

Structure of a Literature-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 literature-based dissertation is given below; each section has particular content you are expected to include. Individual courses may require slightly different layouts, so check your dissertation guide.

Note that:

- it is usual to use headings and sub-headings in a piece of work of this length
 - only the introduction, chapters and conclusion 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 module's guidelines for this. The abstract can be written last as it is telling the reader succinctly the purpose of the dissertation and giving an overview of the findings or conclusions.
 3. **Acknowledgments:** (optional) 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 (5-10% of the word count):** introduce the topic of your dissertation and how it fits into its wider context. Introduce the particular research question/problem you will be addressing in the dissertation and explain its significance and (possibly) why it was chosen. Define the scope of the dissertation, explaining any limitations. Describe the structure of the dissertation, signposting the reader through each section and providing any key definitions.
 6. **Chapters (usually between 3 and 5 – each one 15-25% of the word count):** these are organised thematically - each chapter reviews and discusses the literature relating to a different aspect of your research area. Each chapter should have its own mini-introduction, main body and conclusion.
 7. **Conclusion (5-10% of the word count):** draw together the conclusions and main points from all of the chapters. This is where you revisit your research question/problem, seen in the light of what has been learned. You may make suggestions for further research. Don't introduce any new topics.
 8. **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.
 9. **Appendices:** these are items that you want the reader to see but do not need in the text, usually because they will interrupt the flow or take up too much space. If you include appendices, ensure you refer to them in the main body of your dissertation.

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