



四川大学 商学院 *MBA*
MBA of SCU Business School

**A GUIDE
TO
WRITING YOUR
MASTERS DISSERTATION**

MBA Education Center of Business School

Sichuan University

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Introduction

The dissertation is the final stage of the Master's degree and provides you with the opportunity to show that you have gained the necessary skills and knowledge in order to organize and conduct a research project. It should demonstrate that you are skilled in identifying an area, or areas, suitable for research: setting research objectives; locating, organizing and critically analyzing the relevant secondary data and authoritative literature; devising an appropriate research methodology; analyzing the primary data selected and drawing on the literature in the field; drawing conclusions; and if appropriate making relevant recommendations and indications of areas for further research.

A dissertation is a 'formal' document and there are 'rules' that govern the way in which it is presented. It must have chapters that provide an introduction, a literature review, a justification of the data selected for analysis and research methodology, analysis of the data and, finally, conclusions and recommendations. Where the subject is based around a business or an applied situation recommendation for action may also be required. Advice on the range of suitable topics which relate to the subject area of your Master's degree will be approved by your dissertation supervisor.

The Masters level dissertation is distinguished from other forms of writing by its attempt to analyze situations in terms of the 'bigger picture'. It seeks answers, explanations, makes comparisons and arrives at generalizations which can be used to extend theory. As well as explaining **what can be done**, it addresses the underlying **why**. The most successful dissertations are those which are specific and narrowly focused.

This document is intended to guide you through the dissertation process. It can only offer suggestions; there is nothing that can be said which will guarantee the production of a fine piece of work, but these are suggestions which, through time, have been found to be both practical and effective.

You should read this guide before starting your dissertation and consult it as necessary throughout the process. This will help you to make a start to your dissertation and make more effective use of your meeting sessions you're your supervisor.

N.B. These notes have been produced for general guidance only and you are required to read the recommended texts and journal papers on research techniques appropriate to the research methods of your subject discipline. You are not to use these notes as justification or reference for any methodological approaches or techniques in your dissertation.

The Dissertation in Outline

Aims of the Dissertation

The aims of the dissertation are to:

- put into practice theories and concepts learned on the programme;
- provide an opportunity to study a particular topic in depth;
- show evidence of independent investigation;
- combine relevant theories and suggest alternatives;
- enable interaction with practitioners (where appropriate to the chosen topic);
- show evidence of ability to plan and manage a project within deadlines

After completion of the dissertation students should be able to:

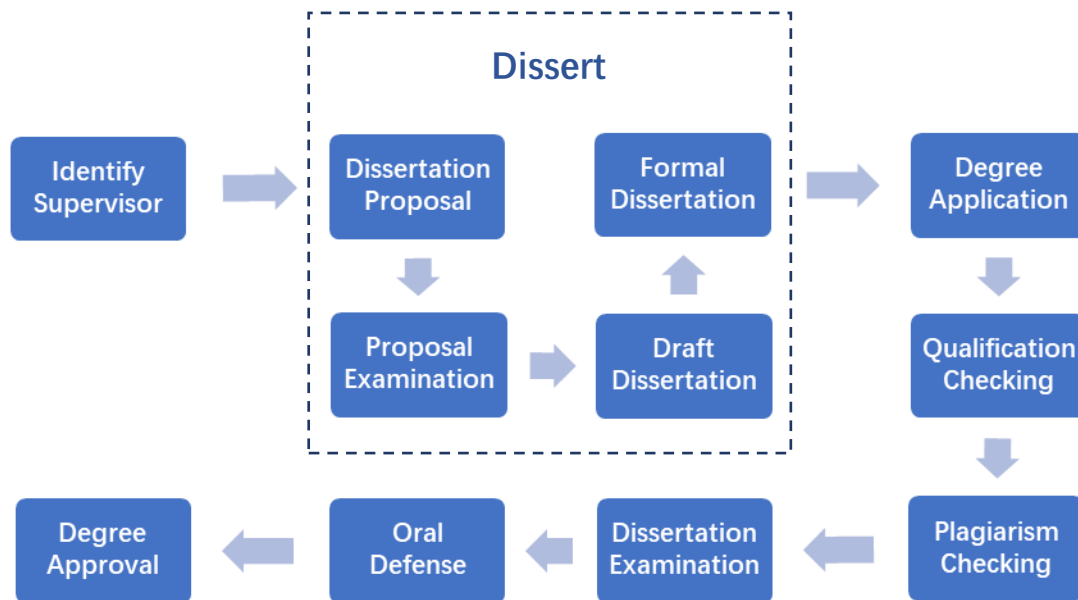
- define, design and deliver an academically rigorous piece of research;
- understand the relationships between the theoretical concepts taught in class and their application in specific situations;
- show evidence of a critical and holistic knowledge and have a deeper understanding of their chosen subject area;
- appreciate practical implications and constraints of the specialist subject;
- understand the process and decisions to be made in managing a project within strict deadlines

Dissertation Styles

Dissertations need to demonstrate knowledge and understanding beyond undergraduate level and should also reach a level of scope and depth beyond that taught in class. All dissertations must be presented in an appropriate academic style and format to ensure that the precise aims of the dissertation are met. It is important that the aims and objectives of the dissertation are clearly expressed and are achievable within the scope of the dissertation framework. Academic style does not just refer to the clarity of expression, grammar, use of citation and referencing but relates to a clearly structured approach to the justification and validation of facts, theories and opinions presented to form a precise argument. With the range of subjects taught across the programme the type of research dissertation will vary.

You will not normally be required to undertake a viva voce examination of your dissertation. The dissertation is assessed on the basis of the content of your submitted document alone.

