



Bristol Business School

Research Methods for Finance

Dissertation Handbook

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Draft

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1. Introduction

Welcome to the Master's level module that may provide your best opportunity to write a document that you can i) be proud of, ii) illustrate your high level of thought and analysis, and iii) really get your teeth into. As part of the Masters programmes you are required to undertake a research dissertation and the purpose of this handbook is to help you through this process.

This module requires the production by the student of a well-researched dissertation on some topic in the finance or banking area. The dissertation should utilise the knowledge gained from one or more modules in the course and either extend this knowledge or apply it in a relevant manner to some problem in the area. The dissertation should demonstrate a capacity for research, originality of thought, and creditable literary quality.

By the end of the module students should have a deep level of understanding in the chosen area of research, together with the knowledge of how to carry out a research project. Students should also have the ability to i) carry out a theoretical and empirical literature review, ii) research a topic in a methodologically sound way and iii) write up the results in a dissertation with a logical structure that considers the evidence in an even-handed way. The end result should represent an academic project that marks the transition of the individual from student to scholar.

2. Deadlines

In order to fulfil the requirements of the dissertation module, all students **must** keep to the following deadlines:

- a. An initial dissertation proposal will need to be produced and submitted in mid February. The **Initial Dissertation Proposal Form** in Appendix E should be completed and submitted via BBS reception by <TBA>.
- b. The **Dissertation Proposal Form** in Appendix D should be submitted to BBS reception by <TBA>.
- c. During the week commencing 19th April 2010 all students and M level dissertation supervisory staff will congregate. Students will make a detailed 5/10 minute presentation on their proposed research topic. Presentations should be of the following format:
 - i) Title
 - ii) Motivation
 - iii) Summary of the literature
 - iv) Emphasis on the gap in the literature that you intend to fill
 - v) Methods of analysis
 - vi) Data requirements, issues and availability
 - vii) Summary
- d. Supervisors will be allocated to students in week commencing 26th April 2010. During this first week of term 3 you should arrange to see your supervisor to emphasise areas where you believe you require most assistance, agree a frequency of meetings throughout the summer where you will meet to discuss your work and problems you are encountering in your studies. The dissertation is a training in self organised work and students must make and keep to their own deadlines and ensure that they have progressed such that no further assistance is required.
- b. For students starting the programme in September 2010 the deadline for submission of the dissertation will be in January 2011 (exact date to be confirmed).

The final dissertation should:

- Be well conceived and acknowledge earlier research in the field, where appropriate.
- Show your ability to undertake a substantial and informed piece of research.
- Demonstrate your ability to collect, organise, and analyse material to communicate effectively.

The Department of Economics and Centre for Global Finance have an internal seminar series that takes place on Thursdays, where staff present their research in an informal setting. In addition, a number of external research presentations are made during the year. You are welcome and encouraged to attend these sessions as they can provide valuable information and lessons on how to undertake and present research.

3. Identifying a Topic

At the heart of your dissertation will be a single idea, or a closely related set of ideas, which you wish to investigate. Unfortunately, there's no handy formula for finding an interesting topic. Experienced researchers will do a lot of work (reading, thinking and discussing ideas) before they decide on the topic they wish to investigate. To find an interesting topic takes time and students **MUST** start this process as early as possible. Exploratory reading **MUST** start as early as possible.

The dissertation must be related to one of the areas in which the MA specialises and in choosing your project you should try to develop linkages with the topics you have studied.

A good project will set out to apply concepts, principles and techniques, acquired through academic study, to problems or issues.

Begin focusing as **EARLY** as possible on specific questions, issues and hypotheses. Avoid spending too much time thinking about gigantic, vague problems. The broader the subject, the less depth you can achieve in your study. Try, therefore, to narrow your focus down to smaller aspects of your problem. This will allow you to make concrete progress towards the completion of your piece of work and avoid superficiality.

In choosing your topic, you will be well advised addressing the following issues:

- **Motivation:** Working on a project can be a long and lonely affair. It is therefore important to select a topic in which you are interested.
- **Academic validity:** You are required to locate the particular problem you are studying within a wider theoretical framework. Therefore, the breadth and depth of the literature available must be a factor in your choice of topic.
- **Feasibility:** It is important that you appreciate the resource and time constraints. Are the data available? How long will it take to have the data ready for analysis? Do not be overly ambitious.
- **Originality:** Give serious consideration to the extent to which your contribution will be original.

Typically will be expected to make some sort of claim and use evidence to support it, and your ability to do this well will separate your papers from those of students who see assignments as mere accumulations of fact and detail. When beginning to choose a topic, ask yourself "what will be my point?". Dissertations should not just be a mere "information dump".

4. The Dissertation Proposal Form

Please note, as indicated in Section 1, all students must fully complete a research proposal form (Appendix D). This completion of this form requires careful thought and consideration, as we need a clear indication of your precise area of research interest. The purpose of this procedure is to ensure that you start off your dissertation with project that is well thought through and feasible.

Your proposed area of investigation must pass the "so what" test. It must represent an area of study that is worth pursuing. Do not start your proposal by saying "no-one else has done this so I am going to"; instead explain what the background to the issue is and then follow

through to explain why. Illustrate the importance of your topic and demonstrate that it is a worthwhile topic for investigation.

