



Managing your time when writing a dissertation

Introduction

Writing a dissertation is a long process. It is therefore important that you do not approach it in the same way as a shorter assignment. It is essential that you plan ahead in terms of when and how you will complete different parts. The following outline some strategies to help you to manage your time whilst writing a dissertation or thesis.

Start early

Start work on your dissertation as soon as possible. For instance, if you are going to write your dissertation during your third year consider starting to undertake some preparatory reading over the summer preceding the beginning of year three. However, make sure that you do not start data collection until you receive ethical approval.

Break the task down

Although a dissertation is a large document it is helpful to perceive it as a series of smaller tasks. These tasks can be broken down into sub tasks. Breaking down the process will make the task more manageable. It is also useful in terms of setting time targets (discussed next).

The following is an example of a broken down process of writing a scientific report based dissertation (the structure of your dissertation will be available in your unit handbook):

- Identify topic area
- Review of literature (reading and note-taking)
- Refine research question

- Literature review draft
 - Development of method
 - Construction of instruments (questionnaires / interview questions)
 - Method section draft
 - Collection of data
 - Analysis of data
 - Results section draft
 - Discussion section draft
 - Conclusion draft
 - Refinement of earlier sections
 - Abstract draft
 - Further proofreading
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Understand the assessment

Dissertations can comprise several assignments (such as proposal and a progress report). Make sure you know how many assessments you need to complete and when these should be submitted.

Identify and plan around assignment ‘bottlenecks’

If you are writing your dissertation at the same time as other assignments there will be times when a lot of work needs to be completed at once (bottlenecks).

List at all of your assignment hand in dates and identify busy periods. You should plan to spend less time of your dissertation around these times (so that you can complete other assignments) and more time on your dissertation when other work is not due.

Set time deadlines

Once you have broken down your dissertation it is a good idea to decide upon an approximate timeframe in terms of when each task will be completed. Initially, this might be based on estimates so deadlines should be regularly reviewed.

Agree deadlines with your supervisor

If you are working with a supervisor you should arrange a time to discuss dissertation deadlines that you set yourself. This will help to ensure that they are realistic and in line with your supervisor's expectations.

List your deadlines

Once you have created deadlines it is a good idea to organise them in a 'to do' list:

To do	By when
Identify topic area	September
Review of literature (reading and note-taking)	September
Refine research question	October
Literature review draft	October / November
etc.	etc.

As noted you will need to review your deadlines but putting them in a table is useful because it allows you to see a route through the dissertation.

Create weekly targets

Once you have listed your deadlines you should set yourself weekly targets that enable you to meet deadlines. It is useful to organise them in weekly 'to do' lists.

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:

lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub

