

Structure of a Primary Research-based Dissertation.

The key to a good dissertation is structure, which needs to be logical and coherent. The reader needs to be able to follow your argument throughout. The usual layout for a dissertation where you collect your own data is given below; each section has particular content you are expected to include.

Note that:

- it is usual to use headings and sub-headings in a piece of work of this length
- only the sections 5-10 below contribute to the word count.

1. **Title page:** the approved thesis title, your full name, the qualification for which the dissertation is being submitted, the date of submission and the word count.
2. **The Abstract:** a summary of your dissertation. There is usually a word count of no more than 300 words, but do check your modules guidelines for this. The abstract can be written last as it is telling the reader succinctly the purpose of the dissertation and an overview of the findings or conclusions.
3. **Acknowledgments:** it is here that you thank people or organizations who have helped you with your work.
4. **Contents page:** a tabulated listing giving page numbers for each chapter and section – Microsoft Word can generate this automatically (see [guide](#) to formatting dissertations).
5. **Introduction:** explain the purpose of your study, putting the area of work into its wider context. Set out your argument with the significance of the problem being addressed. Develop an outline of the dissertation, signposting the reader through each chapter.
6. **Literature review:** what have other people written? Show your grasp and understanding of the relevant theory and previous research. It should show also how the literature informs the proposed study.
7. **Method or methodology:** how did you collect your data? Cover your approach to the research and justification for this, materials and procedures followed, a description of any samples, and, importantly, any [ethical procedures](#) must be followed.
8. **Results or findings:** what did you find? Think about whether you want to begin with an overview of the result and then the detail, or go straight into the detail of the results.
9. **Discussion:** This is where you bring your research into context. You need to bring in the relevant literature, does the literature support your findings? Acknowledge any limitations and how these might have affected your results. In qualitative research, it's common to combine results and discussion but if you are following experimental or quantitative methods, keep them separate.
10. **Conclusion:** This is where you briefly restate the original issue, seen in the light of what has been learned. Pull all the threads of your argument together, perhaps make suggestions for further research. Don't introduce any new topics.
11. **References:** this needs to be in your course's required referencing style. Keep the reference list up to date as you write, to save time at the end.

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12. **Appendices:** These are items that you want the reader to see but do not need in the text, usually because it will interrupt the flow or take up too much space.

Further reading: Greetham, B. (2014) *How to write your undergraduate dissertation*. 2nd ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.