It must explain how you will go about your research, what data you will collect/use and why/how. Define any special facilities/access that you will need and any necessary skills which you either have already or would need to acquire. Your proposal should include some indication of the timetable you intend to keep to in doing your research and writing it up. It must also give some idea of the final format of the dissertation (i.e. chapter headings, areas covered etc.)

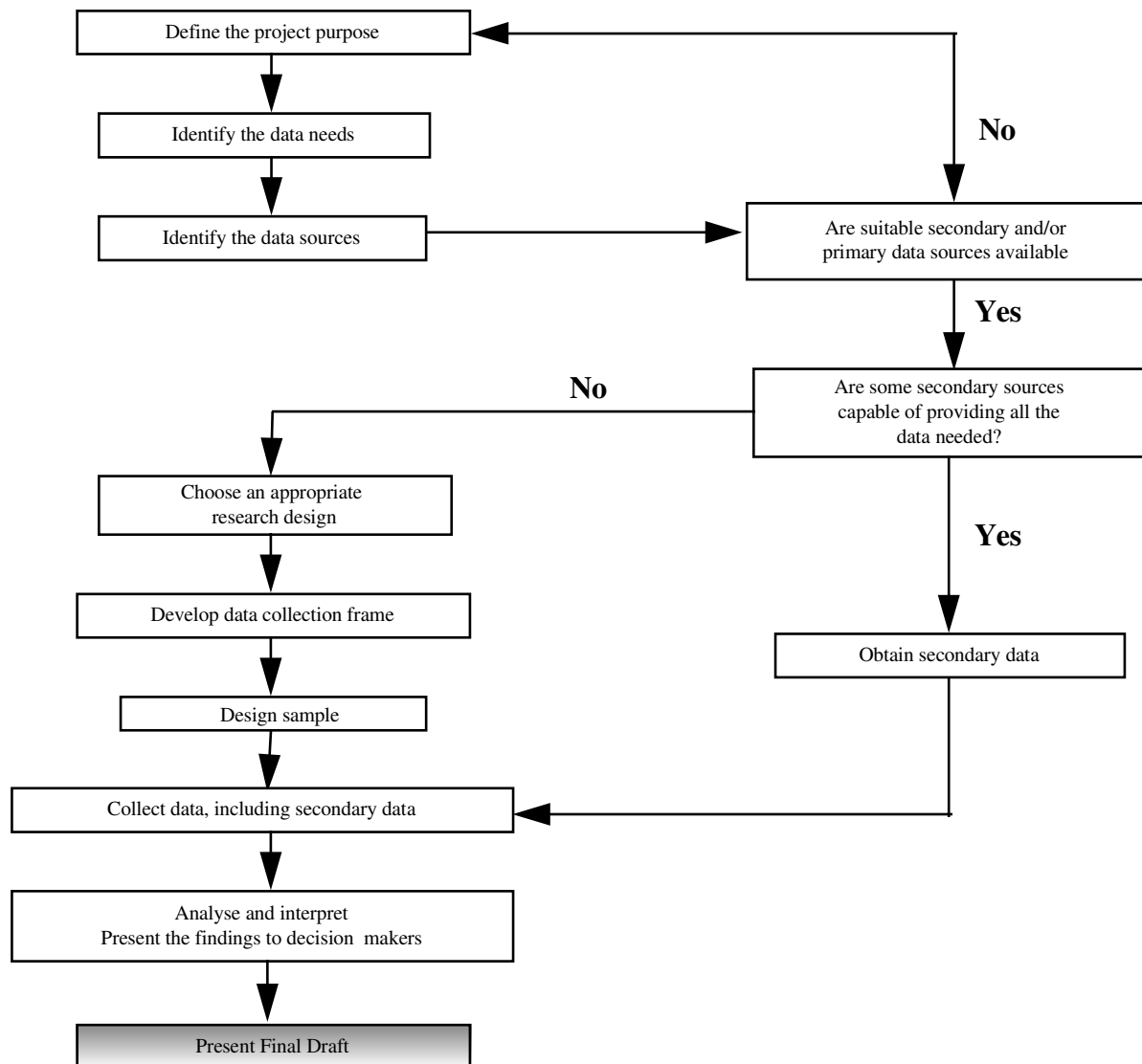
5. Planning and Execution of your Research

Good planning and execution are essential if you are to complete your dissertation and obtain maximum value from this learning experience. A successful dissertation depends to a large extent in developing a good working relationship with your supervisor and any people whose assistance you need to complete your research.

The diagram below summarises the different stages of research you may perform for successful completion of your dissertation. Each dissertation will follow some or all of these stages and proper care must be taken in successfully completing the dissertation. It is vital that you discuss these with your supervisor at each stage.

You need to approach research systematically. It may be helpful to keep a journal and/or to build up a file or portfolio of relevant document, letters, notes of events, etc. It is important to think about this task at the start of the dissertation, rather than trying to recall the early phases when the dissertation is under way.

It is always advisable to work out the time it will take to complete the dissertation. One of the potential difficulties of studying is that structured activities will generally take precedence over unstructured work. The self-management task is to put enough structure and timetabling into the research activity that it assumes priority over other structured activities such as shopping, etc. One way of achieving this is to spend time at the beginning in planning and establishing tasks for the dissertation and estimating times for each of the tasks. You should outline the number of tasks that need to be completed, and put them in order of priority with the estimated time required for completion. A regular note of the amount of time spent on research activities, compared to time spent on other matters, might alert you to question whether your major resource (time) is being used to its full potential. From the outset try to set yourself a timetable and keep to it.



