



DISSERTATION HANDBOOK FOR THE SCHOOL OF MEDIA

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Learning Outcomes	3
3. The Research Process	4
4. Role of the dissertation supervisor.....	4
5. Arrangements for dissertation tutorials/meetings	5
6. Ethical issues in research and guidelines	6
7. Dissertation Submission Requirements	6
8. Layout and Presentation.....	7
9. Referencing – the Harvard Style.....	9
10. Criteria for assessment.....	14

1. Introduction

This Handbook is a reference work for students undertaking a dissertation for either undergraduate or Masters programmes of study in the School of Media, Dublin Institute of Technology. The purpose of the handbook is to offer a general guide to the process of researching and writing the dissertation. It contains essential information regarding requirements for submission and the process of assessment. It is an important document which should be kept for reference throughout the programme. The handbook is organised into the following sections:

- Learning outcomes;
- An overview of the research process;
- Roles and responsibilities of the student and the dissertation supervisor;
- Arrangements for seminar / meetings;
- Ethical issues in research and guidelines;
- Timetable and deadlines;
- Submission requirements (including referencing guidelines);
- Assessment criteria;
- Definitions of cheating including plagiarism;
- Useful sources and suggested reading.

2. Learning Outcomes

The dissertation builds upon the learner's knowledge of relevant theory and practice within their particular area of study. With the appropriate knowledge of research methods, students are required to develop a research proposal, to design and implement a plan for research and to present their work in the form required.

The aim of the dissertation is to enable learners to put into practice the knowledge of research, as well as concepts and skills acquired during their course of study. The dissertation provides an opportunity for the student to specialize in an area of particular interest and to undertake a piece of independent enquiry culminating in a written submission which aims to be of the highest academic standard.

The specific learning outcomes of dissertation are such that on completion of the process, the learner will be able to:

- Understand the relationship between theory, research and practice in their chosen area of media studies;
- Recognise the continuity between the research proposal, the research process and the research report;
- Select and analyse literature relevant to a research problem;
- Be able to justify choice of data collection method;

- Show evidence of using ethical principles in conducting research;
- Be able to use a data collection method appropriate to a research question and research design;
- Be able to evaluate the process of research;
- Compile a research report;
- Become more reflective in their approach to both research and their own practice.
- Comprehend the importance of conducting independent research;
- Evaluate the possibility of conducting further research at postgraduate level.

3. The Research Process

The Dissertation is one of the challenging and important pieces of work undertaken by students during their course of study. It represents an important test of research and analytical skills, the ability to independently manage a research process, and the ability to present and defend an argument.

Prior to undertaking the dissertation, all students will have taken a module in Research Methods which assists them in becoming acquainted with research approaches, how to define a research topic, and the preparation of a more detailed research proposal. Following submission of a research proposal, students should obtain approval from the Dissertation Module Leader that their topic is appropriate to the level of the award. It should relate to the academic field of the student's programme of study, and provide the correct degree of scope for the purpose, i.e. not overly broad or ambitious, and sufficiently focussed.

4. Role of the dissertation supervisor

Following approval of the topic, each student is assigned a dissertation supervisor to oversee the work and assist the student in the research process as the work progresses. The supervisor will generally have relevant research interests and knowledge but it is not essential that they have particular expertise in the actual topic. Their role is to guide and advise on the topic of research, offering feedback on work submitted and ensuring the student keeps to an agreed schedule.

Through detailed discussion with the student, the supervisor will satisfy himself/herself that the topic is feasible in terms of providing an opportunity to conduct research that will draw on a body of literature, establish or outline a relevant theoretical context and provide an opportunity to engage in research enquiry. The supervisor may ask for a more detailed proposal indicating the framework and timescales within which the work will be undertaken. The supervisor will pay particular attention to:

- An agreed schedule of meetings monitoring each stage of the research;

- The student's knowledge and competence in relevant research methods;
- Regular reports from the student on progress and offering constructive advice and criticism;
- Any inadequacies in the research allowing adequate time for re-orientation and correction;
- Any ethical issues that may apply;
- The correct format and layout of the dissertation, and correct referencing.