Key Milestones



Outline of main stages in the dissertation:

- **Semester 1:** academic supervisor selection.
- **Semester 2:** proposal writing assisted by academic supervisor and relevant lectures
- **Semester 3:** formal dissertation proposal submission and examination. (Examination confirms permission to undertake dissertation)
- **Semester 4:** dissertation writing
- **Semester 5:** formal dissertation submission & oral defense (Qualification & plagiarism checking and dissertation examination confirms permission to undertake oral defense)

Supporting Documents

The following documents can be downloaded from the School web site at

- Dissertation proposal form
- Title page template
- Abstract page template
- Authorship Declaration page

Dissertation Supervision

Supervision

You will be supported through the dissertation by an academic supervisor. You will be advised by Programme Director of the process by which your programme either allocates academic supervisors or students seek a preferred academic supervisor. The academic supervisor will ideally have background expertise in your area of study. However, this may not always be possible and you may be allocated a supervisor with more general subject knowledge. Regardless of the subject background of the supervisor, the academic supervisor will understand the research process.

Role of Academic Supervisor

The academic supervisor performs many functions and is there to facilitate and not to lead, hence the responsibility for the quality and content of a dissertation is entirely that of yourself, the student. The supervisor role includes the following:

1. To advise the student whether or not the project appears to be feasible and the possible risks that may be involved, for example problems in trying to access information, potential poor response rates to surveys concerning commercially sensitive issues.
2. To assist the student in tailoring the proposal to the time and other resource constraints.
3. To assist the student at the outset in finding useful and relevant reading material and appropriate academic framework within which to place the topic.
4. To advise on the choice of suitable methodological approach(es).
5. To monitor progress and to advise on what is required to achieve a satisfactory dissertation.
6. Where relevant, to liaise with the company and resolve any problems the student may have in obtaining access to company information or personnel.
7. To first-mark the dissertation, and to submit a marker's report;

Supervisors are asked to aim to reply to any correspondence relating to dissertations (including email correspondence) and to return comments on submitted work within a **fortnight of receipt**. Students should not expect instant responses to e-mails.

It should be emphasized that the dissertation is entirely your own work. However, you may ask your supervisor to read in detail of your dissertation, in order to give feedback on content, style and oral defense.

Students should note that supervision cannot be guaranteed to be available at all times during the summer and winter vacations and students should ensure that they make adequate arrangements with their supervisor to cover this period. At all times it is the responsibility of the student to maintain adequate contact with their supervisor and to keep their supervisor informed of their progress.

The academic supervisor must read the finished work prior to submission and will make comment at any stage. The academic supervisor will not check or correct grammar and expression.

Responsibilities of the Student

1. To maintain regular contact with the academic supervisor. It is the student's responsibility to inform their supervisor of progress and to lead the development of the dissertation. Difficulties must be communicated at the time they are encountered.
2. To write the dissertation in a good standard of clear English using appropriate academic terms and citation and referencing conventions. It is not the responsibility of the supervisor to ensure that this condition is met.
3. To write the dissertation with guidance from the supervisor. The dissertation and research work must be your own. The dissertation is to reflect your subject understanding and research abilities, not that of your supervisor.
4. Where a company project is undertaken, to attend on a regular basis as required, and to maintain regular contact with the company sponsor.

If during the preparation of the dissertation, the focus and direction of the dissertation changes substantially from that outlined in your Dissertation Proposal Form then you should immediately discuss this with your academic supervisor.

Dissertation Supervisor Meeting

The purpose of these meetings is to discuss progress and resolve any difficulties. You will be expected to take a proactive approach to these meetings and bring material or options to be discussed rather than expect your supervisor to say what should be done next.

Initial meetings to discuss topics and planning will usually be scheduled by the academic supervisor. Responsibility for scheduling further meetings will be with you. Your academic supervisor will endeavor to meet you as soon as possible, but you must remember your academic supervisor has other work commitments, conferences to attend, research to undertake and will also take a vacation some time through the summer period. If you are based abroad then progress meetings can take place using e-mail.

The Dissertation

- You will be advised of the deadline for submitting a dissertation proposal by your Programme Director
- The most important source of dissertation topic is: a) problems from previous work experience; b) problems from internship or practical courses; c) topic recommended or assigned by supervisor.
- You must receive confirmation that your proposal is approved before you continue with your dissertation.
- Where a proposal is disapproved then it will have another chance to be examined and major revisions will be permitted.

The Dissertation Proposal

The dissertation proposal is an important working document and which over the next few months becomes transformed into the dissertation. You will see that the main sections replicate the structure of the dissertation.

Used correctly, the proposal will become your road map through the dissertation process. Because of a wide variety of circumstances, the focus of your research may change. If this happens then you should change your proposal document and also agree with your academic supervisor that such a change is appropriate.

The research proposal shows that you have thought through what the main research objectives are to be, that you have identified the main sources of primary and secondary data and that you have given thought as to the research methodology. The proposal should provide your academic supervisor with a ‘detailed skeleton’ of the whole dissertation; the fine details are added when the literature review is completed and the primary research has been undertaken.

The research proposal should include:

(a) A working title

Your title can and probably will change but using precise wording even at this early stage will help to keep your dissertation properly focused.

b) An Introduction to the Topic

This will include a brief description of the topic, the aim, research objectives and research questions to be addressed. You will find that moving from research aim to research objectives, to research questions is quite a difficult task. This, however, will provide a clear focus to your research and help you structure both this research proposal and the final dissertation.

The *aim* of the research provides a description of what you want to achieve from carrying out this research.

The **objectives** of the research outline the particular issues that you need to address in order to achieve the aim above. They are more specific than the aim, in that they outline the particular dimensions of your research topic, which are relevant to the overall aim of your research.

The **research questions** are more specific than your research objectives and specify the various insights/information that need to be collected in order to achieve the objectives. Keep in mind that the research question often starts with a Why, How, or What.

