to 'unforeseen' and 'unpreventable' circumstances should submit a Mitigating Circumstances application (<https://www.seed.manchester.ac.uk/student-intranet/postgraduate/postgraduate-taught/mitigating-circumstances/>), along with supporting documentation.

All work to be considered under Mitigating Circumstances should be submitted as soon as is practicable but note that any work submitted after the end of September may be too late to be marked and considered in time for December graduation.

Any dissertations submitted after the deadline without approved mitigating circumstances can only receive a maximum mark of 40%. It is particularly important to note that any dissertations handed in late and without approved mitigating circumstances will receive a late penalty deduction of 10 marks per 24 hour period or part 24 hour period. If the penalty deduction reduces the original mark below 50% then this will normally be treated as a re-sit. This means that the mark maximum of '40R' will be recorded

Where relevant, students should alert their supervisor to any extenuating circumstances well in advance of the submission deadline.

Students who do not submit a dissertation will normally be awarded a Diploma qualification if they have met all the other requirements of their programme. Students who fail the dissertation with a mark below 50% but higher than 30% (30-49) will be granted one opportunity to resubmit. Students who fail the dissertation with a mark below 30% will not be permitted to resubmit.¹

1.4 Assessment Arrangements

Once submitted, dissertations are assessed and the marking moderated by a minimum of two internal examiners. A sample of dissertations is sent to the relevant external examiner for the programme, who validates standards. Final marks are confirmed by the Board of Examiners, which meets in mid-November. A full explanation of the assessment criteria for the dissertation is set out in Section 4.

1.5 Further Reading

There is an extensive range of reading material associated with dissertation preparation and research methods, and specific reading may be distributed by programme directors as appropriate. Some generic texts include:

Guidance on Postgraduate Dissertation-Type Research

- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2016) *Research Methods for Business Students, 7th Edition*, Pearson, Harlow.
- Collis, J. & Hussey, R. (2014) *Business Research: A Practical Guide for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students*, 4th Edition, Palgrave Macmillan, London
- Walliman, N. (2011) *Your Research Project: A Step-by-Step Guide for the First Time Researcher*, 3rd Edition, Sage, London
- Allan, G. & Skinner, C. (2007) *Handbook for Research Students in the Social Sciences*, The Falmer Press, London
- Bell, J. (2005) *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-Time Researchers in Education, Health and Social Science*. Open University Press, Maidenhead

Developing/Transitional Country-Based Research

- Lunn, J. (2014) *Fieldwork in the Global South*, Routledge, London
- Barrett, C. & Cason, J. (2010) *Overseas Research: A Practical Guide*, Routledge, London
- Sumner, A. and Tribe, M. (2008) *International Development Studies: Theories and Methods in Research and Practice*, Sage, London
- Scheyvens, R. & Storey, D. (eds) (2003) *Development Fieldwork: A Practical Guide*, Sage, London

¹ Students on Distance Learning Programmes under the pre-September 2016 PGT Degree Regulations will be subject to different regulations. Your Distance Learning Programme Administrator can provide further details.

2. Dissertation Preparation

This section offers some pointers on drafting postgraduate dissertations. It contains important information relating to the initial process of preparation and the structure of the final dissertation.

The timetable for dissertation topic selection, supervisory discussions, and submission is provided in Appendix 1.

2.1 Choosing a Dissertation Topic

It is important that you begin the process of choosing a topic as soon as possible. There are, of course, no hard-and-fast rules on how to choose a dissertation topic. However, a sensible approach is to identify a broad area of study – for example, related to one of your lecture courses – but then to narrow this down to a set of more focused research questions or hypotheses. It is important that you avoid vague and over-generalised topics. Proposals for studies like ‘something on sustainability’ or ‘something on East Africa’ are insufficiently well-focused. Try to avoid something as vague as ‘mining in Latin America’, and instead choose something tighter and more focused, like ‘leading organisational change in public sector institutions in Oman’.

You must select a topic which interests you and will retain your enthusiasm for many months, but also one which is practicable within the available time. This seems an obvious point to make, but one which nevertheless is often overlooked as students select topics which they think will appeal to potential supervisors, but which are of little personal interest. Such an approach is rarely successful since any topic must be of sufficient interest to retain your attention for several months.

In the initial stages, it is likely that some of you will have difficulty in selecting a topic. For initial ideas, it is often useful to consider:

- Recent academic journal publications to gain an idea of broad fields of contemporary research interest. In addition, trade or practice journals contain stories on areas of current professional interest, some of which may offer potential for more detailed investigation. Likewise, newspaper stories might stimulate initial ideas, though journalistic writing will need to be translated into suitably robust academic questions and hypotheses.
- Current problems in a current/past organisation, or topics that relate to current job/career priorities.
- Expressions of need by practitioners – e.g. engineers and managers in the field.
- Consult authorities in the field, and be aware of the interests of your lecturers by looking at their on-line research profiles.

Also bear in mind that a topic should have an element of novelty - and does not simply repeat what has been done before. It is also important that the topic should be feasible: matching your capabilities; matching your motivations/interests; data you need should be accessible; and it can be achieved within the time available.

2.2 Submitting Dissertation Topic Suggestions

You are required to indicate your proposed dissertation topic using the online **Dissertation Planning Form**. A link to the form will be made available in mid-January and you should complete the online form no later than mid-February: see Appendix 1. You should note that:

- Topic suggestions are indicative only, and used principally to inform the allocation of supervisors.
- It is possible for you to amend dissertation topics/titles, but you must confirm a final, formal title (see section 2.3 below).
- You need not, at the initial stage, agonise unduly about the precise title for the dissertation; the

topic is of greater importance. Again, the final title, when it has been agreed, needs to be concise.

- You will not be permitted to conduct primary research in countries or areas deemed too risky (after you have completed the risk assessment with your supervisor), and which are thus not covered by University of Manchester insurance.
- You will not be permitted to do primary research with minors, the sick, vulnerable or incarcerated or with any other human groups where ethical consent is problematic, because it is not possible to provide formal Ethical Consent, for these groups, within the timeframe of an MA or MSc.
- Even where primary research is not being conducted with the aforementioned groups, some procedures of research will also not be permitted for ethical reasons. This would include, although this is not exhaustive, investigative procedures involving subterfuge; undisclosed participant observation; and interviewing in non-public spaces. See also Appendices 4 and 7.

Many dissertations do not involve primary research or data collection, and finished work is not penalised for not including these. Similarly, the vast majority of dissertations do not include original or novel 'discoveries'. In other words, you should feel reassured that some of our best dissertations are those which correctly review current literature and secondary data, and reinterpret these in a professional and insightful way.

Some students will want to do primary research, and they are welcome to do so subject to their supervisor and Programme Director's approval of their title, methods and ethical statement (see Sections 2.6 & 2.7). Getting the approvals from the requisite committees takes time and organisation and will have to begin as early as possible. Also be warned that the concerns of a current or previous job or your longstanding commitment to a project or community are not necessarily the best topics for a dissertation. There can be hidden hazards in doing research 'close to home', which may involve your relatives, friends, or people to whom you otherwise have a responsibility, involving what ethics committees term 'coercion' – people may feel obliged to answer your questions; let alone bias – people may tell you what they think you want to hear based on their prior knowledge of you.

2.3 Keeping on Top of the Dissertation Process

Planning ahead

When you are planning your schedule, please do remember that your own time and application is only one of the determining factors. You need to take into account your supervisor's time as well as your own when you are estimating overall time needed. Data collection always takes longer than you expect, as does, for example, the writing of a literature review, and even the completion of your reference list. Given your overall timing constraints, this may require that you find more time than you initially anticipated from your weekly schedule to devote to your dissertation.