Students consistently underestimate the time to write-up research. For the final manuscript the standard estimate is four hours per double-spaced, typewritten page. Many students require more than four hours per page. The summary and conclusions are often rewritten several times, so the standard time is doubled to eight hours per page. Appendices, which may include computer printouts, copies of questionnaires, etc. can take considerable time to collate.

The important concept is **realistic** planning and this must depend on realist time estimates.

6. Supervisors

The supervisory relationship provides a unique opportunity for a detailed exchange of ideas and plans, for the confirmation of good practice, for advice and for evaluative feedback. In short, the quality of the student supervisor relationship is extremely important.

It is essential for you to keep in regular contact with your supervisor who will guide your work throughout the development of your dissertation.

You **should**:

- Arrange to meet your supervisor face to face at *least* three times. These are minimum requirements and more meetings are encouraged. You are advised to agree with your supervisor what is best for you. You must keep a record of meetings, signed by you and your supervisor. Please note that your supervisor is under no obligation to chase you.
- Plan ahead. Supervisors usually have a very heavy workload and therefore you are advised to make advance appointments and not just show up and expect to be seen. Make appointments for specific dates and times with agreed agendas, which can also act as deadlines and milestones to motivate you to complete particular stages of your work.
- Give your supervisor sufficient time to read your material in order for you to receive good feedback. Giving your supervisor work to read just prior to deadlines will not give him/her sufficient time to offer assistance.
- Keep written notes of the comments of your discussions with your supervisor. It is your responsibility to remember what is discussed and to remind your supervisor if necessary.
- Ensure you ascertain the availability of your supervisor during the summer break.

You **should not**:

- Expect your supervisor to be a proof-reader. He/she is there to give you guidance not to do the work for you.
- Miss appointments unless it is absolutely unavoidable. If you are likely to miss an appointment ensure that you inform your supervisor as soon as possible.

Please note that you cannot be supervised if you are overseas; contact with your supervisor should be face to face. In exceptional circumstances communication by email will be acceptable provided that the supervisor agrees in writing that this medium is acceptable for the purposes of supervision.

7. The Literature Review

Once you have identified a suitable topic you must work towards developing a 5,000-word literature review. The literature review should demonstrate that you have a comprehensive knowledge of the research, theoretical and empirical, that relates to your proposed area of research. You must show how your research will build upon or extend the existing literature. The following guidelines should be followed:

What is a literature review?

A literature review is **NOT** merely a summary of other people's work. It is a critical look at the existing research in a particular area/topic. Of course this will mean that you do summarise some of the relevant research in your chosen topic. However, you must **EVALUATE** this research. This will include detailing how the research is related and its relevance to your dissertation. You must not simply provide a description of individual

research. To maximise your grade you must select the important aspects of the research (e.g. the methodology) and clearly indicate how it relates to the other relevant studies (e.g. What other methodologies have been used? How are they similar? How are they different?). You must then indicate how the research relates to your work (e.g. what is its relationship to your methodology?). A good review must provide the context for your research.

How do I write a good review?

By undertaking a review of your chosen topic you will of course enlarge your knowledge. You should also improve and demonstrate your skills in information seeking and critically appraising the relevant research.

The idea of the literature review is not to provide a summary of all the published work that relates to your research, but a survey of the most relevant and significant work. A good review must:

- be organised to demonstrate how the research is related to your dissertation and the research question you are developing
- synthesise results into a summary of what is and is not known
- identify areas of controversy in the literature
- formulate questions that need further research

In general, students should make sure that the following questions are answered:

- What do we already know in the immediate area concerned?
- What are the characteristics of the key concepts or the main factors or variables?
- What are the relationships between these key concepts, factors or variables?
- What are the existing theories?
- Where are the inconsistencies or other shortcomings in our knowledge and understanding?
- What views need to be (further) tested?
- What evidence is lacking, inconclusive, contradictory or too limited?
- Why study (further) the research problem?
- What contribution can the present study be expected to make?
- What research designs or methods seem unsatisfactory?

How do I undertake a literature review?

Before writing your review, the student should consider the following questions:

- What type of literature review am I conducting? Am I looking at issues of theory, methodology, policy, quantitative research or qualitative research?
- What are the specific research questions that my literature review helps to define?
- What is the scope of my literature review? What types of publications have I considered? Have I failed to consider other sources?
- Have I critically analysed the literature I have read? Am I considering the strengths and weaknesses of the research, rather than just summarising them?
- Have I discussed studies contrary to my perspective?

Questions that the student should consider for each individual piece of research include:

- Has the author formulated a problem/issue?
- Is it clearly defined? Is its significance (scope, severity, relevance) clearly established?
- Could the problem have been approached more effectively from another perspective?
- What theoretical framework has the author used?
- Are there any methodological flaws?

- Has the author reviewed and evaluated the literature relevant to his/her analysis?
- Does the author include literature taking positions he/she does not agree with?
- In quantitative analysis, how good are the basic components of the study (e.g. does it include diagnostics tests?) Are the conclusions validly based upon the data and analysis?
- In what ways does this book or article contribute to our understanding of the problem under study, and in what ways is it useful for practice? What are the strengths and limitations?
- How does this research relate to the specific thesis or question I am developing?