(c) A **Preliminary Literature Review** which indicates: (i) that you have studied the work of the major authors in your research field (ii) that you are familiar with the major themes relevant to that subject area (iii) what further investigations you intend to pursue as part of this dissertation. You should bear in mind that you are reviewing the literature in order to develop sharper, more insightful and focused research questions about your topic. Therefore, your literature review should lead to and justify your research objectives and questions.

(d) **The Detailed Research Methodology** which you intend to employ. The methodology section should discuss what methods you are going to use in order to address the research objectives of your dissertation. You need to justify why the chosen methods were selected as the most appropriate for your research, amongst the many alternative ones, given its specific objectives, and constraints you may face in terms of access, time and so on. Reference to general advantages and disadvantages of various methods and techniques without specifying their relevance to your choice decision is unacceptable. Remember to relate the methods back to the needs of your research question.

(e) **Timetable** detailing how you anticipate completing the dissertation by the submission date and, if a company-based project, the means of liaising with the company to ensure the specific objectives are achieved.

Writing the Dissertation

- **Deadlines:** There is no single start date for you to begin your dissertation as you will be preparing the early ideas and initial reviews in the help of academic supervisor. You will be given a formal notification to proceed following the Progression Board in June. You will be given a specific date to submit which cannot be changed. To accommodate the number of dissertations being submitted programme will be given a date during August. The Programme Director will provide you with the deadline date.
- **Word count:** If you are writing a dissertation by research, **20,000** words. (not including appendices and references)

Title Page

The title page should adopt the format shown in the template.

Abstract

The dissertation should contain an abstract of up to 500 words. A good abstract is difficult to write and can only be completed after the full dissertation has been written. It represents a brief summary of the results of the dissertation research. By summarizing the results of the research, it allows other people to get an idea of what was accomplished without having to read through the whole dissertation. Other scholars can read an abstract to decide if looking at the full work will be worthwhile. The abstract should provide sufficient information about the results of the research that reading the full dissertation is not necessary, although your markers will read the full dissertation.

•Hints as to what to include in your abstract:

- Aim and objectives:** What are the main themes, ideas or areas of theory being investigated?
- Boundaries:** What is the context and background to this dissertation? In what areas of theory or business practice should the reader concentrate their attention?
- Methodology:** What was/were the main method(s) employed to generate the results?
- Results:** What were your main findings?
- Conclusions:** What are the main conclusions that you arrive at when viewing the entire dissertation?
- Recommendations:** (if appropriate) What solutions do you offer in answer to the problems posed in the research objectives?

Acknowledgements

A brief statement, acknowledges all help received in writing the dissertation. Try to keep more personal comments about family and friends to a minimum and concentrate on those who have given direct assistance.

Contents Page

The contents page should list the chapter headings, appendices, references and the pages on which they can be found. Separate listing should be given for lists of figures, tables and abbreviations. You will find this easier to create these if you know how to generate these lists using the indexing and style functions within Microsoft Word.

Introduction.

The dissertation should be divided into chapters and sections appropriate to the topic and type of dissertation chosen. The following elements are *typical* of the traditional dissertation. You should discuss the overall structure of your dissertation with your academic supervisor.

The Introduction to the dissertation should set out the background to the research study and address the following areas:

The context in which the research took place

- What is the background, the context, in which the research took place?
- Why is this subject or issue important
- Who are the key participants and/or ‘actors’ in the area under investigation?
- Are there important trends or pivotal variables of which the reader needs to be made aware?
- A clear and succinct statement of the aims and objectives that the dissertation is going to address.
- Have you presented a clear and unambiguous exposition of your research aim, the objectives you will address to meet this aim and your research questions?

The reasons why this study was carried out

- Was this study undertaken for example in order to test some aspect of professional or business practice or theory or framework of analysis?
- Was the research carried out to fulfil the demands of a business organization?

The way the Dissertation is to be organized

You should write your dissertation with the idea in mind that the intended reader and reviewer has some shared understanding of the area being investigated, however, underpinning concepts and arguments still need to be included as otherwise the depth of research will be compromised. In this way, you will not be tempted to make too many implicit assumptions, i.e. by making the erroneous assumptions that the reader has your degree of knowledge about the matters in question or can follow, exactly, your thought processes without your spelling them out. It should be a document which is ‘self-contained’ and does not need any additional explanation, or interpretation, or reference to other documents in order that it may be fully understood.

This short final section of the Introduction should tell the reader what topics are going to be discussed in each of the chapters and how the chapters are related to each other. In this way, you are, in effect, providing the reader with a ‘road map’ of the work ahead. Thus, at a glance, they can see (1) where they are starting from, (2) the context in which the journey is taking place, (3) where they are going to end up, and (4) the route which they will take to reach their final destination. Such a ‘map’ will enable the reader to navigate their way through your work much more easily and appreciate to the maximum what you have done. This chapter may be between 750 to 1,000 words although in some subjects or topics the justification of the subject and scope may change the length of this chapter.

Literature Review

The main reasons for the inclusion, in a Masters dissertation, of a literature review section are:

- To present and to analyze, in a critical manner, that part of the published literature which is relevant to your research topic and which acts as the basis for a fuller understanding of the context in which you are conducting your research; thus, helping the reader to a more rounded appreciation of what you have completed. Remember critical does not mean looking at the negatives but forming an evaluation.
- To act as a backdrop against which what you have done in the remainder of the dissertation may be analyzed and critically evaluated so as to give the reader the opportunity to assess the worth of your writing, analytical and research skills.
- To show that not only have you discovered and reported what you have found to be relevant in the literature search, but that you have understood it and that you are able to analyze it in a critical manner.
- To show that your knowledge of the area of interest is detailed enough that you are able to identify gaps in the coverage of the topic; thus, justifying the reason(s) for your research.
- To show that you know what the key variables, trends and ‘actors’ are in the environment of your study, i.e. you show that you know what the important issues are that need to be investigated.
- To enable readers to be able to measure the validity of your choice(s) of research methodology, the appropriateness of the process by which you analyze your results, and whether or not your findings are congruent with the accepted research which has gone before.