Organising and backing up your work

Organising your work is of key importance. You should build up separate reference files of material as the study develops including notes of all documents read, and copies of particularly useful papers or diagrams, and notes of all meetings and discussions. Ensure that all references are complete, using the Harvard System. Allow time for the development of ideas and arguments through revision and redrafting and full discussions of each section of study. Preparing summaries of each section as part of the drafts can help you achieve this.

Remember to make back-up copies of your work. There is no excuse for not backing-up your files. This can be done using your P: drive, cloud-based services, a CD/DVD, or a USB memory stick. If you have a PC or laptop, back up copies using some of these alternatives. Note that any such 'disasters' of lost work will not justify late submission. Make sure you leave plenty of time to proof read work, format the layout, and chase-up any remaining references; these tasks invariably take much longer than you expect.

The writing process

A golden rule is to write down as much as you can from as early on as you can – and your task will become easier. There are several good reasons for this advice. For some people, actually getting thoughts and methods down on paper presents one of the biggest stumbling blocks. If you feel this way, take comfort that this is a common feeling. However, this must be overcome early in the process. Quite often, it is difficult to spot the flaws in your reasoning until it is set out on paper, so you are well advised to write up bits and pieces in draft as early as possible. Early discussions with your supervisor should be followed by a period where you get down on paper and develop ideas that have been mentioned. Another reason for writing early on is that your supervisor will want to see your reasoning is committed to paper; feedback based on loose ideas can be a waste of time. One of the reasons why you might be reluctant to do this is lack of confidence. Many people who have not written such an extended piece of work before are diffident about committing their critical thoughts and methodology descriptions to paper. Try to rise above this! A more positive reason for getting down to it early is that you will be pleasantly surprised at how many words it takes to put down your ideas. The daunting task of 15,000 words does not seem nearly so unattainable when you realise how many thousands you have already written on literature review and a description of methodology.

2.4 Working with your Supervisor

The student's role

The initiative for requesting supervisions lies entirely with you, the student. Agree methods of getting in contact with your own supervisor: email is usually the best way. You must ensure that dissertation supervisors are kept fully informed on progress and difficulties, and that you prime them with specific questions about issues on which you want feedback. The onus is on you to make sure that you arrange contact with your supervisor: you will not be 'chased' by supervisors.

Your responsibilities include:

- Discussing with your supervisor the type of guidance and comment that you find helpful.
- Beginning the submission of title process, including discussion of Ethical Issues and/or Risk Assessment forms if applicable.
- Taking the initiative in arranging consultations, raising questions, problems or difficulties encountered.
- Delivering written drafts several days before you want feedback.
- Maintaining a schedule of work as agreed with your supervisor, and keeping your supervisor informed of your progress with regular updates.
- Completing the Notice of Submission form at the time of submitting the dissertation.
- Keeping any data you have collected (such as responses to interview questions and questionnaires) in a safe place until such time as the assessment of your dissertation has been fully and formally completed.
- Submitting the completed dissertation via Blackboard, correctly formatted, by the agreed date, having completed an online Notice of Submission form. Information on where and when to submit your dissertation and the link to the online Notice of Submission form will be sent to you by your programme administrator as the time for submission draws near.

Your supervisor will almost certainly be supervising a variety of other projects; therefore, you should not assume that s/he can immediately recall the last discussion you had together about yours. You should never expect on-the-spot responses. There will also be periods when your supervisor is not available, either because s/he is heavily committed with other duties such as examining, or on leave for work or holiday reasons. Do make sure that you and your supervisor are aware of each other's periods of absence.

It is important that you submit whole chapters for feedback in good time in order to receive written feedback from your supervisor, accompanied each time by an updated outline, a running bibliography

and any necessary appendices. Your supervisor cannot deal with smaller sections since it is impossible to see how these relate to the whole.

Your supervisor will not have the time to read your entire dissertation as you prepare it. It would be a good idea, therefore, to discuss this and establish which sections s/he wishes to see and provide written feedback on. Examiners, however, read all of it! Also, supervisors are not to be expected to proof read or to correct spelling/grammar. Students are advised to buy-in or otherwise arrange such services if needed.

To a large extent, then, the dissertation has to be a self-managed process. Your role is to organise the research programme as a whole, taking advice from your supervisor and taking the initiative in raising problems/difficulties. The supervisor's role is to give advice and help about the nature and standard of the work. But remember, the ultimate responsibility remains yours: this is your work and the quality depends on you. Do NOT expect your supervisor to read drafts and re-drafts of every piece of your work, and above all, do NOT expect your supervisor to guarantee it is of a pass standard. When submitted, the dissertation is referred to internal and, in some instances, external examiners who will make an independent judgment of your work in its entirety.

The role of the supervisor is to:

- give guidance concerning the nature of the research process, the standard of work required and in planning the programme of research involved.
- establish at an early stage the supervisor's responsibilities in relation to the student's written work, including the nature of guidance and comments to be offered as work proceeds.
- agree completion dates for successive stages of the work, receiving first draft chapters as appropriate and returning written material with constructive criticism on the broad shape and structure of the work (but not on its detailed content).
- provide advice and guidance to help improve the quality of the work. At all times, however, it must be made clear that dissertation preparation for a higher degree is undertaken within the general principle that the dissertation must be the student's own work.

Supervisory structure

Starting the Dissertation

You will be allocated a dissertation supervisor who is experienced and knowledgeable regarding the dissertation process and research methods. All dissertation supervisors will be able to advise students on the intellectual process of writing a dissertation, including the standards required, research design and dissertation structure, and will be able to respond to student queries regarding the aims and research questions of the dissertation, the conduct of a literature review, methodology and ethics/risk assessment. Each year we have students who want to pursue legitimate topics within the wide subject area of global development policy and management. Do not be anxious if the member of staff assigned to supervise your work is not someone you have met or know. Please also note that, as well as being provided a dissertation supervisor, you may approach any member of staff during office hours for specific advice.

Contact with the Dissertation Supervisor

You are expected to have contact with your supervisor at intervals throughout the dissertation process. Although individual instances will vary, you are permitted a maximum of four substantive consultations with your supervisor. *It is your responsibility to arrange these before the supervision period ends in mid-July.* It is advisable to make arrangements for subsequent contact at the end of each prior contact. If you are unable to meet with your supervisor, you should agree the most convenient way of proceeding (for example through email or by telephone).

On-campus students are advised to keep a formal record of meetings with your supervisor. Your supervisor will also keep a record of meetings.

Dissertation Milestones (timetable):

Note that the structure of supervision arrangements varies over time and is designed to reflect the changing needs of your research:

- **Nov 2020: Milestone 1 – Starting the Dissertation** (see **Section 2.1**)
The Dissertation Handbook will be circulated (on-campus and distance learning) and students will be encouraged to start thinking about dissertation topics which may include discussions with their Academic Advisor or other members of staff.
- **mid-Feb 2021: Milestone 2 – Submission of Dissertation Topic** (see **Section 2.2**)
Students will submit an indication of a general area of interest for their dissertation topic which will aid supervisor allocation.
- **mid-March 2021: Milestone 3 – Supervisor Allocation**
Your supervisor will be allocated and each student will be notified who their supervisor is by email. Students will be allocated a dissertation supervisor who is experienced and knowledgeable regarding the dissertation process and research methods, and where possible has expertise in the topic area. It would be expected that students, if they wish, will be able to make initial contact with their supervisor to address any concerns about the dissertation.
- **end-April 2021: Milestone 4 – Dissertation Proposal/Outline**
The second 'research proposal' assignment for core modules in research methods (which vary for different programmes) will be due by the 'end of April'. Students will then be free to discuss their dissertation research proposals (see **Section 2.5 – Introduction**) with their supervisors and to receive feedback. This should focus on assisting you in the framing of your research – in particular the development of your specific research questions – and also discussion of the conceptualisation and methodology for your work. In other words, discussion at this time focuses on laying the foundations for your dissertation (note: **Distance Learning** students submit their 'research proposal assignment' during the first week of February, and will receive feedback by the end of February).
- **May to mid-July 2021: Milestone 5 – Independent Research with Supervisory Input**
The student contacts the supervisor at any time from the beginning of May to agree a timetable for supervision, to frame the research, develop the research questions and discuss conceptualisation i.e.: lay the foundations for the dissertation. Any need to complete risk assessments and ethical forms needs to be addressed at this early stage.

