

PREPARING DISSERTATIONS AND RESEARCH REPORTS

A Determining the topic

The principal factors to be taken into account are, for most people, as follows:

1. Individual interests
2. Salient aspects of work in the same field
3. Time available (the dissertation constitutes one third of the programme)
4. Research facilities/books/apparatus
5. Opportunities for direct observation, experimentation, etc. (obviously it is of paramount importance to obtain permission and agreement on matters of observation in any institution)
6. Relevance and significance of particular problems in terms of personal and professional needs
7. Susceptibility of the topic to such an enquiry (i.e. sharp delineation of study and the avoidance of 'danger areas' that might be inappropriate to short-term methodology)

B Planning the work

1. Achieve familiarity with previous work in the same area - check bibliographies, journals, lists of theses, etc.
2. Read round the topic as widely as possible, without trying at this stage to relate this reading too closely to one's own subject of enquiry.
3. Identify research questions and, if appropriate, rough out an experimental design, hypotheses, data collection and analysis procedures: consult supervisors at this stage.
4. Allow ample time for this planning stage.
5. Consult dissertations recommended by tutors already deposited in the School library for general information about preparation and production.

C Searching the literature

A few hours invested in a systematic literature search early in the dissertation process will save a great deal of time over the period in which you complete your dissertation.

Why search the literature?

1. To help identify and define a dissertation topic
2. To help facilitate a full understanding of the work that has previously been carried out.
3. To keep up to date with new developments

D Writing up the results

Several drafts may need to be written.

The structure of the dissertation should now be clarified by reference back to B3 above.

1. Introductory sections

- a) Provide a rationale for the study.
- b) Provide a theoretical framework for the concepts employed.
- c) Review the relevant literature and indicate how it relates to your study.

2. Description of the procedure

- a) In the case of the experimental or field work, a full description of the procedures adopted, including an account of the snags encountered and the way in which the original hypothesis and procedure were modified.
- b) Where the dissertation is itself a review of the literature, sources should be identified, together with an indication of the criteria of significance that were employed in evaluating these sources.
- c) If apparatus, tests, etc. are involved, these should be described and illustrated - the illustrations might form an appendix to the study.

3. Reporting the results

- a) Determine the use to be made of tables, statistics, histograms, diagrams, charts, graphs, etc.
- b) State the extent to which the results support or fail to support any original or modified hypotheses or provide answers to the research questions posed.
- c) Where the dissertation is based upon the existing literature, or where empirical work is only a part of the dissertation or is not conducted as hypothesis-testing, the order of the sections should be consistent and coherent and build up to the major conclusion in the final chapter. Return to your original 'research question' in your discussion.

4. Discussion

In the case of empirical investigations, the results should be critically evaluated, and then articulated with the literature reviewed.

E Format

Every dissertation must have:

- 1. A title page, with title, name, award sought, and date of submission.
- 2. A table of contents, with page numberings for the chapters and main sub-divisions.

3. A signed memorandum, bound in the dissertation, stating how far the work contained in the dissertation was the candidate's own work, or how far it was conducted in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others.
4. A synopsis of not more than 300 words setting out the problem investigated, the main hypotheses or major issues arising out of the problem, the method of work, and the major findings. This synopsis must be placed at the beginning of the dissertation and bound with it. It should be capable of making sense apart from the dissertation. It does not serve as an introduction to the dissertation.

A GUIDE TO REFERENCING YOUR WORK

There is no one correct way to reference your work. The preferred style, and one which is very widely used currently in academic publications, is the Harvard system. All of the following notes of guidance refer to the Harvard system. You are of course free to use an alternative recognised system if you so choose. However it is essential that you fully reference all of the work which you produce for assessment purposes. If you use the Harvard system it is not necessary to produce a separate bibliography, the list of references will suffice.

N.B. In this guide italics are used for titles; if you do not have access to a word processor then underlining may be used instead of italics.

- 1) **Single Author**
 in your dissertation: (Stewart 1986)
 in the references: Stewart, J. (1986) *The Making of the Primary School*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press.
- 2) **Two Authors:**
 in your dissertation: (Pollard & Tann 1987)
 in the references: Pollard, A. & Tann, S. (1987) *Reflective Teaching in the Primary School*, London, Cassell.
- 3) **Three or More Authors:**
 in your dissertation: (Mortimore et al. 1988)
 in the references: Mortimore, P., Sammons, P., Stoll, L., Lewis, D., & Ecob, R. (1988) *School Matters*, Wells, Open Books.
- 4) **Single Author's Chapter in an Edited Book:**
 in your dissertation: (Acker 1987)
 in the references: Acker, S. (1987) 'Primary School Teaching as an Occupation' in Delamont, S. (ed.) *The Primary School Teacher*, Lewes, Falmer Press.

NOTES:

- I) Where the author is actually an editor then add (ed.) after their name and before the date.
- II) Where a chapter in an edited book has more than one author then apply the same rules as in 2 and 3 above.
- III) When a book has more than one edition, make clear which one you have used by inserting the edition after the date but inside the brackets. (1987, 3rd edn.)

5) Articles in Journals

Single Author

in your dissertation: (Nias 1984)

in the references: Nias, J. (1984) The definition and maintenance of self in primary teaching, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 5,3,pp.267-280

NOTES:

- I) Where available include the volume number, the part number and the page numbers.
- II) Where there is more than one author then apply the same rules as in 2 and 3 above.

6) Government Publications

in your dissertation: (Central Advisory Council for Education 1967)

in the references: Central Advisory Council for Education (1967) *Children and their Primary Schools*, London, HMSO (The Plowden Report).

7) Open University Course Publications

in your dissertation: (The Open University 1988) in the references: The Open University (1988) *E325 Managing Schools*, Block 4 *Managing Staff in Schools*, Milton Keynes, The Open University Press.

Listing Your References

In the references at the end of your piece of work list alphabetically all the sources to which you have referred, following these rules:

- 1) Single authored items for each author are listed before multiple authored items by the same person.
- 2) Within the single authored items and within the multiple authored section for each person the items are listed in date order.
- 3) Where an author has more than one item in any given year these should be distinguished by adding lower case letters after the year. (Nias 1984a) (Nias 1984b)

When set out like this the problems of referencing sources look daunting but remember this guide is attempting to be comprehensive. Most of your references are going to be relatively straightforward so don't try to commit to memory the entire contents of this guide. Instead, keep it handy when you are working on an essay.

Do keep reference details on everything you read, it might seem tedious at the time but can save many hours chasing up references when you have finished writing your essay and are running out of time. It is a good idea to keep a card index of all the books and papers you read. On these cards record the referencing details plus the Library classification, this can save you hours on the computer terminal when you need to track down a book you have already used on a previous occasion.

Students who are in doubt about referencing should consult their tutor.

MATERIALS AND PRESENTATION

1. Students are reminded that they should make arrangements for the typing and binding of the dissertation well in advance; they should also allow sufficient time for these operations (including checking and corrections) to be carried out. If they do not, they may be asked to make corrections at a later stage, after the work has been bound and submitted.
2. A4 international standard size paper must be used. (These notes are on A4.)
3. One side of the paper only should be used. The best place for page numbers is at the centre bottom of the page.
4. Typing should be double spaced except for quotations, footnotes and tables, which should be single spaced.
5. Ample side margins (approximately 3.81 cm (1.5") on left and 2.54 cm (1") on right) should be used, with the top and bottom spaces uncrowded.