The literature review is presented in the form of a précis, a classification, a comparison and a critical analysis of that material which is germane to a full understanding of your research study. Such published material may be drawn from all, or a combination of, textbooks, journal articles, conference papers, reports, case studies, the Internet, magazine features or newspaper articles. It should be remembered, however, **that the most important source of academic literatures is journal articles** and you should ensure that you are familiar with the most recent publications in journals relevant to your subject area.

Remember that your literature review should lead and justify the research objectives and questions of your dissertation. Your literature review should not just be a catalogue of authors, frameworks and ideas but should attempt to introduce a critical evaluation of those authors work.

The literature review will be around 3,000 to 4,000 words. Hints on how to go about the literature review are contained in the Appendix.

Research Methodology.

You should begin the Research Methodology chapter by stating, again, the research objectives of the project. This will enable the reader to make an assessment as to the validity of your chosen research methodology.

This chapter is that part of the dissertation where you have the opportunity to justify to the reader the process by which the research questions, which were derived by an analysis of the relevant literature, were answered. It is not sufficient to say, for example, “suitable respondents were sampled using a quota sampling technique and then surveyed using a postal questionnaire” and then leave it at that. It might well be the case that, given the problem(s) to be investigated, such a choice of research methods is entirely appropriate. However, if you have not taken the opportunity to justify your research choices to a reader, they could be correct in assuming that you have, by chance, merely guessed at what would work and, more by luck than judgement, arrived at the ‘correct’ solution to the problem.

The chapter on research methodology must, painstakingly argue for, and justify each, decision that is taken when arriving at the way in which the research is to be organized. Every time that you, the researcher, have to make a choice from a number of options, you must state what each of these are, why you made the choice you did, and why you rejected those not used. Further information and hints on the research methods chapter are shown in the Appendix.

The conclusion of this chapter should provide a summary of the main points that have been covered. The conclusion should also direct the reader as to how the contents of this chapter link in with the contents of the next chapter, your findings. This chapter will be usually be between 1,000 and 2,000 words.

Findings / Results / Data Analysis.

This chapter presents the evidence and/or results of primary research which you have undertaken. Depending upon your subject area this can be in the form of detailed quantitative models, hypothesis testing to some basic analysis using basic descriptive statistics or qualitative techniques dealing with structured content analysis, textual analysis, to case study descriptions.

The main part of the chapter is the presentation of the data that you obtained. Even projects of relatively moderate dimensions will generate a large amount of data which has to be considered. **This data must be organized in a logical and coherently ordered whole** so that your thought processes and interpretation are clear to the reader.

Whatever form of data analysis has been undertaken, it must be accomplished with care and attention to detail, as should the way in which the results are presented.

Nothing is guaranteed to frustrate a reader more than to have to plough their way through an arid mass of tables, figures and statistics. Better by far to describe in an accessible manner (which does not mean that you should talk down to the reader) what the research has uncovered and to include only the most pertinent figures as evidence of your findings. Dissertations which included detailed modelling or quantitative analysis will clearly need to show all relevant assumptions, relationships and methods. Your academic supervisor will be able to advise on the level of detail required in the main body as opposed to that included in the Appendix.

Graphs, diagrams, pie-charts etc. are all useful ways of presenting research results; they are an imaginative way of ‘breaking up’ solid blocks of text – they let a little ‘light’ into the body of the text as long as they are relevant and illustrate your points. Keep your review to those items which are relevant to your research question and not just everything I found out.

There will be problems in the execution of any research project and their occurrence should be brought to the attention of the reader. Without stating them, one of the essential elements of the context in which the research took place will be missing.

Not all dissertations contain quantitative data. In many situations, students will have made extensive use of qualitative research techniques such as focus groups and/or in-depth unstructured interviews. While quantitative data lends itself to graphs, tables and so on, qualitative data, and the way it is presented, pose particular challenges for students. As ever, your objective should be based on the belief that the data must be presented in such a manner as to make it easy for the reader to follow the logic of the analysis.

The analysis of qualitative data should be based on the research questions and issues that you explored during your fieldwork. For instance, you may have addressed six or seven critical questions in a series of interviews. Each of these questions should be examined separately, rather than describing each focus group in turn. This provides a degree of logical flow and development to the analysis. In addition, it is advisable to focus on the points of agreement and disagreement that emerged during the interviews. This should be supported with relevant quotations from the transcripts of the interviews. You should avoid lengthy quotations, unless they are of critical importance. However, short excerpts enrich the reader’s understanding of the issues and provide you with the opportunity to shed a clearer insight on the topic.

Many students make the mistake of providing a very superficial, descriptive analysis of qualitative data. This does not allow you to demonstrate that the research you undertook was of a substantive nature. Tables can also be included that reflect the respondent’s overall attitudes, perceptions and views about the themes.

You are not required to include all the transcripts of interviews, surveys or datasheets.

Only include the summarized data in the main body of the dissertation.

Appendixes should be restricted to no more than 25 pages. You can keep additional information in a folder for use by the markers if requested.

In the case of company projects, you may need to include some brief outline about the company and its activities. Again, keep these comments focused on the topic area and not just a broad and general description of everything you know about the organization.