The dissertation must not be purely descriptive. It should involve argument and counter-argument or objection. This will show the reader that you have a deep understanding of the issue you are discussing. By anticipating alternative views and those that may disagree with your position you are showing that you have thought things through.

Students often perform badly because their dissertations are too descriptive and have no theoretical or conceptual basis. Discuss with your supervisor how best to incorporate a perspective on the “bigger picture” or appropriate theorising into your research.

8. Researching on the Internet

To ensure your literature review is comprehensive it is vital that you utilise all available electronic services available to you. The following provides some indication of what services are available. Depending on your chosen topic, many of these sites may not be useful. However, it is only by experimenting with the sites available that you will be able to evaluate them.

Library Provided Sources

The library provides access to several sources of online articles and online bibliography services. Given that these services are search engine based, it is highly recommended that you use these services when designing your project proposal. They will illustrate what research has been completed in your chosen topic and provide direction and possible questions to answer. They are also extremely important in ensuring that you review the literature adequately. **All** students should therefore consult these services to maximise their grade.

Most of the library provided resources require users to enter an ATHENS username and password (available from the information desk in the library). Others are controlled via I.P. address and are therefore only available from computers attached to the University network.

For bibliographic searches (important in finding journal articles on your subject and to ensure you have reviewed the available literature) the following site is highly recommended:

URL: <http://wos.mimas.ac.uk>

Mimas should not be the only bibliographic service used. Using only one such service will mean that it is likely that your literature review is incomplete. OCLC *Firstsearch* should also be used. (<http://newfirstsearch.uk.oclc.org>). This service also provides an opportunity to search for books. The username and password for this service is available in the library.

General Internet Search

In the following sections there are recommended internet sites. It should be noted that the lists are not exhaustive. It is important for students to ensure that they have reviewed all relevant material available on the net. General internet search engines could be used, including:

Yahoo (<http://www.yahoo.co.uk>),

Google (www.google.com),

Google Scholar <http://scholar.google.co.uk/>

Inomics (<http://www.inomics.com/query/search>) and

Economics search (<http://www.economicsearch.com/research>).

Internet Resource Guides

b) Choose search engine and enter keywords

General Search engines:

Google <http://www.google.com/eg/> or <http://www.google.com/>

Google Scholar <http://scholar.google.com/eg/> or <http://scholar.google.com/eg/>

Yahoo <http://www.yahoo.com>

a. Economics

i. Resources for Economists on the internet

<http://rfe.org/> (<http://rfe.wustl.edu/EconFAQ.html>),

This lists more than 1,000 resources on the internet of interest to economists.

ii. WebEc <http://www.helsinki.fi/WebEc> and RepEc <http://www.repec.org>

WebEc categorises the free economics information that is available on the web and RepEc provides access to working and discussion papers worldwide.

iii. Intute: Social Sciences : <http://www.intute.ac.uk/socialsciences/>

This site is funded by the British ESRC and includes a comprehensive section on economics resources on the net. Includes a search engine

iv. Biz/Ed Gateway <http://bized.ac.uk>

The Business and Economics information gateway contains links to a large number of Internet resources in the broad fields of economics and business, as well as primary materials, most notably case studies, work sheets and substantial datasets not found elsewhere on the Internet.

v. RDN Virtual Training Suite <http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/>

This site offers a tutorial in using the internet for Economics and includes many of the sites listed in this document.

For our Departments Discussion papers: <http://ideas.repec.org/s/uwe/wpaper.html>

For the Economics Working Paper Archive see <http://econwpa.wustl.edu/wpawelcome.html>.

For the Heterodox Economics Archive see gopher://csf.colorado.edu/11/econ.

For electronic texts on Marx/Engels see <http://csf.colorado.edu/mirrors/marxists.org>.

History of Economic Thought: <http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/>

and <http://cepa.newschool.edu/het/>

b. Finance

Examples of the resource collections included on this site are as follows:

i) For students interested in finance related topics the Journal of Finance links page is highly recommended. This can be found at the following address:

<http://www.cob.ohio-state.edu/fin/journal/jofsites.htm>

The site has many links, including finance journal, working paper sites, online textbooks and financial data.

ii) Professor James R. Garven's gateway to Internet resources 'providing substantive information concerning economic and finance-related information, including links to databases and to major finance and economics journals':

<http://www.finweb.com>

The University of Tennessee provides another good resources page at the following address:

<http://web.utk.edu/~jwachowi/>

and (http://web.utk.edu/~jwachowi/wacho_world.html).

c. Banking

i. The European Central Bank can be found at <http://www.ecb.int>

ii. Sources of information on monetary history and forms of money can be found at:

<http://www.ex.ac.uk/~RDavies/arian/money.html>

iii. Links to over 1400 banks, to stock exchanges from 65 countries, to major financial markets and news:

<http://www.qualisteam.com/eng/>

You may also find the following useful for banking:

For a wide variety of information on central banks see <http://patriot.net/~bernkopf>.

d. International Business

You may also find the following useful for international business:

<http://metalab.unc.edu/reference/moss/business>,

<http://ciber.bus.msu.edu/busres.htm>,

<http://www.library.nijenrode.nl>,

<http://web.idirect.com/~tiger/supersit.htm>,

<http://www.dis.strath.ac.uk/business/index.html>.