The latter part of the period will concern development of a literature review and methodology, and then move on to the later chapters, including possibly undertaking primary research, and will include a maximum of **four** supervision consultations. Therefore there is an onus on you to use this time effectively. Remember that every time you give your supervisor something to read, s/he will need a few days to read it (note: **Distance Learning** students can contact their supervisor from mid-March).
- **mid-July to end Aug 2021: Milestone 6 – Independent Research**
During this stage the student should be completing the analysis and write-up, working independently without further supervisory input.

Please note that any alteration to the dissertation title can be made on the Notice of Submission form at the time of dissertation submission. However, if a change to dissertation title affects ethical issues and/or fieldwork, this must be discussed in advance of submission and agreed with the dissertation supervisor and an application made via the Ethical Review Manager (ERM) application system, where relevant.

Difficulties or Problems

Your supervisor will ensure that you are made aware when progress on the dissertation is below the standard expected and are given guidance as to how the problem should be rectified. If you feel that the dissertation is not proceeding satisfactorily and are unable to resolve the difficulty with your supervisor,

you should seek advice by writing to your personal tutor or the Programme Director. If both of these are your dissertation supervisor, the letter should go to the Head of Institute.

2.5 Structure for dissertations

Your dissertation is likely to be structured along the following lines. It is helpful to have brief introductory and concluding paragraphs for each chapter to introduce its content and draw findings together and link to the next chapter.

- **introduction** to the study, outlining: (a) **background** to the topic, in terms of key policy and/or research questions, issues and debates; (b) the **shape and scope** of the dissertation, outlining for the reader the broad purpose of the study; (c) an outline of the **structure** of the dissertation. (This should broadly follow the lines of any Dissertation Proposal you may have submitted.)
- a **literature review**. This should provide an overview of a range of literature relevant to the topic chosen, including relevant policy documents and technical reports as well as other academic work detailing research findings in your chosen field of study. The purpose is to identify gaps in the overall body of research and to outline the (modest) ways in which your research can fill those gaps and expand the larger body of knowledge. It is *not* simply a summary of everything written on a particular topic; rather, it is an attempt to locate your research within the broader array of knowledge on a particular subject. This, in turn, will provide a detailed justification for, and explanation of, the research questions or hypotheses around which your work will be structured.
- the **methodology** you have employed to attempt to address the research questions or test the hypothesis, outlining both the broad research design and justifying the particular methods and techniques selected. You may also incorporate either here or in the previous chapter details of the conceptual framework that shapes your work.
- a **results** chapter, outlining the findings of research undertaken (e.g. review of policy and technical documents, interviews with key actors, questionnaire-based surveys, or analysis of data collected from secondary sources).
- an **analysis and evaluation** chapter, exploring the significance of the results, relating them to the 'bigger picture' issues outlined in your literature review and highlighting the implications in light of the research questions or hypotheses.
- a **concluding** chapter, relating findings presented in the previous chapters to the research questions/hypotheses, and highlighting the implications of your work for policies, practices, theories or techniques, and setting out the ways in which your research has advanced or reinforced knowledge of your chosen subject area.
- a full **bibliography**, covering *all* works cited in the main text.
- any other relevant reference materials, which may be presented in the **appendices**.

The following example does not give an exact blueprint for your dissertation: you will decide the structure in discussion with your supervisor dependent on topic and methods. But it offers an illustration plus some tips on the typical scope and content of chapters and sections.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

The dissertation should begin by outlining the background to your topic. This could include the broad policy, sectoral or organisational context (where relevant), and details of other research studies which have looked at the area of study.

You must remember that this section should act as a general introduction to the study, and should therefore be short and snappy, avoiding too much detail. A common problem with dissertations is too much contextual, background material, and insufficient analytical detail or synthesis of source documents and interviews. You should merely introduce the topic, and flesh out some of these ideas later on in the work, particularly in the literature review, which will involve a much more detailed exploration of key research issues and questions, based on current findings.

Shape and scope of the study

The second section of chapter 1 should build on the background context you have outlined, and explain in brief the purpose of the study and the broad questions and issues you will be addressing. You would also include here some mention of your research methods, though these will be explained in greater detail in your methods chapter. You may also – in that later chapter and on the basis of the earlier literature review, state the formal aims and objectives of the study and outline specific research questions to be addressed or hypotheses to be tested.

Structure

The third section in the chapter 1 is normally an outline of the structure of the dissertation. The progression of chapters must be logical, with each building upon material covered in the preceding chapter. This will help focus your mind on the material required for the final report, and in planning your time. The precise structure adopted will be dependent on the particular topic chosen, and should be devised in consultation with your supervisor.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The second chapter might be a literature review, although again the structure will vary according to the precise topic selected and should be discussed at length with your supervisor.

The literature review is something which confuses many students. In essence, the aims of a literature review are two-fold. First, it should bring the reader up to date on **previous research findings** in the field, with particular reference to your chosen topic. This can point towards areas of general agreement (or disagreement) among researchers, highlighting what different studies say about your chosen topic. To use the example of outsourcing once more, it may be the case that previous research has yielded important findings on success and failure of outsourcing initiatives (even if some studies disagree), but there have been recent changes in the market and regulatory environment within a particular sector (say, the banking sector) which raise new and unanswered sets of questions which your research will proceed to explore. The central aim is to pull out the key ideas and findings from past research and 'locate' your study within that broader body of knowledge.

Secondly, where your chosen topic is related to particular **policies or strategies**, your literature review should consider relevant policy/strategy and/or technical documents, in addition to the more 'academic' literature. For instance, in the case of the outsourcing topic, the literature review might also assess the ways in which different types of organisations (both public and private) have attempted to develop strategies that seek to use outsourcing to achieve rapid organisational transformation and explore the extent to which they have met with any success in doing so. In other words, some dissertations may have a 'policy/strategy review' as well as a 'research review' as part of the overall literature review.

In summary, then, a literature review should *synthesise* others' work, highlighting the key themes to

emerge from other studies and applying these to your own research. You should **not** treat the literature review as simply a summary or précis of policy documents, journal articles and books: it should not be, for example, ‘everything I know about organisational change’, or ‘everything I know about development policy’. Instead, the literature review must be related to the tightly defined research questions or hypotheses which your study is intended to address. In other words, it requires your own assessment of the key findings of earlier work which relates to your topic. A literature review has to be comprehensive, covering policy debates as well as theoretical and conceptual issues (i.e. academic literature). It is also important that you concentrate on literature which is of direct relevance to your work; ignoring related material of only marginal relevance.

You might well select (or create via synthesis of multiple sources) a conceptual model or framework that you will apply to your research. If not in this chapter, then it would likely appear in the next.

It is also vital that you avoid plagiarism, whether unintentional or deliberate. If you lift ideas, or quote a short passage from others’ work – which is, of course, perfectly acceptable – you have to acknowledge the source by full and proper referencing.

