

PLANNING YOUR COURSEWORK

Good planning using effective strategies will support you in every stage of the coursework process. This advice sheet will provide you with some tools which you can use to keep yourself on track.

What are your key dates?

Most importantly, take note of the final submission date and any interim deadlines. For some assignments e.g. a dissertation or final year project you may need to submit a proposal of what topic you're going to cover, or a draft chapter by a certain point.

Using a visual plan like a Gantt chart (with your tasks on the left and dates along the top) is a great way to see what you need to do at each stage. Gantt charts can be created in Excel but there are some online tools that make it even easier e.g. Wrike, GANTTPRO, Tom's Planner.

For dissertations and projects, you will be expected to have a number of meetings with your supervisor, either face-to-face or online. Make a list of these and plan around them accordingly.

You may also need to allocate time to learn how to do research or use new software. Make sure you consider these as you plan your schedule.

Think about the word count

Keep the word count in mind as you take notes and develop your ideas as you will need to be sure that you have an approximate idea of the length of each section or chapter.

How will you make notes?

An important part of academic writing is synthesising the ideas and data from multiple sources. It's important to develop a system of note taking that works for you.

There are many techniques you can use e.g. Cornell, flash cards, mindmaps. You may also find apps such as DropMind Lite, Evernote, and Total Recall useful. There is also a note taking feature within Mendeley (see below).

How will you manage your references?

Make sure you have a system for keeping track of your references and you know which referencing style you are supposed to use in your work.

Using referencing software is a good way to keep track of what you have read and will also help you put your citations and bibliographies into the correct format. There are many types of software available. The University supports the Mendeley reference software.

Supporting material on using Mendeley is available from:

<https://learn.lboro.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=3539>. Information about citing and

referencing and avoiding plagiarism is available from:

<https://learn.lboro.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=5792> .

SUGGESTED DISSERTATION CHECKLIST

Although specific to dissertations / final year projects many of these tasks are applicable to other types of coursework.

Task No.	Description
1	Topic finding
1.1	Read through lecture notes and assignments for topic inspiration
1.2	Create a mindmap of possible topics and interests
1.3	Select and start learning to use reference management software e.g. Mendeley
1.4	Preliminary research: are there enough sources of data or literature available?
1.5	Refine topic into research questions
1.6	Write preliminary objectives for achieving your research question
1.7	Meet with potential supervisor to discuss topic suitability, research question and objectives. Amend plan based on feedback (optional)
2	Proposal
2.1	Write up a working Dissertation title
2.2	State your research question(s)
2.3	Conduct a brief literature review- what has already been written about your topic?
2.4	Methodology- how will you collect and analyse data, and why?
2.5	Prepare ethical statement
2.6	Provide detailed plan/ timetable
2.7	Create bibliography/ reference list
2.8	Fill out cover sheet, risk assessment and ethical approval forms.
3	Full literature review
3.1	Refresh searching skills (attend workshop or look at materials on Learn 'Get the Know-how')
3.2	Carry out searches
3.3	Read through materials gathered, pick out common themes and debates
3.4	Critically evaluate the materials
3.5	Start writing (keeping your research question(s) in mind)
3.6	Proofread
3.7	Speak to you supervisor: have you missed any of the major sources/ papers?

4	Methodology
4.1	Select and prepare methods. Are there any models in the existing literature?
4.2	Critique methodology and amend. Check in with your supervisor
4.3	Create project summary, participant information sheet and informed consent forms (if conducting interviews or questionnaires)
4.4	Plan dates for gathering data
4.5	Update bibliography and write up methodologies section
5	Data collection and analysis
5.1	Test selected methods on a small sample or friends
5.2	Review results and feedback, and amend the methodology if necessary
5.3	Carry out data collection – providing participant information sheet and gaining informed consent (if conducting interviews or questionnaires)
5.4	Record results
5.5	Validate data
5.6	Carry out initial analysis of the results
5.7	Write up 'stories': what do the results say?
5.8	Write up data analysis section
5.9	Check in with your supervisor: do the 'stories' and analysis make sense?
6	Writing
6.1	Write up remaining sections: Discussion/Evaluation; Conclusions
6.2	Review and improve writing (keeping your research question(s) in mind)
6.3	Proofread
6.4	Finish reference list and bibliography
6.5	Add in title page, table of contents, abstract, appendices etc.
7	Gathering together/ finishing off
7.1	Final proofread and re-write
7.2	Fill out cover sheet
7.3	Submit and celebrate!

Suggested Table of Contents/ Dissertation structure:

Executive Summary or Abstract
Introduction
Literature Review
Research Methods
Results/Findings
Discussion/Evaluation
Conclusion (including future direction)
References
Appendices (if needed)

Further help

You may also find these titles helpful:

Cottrell, S. (2014) *Dissertations and project reports: a step by step guide*, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan – **Available online, and at 808.066 378/COT**

Levin, P. (2011) *Excellent dissertations!* (2nd ed), Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Open University Press. – **Available online, and at 808.066 378/LEV**

McMillan, K. and Weyers, J. (2011). *How to write dissertations & project reports* (2nd ed.), Harlow: Prentice Hall. – **Available online, and at 808.066 378/MAC**

Murray, R. (2017) *How to Write a Thesis*, (2nd ed), Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Open University Press – **Available at 808.066 378/MUR**

Other advice sheets are available on:

- Reading Efficiently
- Taking Notes
- Doing a Literature Review
- Citing and Referencing
- Minimising Stress
- Working with Your Supervisor

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