Newspapers

Students should note that newspapers could be useful for information that is too recent or local for academic analysis. Online sites will often provide free archive search engines. Links for online international newspapers can be found at: <http://www.onlinenewspapers.com>. Students, however, should note that because newspapers deal with contemporary events, often of a political nature, articles are likely to be biased, with no clear distinction between facts and opinions.

e. US Department of State Country Reports

From data compiled by US embassies, this site provides reports on economic and trade policies of over 80 nations. Information provided includes key economic indicators, exchange rate policies, export subsidies and debt management policies.

URL: http://www.state.gov/www/background_notes/index.html

d. UK Government Publications Online

To search for UK public sector information on the net students are advised to use the search engine at the following site:

<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/index.htm>

9. Data

Finding the appropriate data can be the most difficult part of the project. You should check that the data is available before deciding on a topic and make sure you are clear what the data is. You can use time series data, cross section data (observations at one moment in time over countries, regions, families, etc.), or panel data which combines time series and cross section.

Make sure there are enough observations and variables. The sample size can be important in determining the techniques you can use and the precision of our results. Aim to have at least 30 observations for annual or cross section data; more for quarterly or monthly data. Unless you have experience of large data sets, or can get help in handling them, do not go much above 100 observations.

Make sure you know the exact definition of your data and what they are measuring. Terms like income and prices are not acceptable as they give little information. The sort of questions you should consider are:

- Are the data current or constant price?
- What is the base year?
- What is the coverage (Net or Gross, Domestic UK or GB)?
- Are they seasonally adjusted?
- Have the definitions changed over the sample period?
- If it is constructed data, how was this done?
- Is the data based on a sample?

You may have to do a lot of work to make the data useable or comparable. If so provide information on this work, possibly in the form of a data appendix, so that you can be given credit.

You may have to adjust the data in various ways to deal with missing observations, to splice series on different bases, or to convert them into a different currency. Published data are not infallible, so always be on the look out for possible mistakes.

You should know something about the relevant history and institutions, such as important events, like strikes, wars, or changes of government.

Once you have loaded the data onto the computer, you should conduct a descriptive analysis. Print the data out and check carefully for typing errors. Plot the data and note the distinctive features such as trends, temporal dependencies, seasonality, unusual observation, etc. Calculate the means variances of your variables and their correlations.

Repeat this process after you transform the data in any way:

- growth rates or ratios (the savings rate, the velocity of circulation, the share of profits) are often more informative because they are not dominated by trends.
- logarithmic transformations are often used in economic models as the coefficients can then be interpreted as elasticities; the change in the logarithm is approximately equal to the growth rate; variances are more likely to be constant; and many interesting economic hypotheses can be expressed as linear restrictions in logarithmic models.

Where there are a number of possible measures for a series use all of them and try to decide which is best. You can report this in the project. e.g. Do wages respond more to the consumer price index or the retail price index? Do not decide a priori, test and find out.

Keep detailed notes on the sources of data and anything you do to them. Its easy to forget at a later stage. You might end up with some adjustments you made and forgot about dominating your results.

Keep at least two backed up copies of your data on separate discs, stored separately. There are many ways of loosing or corrupting disks and it can be a lot of work typing the data in again.

There are numerous sources of data. Examples include:

UK data:

Economic Trends Annual Supplement

The Blue Book (National Income and Expenditure)

The Annual Abstract of Statistics

Financial Statistics

Employment Gazette

ESRC datasets can be found using the BIRON service. This includes the procedures required to gain online access to ONS data. This service can be found at <http://www.data-archive.ac.uk>

For international data:

World Development Report: published by the World Bank

OECD Main Economic Indicators

International Financial Statistics: Published by IMF

For the US:

Economic Report of the President: has an appendix giving the main economic aggregates.

Financial data:

Datastream: provides various financial and company accounts information and is available in the library. It also has some coverage of international macroeconomic and financial data. Students are advised that the Library can offer training to groups of four students at a time. Training can be booked at the Library Enquiries Desk.

Similar but more limited data sources are available in the Hendon library.

There are also a number of publications which present data, such as:

Maddison (1982) which gives long runs of historical data for the main capitalist countries.

Berndt (1991) provides data on a floppy disc.

NB OECD and Eurostat data are available on disk if required. It is still a good idea to study the publications to make sure the data is what you think it is and to check on any idiosyncrasies

10. Writing Style

Your dissertation should be written using simple language. Avoid long-winded, rambling accounts with no natural flow or sequence. It should be written in the past tense and usually, in the third person, not the first person singular. For instance, say “it could be argued that this shows...” and not “I think this shows...”. The exception is where you are reporting your own action/decisions or where you wish to introduce a personal note in your final recommendations (e.g. “I think the way ahead is...”).

Remember that most people redraft dissertations many times to reach the final polished version. Try to make use of a word processor. This will considerably enhance your presentation and may help your writing.

It is also important to thoroughly check the report for errors, omissions or inconsistencies. Four checks are usually needed:

- a check for inconsistencies in the logical flow of the written arguments.
- a check for accuracy and constancy of numerical data;
- a check for spelling or typing error.
- a second typing and spelling check (try to get a friend or colleague to do this as you may be too close to it by this stage).

Spelling mistakes, whilst of limited importance themselves, tend to lower reader confidence in the overall thrust of the argument, so make every effort to avoid them. Use the spell checker function on the word processing package and, if available, the grammar checker too.