Discussion

In the introduction to the dissertation you described the context of the research. In the literature survey you analyzed the work of previously published authors and derived a set of questions that needed to be answered to fulfil the objectives of this study. In the research methodology section you showed the reader what techniques were available, what their advantages and disadvantages were, and what guided you to make the choice you did. In the results section, you present to the reader the outcome of the research exercise.

The introduction of this chapter reminds the reader what, exactly, were the research objectives. Your review of the literature and your evaluation of the various themes, issues and frameworks helped you to develop a more specific set of research questions. In essence, your analysis of the data that you have collected from your fieldwork should provide answers to these questions. You should, as a matter of priority, focus attention on data that is directly relevant to the research questions. You should avoid the mistake of including analysis that might be interesting in a general way, but is not linked to the original direction of the dissertation. Peripheral data can be included as an appendix; however, you are reminded that there is a **limit of twenty-five pages for appendices**. The introduction should also explain how the results are to be presented.

This is the heart of the dissertation and must be more than descriptive. This chapter develops analytic and critical thinking on primary results and analysis with reference to theoretical arguments grounded in the literature review. You should try to highlight where there are major differences and similarities from the literature or between different groups. Where a model or framework of analysis has been used or is being developed you should highlight the main relationships as well as explaining the reason and significance behind features or decisions being discussed.

Conclusions.

Here you will bring together the work of the dissertation by showing how the initial research plan has been addressed in such a way that conclusions may be formed from the evidence of the dissertation. No new material or references should be placed here. The conclusions should make a statement on the extent to which each of the aims and

objectives has been met. You should bring back your research questions and state clearly your understanding of those questions. Be careful not to make claims that are not substantiated from the evidence you have presented in earlier chapters.

If you are undertaking a company project based around a business issue do not confuse recommendations for the company with conclusions. If you want to include a list of recommendations then do so in a separate short chapter. **The conclusions address the wider understanding of the issue you have been studying.**

You should include a short sub section on any suggestions for further research for colleagues who might wish to undertake research in this area in the future. There should also be a short statement of the limitations of the research. Often as a single case study or limited range of companies you cannot really claim that your research holds for all companies. However, by adopting a rigorous approach to your literature review and methods which have validity and can be repeated you can make a reasonable but limited claim that your conclusions should be taken seriously.

References

All references used in writing the dissertation (whether direct quotations or paraphrasing) should be included in a reference list/bibliography, compiled in alphabetical order by author. The Harvard system for listing references should be used.

Appendices:

Appendices may be used to provide relevant supporting evidence for reference but should only be used if necessary. Students may wish to include in appendices, evidence which confirms the originality of their work or illustrates points of principle set out in the main text, questionnaires, and interview guidelines. Only subsidiary material should be included in appendices. Students should not assume that Appendices will be read by Examiners in detail.

Authorship Declaration

A brief statement, signed by the student and academic supervisor, should be provided which:

1. Gives an assurance that the dissertation is your own work. You may need to supply evidence of how you arrived at your findings. You should retain copies of all their fieldwork and analysis in a separate folder (including interviews and transcriptions), should they need to be consulted by internal examiners. The folder should not be submitted with the dissertation and will only be required on demand.
2. A declaration that the work complies with University regulations on plagiarism.

A fixed Authorship Declaration Page should be adopted.

Layout, Style and Writing Suggestions

Dissertation Formatting

Aspect	'Word' Command Line	Recommended Setting
<i>Word count</i>	/	20,000 words. (excludes abstract, references i.e., main text only)
<i>Paper Size</i>	File, Page setup – Paper.	A4
<i>Margin Settings</i>	File, Page setup, margins	Top 2.54cm, Bottom 2.54cm Left 3.17cm, Right 3.17cm Gutter 0cm Gutter Position Left
<i>Line spacing</i>	Format, Paragraph, Indents & spacing	One and a half spacing, not single or double.
<i>Page Numbering</i>	View, Header & Footer, Insert page Numbers	For sections from Acknowledgements to start of Main Text page number format is i) ii) iii) ..and so on continuously For Main Text page format is 1,2, 3 and so on continuously With position on page centred aligned
<i>Text</i>	Format, Styles & Formatting	Times New Roman
<i>Font</i>	Format, Styles & Formatting	12 point font
<i>Alignment</i>	Format, Styles & Formatting	Justified
Typical Dissertation Layout		
<i>Front cover</i>	/	Required, see separate example
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	/	Required
<i>Abstract</i>	/	Required, see example
<i>Table of Contents</i>	Insert, Reference, Index & Tables	Required
<i>List of Figures</i>	Insert, Reference, Index & Tables	Required (Note all figures in the main text must be numbered, titled and attributed)

<i>List of Tables</i>	Insert, Reference, Index & Tables	Required (Note all tables in the main text must be numbered, titled and attributed)
<i>Abbreviations</i>	/	Optional
<i>Main text Chapter & Section Headings</i>	Format, Bullets & Numbering, Outline numbered	Chapter title, bold, 16 point font outlined numbered e.g. Chapter 1; start each chapter on new page Section title, bold, 14 point font outlined numbered e.g. 1.1; Sub section title, 12 point font, outlined numbered e.g. 1.1.1
<i>List of references</i>	/	Harvard system preferred
<i>Appendices</i>	/	Appendix title, bold, outlined numbered e.g. Appendix 1, start each Appendix on new page
<i>Binding</i>	/	Perfect binding
<i>Number of copies</i>	/	Seven hardbound copies plus an electronic version, Word format.

Writing Style

As was stated at the start, a dissertation is a ‘formal’ document and, as such, its contents must be expressed in a certain style. That style is the third person singular passive i.e.

Marketing sits within the wider knowledge base of the social sciences and, while it cannot, because of its nature, employ the techniques, formulae and laws of the pure sciences, it should aspire to a ‘scientific’ level of objectivity.