A useful starting point for literature reviews is to read a small number of core texts, and then trace back the more detailed articles cited. For example, if your dissertation is on ‘The role of public-private partnerships in healthcare in Nigeria’, you might begin your literature review by looking at broad texts on healthcare, before focusing-in upon more detailed (and directly relevant) work cited in these texts (e.g. other research on public-private partnerships). You should also try to make use of a full range of sources for literature review material. In particular, learn to use the library search facilities. In particular, make use of the bibliographic databases and other sources that offer pointers to journal papers that you can readily access online. You may also find Google Scholar useful for the same purposes.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The dissertation should attempt to build upon the material covered in the literature review through a programme of further desk-based analysis, or possibly the collection of data in the field. This might take the form, for example, of:

- a short programme of structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews (e.g. face-to-face, or by email);
- the collation of data from published sources such as via published case studies or other government or industry surveys.
- the collation of relevant policy documents, both published and unpublished (e.g. consultants reports, donor reports, – again the list is endless);
- a structured questionnaire survey (again, face-to-face, by telephone or by email).

You can structure this into Chapter 3 in the following way:

Research questions and/or hypotheses

Building on the key areas of interest you have identified in the literature review, the first part of Chapter 3 would normally contain a question or set of questions to be addressed by your dissertation, a particular issue to be explored, or a set of hypotheses to be tested. It is vital that you set out in detail the research questions, hypotheses, issues or problems your study addresses. This could take the form of either of the following:

- *research questions*, e.g. in what ways are organisations in developing countries formulating strategies for outsourcing information systems, what form do these strategies take in different types of organisations, and to what extent do strategies differ according to sector and country location?
- *hypotheses* to be tested, e.g. ‘Cash transfers have led to greater expenditure by men than women within low-income households’. The veracity of this hypothesis would be tested, possibly by using appropriate quantitative methods, or through qualitative interviews with relevant sources. However,

you should bear in mind that it is not always possible to develop such research hypotheses for certain topics; and it may not be possible to collect the type of primary data that is required to test them effectively. A detailed description of the research question(s) may be more appropriate. In addition, it is vital that you devise hypotheses which are not over-ambitious: remember that your study is limited in both time and in the length of the final dissertation.

Aims and objectives

The second part of chapter 3 could show the aims and objectives for your study:

- *Aims*: these set out the overall purpose of the study. They are broad statements which explain what you are trying to achieve to a non-expert reader who may not be familiar with your topic area.
- *Objectives*: these are the specific operational targets which will assist in meeting the broad aims of the study. Since these objectives are clearly set out, they will be used to judge what you have been able to achieve at the end of your dissertation. It is thus unwise to be over-ambitious by setting objectives which are not realistically achievable. At the same time, devising clear objectives at the outset of your research will ensure that the work is sufficiently focused, and avoid the work being too generalised. Throughout your programme of research, you should constantly refer back to your objectives to ensure that what you are doing or writing is relevant, and to ensure that it will help to meet those objectives.

For both aims and objectives, these should be stated as succinctly as possible, and should be revised, if necessary, as work progresses. Therefore it is quite possible that your questions, aims and objectives will all be covered in quite a short amount of text.

Note, in outlining aims and objectives, you need to build on the conclusions of your literature review, the purpose of which in essence is to explain and justify the focus of your research.

Research design

Thirdly, having generated relevant research questions and/or hypotheses, you have to explain clearly *how* you will go about answering or testing these. In other words, you must give details of the research methods to be used, outlining the overall research design – including any conceptual framework or model that you are using, and (in relevant cases) specifying methods of data collection (e.g. sources of published data that have been used, semi-structured interviews which have been conducted). You must attempt to **justify** the choice of your particular methodology, in light of the chosen research topic: you have to try to demonstrate why the methods selected are appropriate to answering a particular question, or investigating a given hypothesis. Why, for example, is a programme of interviews useful in investigating your topic? Why are particular data sources useful? Why have you chosen to collate a series of policy documents? Why have you selected particular case study areas? And how have you gone about investigating a particular case study?

Example One: the use of a *case study* approach. You should explain briefly:

- why a case study approach is the most appropriate method to tackle the research questions;
- why you have used one case study rather than two or more, or vice versa;
- why you have used a particular case study or studies (e.g. previous research might have ignored certain places; a problem or issue might be especially apparent in that area; or the area may be representative of the general pattern);
- the ways in which you have collected information for these case studies, whether it be interviews, collation of policy documents, or use of published data for that area (it is not sufficient simply to say that you will ‘do’ a case study, without specifying the means by which this will be conducted).

Example Two: the use of *interviews*. You should explain briefly:

- why you have chosen to use interviews to address the research problem;

- who you have interviewed, and why;
- what questions were asked and why;
- the means by which you conducted interviews (e.g. were they unstructured discussions, structured face-to-face questionnaires, or email questionnaires?);
- how you have used the information collected (e.g. quotes from interviewees etc.).

Chapters 4 and 5: Fieldwork/results and analysis/evaluation/discussion

You must also take care to avoid a purely descriptive study which is then dutifully described without interpretation, commentary or evaluation. You must try to develop themes and arguments on the basis of interviews, data assembled or documents collected. Your work must go beyond mere description, to provide an analysis of information collected, and to highlight the implications of your findings. Where you are undertaking a case study, for example, you should ensure that you constantly refer to the bigger picture: what, if anything, does the experience of a case study area or subject say about the broader question you are exploring through your research?

In writing a suitably analytical and interpretative piece of work, it is important that you refer back continuously to your initial objectives and avoid being side-tracked on irrelevant detail, or bogged-down by the superfluous minutiae which surround any topic. At the same time, you must also take care to ensure that the information collected is not simply 'analysed' for its own sake, without identifying the implications for the study: this is one distinction between a dissertation and project work. Throughout this stage of the work, you should constantly ask yourself what is the implication of a given finding for your research question or hypothesis. For example, if an interviewee makes a particular comment, or if you note an interesting quote in a committee report, what are the implications of this for your dissertation topic? It is important to avoid writing in an over-generalised way, neglecting to concentrate on tightly defined objectives for the research. For example, on too many occasions, student dissertations read like 'everything I know about e-business/outsourcing/export-led strategy in Bangalore', rather than a study which focuses on a clear and well-defined research question and which is of interest beyond a particular case study area.

In some cases, you might opt to have two chapters devoted to 'results': a first one describing your main findings and outlining the results of any fieldwork; and a second discussing the broader implications. Whether you have one or two chapters is likely to depend upon the topic in question. Again, you will need to discuss this with your supervisor.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The concluding chapter should not merely summarise material already covered in previous chapters. Instead, you must attempt to draw together the various messages to emerge from your review of the literature, and from your 'analysis' chapter(s). Again, it is important not to be descriptive, and to concentrate on the research questions posed at the outset of your study. In particular, you should try to highlight the implications of your study for both (a) research and knowledge of a particular topic area, and (where relevant) (b) policy and practice.

2.6 Ethical Applications, confirmation of title and risk assessment

All students are required to complete an online **Confirmation of Dissertation Title, Ethical and Risk Assessment** form. It is essential that you complete this form in order that we have an indication of your agreed dissertation title. The link to this online form will be sent to you by your programme administrator.

Risk Assessment

You should consider whether your dissertation research will constitute a 'risk' of some description. The School provides advice on most types of risk associated with independent research through generic risk assessments detailed in **Appendix 4**. For work within the UK, this normally falls into the 'low risk' category.

If your proposed work is not covered by these risk assessments e.g. you wish to interview people as a lone researcher, then you must complete a full risk assessment and this will need to be accepted before you can start any work.

Ethical Review

Prior to starting any recruitment, data collection or research you must ensure that you have completed the University's [Ethics Decision Tool](#). The tool will advise whether ethical approval is required for your specific project. If you wish you can complete the Ethics Decision Tool with your supervisor but if this is not possible, take a screenshot of the outcome and share it with your supervisor for discussion. You should retain a copy of the toolkit outcome. You must then agree the next steps for your project with your supervisor.