Writing hints for beginners (puns intended):

- Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
- Prepositions are not words to end a sentence with.
- And do not start a sentence with a conjunction.
- Avoid clichés like the plague.
- Also, always avoid annoying alliteration.
- Be more or less specific.
- Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are (usually) unnecessary.
- No sentence fragments.
- Contractions aren't necessary and shouldn't be used.
- One should never generalise.
- Do not use no double negatives.
- Eschew ampersands & abbreviations, etc.
- Eliminate commas, that are, not necessary.
- Never use big words when a diminutive one would suffice.
- Kill all exclamation marks!!!
- Use words correctly, irregardless of how others use them.
- Use the apostrophe in it's proper place and omit it when its not required.
- Puns are for children, not groan readers.
- Proof read carefully to see if you any words left out.

Advice on writing skills is available at the following address:

URL: <http://www.economist.com/research/StyleGuide/>

Online guides to writing research papers:

1) <http://web.mit.edu/writing/index.html>

2) <http://campusgw.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/manntom2.cgi?section=help&URL=newhelp/newhel>

Study skills support (English for academic writing) is available from the Faculty. Ask at the desk.

For more information on help available to students with disabilities please see the University's intranet site.

11. Preparation and Submission

Structure of dissertation

Your dissertation should be presented in the following sequence:

Title Page
Abstract
Acknowledgements
Table of contents
List of tables
List of figures
Introduction
Body of the dissertation (divided into appropriate chapters)
Summary/Conclusions/Recommendations
Appendices
References

Let's look at each of these in turn:

Title and title page

The title should describe the content of the report accurately and concisely. The reader's first impression of your document is based on the title, so be clear and imaginative. Remember that many people use electronic databases to locate material such as dissertation in libraries, so make sure that the words in your title equate with the contents.

In addition to the title itself, the title page should also provide the following information:

- the qualification for which the dissertation is submitted, e.g. MA Economics
- the name of the institution to which the dissertation is submitted.
- the year of submission.

Abstract

An abstract is a resume (approximately 300 words) of the subject under investigation, the aim of the dissertation, and how it was tackled, together with a short reference to the main conclusions and recommendations.

Acknowledgements

This item gives the student the opportunity to express thanks to her/his employer and other individuals who have given any assistance or advice. Avoid being too flippant at one extreme or too humble and pathetic at the other.

Table of contents

The table of contents follows the title page. It should list in sequence, with page numbers, all relevant subdivisions of the report including the titles of chapters, sections and sub-sections as appropriate.

Lists of Tables and Figures

There should be a list for each and they should appear on a separate page. Give the titles and the page numbers for each table or figure.

Introduction

A typically introduction would include the following elements:

- **The background:** briefly explaining and introducing the subject of your dissertation.
- **The objectives:** a clear and precise statement of the aims of your dissertation.
- **The methodology:** a concise statement of the theories and concepts employed in your research.
- **The methods:** details of the way you met the research objectives. For example, if this involved a survey you would have to give details of who was contacted, how they were selected, how many co-operated, and how the data was collected and analysed. Also provide your rationale for adopting a particular research method rather than another.
- **An overview** of the way the dissertation is structured. Describe the contents of each chapter briefly and explain how they fit together.

You **must** avoid writing an introduction that is vague, disorganized, error-filled, off-the-wall, or boring. It provides the reader with an initial impression of your writing and the quality of your work. It should be concise, engaging, and well written. It should capture the reader's interest, ensuring that they want to read the rest of your paper.

It is not necessarily true that you should write your introduction first. You may find that it is more effective to wait until later, given that it may be the case that it is only through the experience of writing your paper that you discover your main argument. An introduction written at the beginning of that discovery process will not necessarily reflect what you wind up with at the end.

Body of the Dissertation

Clearly it is difficult to prescribe the structure for the body of your dissertation. It will typically be between five to eight chapters in length, each with a number of sub-headings covering relevant topics. (Paragraph numbering is optional but if is applied it should be done so consistently throughout). Without question the main weakness with student dissertations is a lack of structure. Your task is to explain your objectives and take your reader logically through the evidence that led to your final conclusions and recommendations.

Ensure that the arguments you are presenting are based on evidence rather than anecdote. They must be based on valid empirical or secondary data in a way that is consistent with existing theoretical perspectives on this issue.

Also ensure that arguments flow in a logical way that is clear to the reader. The chances are that if you have written 500 words without introducing a sub-heading then you are drifting into a “wooly” essay, as opposed to a tightly structured dissertation.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions are often the most difficult part of an essay to write, and many writers feel that they have nothing left to say after having written the paper. A writer needs to keep in mind that the conclusion is often what a reader remembers best. Your conclusion should be the best part of your dissertation.

A conclusion should

- stress the importance of the dissertation’s main statements,
- give the dissertation a sense of completeness, and
- leave a final impression on the reader.

Suggestions

- **Answer the question “So What?”** Show your readers why this paper was important. Show them that your paper was meaningful and useful.
- **Synthesize, don't summarize** Don't simply repeat things that were in your paper. They have read it. Show them how the points you made and the support and examples you used were not random, but fit together.
- **Redirect your readers** Give your reader something to think about, perhaps a way to use your paper in the "real" world. If your introduction went from general to specific, make your conclusion go from specific to general. Think globally.
- **Create a new meaning** You don't have to give new information to create a new meaning. By demonstrating how your ideas work together, you can create a new picture. Often the sum of the paper is worth more than its parts.
- **Echoing the introduction** Echoing your introduction can be a good strategy if it is meant to bring the reader full-circle. If you begin by describing a scenario, you can end with the same scenario as proof that your essay was helpful in creating a new understanding.

