

School of Psychology



University
of Sussex
MS

MSc Research Dissertation Handbook 2011-12

MRes in Psychological Methods (935C8)

MSc Applied Social Psychology (935C8)

MSc Cognitive Neuroscience (9335C8)

MSc Experimental Psychology (927C8)

MSc Foundations of Clinical Psychology and
Mental Health (918C8)

MSc Health Psychology (935C8)

Convenor and Contact Details

MSc Research Dissertation Convenor Helga Dittmar, PEV1 2B5

For all your queries concerning Masters programmes, your first ports of call are:

Your Masters Programme Director:

MRes in Psychological Methods	Alan Garnham (2B12)
MSc Applied Social Psychology	Helga Dittmar (2B5)
MSc Cognitive Neuroscience	Jamie Ward (2B1)
MSc Foundations of Clinical Psychology and Mental Health	Kate Cavanagh (2C7)
MSc Experimental Psychology	Jane Oakhill (2B3)
MSc Health Psychology	Donna Jessop (1C11))

Psychology Office Staff in Pevensey 1 2A13:

Andy Taylor	psyoff@sussex.ac.uk
Fran Barnard	psyoff@sussex.ac.uk
Penny Ingram	pennie@sussex.ac.uk

Research Dissertation Meeting in October 2010

This is a meeting for all Masters students in Psychology with both the MSc Research Dissertation Convenor and with previous Masters students, who are now engaged in doctoral research in the School of Psychology. The purpose of the meeting is help you think about and prepare for your Research Dissertation. The Research Dissertation Convenor will talk briefly about what makes a good research project and how to avoid common pitfalls. The previous MSc/MRes students will briefly talk about their own experience of carrying out and writing up their masters research dissertation. However, the main format is intended to be a question-and-answer session, so that you have the opportunity to ask about whichever issues or aspects are important to you, you are concerned about, or you would like further information on. The exact date and venue of this meeting is:

**Friday, 14th October, 1.00pm
Pevensey 1 Lecture Theatre 1A7**

Research Dissertation Information and Requirements

The information in this handbook applies to all MSc and MRes students in Psychology (full-time and part-time). Most of the information and requirements are the same for all six programmes we offer – MRes in

Psychological Methods, MSc in Applied Social Psychology, MSc Foundations of Clinical Psychology and Mental Health, MSc in Experimental Psychology, MSc in Health Psychology, and MSc in Cognitive Neuroscience – but there are also minor variations (these variations are detailed in this handbook, please watch out for them). All students submit a Research Report that is modelled on a professional peer-reviewed journal article.

Please read this handbook carefully and keep it in a safe place so that you can refer to it again at a later date!

Aims

Whichever programme you are taking, your research dissertation is your opportunity to gain first-hand experience of carrying out a substantial piece of original empirical research, typically under individual supervision by a member of faculty, who is an expert on your research topic. For some of the students on the MSc Foundations of Clinical Psychology and Mental Health, supervision will be offered in collaboration with a field supervisor in the Sussex Partnership Foundation Trust. For students on the MSc Neuroscience, supervision may also be offered by staff in the Brighton and Sussex Medical School. As part of the research dissertation and as invaluable practice and preparation for submitting research manuscripts for publication, students are required to submit their research report in the form of a manuscript submitted to a prestigious journal for publication, following the guidelines of the *American Psychological Association* (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th Edition, library location: QZ 35 Ame). There is also a very good online guide on APA style essentials at http://www.vanguard.edu/faculty/ddegelman/index.aspx?doc_id=796. The dissertation is a heavily-weighted course, reflecting the importance given to original research within the overall structure of the Psychology Masters programmes.

Research Dissertation objectives

In carrying out their project, students should:

- Utilize a range of library and electronic resources in researching the chosen project topic
- Participate constructively in supervision sessions
- Acquire practical and problem-solving skills through operationalising research questions
- Extend skills of critical reflection, logic and critical argumentation by developing a well-reasoned research rationale
- Consider, and demonstrate awareness of, the ethical implications of the proposed research
- Collect original data (although secondary data analysis may be possible in some cases, if agreed with the supervisor)
- Conduct appropriate analysis of the data

- Show an understanding of the research findings and be able to present them appropriately
- Produce a project report, modeled on a professional psychology journal article
- Demonstrate an appreciation of the limitations of their own research

Publishability of Research Dissertation

It is not uncommon for a Masters research dissertation to be published jointly by student and supervisor, either as a publication in its own right, or as part of a multi-study paper, also reporting related research carried out by the supervisor.



