



# Getting organised when writing a dissertation

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## Introduction

Writing a dissertation is a long process so it is important that you are well organised. Whilst writing a dissertation it is likely that you will need to refer back to information several months after you first looked at it. It is therefore important to think about how you will store and record information.

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## Read the handbook

It is essential that you read all dissertation assessment guidance that is available in the unit handbook. This will detail how many assignments are involved in the dissertation process (it is not necessarily just one thesis) and when these need to be submitted.

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## Start early

If you are going to start writing a dissertation in year three think about whether any preparatory work can be undertaken during the summer break. For instance, you might be able to start to research the topic, undertake reading and create notes. However, make sure that you do not start any data collection until you have spoken to your supervisor and received ethical approval.

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## Keep a record of searches

Whilst completing a dissertation you will need to undertake a significant amount of research. However, this research will not necessarily be undertaken at the same time. It is therefore a good idea to keep a list of where you have looked for information and what search term combinations were used. This will mean you can check that an earlier search has not been repeated.

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## **Label paper based notes**

When making notes on paper make sure that you clearly label where the information was taken from (write down the full reference in accordance with your faculty conventions).

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## **Transfer paper based notes to a computer**

It is much easier to make notes on a computer rather than on lots of different pieces of paper. If you start to collect a lot of paper based notes think about whether you can transfer this information to a Microsoft Word document. Make sure that all computer based notes are clearly referenced so that you know where information originated.

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## **Label electronic documents**

When you save a journal article from the internet it will usually have a long number as the default file name. Before you save the document change the default file number to the surname of the first author. This will make it easier to search for and find the document should you need to use it again.

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## **Use ring binders / Lever arch folders**

When writing a dissertation you will very quickly collect a large amount of paper (for instance, journal articles, photocopying or print outs from the internet). It is important to carefully file this information so that it can be found quickly in the future. The easiest way to do this is to file your papers alphabetically in a lever arch file (based on author surname or the name of the organization).

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## **Budget time**

Dissertation writing is a long process so most students will find that they have to complete other assignments at the same time as writing their dissertation. It is very important that you do not neglect these assignments. Make a list of hand-in dates and identify when you will need to focus on assignments.

## Back up your work

Make several backup copies of your dissertation in different places (for example, home computer, memory stick and university U: drive).

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## Keep useful contact details

Make a note of important contact details. For instance, your supervisor's or Academic Liaison Librarian's university phone number and email address.

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## Address your knowledge gaps

You should consider what skills you will need in order to complete your dissertation. Are there any areas where you will need further training? For instance, searching for information, note-taking or using statistical packages (such as SPSS). If so, book an appointment with an appropriate member of university staff as soon as possible.

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## Further information

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as workshops and drop-ins) for you to enhance your academic skills. For more information visit:

**[lweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub](http://lweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub)**