Appendices

Appendices are not counted as being within the word limitation of the dissertation (15000 words) but must not exceed 25 percent of the text. Material for appendices, e.g. organisation charts, copies of questionnaires, sales turnover for particular products for particular time periods should be letter referenced in the text, e.g. see Appendix A, see Appendix B., etc.

References

Written and electronic material used in your dissertation project should be referenced using a standard referencing convention such as the Harvard system detailed below.

References cited in the text should give the author’s name and the date in parentheses, e.g. Smith (1995). Where there are two co-authors both names should be given, e.g. Taylor and Smith (1997). Where there are more than two authors, the name of the first should be given, followed by an et al., e.g. Taylor *et al.* (1999)

If an author has produced more than one work in a given year, this should be identified as Becker (1970a), Becker (1970b) etc.

The reference section of the project should list all the text references in alphabetical order of the authors' surnames. The details given enable the sources to be traced.

When referring to a book:

Kay, J. (1996), *The Business of Economics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Golding, G. and Middleton, S. (1982), *Images of Welfare: Press and Public Attitudes to Poverty*, Blackwell: Oxford.

When referring to an article in a book:

Rosati, D.K. (1992), Problems of post-CMEA Trade and Payments, in Fleming, J. and Rollo, J.M.C (eds) *Trade, Payments and Adjustments in Central and Eastern Europe*, London: RIIA and EBRD.

When referring to a journal article:

de Vos, K. and Garner, T. (1991), 'An Evaluation of Subjective Poverty Definitions. Comparing Results from the US and the Netherlands', *Review of Income and Wealth*, Vol. 37, pp. 267-285.

Zucker, G.S. and Weiner, B. (1993), 'Conservatism and Perceptions of Poverty - An Attributional Analysis', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol, 23(12), pp. 925-943.

When referring to government and other publications:

Department of Employment (1973), Characteristics of the Unemployed, *Department of Employment Gazette*, June.

Economist (1992a), *Economics Focus: Japan's Troublesome Imports*, 11 January.

Economist (1992b), *Trade Watch: A Good tanning*, 22 February.

When referring to an Internet source:

George Edwards Library, *The preparation and presentation of theses and dissertations [online]*, Guildford: University of Surrey, 1999. Available from: <http://www.surrey.ac.uk/Library/theses.html> [Accessed 1 September 2000]

12. Assessment

Your dissertation will be assessed using the following criteria:

- The aims and objectives of the report should be clearly stated.
- The ability to use relevant theoretical knowledge should be demonstrated.
- A clear description of the research method(s) adopted and the reasons and the justification for the choice of method(s) should be provided.
- A clear description of sources of data, method of collection and analysis should be provided
- A justification for the appropriateness of data collected and data analysis should be provided and awareness of the limitations imposed by, and opportunities offered by, the chosen project design should be demonstrated.
- The research findings should be analysed and their implications set out clearly.
- Appropriate structuring of the report and presentation
- Succinct and coherent presentation of material.
- Acknowledgement and citing of all external sources throughout the report.

Two internal markers will mark the dissertation, one being your supervisor.

You may be examined orally (a “*viva voce*”) by a small panel of internal and/or external assessors. A *viva* involving external assessors is likely to take place where a dissertation is particularly good, where it displays distinctive or unusual features, where there is the possibility of failure or where the supervisory log has not been completed fully. It will be the responsibility of the Programme Leader in consultation with your supervisor and the other marker to determine whether or not a *viva* is required. An internal *viva* may be set at a time to be determined by the Programme Leader with regard to the availability of the staff and student but in any event before the internal Assessment board. A *viva* involving an external examiner would normally take place on the day that the assessment board meets. Students should ensure that they are available during the assessment board period in the event that a *viva* is required.

13. A Note on Plagiarism

Plagiarism means the use of the ideas or others without acknowledging them as such. It is an academic tradition that the ideas or words of another are not used without acknowledgement. You must adhere to this tradition; it is totally unacceptable to plagiarise.

PLAGIARISM IS AN EXTREMELY SERIOUS ACADEMIC OFFENCE.

IF YOU ARE IN ANY DOUBT AS TO WHETHER OR NOT YOU ARE PLAGIARISING THEN YOU MUST SEEK THE ADVICE OF YOUR SUPERVISOR.

ALL CASES OF SUSPECTED PLAGIARISM WILL BE STRENUOUSLY INVESTIGATED.

PROVEN PLAGIARISM CAN HAVE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES FOR YOU AND YOUR DEGREE. DO NOT DO IT!