If you both agree that ethical approval is not required for your project then you can proceed but you must ensure that you comply with all [best practice requirements](#), including GDPR, informed consent and data storage.

If you agree that ethical approval will be required for your project, you then need to decide what type (i.e. school level or full UREC). To do this, please ensure you read the [SEED Student Intranet pages](#) on applying for low or medium risk review. If your study meets all mandatory criteria for either low or medium risk school review, then you can apply for approval using this route. However, if your study does not meet all of the mandatory criteria, you must apply for full UREC review. More information on the UREC process can be found on the [Research Ethics website](#).

Once you have decided on the route of ethical approval that is appropriate for your project you need to log on to the online [Ethical Review Manager \(ERM\)](#) to create a new ethics application. Ensure you choose the correct route of review in Section A and answer all questions on form. Also, be sure to include any relevant attachments such as participant information sheets, consent forms, data collection tools (i.e. interview schedule, focus group schedule, questionnaire, etc) and advertisements. These can be found at <https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/rbe/ethics-integrity/ethics/app-prep/>

Before any recruitment or data collection can begin you must ensure that your ethics application has been reviewed and approved by the school ethics committee or UREC via the Ethical Review Manager (ERM system). Any required/suggested revisions made by the committee must be reviewed, your form and supporting documentation updated and then resubmitted back to the Committee for final approval in the ERM system. You must ensure that you receive formal confirmation of ethical approval by email and PDF attachment before you can start your dissertation project.

As all ethics applications are submitted via the Ethical Review Manager (ERM), please read our [guidance on completing the ERM form](#), use the information bubbles next to all questions in the online application form and read our [frequently asked questions \(FAQs\)](#) document. **Please use all of these resources before contacting your supervisor or the School's Ethics Chair with questions. It is also advisable to check the timescales involved should you require submission of a full ethics application. If applying for a high risk UREC application, from the point of submission, this can take a minimum of 12 weeks and medium risk applications (at school level) can take between 6-8 weeks. Please consider these timescales carefully as they may lead to a significant delay in your dissertation project.**

Further information on good research conduct, misconduct and policies and guidelines can be found on our [research governance, ethics and integrity webpage](#) on the central University website.

3. Submission Format

3.1 General information

All dissertations must be written in English; quotations, however, may be given in the language in which they were written, with appropriate translation provided. In exceptional circumstances variation of this regulation may be approved by the University for candidates to submit a dissertation predominantly in their language of research.

Students will be asked to submit their dissertation in electronic form through Blackboard. You will be asked to submit your dissertation to two Turnitin submission windows at the time of submission, so each marker has a separate copy.

If you would like to produce a bound copy, then guidance on doing that can be provided by your programme administrator. But please note this is not a requirement of the dissertation process.

3.2 Presentation

The overall structure must be clearly presented (e.g. with an organised hierarchy of fonts and typefaces for chapter and section headings), with logical layout of chapters and paragraphs, and with text and graphics integrated in an overall 'house' style.

3.3 Style and Language

The aim should be to use simple prose, but with variety in the construction of sentences and an expansive approach to the vocabulary employed. Sentences are best kept short (maximum of around three lines), but their length should be varied to avoid monotony. Paragraphs should be of reasonable length (normally 3-6 sentences in length) and help to build up argument sensibly, allowing the reader time to digest one idea or theme before introducing another. Convention requires the use of an *impersonal* style in the narrative past tense, but other tenses may be necessary when, for instance, the writer states an existing or future condition; and it is acceptable to use "I.." when referring to yourself – e.g. if your research relates to a project you have worked on. It is important to adopt a mode of writing which keeps the reader interested, and this can be achieved more easily if the active voice is used e.g. 'examination of the site revealed...'. Try to adopt this mode of writing right from the start since altering a whole draft can be lengthy and tiring. It is also important to use language which is neutral when matters of race and gender are involved. Terminology is often used as verbal shorthand to convey complex ideas (e.g. 'multiplier effect', 'regime approach') and terms employed must be used accurately in the sense by which they are understood among those familiar with the subject.

The most frequently used abbreviations are - *i.e.* (that is), *e.g.* (for example), *etc.* (*et cetera*, other things of the same class), *viz.* (namely), *cf.* (compare with), *no.* (number), *ibid.* (the same place), *idem.* (the same), *sic* (*sic passim*, thus, typically used to denote an error in a quote), *et al* (and others) – be sparing in the use of these in the main text. Where title abbreviations are used it is common practice to use the full term followed in brackets by the abbreviation on the first occasion of use in the text, and thereafter use the abbreviation only e.g. environmental impact assessment (EIA), information-and-communications technologies for development (ICT4D). The punctuation between the initial letters of well-known organisations should be omitted in the text e.g. EU, UN. Do not abbreviate units of measurement unless they are preceded by an exact number e.g. 17ft; do not add an *s* to the plural of an abbreviation e.g. 40cm, 18lb. Where you use a local currency, always provide an international currency equivalent – typically US\$ but GB£ or euros are acceptable.

3.4 Word limit

See **1.2 Dissertation Requirements**. An over-long dissertation is usually one which is sloppily written, too vague, and strays from the specified aims and objectives. Equally, it is important that you do not agonise

too much about word length: you do not have to 'hit' the word limit exactly. A word count for text and for appendices should be inserted at the bottom of the contents page.

3.5 Graphical material

Maps, statistical tables, figures, diagrams, graphs and photographs often provide a useful means of summarising complex information. They can also add to the work in a presentational sense. However, you should take care to use these sparingly in a manner appropriate to the topic. Any graphical figures must be referred to in the main body of text and properly labelled. All illustrations must have a designation, number and title situated immediately above or below, usually with the prefix of Figure or Table in capital letters. Ensure that you can obtain or draw illustrations easily for the final draft. Illustrations may be lifted from other sources, if properly acknowledged. Colour copying is now the normal expectation for any illustrations utilising colour.

Statistical tables or graphs should normally be no greater than a single A4 size page. All rows and columns should have unambiguous headings, and use ruled lines sparingly. Graphs should only have as many grid lines as are needed for comprehension of trends and relationships (normally 4-5 being the maximum), and with legends and descriptive notes normally standing clear of the grid lines.

3.6 Proof reading

The final draft of your dissertation should be read, where possible, by another person in order to eliminate errors of syntax and grammar, and any typographical errors which are not picked up by standard word processor spell-checkers and grammar-checkers. Proof reading is time consuming, but extremely important. If you cannot prevail upon a friend to do it, it is critical that you do it yourself. In particular, you should take care to avoid long, rambling sentences, pretentious and jargon-ridden prose, and bad grammar. Learn how to use the apostrophe in the correct manner. Avoid vague, vogueish jargon like 'sustainability', 'partnership' or 'stake-holder' unless you are sure of the precise meaning of these. Note that it is *not* your supervisor's role to proof-read final drafts.

3.7 Plagiarism

The University's regulations covering plagiarism (copying work from others without reference to the source) is fully set out in your Programme Handbook. It is regarded as a serious malpractice, and may lead to severe penalties for the work - including removal from your MSc programme. The most common way in which plagiarism occurs is by the verbatim reproduction of another author's work without acknowledgement, or the 'lifting' of a concept from a specific source without attribution. Full and proper referencing of sources is a vital safeguard against plagiarism.

3.8 Bibliography and referencing

References must be consistent throughout the dissertation. A complete bibliography of all policy documents and literature consulted should be given and properly referenced using the Harvard System, following the standard guidelines for work in GDI and outlined in Programme Handbook. All work cited in the main text should appear, fully referenced, in the bibliography; all works in the bibliography should appear in the main text. This, of course, applies to your final dissertation and, indeed, to all work completed in GDI. It is vital that you adopt the proper referencing system, otherwise you will lose marks. It is often helpful to keep a file of all work to which you refer over the course of your study; this can prove invaluable when you come to compile your final bibliography.

