

## DISSERTATION WRITING GUIDELINES

A number of courses are offered as ‘Advanced Topics in Anthropology’ options in the Spring and Summer terms of your final year (single-honours Anthropology students take two options). These are 36 credit courses, which reflect faculty members’ own areas of specialisation, and are assessed by submitting an 8,000 word dissertation in Week 5 of the Summer Term. Although the courses are similarly structured, they are taught in different ways and, in the first instance, students should refer to individual course documents and tutors for advice. These dissertation writing guidelines are intended to supplement both individual course materials and the general Undergraduate Student’s Handbook (available at [www.sussex.ac.uk/academicoffice/1-3-2-1.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/academicoffice/1-3-2-1.html)) – see especially Section 4, Rules for the Submission of Formally Assessed Work. There is also an excellent online ‘Companion for Undergraduate Dissertations’ available at [www.socscidiss.bham.ac.uk](http://www.socscidiss.bham.ac.uk) – this is produced specifically for social science students and is packed with helpful advice.

### What is a dissertation?

The dissertation is an opportunity to produce a substantive piece of research equivalent to a research paper. It is about the same length as a journal article or book chapter. Unlike shorter essays, a dissertation thus involves conducting and writing a substantial piece of original research which departs from reading lists. Given time and resource limitations, this is usually library-based research, although can extend to the use of other sources (media, grey literature, e-mails from informants, etc. as appropriate). Your dissertation CAN also include original empirical ethnographic data, but this is NOT an expectation, and you would need to discuss this with your supervisor. Whilst there is space for innovation and creativity, your dissertation should:

- Formulate a clear question that clearly relates to your Advanced Topic;
- Review analytically the literature in the field relating to your question;
- Engage in independent research to gather materials (ethnographic and other) necessary to address this question;
- Combine theory and evidence to address the question
- Present and discuss your findings, whilst demonstrating how they relate to your original question

### Choosing a dissertation topic

Although the subject of your dissertation will need to be related to the themes and issues covered in your ‘Advanced Topics’ course(s), this is an opportunity to identify and explore your own areas of interest. Generally speaking, the more narrowly focused your topic, the better (although, of course, you should locate your particular study within a broader anthropological debate). As well as considering your personal enthusiasms, it is also important that you design your project with an awareness of the constraints that you face. Questions you should therefore ask yourself include:

- Will the topic sustain your interest over the months to come?
- Is there an existing literature within which you can locate your work?
- Is there sufficient material to provide the evidence that you are going to need.
- Is the topic one that you can research with the time and resources available?
- Do you have the time and opportunity for empirical work?

There will be plenty of opportunity to discuss your developing dissertation plans within your course seminars throughout the Spring Term. In some courses you will be required to submit a 2,000 word Dissertation Proposal in Week 9 of the Spring Term as a second piece of unassessed course work. You will need to get your tutor to approve your proposed project before proceeding.

## **Supervision**

Although dissertations are individual student-led projects, your 'Advanced Topics' course tutor(s) will supervise your work, providing support, guidance and advice. There is some variation across courses, but this supervision will include at least two pre-arranged individual tutorials of approx. 20 minutes each (typically in Week 10 of the Spring Term and Week 2 of the Summer Term). To make the most of this time, you should come well prepared with specific queries that have arisen in your work so far and a copy of your work in progress. Supervisors will not be able to read complete drafts of your dissertation.

## **Organizing your time**

It is never too early to start thinking about your dissertation. However, as the Spring Term proceeds and work inevitably begins to mount up, it is essential that you budget your time for your dissertation work carefully. For most students this means blocking out time throughout the Easter vacation and first weeks of the Summer Term for each piece of work. Do not underestimate the amount of time you will need or leave things until the last minute! An example for how to timetable your dissertation work follows:

<i>Timetable</i>	<i>Process</i>
From now	Gestation – allowing ideas to develop and take shape
Spring Term	Preliminary literature search – developing ideas in relation to existing work; discuss ideas with peers and tutors. A bibliographic search is one of the first tasks that you will need to do and it is extremely important to establish whether the research is 'do-able'.
Spring Term Wk 7-9	Write dissertation proposal – formulate working title, research questions, etc.
Spring Term Wk 10	Supervision tutorial – revise/develop ideas in light of supervisor's feedback
Easter vacation onwards	Main period of research – library-based work and primary data gathering (if applicable); begin writing first draft of dissertation
Summer Term Wk 2	Supervision tutorial – revise first draft in light of feedback
Summer Term Wks 2-4	Write final draft; preparation of dissertation for submission
Summer Term Wk 5	Submit dissertation!

## **Dissertation structure**

By the time you begin writing the first draft of your dissertation you will have accumulated a wealth of notes, scribbles and ideas. You are already deep into the research process! In order to write-up and communicate your research findings effectively, it is necessary to structure this material. It is a good idea to re-read a couple of scholarly articles that have impressed you and consider how the authors have structured their arguments (many articles will be of a similar word length to your dissertation).

We do not prescribe a structure, as this might vary according to the subject and genre of research and your particular take. The dissertation does, however, need to be well organized in order to sustain the argument over 8,000 words. It is important that you discuss this with your tutor. Think of the varied ways that the articles that you have been reading during your degree have been organised. It goes without saying that you should pay close attention to spelling and grammar, and we do, of course, require proper referencing. A good dissertation is always meticulously referenced,

either in footnotes or in the text. We encourage anthropologists to follow the standard style of referencing used in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*.

## Plagiarism

You are reminded that direct copying without quotation marks or unacknowledged extended paraphrasing from books and journals is plagiarism. Students who are found guilty of plagiarism in their examinations are subject to very heavy penalties. For further information of plagiarism issues, see [www.sussex.ac.uk/academicoffice/1-4-1.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/academicoffice/1-4-1.html).

## Submitting your dissertation

You should consult Section 4 of the latest edition of the Undergraduate Student's Handbook (available at [www.sussex.ac.uk/academicoffice/1-3-2-1.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/academicoffice/1-3-2-1.html)) for rules about submitting your dissertation. However, a few points to bear in mind:

- The dissertation word limit (8,000 words) includes all footnotes, endnotes and quotations cited in your main text, but does not include abstract, bibliography or appendices
- Your name should not appear on the dissertation itself (including title page, etc.)
- Two copies of the dissertation should be submitted
- You will need to complete and have signed by your tutor a triplicate BA/LLB Examination Title Form confirming that your dissertation title has been approved (a copy of the form needs to be attached to each copy of the dissertation that you submit)
- Before submission, you need to collect and complete a triplicate cover sheet from the SocCul School Office and attach a copy to each copy of the dissertation that you submit

## Further reading

'Companion for Undergraduate Dissertations' available at [www.socscidiss.bham.ac.uk](http://www.socscidiss.bham.ac.uk)

Becker, H.S. (1986) *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. (Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing & Publishing) Chicago, University of Chicago Press

Bell, J. (1999) *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-Time Researchers in Education and Social Science*. 3rd ed. Milton Keynes, Open University Press

Hart, C. (1998) *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Research Imagination*, London, Sage Publications

Kjell Erik Rudestam & Rae R. Newton (2000). 2nd ed. *Surviving your dissertation : a comprehensive guide to content and process*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications

Taylor, G. (1989) *The Student's Writing Guide for the Arts and Social Sciences*, Cambridge, CUP

Walliman, N. (2000) *Your Research Project: A Step-by-step Guide for the First-time Researcher*, Sage