Supervision Arrangements and Entitlement

Whether you are a full-time student or a part-time student, you are strongly advised to begin thinking about your dissertation (i.e. identifying the research area, formulating specific questions) as soon as you join your MSc or MRes programme. The research areas for which members of faculty are expert and willing to supervise are given at the School of Psychology website. For each faculty member, their research interests are given, as well as a list of recent publications. Faculty research is organised into four Research Groups and, depending on your Masters programme, one or other of these may be the closer to your own likely research interests. So, for example, students on the MSc Applied Social Psychology programme might be particularly interested in the research expertise in the Social and Applied Psychology Group. However, this is not necessarily the case, and students on the MRes and the MSc in Experimental Psychology may well be interested in any of the four research groupings.

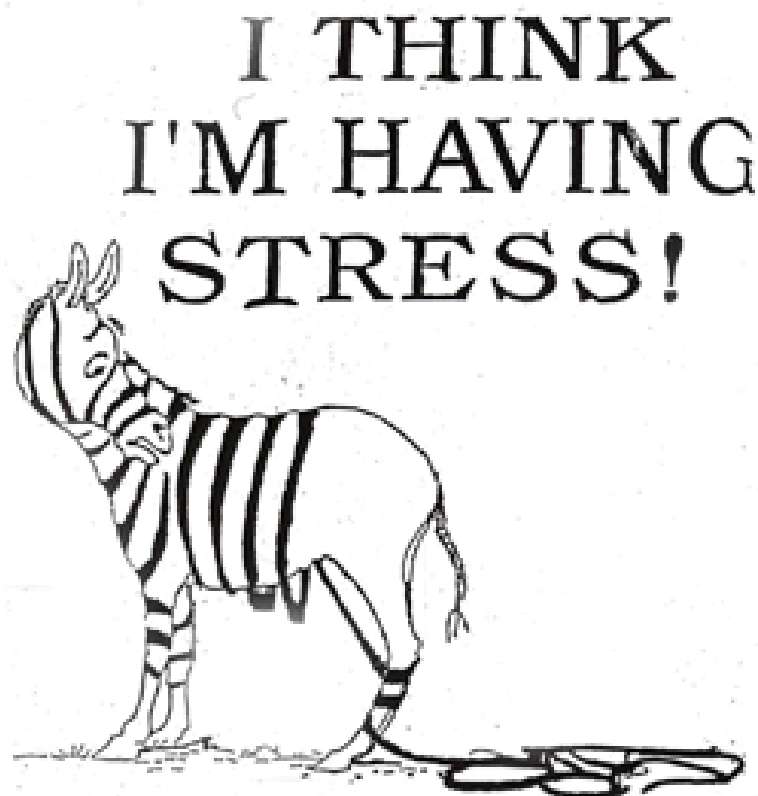
After gaining some overview of the very diverse research interests represented in the School of Psychology at Sussex, you should decide at an early stage which area(s) of research you would like to consider for your own research project work. **It is then up to you to become proactive, and talk informally to members of faculty about their expert area of research and your ideas for your dissertation**, but please check first by e-mail how and when they would like to be contacted.

Important: Please note that some members of faculty may have specific suggestions for research projects, which are linked to their own on-going research. Please check on the Study Direct website "Research Dissertation (MSc/MRes).

Office Hours

Office hours are designated times when faculty members of the School of Psychology are available to discuss any matters students may wish to raise with them, such as their ideas for their research dissertation. They are available from the Psychology Office in Pevensey 1, room 2A13.

Please remember, getting started early, sticking to deadlines and being organised avoids unnecessary stress!



Supervisor Allocation Procedures and Deadlines

You will be asked to indicate your preferences for a supervisor on a form (attached at the end of this handbook, but also available from the School Office) that needs to be handed in by the end of **week 6 of the Autumn Term, i.e. Friday, 11th November, 4pm**. This deadline applies to both full-time and part-time students. Please make every effort to stick to these deadlines. **The expectation is that you have already talked to at least your first choice of supervisor and that s/he has indicated their willingness to supervise you in principle.**

Allocation will start as soon as the deadline for the form submission has passed, but not before. The aim is to provide the best match between your interests and supervisor expertise, with the constraints that members of faculty usually supervise up to three masters research projects. If you hand in your form late, your preferences will not be taken into account until all other students are allocated.