3.9 Appendices

Appendices, if necessary and if relevant, can also be included in your dissertation. However, the use of appendices has to be justified and legitimate: they should not just be a repository of disparate information which does not fit anywhere else; nor should they be used to avoid exceeding the word limit. Instead, appendices might usefully contain material such as the list of interviewees canvassed, lists of documents

collected, data sources consulted, tables of data, correspondence, questionnaires, extracts from circulars or statutory regulations, and summarised accounts of previous studies.

3.10 Presentation conventions for text and formatting

There are a number of conventions to which you must adhere when submitting your completed dissertation. These are listed below.

<i>Title</i>	The title must be short, unambiguous and accurate.
<i>Title page</i>	This should provide a statement as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Title of the dissertation ▪ The following text: 'A dissertation submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of xxx in the Faculty of Humanities' ▪ the year of submission (not including the month). ▪ the candidate's 7 or 8-digit student ID number. ▪ the name of the candidate's School ('School of Environment, Education and Development').
<i>Table of Contents</i>	A list of contents, giving all relevant sub-divisions of the dissertation and a page number for each item (in Arabic numerals throughout). The final word count, including footnotes and endnotes, must be inserted at the bottom of the contents page. If illustrative materials are integrated within the text a separate list of illustrations should be prepared.
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	The term 'illustration' refers to all tables, maps, plans, graphs, diagrams, photographs. The list of illustrations should provide number, title, and page references. This usually appears on a separate page unless included in the table of contents.
<i>Abstract</i>	All dissertations must include an abstract. This should be undertaken when the dissertation is otherwise complete. The abstract should precede the introduction so that the reader/examiner can quickly see what the text is about prior to more detailed reading. Typically the abstract defines the problems the writer sets out to solve, the main procedures adopted, and the principal results and conclusions; it should occupy a single A4 page, and can be single-spaced.
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	Assistance given to the student in the preparation of their work must be acknowledged, and would usually include the supervisor and any key individuals (other academics, individuals from the agencies under study etc.) who have helped. Acknowledgments should not normally exceed one or two paragraphs.
<i>Declaration</i>	A declaration stating that: 'No portion of the work referred to in the dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning'.

Intellectual Property Statement

All **four** of the following notes on copyright and the ownership of intellectual property rights must be included as written below:

i. The author of this dissertation (including any appendices and/or schedules to this dissertation) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the “Copyright”) and s/he has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.

ii. Copies of this dissertation, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made **only** in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has entered into. This page must form part of any such copies made.

iii. The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trade marks and other intellectual property (the “Intellectual Property”) and any reproductions of copyright works in the dissertation, for example graphs and tables (“Reproductions”), which may be described in this dissertation, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.

iv. Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this dissertation, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions described in it may take place is available in the University IP Policy (see <http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=24420>), in any relevant Dissertation restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, The University Library’s regulations (see <http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/about/regulations/>) and in The University’s Guidance for the Presentation of Dissertations.

Text

Text should be formatted as double or 1.5 spacing, with a minimum font size of 12 (Times) or equivalent for other fonts for the main text. Single-spacing should be used for indented quotations of more than three lines, footnotes and references. Pages may be single or double-sided. Chapter headings section headings should be bold and capitalised; sub-section headings should be bold.

Page sizes and margins

If you wish to allow for binding the margin at the binding edge of any page must be not less than 40mm; other margins must be not less than 15mm. The required paper size is A4 (197mm x 210mm).

Page numbering

Page numbering must consist of one single sequence of Arabic numerals (i.e. 1, 2, 3 ...) throughout the dissertation. Page numbers must be displayed on all pages except the title page. The pagination sequence will include not only the text of the dissertation but also the preliminary pages, diagrams, tables, figures, illustrations, appendices, references etc. Roman numerals must not be used for page numbering.

<i>Maps</i>	Where maps are used, these should be no larger than A4.
<i>Diagrams and tables</i>	These should be clearly presented, properly sourced, and explained in the text. See 3.5 Graphical Material .
<i>Photographs</i>	Titles with explanatory notes should be on the page preceding the photograph, or underneath the photographs, printed in a consistent manner.
<i>Quotations</i>	Direct prose quotation exceeding three lines of text should be set out in a separate inset paragraph in single line spacing (indented about 25mm to the right and left of the main text), without inverted commas. Shorter quotations should be enclosed within the main text, in double inverted commas. If there are gaps in the quotation use three dots '...' to indicate where the words are left out. For all quotes, the author and page number must be stated. If it is desired to draw attention to a phrase in a quotation do this by italics, but note in the reference whether any italics are in the original or have been added by you as author (e.g. Smith, 2016, emphasis in original; or Jones, 2016, emphasis added).
<i>Footnotes</i>	These should be used very sparingly, if at all. Where footnotes are deemed absolutely necessary, they should be of direct relevance to the topic. They should be placed at the bottom of the page. They should be numbered consecutively throughout the dissertation as a whole. The font should be 9 point (in Times New Roman or similar). Text should be single spaced.
<i>References</i>	Should be in Harvard style (see information in your handbook for further details). All references must be included in the bibliography, which should be arranged by alphabetical order of author surname. Where there is more than one reference by the same author in the same year each should be differentiated by a, b, c, etc (e.g. Jones 2016a, Jones 2016b)

3.11 Dissertation Checklist

You need to check your draft for what might be termed continuity errors. Roughly speaking, this means checking that the whole text is consistent with itself from beginning to end. If you have changed some sections, there might be section headings to re-number, for example. To help you eliminate such errors, here is a checklist:

- are the headings and sub-headings in the contents list the same as those in the text?
- have you given lists of tables and figures as well as chapters in your contents?
- are they all numbered consecutively? Numberings from earlier versions may persist and you may have two chapter 4s or no chapter 6. Using the automated Table of Contents wizard in Word can help enormously in this respect.
- are all the cross-references to other sections of the study correct?
- do all the references in the text have a corresponding entry in the bibliography, with the same date as the reference in the text?
- where you refer to an article within an edited collection, have you included the full book reference, with editors, as well as the chapter reference?
- are all the references complete, i.e. have you included the publication date and place, as well as the publisher's name?

- tables: check that their numbers and titles are correct, and that references to them in the text are correct.
- figures: as for tables
- have you checked all the calculations in your tables, including correct totals?
- is there enough labelling information in your tables and graphs? (e.g. if you refer to percentages, is it clear exactly what they are percentages of? Do you make it clear whether raw scores or percentages are being referred to?)
- have you calculated all the figures to the same number of decimal places?
- are you consistent about abbreviations?

None of these proof-checking tasks are the responsibility of your supervisor.

4. Assessment Criteria

Dissertations are judged against a set of guiding criteria. The order in which the points are set out below implies no particular weighting; all the criteria listed are potentially of equal importance, though some may be more appropriate than others according to the particular topic covered in any one dissertation.