5. Arrangements for dissertation tutorials/meetings

At the outset, the supervisor and student will agree a schedule of meetings to monitor the progress of the research. This normally comprises **6 detailed tutorials** mirroring the phases of each stage of development the research.

In the early stages, the supervisor will comment on the suitability and potential of the topic, providing feedback and appropriate direction for the advancement of the research. As the research develops, the supervisor adopts a more generalized supervisory role with less detailed comment. **The ultimate responsibility for the successful development of the research project lies with the student and a major aspect of the learning which takes place involves the development by students of skills in self management, independent learning and research. The student must assume ownership of the project and ensure that the objectives are met.**

The student will be required to carefully prepare for meetings, reporting on work undertaken and completed, progress made since the last meeting and agreed plans or next steps in the research. Before the student embarks on any primary research, the supervisor will have discussed in some detail the research methodology proposed. The framework for analysis and techniques to be used will also be discussed. The student should submit drafts of work at a time agreed with the supervisor before each scheduled meeting. The student will receive feedback to confirm that:

- The correct academic style and approach is being used,
- There is the required rigour, breadth and depth;
- There is relevant and appropriate referencing
- The overall structure of the work is appropriate.

6. Ethical issues in research and guidelines

All students and supervisors need to pay attention to any ethical issues which may arise in the course of the research and to ensure that the project conforms to good practice for research projects of this kind. Any issues that arise that may involve potential conflict of interest, risk or exploitation of the researcher or subject should be thoroughly investigated in advance. Where necessary, advice from the Head of School should be sought.

It is good practice to confirm that the work conforms to a code of practice, appropriate to the nature of the research. The Sociological Association of Ireland (SAI) website provides a useful reference point:

http://www.sociology.ie/docstore/dls/pages_list/3_sai_ethical_guidelines.pdf

7. Dissertation Submission Requirements

All students are required to research, write and present a dissertation on a topic based on their relevant programme's theory or practice.

Details on length requirement and deadline for submission are given in the student handbook of each individual programme.

- Dissertations are to be submitted to the Exams Office in DIT-Aungier Street.
- The final draft of the dissertation must be typed, spell-checked and properly bound and must follow the presentation requirements detailed below.
- The dissertation must be based on the candidate's own work and should not have previously formed a part or whole of a submission for a degree or any other qualification at any academic institution.
- **Three** copies of the dissertation, **one** of which must be hard-bound, must be lodged with the Examinations Office **no later than 4pm by the day of the deadline**. An electronic copy should be sent to the supervisor by the same deadline.

8. Layout and Presentation

The hard-bound copy should be bound in black and have the following information on the front cover:

- the title of the dissertation;
- the initials and name of the candidate;
- the award for which the dissertation is submitted;
- the year of submission.

The same information (excluding the title) shall be printed in the same order in at least 24pt (80mm) type along the spine of the cover.

The dissertation shall be printed on one side only of good-quality A4 paper, 80 gram, one and a half spaces, with a left-hand margin at the binding edge of not less than 40mm and all other margins not less than 20mm. A standard font (such as Times, Arial etc) 12 pt should be used.

Pagination

Pages must be numbered consecutively throughout the text, including those pages incorporating photographs or diagrams which are included as whole pages. If a title page is used for chapter, pagination begins on the title page of chapter 1.

Photographs and/or diagrams must be appropriately indexed and accompanied by an explanatory legend.

Appendices

Appendices should be named alphabetically, and each appendix paginated consecutively but separately from the main text and from each other. Audiovisual material may be submitted in an appropriate format, eg, CD or DVD.

Title page

The dissertation should contain a title page with the following information:

- the full title of the dissertation and sub-title if any;
- the qualification for which the work is presented;
- the name of Dublin Institute of Technology, the supervisor and the month and year of submission.

Declaration

The dissertation shall have a page containing the following declaration, signed by the candidate, bound in to the dissertation immediately following the title page:

DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of

[Insert title of award. Eg BA in Photography]

Is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for assessment for any academic purpose other than in partial fulfilment for that stated above.