This is an objective statement, and that is the way in which your dissertation should be expressed. If you have conducted your research properly i.e. you have designed a ‘correct’ research methodology, you have recorded the results accurately and analyzed the data in an appropriate manner, then you should have arrived at a set of results that anyone else would arrive at if they had also conducted that research. Although you cannot ‘take yourself out’ of the project, you can take yourself out of the report. Thus, while not using the rules of pure science, you can suggest by the style of presentation, that you have been striving for scientific objectivity.

Ensure that you use gender-inclusive vocabulary.

Using Introductions and Conclusions to chapters

Each of your chapters will require both an introduction and a conclusion. The former

provides the reader with a contents ‘map’ of what is to come, and the latter provides a concise summary of what they have just read. Each introduction should look back to the conclusion of the previous chapter, and forwards to the contents of the chapter which you are introducing. The conclusion should look back into the chapter just completed, and forward to the introduction of the following chapter. These conclusions and introductions act like small links which bind the ‘chain’ of the chapters together in a more seamless whole than would have occurred if the chapters had not been introduced or concluded; they ‘smooth out’ the transition from chapter to chapter and from topic to topic.

Approval of Questionnaires and Surveys

All questionnaires which are to be used in research must first be approved by the academic supervisors and in the case of the company projects the company concerned. This is to ensure that questions are grammatically and logically correct. The academic supervisor will not necessarily make the necessary corrections but highlight where improvements are required.

Citations and References

The University has a policy which covers all Masters students in relation to a reference system. **It is important that you get your citations and references correct.** You must always cite the source of your material; **inadequate citation could leave you open to the suspicion of plagiarism.**

Within text citation

This is where any formal mention that you make in your dissertation to something written by someone else. Every citation must be supported by a **reference** which supplies the details which will enable the reader to follow up that citation. The University employs the Harvard System of referencing. If you refer to the work of an author in your text then it should be cited as, for example,

Smith (1997) states that the shoe size of an individual is a function of three criteria.

or

Shoe size has been demonstrated to be a function of three criteria (Smith 1997).

Perhaps more than one author has made a broadly similar point and you want to include them all. In such a case the citation should appear as follows:

'Logistics research is always important in new product development (Freeman 1997; Hardy 1989; Willis 1999).'

If you quote directly from an author's work you should include the page number from which the quotation is taken, e.g. (Smith 1997, p 4.)

End of text referencing

The list of references is placed at the end of the dissertation (in alphabetical order of first author's surname), as follows:

For a journal: Smith, S. (1997) "The Effects of Shoe Size on Consumer Behavior", Journal of International Shoe Manufacturers, Vol. 34, No. 45, pp 23-45.

For a textbook: Smith, S. (1997) Strategy, Marketing and Consumers, Paisley, Academic Free Press, 7th edition.

If you are only referring to a small portion of a large text, then you must specify which parts are relevant by adding either the chapters, "chapters 4 and 6", to which you are referring, or the appropriate pages (Smith 1997 pp 126-341).

Text notes

Text notes can provide additional information on points made in the text of the dissertation. They may be presented as footnotes or as endnotes, either of which should be **kept to a minimum**. Neither footnotes nor endnotes should be used, however, if the sole purpose is to give a page or reference, these should be presented as parenthetical insertions into the main text of the dissertation. Articles and books mentioned in the text, including text notes, should be identified by the author's name and the year of publication. The title of the article or book should then be listed in the dissertation's list of references.

Attribution and Plagiarism

Plagiarism occurs when students attempt to pass off someone else’s work as their own. Typically, sections of text are taken verbatim from another person’s work without proper attribution being given. This is a form of cheating and the University takes a very serious view regarding any student involved in cheating. Severe penalties will be applied. The University will use reference checking software to ensure that dissertations are correctly and fully referenced.

See <http://www.hw.ac.uk/registry/resources/PlagiarismGuide.pdf>

When the work of others is used, a direct quotation, a figure or a general idea, it must be acknowledged in the text and list of references. Quotation marks should always be used to indicate direct quotations. If students are in any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism, they are advised to consult their dissertation advisor.

Similarity Rate and Results

Similarity Rate	Results
$\leq 15\%$	Pass
$15\% < X \leq 30\%$	Recheck after revision
$> 30\%$	Fail

Confidentiality

If the material in a dissertation is regarded as confidential, the student should mark the text ‘CONFIDENTIAL’ on the front cover when it is submitted. In this event the dissertation will be seen only by members of the Board of Examiners and administrative staff and it will be kept secure, away from those available for consultation. No one outside the Board of Examiners and administrative staff will be allowed to see the dissertation unless they are given written permission by the student and Programme Director. Requests to see such dissertations are almost universally refused. Such dissertations will be kept secure for a period of 2 years only, unless the student specifically requests a security classification to be applied for a longer period.

Submission Arrangements

Seven hard copies of the dissertation (five anonymously for oral defense and two signed for retention), written and bound in the approved manner, an electronic version (using MS Word format) should be submitted to the MBA Office in room 412 by the published deadline.

Any dissertation submitted after the deadline **will not be marked**.

The dissertation deadline will be strictly observed.

Dissertations can be submitted earlier.

Submission Deadlines

One of the learning aims of a Master's programme is to demonstrate the ability to manage a complex and extended piece of work within the given word count and available timescales. This requires careful planning and the need to reprioritize and adjust your work as circumstances change.

One-year examination postponement will be applied for any late submissions to dissertations.

Last-minute delays through printer failure; corrupted files or breakdown to computers; unforeseen problems with statistical software; staff or interviewees being unavailable; just run out of time to complete writing or analysis; or even colds are not accepted.