4.1 Content

- Relevance to policy and practice in fields associated with the programme of study
 - i) Is the dissertation relevant to the discipline of the programme and policy/practice within this specified field? Does the student demonstrate an appreciation of the relevance of the work for policy/practice, or to deeper academic understanding of the discipline?
 - ii) Does the work deal adequately with relevant theoretical and methodological issues, and where appropriate, highlight the policy/practice implications of the work, within the topic defined? Does it avoid superfluous detail?
- Aims, objectives and purpose of study
 - i) Does the writer spell out the aims and objectives of the study clearly? Do the objectives substantiate the achievement of the broader aims?
 - ii) Do the research questions or hypotheses set out clearly the analytical path of the study?
- Use and knowledge of literature
 - i) Where appropriate, does the literature review demonstrate a clear appreciation of broad theoretical perspectives relevant to the topic, and the strengths and weaknesses of these perspectives?
 - ii) Where appropriate, does the literature review demonstrate a clear understanding of policy/practice relevant to the topic?
 - iii) Does the literature review offer an adequate review of related research, and demonstrate an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of other studies? Does it suggest an understanding of the remaining gaps in the research conducted on the chosen topic?
 - iv) Has the writer made use of an adequate range of sources? Is sufficient attention paid to academic and theoretical arguments as well as technical reports and case documents? Are there relevant references which have been omitted? Are sources acknowledged?
 - v) Are references listed fully, and in the correct way?
- Methods
 - i) Does the writer set out clearly the adopted research methodologies? Do the research methods used involve original research (e.g. data collection by interviews, surveys or analysis of secondary data).
 - ii) Are the methods selected appropriate to the study topic? Do they flow logically from the literature review?
 - iii) Are the methods selected used effectively?

- iv) Where case studies are used, is justification offered for selection? Are case studies linked to broader topics?
- Fieldwork (where applicable)
 - i) To what extent are empirical data relevant to the aims/hypotheses and methods selected for the study? Are there any gaps in data collected?
 - ii) Where relevant, is questionnaire design and analysis adequate?
 - iii) Where interviews are used, has the student given consideration to structuring of questions, transcription methods and range of interviewees selected?
 - iv) Has the writer gone beyond the obvious, showing initiative or imagination in finding relevant data in original places?
 - v) Does the writer show an appreciation of data access difficulties?
- Quality of argument
 - i) Does the work distinguish between 'facts' and 'values'? Has the writer avoided imposing his or her values upon the work, so far as possible, or is there a reasoned justification for these values?
 - ii) Is there an appropriate balance between description and analysis? Is each piece of description supported by an appropriate piece of analysis, demonstrating the meaning, significance, or implications of the events or phenomena which have been described?
 - iii) Is the line of argument presented clear and justified, or, conversely, does it tend to be incoherent, unstructured and repetitive?
 - iv) Are conclusions drawn adequately supported by empirical evidence, by statistical information, by appropriate quotations or by relevant examples or case studies? Does the work avoid assertion and unsubstantiated inference? Where the available evidence does not enable clear conclusions to be drawn, is there a clear appreciation of this?
 - v) Does the work show an appreciation of the implications of arguments presented in one portion of the dissertation, for material covered elsewhere? Do arguments flow in a logical fashion and avoid contradiction?
 - vi) Do the conclusions offer original interpretations and novel lines of argument, or merely rehash the findings of other studies?
- Conclusions
 - i) Are empirical findings used to highlight policy/practice or theoretical implications?
 - ii) Are the conclusions reached at the end of the dissertation clearly related to the questions posed at the beginning?
 - iii) Does the writer show an awareness of the limitations of the research and provide suggestions for future research?

4.2 Structure

- Is the division into sections, parts, or chapters clear and logical? Does it help the reader to understand the method of enquiry or the structure of the argument which the writer has adopted?
- Does each chapter contain a clear (but brief) statement of its purpose in relation to the aims for the study as a whole?
- Does each chapter end with a summary of the implications of material covered for the study as a whole? Does it lead logically into the next chapter?
- Is appropriate use made of appendices, so that material which is vital to the structure of the dissertation is in the main text itself, and only contributory or supplementary material relegated to the appendices?
- Is there a clearly explained, logical relationship between the argument presented, and any diagrams, tables, maps, or other illustrations? Are the latter placed in the text at the right points, so that their relationship to the argument is made as clear as possible?
- Are paragraphs structured in clear and logical fashion? Are sentences structured concisely to convey points clearly? Are vital points buried in over-long and poorly structured sentences, inappropriately placed in footnotes, or otherwise lost? Is it obvious what the writer thinks is crucial and what he/she thinks is subsidiary?

4.3 Presentation

- Is the dissertation written in comprehensible, plain English, unencumbered by pretentious, obscure language, and ill-understood jargon?
- Does citation of other work seem to have been done mainly to help, or to impress? Has work been cited to help the reader follow the argument, to understand its intellectual origins, and to check on points which may be of interest?
- Does the dissertation look reasonably professional and presentable? Or is it badly laid out or messy?
- Have supporting photographs, charts, tables and maps been used in an effective way?
- Has the dissertation been carefully proof read, or are errors left, apparently unnoticed?

Appendices

Appendix 1

School of Environment, Education and Development

Appendix 1a: Postgraduate Dissertation Timetable (On-Campus)

November

- Dissertation handbook distributed
- Preliminary identification of dissertation topic
- Dissertation workshop (timing and format may vary with programme)

February

- Students submit proposed title/topic (via the electronic Dissertation Planning Form).

March/April

- Allocation of supervisors
- First contact with supervisor
- Ethical and risk review
- Ethical Applications, confirmation of title and risk assessments: You will be asked to complete an online form; the link will be sent to you by your Administrator, on which you should confirm your proposed title and that you have discussed any ethical and risk considerations with your supervisor.

May/June

- Submission of initial research proposal/draft chapters to supervisor

July

- Deadline for final comments / input from supervisor (mid-July).

August

- You should submit two identical electronic copies of your dissertation in the approved format by **Wednesday, 1 September 2021 (full-time students)**.
- Dissertations **must** be submitted via Blackboard and **not** to your supervisor. Details of the submission process will be communicated by the GDI Programmes Team in the final weeks before submission is due. See **1.3 Submission arrangements** and **3.0 on Submission format** for more information.
- Notice of submission: on submission of your dissertation, you are also required to complete an electronic Notice of Submission form, which will be sent to you via your Administrator. This form will also be available on Blackboard.

Appendix 1b: Postgraduate Dissertation Timetable (Off-Campus)

November

- Preliminary identification of dissertation topic
- Research Methods course unit
- Dissertation handbook distributed

February

- Students submit dissertation proposal as part of their assessment for the Research Methods course unit.
- Proposed titles (via the electronic Dissertation Planning Form: see Blackboard) due by mid-February.

March/April

- Allocation of supervisors
- First contact with supervisor
- Ethical and risk review
- Ethical Applications, confirmation of title and risk assessments: You will be asked to complete an online form; the link will be sent to you by your Administrator, on which you should confirm your proposed title and that you have discussed any ethical and risk considerations with your supervisor.
- Submission of Chapter 1

May

- Submission of Chapters 2 and 3 to Supervisor

June

- Main data collection and analysis
- Notification of title: you will be asked to complete a form, which will be sent to you via your Administrator, on which you should write your proposed title, which should then be signed by your supervisor. This form should be returned to your Programme Administrator.

July

- Submission of Chapter 4 to Supervisor
- Deadline for final comments / input from Supervisor (mid-July).

August

- You should submit two electronic copies of your dissertation in the approved format by **Wednesday, 1 September 2021**.
- Dissertations **must** be submitted via Blackboard and **not** to your supervisor. Details of the hand-in process will be communicated by the GDI Programmes Team in the final weeks before submission is due. See **1.3 Submission arrangements** and **3.0 on Submission format** for more information.
- Notice of submission: on submission of your dissertation, you are also required to complete an electronic Notice of Submission form, which will be sent to you via your Administrator on receipt of your dissertation title form.

Appendix 2
University of Manchester
School of Environment, Education and Development

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

[complete each section]

What is the title of the research?

Who will conduct the research?

What is the aim of the research?

Why have I been chosen?

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

What happens to the data collected?

How is confidentiality maintained?