You can of course make use of the ideas of others. However, this must be acknowledged according to the following conventions:

- Each use of the ideas or words of another must be individually acknowledged. In addition, each work consulted must be listed in the reference section. The mere presence of a work in the reference section does not override the need for acknowledging each individual use of that work in a reference in the text and, though necessary, is by itself insufficient.
- Any use of exact words of another must be acknowledged by enclosing them in quotation marks and by stating their source. For example:

'Confusing the industry with the market is one of the most frequently repeated mistakes in corporate strategy' (Kay 1996: 202)

- If any part of a passage from a publication is used this should be indicated by replacing the omitted words with a short series of dots. For example:

'Economics is the natural integrative discipline for much of management science. But its past relative neglect of the firm...has severely limited the role it has to play' (Kay 1996:8)

- If you do not have access to the original source of a quotation but have found it quoted in the work of somebody else you should give the original source (which the author you have found should have quoted) and the reference where you found it. For example:

Scherer (1970) quoted by Kay (1996:5)

- If you are not using the exact words of another but are making use of their ideas this should be acknowledged. For example:

As Kay has argued macroeconomic forecasts are at best reliable for short periods ahead (Kay 1996:12).

Web sites on plagiarism and how to avoid it include:

<http://www.plagiarism.org/>

<http://ualr.edu/owl/plagiarism.htm>

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>

<http://wcclibrary2.blogspot.com/2008/01/help-students-avoid-plagiarism.html>

All students are provided with a Dissertation supervision log. This must be completed and any discrepancies will lead to an oral examination.

UWE now has plagiarism software *Safe Assign* and it is intended that this will be used as part of the assessment process.

APPENDIX A: Technical production of the project

Paper size and typing

The project should be typed on A4 white paper, and lines should be double spaced.

Margin

The left hand margin should be not less than 40mm and the other margin not less than 20mm (a sheet of A4 double spacing will produce 29 lines of type and a maximum of about 300 words, so your project should be around 40 pages in length).

Page Numbering

All pages should be numbered consecutively throughout the project report, including the appendices. The page numbers should be located centrally at the bottom of the page approximately 10mm above the edge. Tables should be numbered consecutively throughout the dissertation. The opening pages (Abstract, Acknowledgements etc.) may make use of Roman numerals, with text having Arabic numerals.

Binding

The project must be “case bound” in black such that the pages are permanently secured between board that is sufficiently rigid to support the weight of the work when standing upon a shelf. the normal binding size is 297mm x 210mm. The title of the project and the name of the author should appear on the front cover. The spine should contain (reading from top to bottom): the course title, the initials and surname of the author, and the year of submission.

Appendix B: Dissertation Supervision Log

Students should have at least 3 prearranged meeting with their supervisors. The first meeting is to discuss their submitted proposal. A second meeting is to discuss the student's progress, for which students are expected to have submitted written work for discussion. The third meeting is to discuss their rough final draft. At each meeting students should ensure that their supervisors signs the log. It is expected that students will have additional meetings, but these do not need to be logged.

When students are ready to submit they should get the declaration signed by the supervisor and attach it to the dissertation when they submit it to the Student Office.

Failure to comply with this procedure may lead to the submission being refused or to students being required to undertake a viva voce.

Please Note: It is the student's responsibility to make sure that they have regular supervisory meetings and that this form is signed

Student's Name: _____

Masters Programme: _____

Title:

Supervisor's Name: _____

Supervisor's Declaration

To be completed when the supervisor has seen the final draft. If there is any doubt in the supervisors mind they should not complete it:

I have supervised this dissertation and I am sure that it is the student's own work.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Dissertation Supervision Log

Student's Name: _____

Meeting 1: Dissertation Proposal

Date:

Comments:

Actions required:

Student: _____

Supervisor: _____

Meeting 2: Progress

Date:

Comments:

Actions required:

Student: _____

Supervisor: _____

Meeting 3: Rough Final Draft

Date:

Comments:

Actions required:

Student: _____

Supervisor: _____

Appendix D: Dissertation Proposal Form

Name:
Student Number:
Programme of Study:

PROVISIONAL TITLE

This may be your first attempt at a title. It may change as your work progresses. At this stage it should closely mirror the content of your proposal.

--

BACKGROUND

This should explain why you feel the research you are planning is worthwhile. This may be expressed in the form of a problem which needs solving, or something you find of interest. You are expected to demonstrate, in brief, a clear link between the previous work that has been done in this field and the content of your proposal. You should indicate the key literature sources from which you intend to draw your ideas.

--

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

This should provide a clear indication of what your research seeks to achieve.

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

This section should detail how you intend to achieve your research objectives.

Research Design:	This section gives an overall view of the method chosen and the reason for that choice.
Data Collection:	This section should include much more detail about how specifically the data are to be collected and associated issues of access and ethics.

TIMESCALE

This should provide a guide to the anticipated completion of each stage of your research.

Target date	Tasks to be achieved

RESOURCES

This will provide an indication of the viability of your proposal, in terms of finance, data access and equipment, and should include an acknowledgement of any anticipated problems in any area.

Finance:	include realistic costs such as travel, subsistence, help with data analysis or postage for questionnaires
Data Access:	state how you will access the required data, for example, do you have contacts within relevant organisations?
Equipment:	state how you intend to analyse the data, including computer software packages to be used

REFERENCES

Provide a list of 5 literature sources to which you have referred in the background section that relate to the previous work undertaken in your area of study.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

FOR MODULE LEADER USE ONLY

First Marker:	Second Marker:
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Appendix E: Initial Dissertation Proposal Form

Name:

Student Number:

Programme of Study:

PROVISIONAL TITLE

This may be your first attempt at a title. It may change as your work progresses. At this stage it should closely mirror the content of your proposal.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF PROPOSED RESEARCH (Max 200 words)

This should briefly summarise the research you plan to do why it is worthwhile.