- Remember to keep backups of all electronic working and supporting files.
- Allow time for proof reading and printing as this always takes longer than you think. (When including colour is it really necessary as it will add to your time and cost).
- Plan you interviews in advance and check that you know when key people will be on holiday.
- Keep your academic supervisor informed of major delays and interruptions as they occur.
- Start your dissertation early and have a week by week time plan, modify it but don't lose site of the end date or objective.
- Find time to relax and whilst short breaks away can help you to clarify your thoughts avoid extended visits to or by family and friends as the time will go very quickly.

Assessment

All dissertations will be read by one Internal Examiner and one External Examiner excluding the academic supervisor. For company-based dissertations the company will not be involved in the assessment process. In addition, some dissertations may be read by one more External Examiners to ensure a uniform standard is maintained.

Marking Criteria

A composite mark will be awarded for the dissertation by every single examiner. 100-point system will be applied. The criteria used in the marking process will reflect the following.

Criteria	Marking			
	Grade A [90, 100]	Grade B [75, 90)	Grade C [60, 75)	Grade D [0, 60)
<i>Research Significance</i> X ₁				
<i>Research Methodology</i> X ₂				
<i>Innovation and Result Application</i> X ₃				
<i>Expression & Format & Logic</i> X ₄				
<i>Research Content</i> X ₅				
Final Mark	$X = x_1 * 20\% + x_2 * 20\% + x_3 * 10\% + x_4 * 25\% + x_5 * 25\% =$			

- **Research Significance:** dissertation has practical application value or theoretical research significance.
- **Research Methodology:** show an awareness of the relevant literature; designed a ‘correct’ research methodology, recorded the results accurately and analyzed the data in an appropriate manner.
- **Innovation and Result Application:** showing something new, either from reviewing the literature or from undertaking an empirical investigation, or both. An ability to bring together in a coherent fashion the perspectives of two or more theoretical standpoints and apply the results in a practical setting.
- **Expression & Format & Logic:** coherent and thoughtful level of English; clear and logical structure; written and bound in the approved manner.
- **Research Content:** A depth of knowledge and critical understanding of an

interdisciplinary or specialist area; an informed description of events or data; an analysis of the information collected and this must be directed towards answering the research questions raised by the dissertation.

Marking and Assessment Results

A mark of ≥ 60 (Grade C) or greater is required to pass the dissertation. When marks are agreed as achieving Grade D (< 60), this is classed as an initial fail. Minor editorial corrections or deficiencies are allowed for oral defense based on the comments of markers within the fixed time.

Marking Results

Final Mark	Grade
[0, 60)	Grade D
[60, 75)	Grade C
[75, 90)	Grade B
[90, 100]	Grade A

Assessment Results

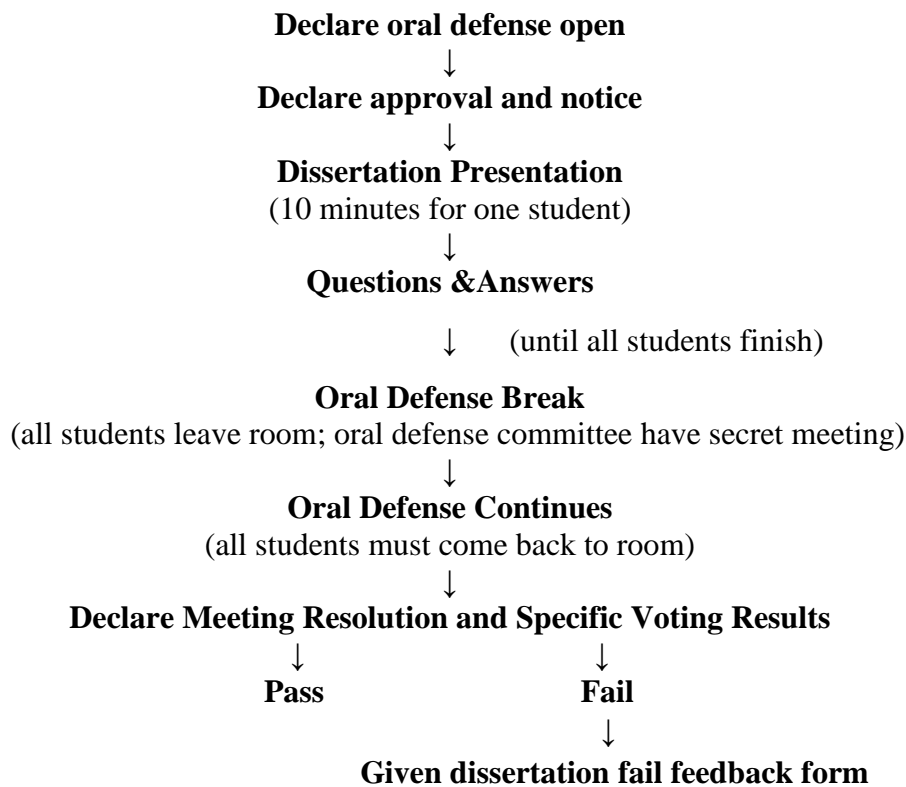
Type	Mark of Examiner A	Mark of Examiner B	Results
1	[0, 60)	[0, 75)	Oral Defense Disqualification
2	[0, 60)	[75, 100]	One More Examiner Marking Grade A-C : Oral Defense Permission Grade D : Oral Defense Disqualification
	[60, 75)	[60, 75)	
	[60, 100]	[60, 100]	
	Receiving a Grade D [0, 60)		
3	[60, 100]	[75, 100]	Oral Defense Permission

Oral Defense

After dissertation examination and minor revision, five anonymous hard copies of formal dissertation, bound in the approved manner should be submitted for oral defense. You will be given a formal notification to proceed following the school arrangement in November.