Signed (Candidate)

Date

Plagiarism of any kind and falsification of data in any way are strictly forbidden and constitute serious breaches of examination regulations.



Chapter headings and sub-headings

Chapter or section headings should be in capitals, plain text, centred and separated from the body of the text.

Example

PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONALISM

The relationship between public relations education and public relations professionals appears ...

Sub-headings within a chapter should be lower-case, bold text, placed in the left-hand side of the page and separated from the body of the text.

Example

Commission on Public Relations Education

The first formal move was made in August 1973 when ...

Sub-sections

These headings are used to indicate further sub-sections. This heading is in lower case, bold text and is contained within the body of the text:

Example

Public Relations versus Publicity. Nonetheless, a number of public relations educators and scholars have struggled to lift ...

Abstract

The dissertation should include an abstract of not more than 300 words. This should follow the table of contents in the dissertation. The abstract should be typed in single spacing and should indicate the author and title of the dissertation in the form of a heading. It should include:

1. The principal aim, objectives and scope of the investigation;
2. The method and methodology
3. A summary of results
4. The principal conclusions

9. Referencing – the Harvard Style

An appropriate system of scholarly referencing should be accurately and consistently used throughout the dissertation. The method of referencing adopted for dissertations in the School of Media is the Harvard System which is outlined below. There are some different versions of this style with small differences in punctuation and abbreviation. It is most important to adapt one and to use it throughout the work.

Bibliography

A bibliography should be included at the end of the dissertation. The bibliography should contain a full citation only of every work directly referred to in the text. It should be in alphabetical order by surname of the author, followed by the first name or initials as given in the work cite.

Books

should be referenced in the following form:

Surname, initials (year of publication): name of publication (*in italics*), place of publication: publisher.

For example:

White, J (1991) *How to Understand and Manage Public Relations*. London: Business Books.

Referencing a book with multiple authors:

Cutlip, SM, Center, AH, and Broom, GM (1994) *Effective Public Relations* (7th ed). New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.

Referencing a chapter within a book:

Traverse-Healy, T (1995) 'Public Relations in Action' in Black, S (ed): *The Practice of Public Relations* (4th ed). Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Referencing a particular chapter in a book by the same author:

Grunig, J E (1992) 'What is Excellence in Management' in Grunig, JE (ed): *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Referencing two publications by the same author from one year:

Black, S. (1989a) *Introduction to Public Relations*, London: The Modino Press.
Black, S. (1989b) *Exhibitions and Conferences from A to Z*. London: The Modino Press.

Referencing a forthcoming publication:

Hehir, P (forthcoming) *Running a Public Relations Consultancy*. London: Kogan Page.

Referencing articles:

Author, initials (year of publication): 'name of article', name of journal (*in italics*), volume or series number, start of article page number, for example:

Tixier, M (1997) 'The Why and How of Quality in Public Relations', *International Public Relations Review*. 19 (3) 23-6*.

(* Note, when referencing page numbers of the article, it is important to condense the information, for example 23-6 not 23-26).

Referencing an article with multiple authors:

Harrison, J and Tonnaer, B (1996) 'A New Currency – A New Millennium, *International Public Relations Review*, 18 (1).

Referencing government reports and publications:

Department of Labour (1989) *Case Studies in Employee Participation*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (1993), *New Forms of Work Organisation*. Dublin: ICTU.

Sometimes if you have a number of government publications it might be better to place them under a separate heading, for example:

(a) Government publications

(all published by the Government Publications Office, Dublin).

(b) Books and articles

(all other books and articles would be referenced as normal under this heading).

Referencing unpublished manuscripts, theses, dissertations and working papers:

Cremin, N (1991) *Public Relations Education – The Employer’s Perspective*. MBS unpublished dissertation, University College, Dublin.

Referencing media

Newspaper article

Shepherd, J. (2007) ‘Smoothie transition: is it really goodbye to the student union bar and hello to mango energisers and campus gyms?’ *The Guardian*, 21st August, p. 6.

Film

Mamma Mia. 2008. Dir. Phyllida Lloyd. [DVD] London: Universal Pictures: UK.

