

Finishing off and checking through

This stage can be time consuming, so leave yourself enough time to have a final read through of your dissertation to pick up any lingering mistakes or typos.

If you're trying to track down that missing reference for your bibliography, you can always ask a librarian for help finding it.
www.reading.ac.uk/library/

Good presentation matters – it gives a professional appearance and puts the reader in a good mood.

If you choose to get your work hard bound, it can take a few days, so check with the printers / stationers beforehand.

What does your department do...?

Check your **course handbook** for your department's preferences on:

- Style
- Referencing
- Layout
- Binding

Good luck- enjoy the opportunity to do creative research... and remember, the Study Advisers are available to help with all areas of your dissertation.

For more information....

See **Dissertations 1. Generating ideas and forming a question**

See **Dissertations 2. Doing your research**

For more on this and other aspects of academic study, see our website at www.reading.ac.uk/studyadvice

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Writing up your dissertation



Dissertations 3

This guide covers how to write up your dissertation and get it all done in good time, including:

- Getting it all done in the time you have
- Writing up
- Keeping going
- Finishing off and checking through

Getting it all done in the time you have

Don't panic! Your dissertation might seem like an endless project, but having both an overall list of tasks and a daily plan will get it done.

Plan an overall work schedule:

Break down your dissertation into stages and **plan backwards from your deadline** to fit them all in

- Start with your literature review
- Think about your methodology
- Identify primary sources
- Identify secondary sources, if appropriate

- Write as you go along
- Organise and analyse your material
- Write up
- Redraft / check / proofread

Do a little bit on a regular basis:

- Decide in advance when you're going to work on your dissertation – set aside time each week or have a particular day to work on it.
- Give yourself a specific task to do in that time.
- Do difficult tasks at the times of day you work best.
- Do easy tasks when you're tired / less motivated.

Have a disaster plan!

No one ever sticks to their plan perfectly, so set aside time for “catching-up”.

Also be aware mechanical tasks like sorting the bibliography and proofreading will take longer than you think. Computers and printers know when you're in a hurry and will scheme to break down at the most inconvenient moment!

Writing up

- Write up as you go along. It is much easier to keep track of how your ideas develop; writing helps clarify your thinking. It also saves having to churn out 1000s of words at the end.
- You don't have to start with the introduction – start at the chapter that seems the easiest to write – this could be the literature review or methodology, for example.
- Think of each chapter as an essay in itself – it should have a clear introduction and conclusion. Use the conclusion to link back to the overall research question.

- Think of the main argument of your dissertation as a river, and each chapter is a tributary feeding into this. The individual chapters will contain their own arguments, and go their own way, but they all contribute to the main flow.
- Write a chapter, read it and do a redraft - then move on. This stops you from getting bogged down in one chapter.
- Write your references properly and in full from the beginning.
- Keep your word count in mind – be ruthless and don't write anything that isn't relevant. It's often easier to add information, than have to cut down a long chapter that you've slaved over for hours.

Keeping going

After the initial enthusiasm wears off, it can be hard to keep motivated – it's also natural to feel confused and overwhelmed at points throughout your dissertation; this is all part of sustaining a longer project.

- Break down large, unappealing tasks into smaller bearable ones.
- Give yourself rewards when you've completed tasks.
- If you're feeling reluctant to work, do more straightforward tasks like compiling the bibliography or doing the title page.
- If you're feeling confused about what you're doing, try writing a short paragraph summarising what your research is about. This can help you find a focus again.
- If you're feeling overwhelmed, try identifying the one thing that you need to do next; often this will logically lead to further steps, and you'll be able to get started again.
- Talk to friends or your supervisor about what you're doing; explaining where you are in your project and how it's going can help clarify your thinking.