Anonymous method is applied during the whole oral defense process. Only dissertation topic, class and student number appear; student's name and academic supervisor's name is forbidden to appear.

On-site Process



Presentation

Students presentation last no more than 10 minutes, 10-15 slides are recommended. Presentation contents include but not limited:

- Topic background and significance
- Main structure
- Innovation or application value, application results
- Gains and experience

- Deficiency and problems that need to be addressed further

Original questionnaires and interview outline are required if it's adopted during research, in case of examination.

Notice

- Enter oral defense room in advance and make all the preparations. (e.g. copy slides into computer, prepare outline, paper, pen and so on)
- Do not use mobile phones or other electronic communication devices, including searching information, audio and video recording and other functions
- All students must come back to room and listen to defense resolution and specific voting results by the time of the notice after oral defense break. **Absent without cause, no declaration and the oral defense shall be deemed invalid.**

Appendix 1. Order of Parts

The dissertation should be arranged in the following manner:

- 1. Title Page**
- 2. Abstract**
- 3. Acknowledgements**
- 4. Contents Page**
- 5. Introduction**
- 6. Literature Review**
- 7. Research Methodology**
- 8. Findings/Results/Data Analysis**
- 9. Discussion**
- 10. Conclusions**
- 11. References**
- 12. Appendices**
- 13. Authorship Declaration**

Appendix 2. Further Notes on the Literature Review

1. The introduction might include:

- A definition or description of topic in general terms, or of the issues you propose to investigate – this will give the reader a context in which the literature may be viewed.
- The key trends in this sector of the literature, the main theories and areas of disagreement, and possibly, gaps in the literature.
- An explanation of why you are conducting this literature review and the standpoint you will be adopting when conducting your critical analysis.
- The manner in which the review will be presented.
- An explanation as to why, if appropriate, some literature has not been included in the study.

2. The Main Body of the Literature Review

This might include:

- Begin with a discussion of the main theories or models, which are appropriate to your study.
- Group together appropriate themes or trends and discuss them in detail.
- Begin in general terms and then narrow down to specific details, this applies to the entire literature review and to individual sections.
- Try to explain and, if possible, to resolve conflicts in what you report.
- Cover all the topics which are relevant to the dissertation.
- Be comprehensive enough to act as a suitably firm foundation, such that it will support the research in the remainder of the dissertation.
- Be up to date – always try to employ the most contemporary journal articles or sources.

3. The Conclusion of the Literature Review

At the end of the Literature Review, in this conclusion, you should make explicit what exactly the research objectives of the research are, so that the reader is in no doubt as to what you are about to investigate.

In order to do this, you should:

- Summarize the major points that the literature review has uncovered.

- Point out the gap(s) in the literature, if there are any, and use these to emphasize the justification for carrying out the current research project.
- Remember that your literature review should lead and justify the research objectives and questions of your dissertation.

4. Hints on conducting a Literature Review

- a) The University's subject librarian will help you find relevant material.
- b) Use the Library electronic journal catalogue as a way of gaining access to relevant material. In particular, learn how to input the keywords for individual search engines – each have their own idiosyncrasies.
- c) Make a decision as to those keywords which encompass your subject within reasonably narrow confines; too 'wide' a definitional span and you will be engulfed with too much that is of only peripheral relevance; too 'narrow' a definition and you will be excluding items which are of use.
- d) Always try to gain access to full, original articles or to complete texts; using quotes or citations from third parties may carry with them a certain 'colour' which the original author did not intend and which might bias your review.

5. Questions to be asked when carrying out a Literature Review

- Are the references included relevant to the topic(s) under investigation?
- Do the references support all the topics or themes that must be discussed to aid a full understanding of the context of the research and of the research objectives?
- Has the literature review discussed, to the appropriate level of detail, each of the topics?
- Have all the key authors been cited and discussed?
- Does the space given to each section of the literature review reflect its individual importance?
- Have the most current texts and journals been employed?

Appendix 3. Hints on Research Methods

Hints on the research methods chapter

Introduction

- How is the chapter to be organized?
- What are the research problems that need to be addressed (these should follow on from what was presented in the conclusion to the literature review chapter)?

Primary versus Secondary Research

The contribution of both forms to the research.

This section might seem to be somewhat retrospective in that you have already written a chapter, the Literature Review, using secondary data. This is true, but the standard convention of dissertations is such that the justification for secondary data analysis is included in the Research Methodology chapter and not in the Literature Review.

Quantitative versus Qualitative Research Methods

The reason for deciding on a particular method.

- Why did you choose the one you did?
- Why did you reject the other system?

Please remember that no ‘rule’ says that a choice must be made between two or more choices, and this is so at any point when you are faced with having to make a decision; this applies not just for the section currently under discussion. For example, there are many research projects, which employ both primary and secondary research, and/or qualitative and quantitative research methods. You make your choice, or choices, in the light of your unique research situation and context and the questions which need to be answered. But whatever choice, or choices, you make – you must justify what you have done.

a) For a Choice of Qualitative Research Method(s)

Why did you choose the method(s) you did? What are the benefits of this form of research above others in this instance? If you chose a qualitative research technique or techniques, please remember that the methodology chapter must include a discussion as to the manner in which the results are to be analyzed.

b) For a Choice of Quantitative Research Method(s)

Why did you choose the method(s) you did? Why did you reject the others? You will need to justify the precise fieldwork method.

Questionnaire Design (if you used a questionnaire)

Considerations: question content; question phrasing; types of response format; question sequence; questionnaire layout; pre-test, revision and final version of the questionnaire, use of on-line surveys.

Interview Guide Design or semi-structured questionnaire (if you used an interview guide)

Considerations: question content; question sequence.

Remember: Whether you use a structured questionnaire or an interview guide with open-ended question format, the questions should address the research objectives of your dissertation.