Episode of a TV Series:

‘Remembrance of the Daleks: Part 1’, *Doctor Who*, (1988) Dir. Andrew Morgan [TV], BBC2, 5th October.

Individual Item within a TV Programme:

Thatcher, Margaret, (1986). Interview. In: *Six O’Clock News*. [TV], BBC1 29th January.

Referencing websites

(a) Website with no author

Take the information from the web page itself or the associated Home Page - use the title bar and the credits at the bottom of the page, your own date of viewing the page and insert the words [Online] and Available from World Wide Web:

Title of website (year as appearing on site) [Online]. [Date accessed]. Available from World Wide Web : <url of site>

(b) Website with author Take the information from the web page itself or the associated Home Page - use the title bar and the credits at the bottom of the page, your own date of viewing the page and insert the words [Online] and Available from World Wide Web:

Family name, first initial(s) (year) *Title* [Online]. [Date accessed]. Available from World Wide Web : <url of site>

(c) Electronic journal article Use information from the web site and the article: Family name, first initial(s). (year) Title of article. *Journal title*. [Online]. **Volume** (issue number) [Date accessed], page number of your quotation. Available from World Wide Web: <url of site>

Citation within the body of the text:

There are a number of different styles of referencing authors within a body of given text. Some of the more common methods are as follows:

At the end of the sentence cite the (author, year of publication: page number if relevant), for example:

(Beard, 1997: 73).

Alternatively the author can be cited at the beginning of the sentence, for example:

Grunig et al (1992) claim that ...

If you wish to cite a particular chapter or chapters:

(Grunig, 1992; ch 5) or (Grunig, 1992: chs 5 and 6).

If you want to pay particular reference to a single book or article:

(see Grunig, 1992) or (see esp. Grunig, 1992).

Quotations within the text:

When quoting directly from another author you must give the author, year and page, and ensure that the full reference is given in the bibliography.

Normally quotations should be enclosed in single inverted commas in the text. Use double inverted commas only for quotes within a quote.

Long quotations within the text:

Quotations over about 40 words in length or four lines of text should not be enclosed in inverted commas but should be block-indented from the left and typed in single-line spacing, for example:

Harrison (1995) notes:

The results of the activity help the client to see how the company is doing, so that the company's public relations strategy overall can be revisited and, if necessary, revised.

Omission from the material being quoted should be indicated as follows:

Harrison (1995: 20-1) notes:

'Following the second world war, ... there was a massive growth in public relations consultancies and in-house units ... When peace came, the climate for formalised public relations was good.'

References within the text to interviews:

References to interviews should give the name of the interviewee and the date of the interview, for example:

(interview with Feargal Quinn, 1 March 1997).

Subsequent references to the same interview can be given in an abbreviated form, for example, 'Quinn interview'.

10. OTHER ELEMENTS OF FORMATTING AND WRITING STYLE

Figures and Graphs

Figures and graphs should have a title and should be numbered in separate series by chapter and in order of appearance, for example:

Figure 7.1 Domino model of communication effects would be the first figure in chapter 7 while

Figure 7.2 Levels of implementation and impact criteria for communication and public relations programmes would be the second figure in chapter 7.

The axis of graphs should be clearly labelled. Each line in a graph should be labelled or you may provide a 'key' or 'legend' to the diagram. The source for the graph or table should be given.

Tables

Likewise tables must have titles and the source for the table be clearly given. Tables should be numbered in separate series by chapter and in order of appearance.

Abbreviation

Acronyms should be spelled out in full on first usage: for example, National Asset Management Agency (NAMA), and as NAMA thereafter.

An alphabetical list of abbreviations should be provided at the start of the dissertation and should be referred to in the contents page.

Omit full stops in abbreviations consisting of capitals: for example, DIT.

Avoid contractions in the text such as e.g., i.e., viz. as these are a form of shorthand.

Non-English words should be italicised unless these are reasonably common terms.

Numbers

Numbers less than 10 should normally be spelt out, for example, four companies.

Percentages

Use 'per cent' in the text and % in tables.