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

What is the duration of the research?

Where will the research be conducted?

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

Contact for further information

What if something goes wrong?

Appendix 3

University of Manchester
School of Environment, Education and Development

[insert title of dissertation/project/research]

[remove questions 3 and 4 if not relevant within your research]

Appendix 3: Consent Form

If you are happy to participate please read the consent form and initial it:

- | | Please
Initial
Box |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that the interviews will be audio/video-recorded | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes | <input type="checkbox"/> |

I agree to take part in the above project

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____

Appendix 4

Appendix 4: Risk Assessment

This information can be found on the student intranet at <http://www.seed.manchester.ac.uk/studentintranet/healthandsafety/>

- **Full Risk Assessment:** (<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=25622>)
- **Generic Risk Assessment – UK:** (<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=25623>)
- **Generic Risk Assessment - Low Risk Overseas Destinations:**
(<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=25624>)
- **Generic Risk Assessment - Normal Office Work on Campus:**
(<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=25625>)

Notes to Accompany General Risk Assessment Forms

These forms are the ones recommended by Health & Safety Services, and used on the University's risk assessment training courses. It is strongly suggested that you use them for all new assessments, and when existing assessments are being substantially revised. However, its use is not compulsory. Providing the assessor addresses the same issues; alternative layouts may be used.

- (1) **Date** : Insert date that assessment form is completed. The assessment must be valid on that day, and subsequent days, unless circumstances change and amendments are necessary.
- (2) **Assessed by** : Insert the name and signature of the assessor. For assessments other than very simple ones, the assessor should have attended the University course on risk assessments (link to STDU)
- (3) **Validated by** : Insert the name and signature of someone in a position to validate that the assessment has correctly identified hazards and addressed the risks. This will normally be a line manager, supervisor, principal investigator, etc.. who should be competent to identify the hazards and assess the risks. This person should have attended the University's risk assessment course, or equivalent.
- (4) **Location** : insert details of the exact location, i.e. building, floor, room or laboratory etc
- (5) **Assessment ref no** : use this to insert any local tracking references used by the school or administrative directorate
- (6) **Review date** : insert details of when the assessment will be reviewed as a matter of routine. This might be in 1 year's time, at the end of a short programme of work, or longer period if risks are known to be stable. Note that any assessment must be reviewed if there are any significant changes – to the work activity, the vicinity, the people exposed to the risk, etc
- (7) **Task / premises** : insert a brief summary of the task, e.g. typical office activities such as filing, DSE work, lifting and moving small objects, use of misc electrical equipment. Or, research project [title] involving the use of typical laboratory hardware, including fume cupboards, hot plates, ovens, analysis equipment, flammable solvents, etc.

- (8) **Activity** : use the column to describe each separate activity covered by the assessment. The number of rows is unlimited, although how many are used for one assessment will depend on how the task / premises is sub-divided. For laboratory work, activities in one particular lab or for one particular project might include; use of gas cylinders, use of fume cupboard, use of computer or other electrical equipment, use of lab ovens, hot plates or heaters, use of substances hazardous to health, etc
- (9) **Hazard** : for each activity, list the hazards. Remember to look at hazards that are not immediately obvious. For example, use of a lathe will require identification of the machine hazards, but also identification of hazards associated with the use of cutting oils (dermatitis), poor lighting, slipping on oil leaks, etc. The same activity might well have several hazards associated with it. Assessment of simple chemical risks (e.g. use of cleaning chemicals in accordance with the instructions on the bottle) may be recorded here. More complex COSHH assessments e.g. for laboratory processes, should be recorded on the specific COSHH forms ([link](#)).
- (10) **Persons in danger** : insert everyone who might be affected by the activity. Remember those who are not immediately involved in the work, including cleaners, young persons on work experience, maintenance contractors, Estates personnel carrying out routine maintenance and other work. Remember also that the risks for different groups will vary. E.g. someone who needs to repair a laser may need to expose the beam path more than users of the laser would do.
- (11) **Existing measures to control the risk** : list all measures that already mitigate the risk. Many of these will have been implemented for other reasons, but should nevertheless be recognised as means of controlling risk. For example, restricting access to laboratories or machine rooms for security reasons also controls the risk of unauthorised and unskilled access to dangerous equipment. A standard operating procedure or local rules (e.g. for work with ionising radiation, lasers or biological hazards) will often address risks. Some specific hazards may require detailed assessments in accordance with specific legislation (e.g. COSHH, DSEAR, manual handling, DSE work). Where this is the case, and a detailed assessment has already been done in another format, the master risk assessment can simply cross-reference to other documentation. For example, the activity might be use of a carcinogen, the hazard might be exposure to hazardous substances, the existing control measures might all be listed in a COSHH assessment. Controls might also include use of qualified and/or experienced staff who are competent to carry out certain tasks; an action plan might include training requirements for other people who will be carrying out those tasks.
- (12) **Risk Rating** : the simplest form of risk assessment is to rate the remaining risk as high, medium or low, depending on how likely the activity is to cause harm and how serious that harm might be.

The risk is **LOW** - if it is most unlikely that harm would arise under the controlled conditions listed, and even if exposure occurred, the injury would be relatively slight.

The risk is **MEDIUM** - if it is more likely that harm might actually occur and the outcome could be more serious (e.g. some time off work, or a minor physical injury).

The risk is **HIGH** - if injury is likely to arise (e.g. there have been previous incidents, the situation looks like an accident waiting to happen) and that injury might be serious (broken bones, trip to the hospital, loss of consciousness), or even a fatality.

Schools or administrative directorates may choose to use other rating systems. Typical amongst these are matrices (of 3x3, 4x4, 5x5 or even more complex) which require the assessor to select a numerical rating for both “likelihood that harm will arise” and “severity of that harm”. These may give a spurious sense of accuracy and reliability – none are based on quantitative methods. There are methods of estimating risk quantitatively, and these may be appropriate for complex design of load bearing structures and the like. Advice on methods of risk assessment is available from HSS.

Whatever system of assessment is adopted, it is **essential** that the assessor has received suitable training and is familiar with the meaning of the terms (or numbers) used.

- (13) **Result** : this stage of assessment is often overlooked, but is probably the most important. Assigning a number or rating to a risk does not mean that the risk is necessarily adequately controlled. The options for this column are:

T = trivial risk. Use for very low risk activities to show that you have correctly identified a hazard, but that in the particular circumstances, the risk is insignificant.

A = adequately controlled, no further action necessary. If your control measures lead you to conclude that the risk is low, and that all legislative requirements have been met (and University policies complied with), then insert A in this column.

N = not adequately controlled, actions required. Sometimes, particularly when setting up new procedures or adapting existing processes, the risk assessment might identify that the risk is high or medium when it is capable of being reduced by methods that are reasonably practicable. In these cases, an action plan is required. The plan should list the actions necessary, who they are to be carried out by, a date for completing the actions, and a signature box for the assessor to sign off that the action(s) has been satisfactorily completed. Some action plans will be complex documents; others may be one or two actions that can be completed with a short timescale.

U = unable to decide. Further information required. Use this designation if the assessor is unable to complete any of the boxes, for any reason. Sometimes, additional information can be obtained readily (e.g. from equipment or chemicals suppliers, specialist University advisors) but sometimes detailed and prolonged enquiries might be required. E.g. is someone is moving a research programme from a research establishment overseas where health and safety legislation is very different from that in the UK.

For T and A results, the assessment is complete.

For N or U results, more work is required before the assessment can be signed off.

- (14) **Action Plan.** Include details of any actions necessary in order to meet the requirements of the information in Section 11 'Existing measures to control the risk'. Identify someone who will be responsible for ensuring the action is taken and the date by which this should be completed. Put the date when the action has been completed in the final column.