Footnotes and endnotes

These should generally be avoided. Where footnotes or endnotes are used they should be numbered sequentially within chapters.

Footnotes must appear at the bottom of the page on which they are introduced.

Endnotes should be placed at the end of the chapter to which they refer or they can be presented by the chapter immediately following the text and appendices of the dissertation.

11. Criteria for assessment

The dissertation is assessed according to the following criteria:

Research Idea

Evidence of independent enquiry and/or level of originality in either conclusion, method or subject area.

Research Methodology

Success in coping with research, use of research and/or theoretical methodology, setting up and pursuing the field or library-based project.

Comprehensiveness and Standard of Analysis

Intellectual and practical knowledge and understanding of and insight into the research question; depth and breadth of analysis; use and spread of sources, including academic literature. Logical structure, comprehensive and cogent argument.

Standard of Presentation

Quality of writing; standard of presentation and freedom from errors.

12 DISSERTATION ASSESSMENT

The dissertation will be separately assessed by two internal examiners. An agreed written report is submitted by the internal examiners. In the case where it is not possible to agree a joint mark, either a third examiner is appointed or the thesis is referred to the external examiner, or both.

Explanation of Grades

>70 (1st)

1. Evidence of comprehensive understanding and deep knowledge of specialist area; outstanding ability to apply, challenge and develop relevant intellectual theories and knowledge of chosen topic.
2. Extensive evidence of intelligent and thorough research, demonstrating mastery of scholarly enquiry. A degree of originality in the presentation and discussion of the material that may be of postgraduate quality.
3. Almost no spelling or typing errors and a very high standard of grammar and presentation.
4. Sound, almost flawless structure and obvious ability to maintain an extended argument in writing .
5. Excellent referencing and a full bibliography (with evidence of use/citation of texts in the dissertation).

60-69 (2:1)

1. Substantial understanding of the specialist area and evidence of deep understanding of theories, principles and concepts in most areas, but lacking in depth in some areas.
2. A good mastery of research approaches; a relevant/appropriate subject matter, clear research focus and title.
3. Sound structure; capable of maintaining an extended argument in writing.
4. Limited spelling, typing or grammatical errors and good standard of presentation
5. Clear referencing with arguments properly reflected in a bibliography.

50-59 (2:2)

1. Competent understanding of relevant intellectual issues but may be some omissions or use of outdated and/or obvious material.
2. Relevant subject matter but thesis/title may lack clarity.
3. May lack originality.
4. The dissertation will be generally coherently structured, and able to maintain an argument, but probably with some flaws or gaps.
5. Possibly some difficulties in expression and/or presentation in need of improvement.
6. Inaccuracies in referencing and/or bibliography.
7. Dissertation brief will have been met.

40-49 (Pass)

1. Superficial though acceptable engagement with relevant, core theories; probably under-researched.
2. Possibly inappropriate subject matter and/or lacks a clear thesis or title.
3. Structure likely to be flawed in places; displays only a rudimentary ability to conduct an extended argument in writing.
4. Essential competence in extended written expression but probably with frequent mistakes in spelling, grammar, typing and/or poor presentation.
5. Referencing may be incomplete or absent and may be not properly reflected in the bibliography.
6. Dissertation brief may be partially fulfilled.

>40 (fail)

1. Little, if any, engagement with relevant theory; and little evidence of academic research.

2. Possibly irrelevant subject matter and/or lacks a coherent thesis or title.
3. Poor structure with crucial omissions in content and little or no argument.
4. Possibly incoherent and/or illegible with unacceptable presentation.
5. Referencing unsatisfactory or absent. May be highly derivative or possibly plagiarised.
6. Dissertation brief may not have been met.

11. Further Reading

Students will be given appropriate reading lists during their research methods training. They are recommended the following general text for further details on referencing and appropriate writing style:

Murphy, Anne (2009) *The General Guide for Academic Writing and Presentation of Assignments*. Dublin: DIT. Available at:
<http://www.dit.ie/media/images/study/maturestudents/Academic%20Writing%20Guide%202009.pdf>