You will be notified of who your supervisor is as soon as possible, but no later than the beginning of the eighth week of the Autumn Term. Please make contact with your supervisor towards the end of the Autumn Term to arrange preliminary reading or other preparatory work, so that you are ready to start fully on your Research Dissertation in the Spring Term. Part-time students should also get in touch with their supervisor, but need not arrange any preparatory work until the Summer Term, so that they are ready to work on their dissertation from the Autumn Term in their Year 2.

Supervision Entitlement

Please note that each MSc student is formally entitled to 4 hours of supervision, the format of which is agreed with his or her supervisor (e.g., eight sessions of half an hour each). In addition to this supervision time, you can expect your supervisor to provide feedback on a draft of the research project. You should check with your supervisor when s/he would like to receive your draft and when you can expect feedback on this draft.

The supervisory practices of different supervisors will vary considerably: you should therefore be clear which particular mode of supervision your supervisor expects to employ with you. Projects can also take a number of different forms: for example, they may involve quantitative or qualitative research, or both; students on some projects act primarily in a research assistant role, or may be involved in partial replications of existing research; other students may be very much pursuing their own ideas on original studies of their own design. Some students work as part of a research team or group; others work more independently. Please note that before considering publishing project work in conference proceedings, papers or other public formats you must first discuss this with your supervisor, as he/she would normally have to agree (as co-author).

Research Resources

A sum of £75 (liable to revision) is available to each student for covering the costs required for their research work, (e.g. questionnaire printing). In exceptional circumstances, this sum may be slightly higher, such as for research that requires costly administration. Please note that photocopying of questionnaire or preparation of research stimuli that incurs costs needs to be arranged through the Psychology Office. DO NOT pay yourself and expect reimbursement; arrangements through the Office are usually much more cost-efficient than commercial facilities.

In addition to the Psychology computer rooms 2D8 and 2D9, there is a computer lounge for masters and research students in Pevensey 1, room 2D17, which can be accessed by a number lock (please contact Penny Ingram in the Psychology Office to get the code).

Masters students do not have individual dedicated desk space, but there are lockers outside 2D17 for books and notes, and there are several desks without computers in 2D17 that can be used for reading, note taking, etc.

Depending on your research project and supervisor, masters students may also have access to one or more of the many dedicated or bookable laboratory facilities within the School of Psychology. Some of these are located in Pevensey 1, but the bulk is in Pevensey 2.

Ethical Approval: Clearance and Risk Assessment

All students will need to complete applications for ethical approval for their research from the School of Psychology (University of Sussex). No data must be collected until such approval has been granted. An electronic copy of the Ethics form for research projects can be downloaded from the School of Psychology website, at

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/internal/hse>

It is designed specifically to meet the requirements of the British Psychological Society's guidelines for the conduct of ethical research. These guidelines can be obtained from the following web address:

http://www.bps.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/code_of_human_research_ethics.pdf

Research projects are classified as either low or high risk. On the Sussex website, in addition to the ethics form, there is a flowchart on the right hand side outlining how to decide whether yours is a "low" or "high" risk project (check also with your supervisor). Low risk applications are sent to the Psychology Ethics Officer, who during 2011-12 is Richard de Visser (e-mail r.de-visser@sussex.ac.uk). High risk applications are sent to Cluster-based Research Ethics Committee at c-recpsysci@sussex.ac.uk. Please note that research with particular populations (e.g., patients), or involving particular techniques (e.g., ingesting any substance, medical procedure) may require additional ethical or other clearance. Students wishing to work in the NHS context may be interested in the relevant information about additional ethical clearance (please note, this may require extra time!) at <https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/>

You must include a section on the Ethical Issues that relate to your project in the Methods section of the Research Report (see below), and also attach a printed copy of your completed Ethics Form to the report itself, as part of the Appendices (see below).

Research Dissertation Write-Up and Submission

There are generic guidelines for writing-up and submitting research dissertations that apply to all masters students, and these are outlined first. Please note again that there is some variation according to the MSc programme that you are taking.

Please check the deadlines for submission via the
Psychology websites

Generic Guidelines for Writing-Up and Submitting the Research Dissertation

The report of your research project should be no more than the specified number of words (see below) in length (including any footnotes, but excluding references, appendices and data in the form of quoted text [the latter being applicable to some projects employing qualitative methods]), and should be written in a style and format similar to that of an article published in a Psychology journal. To enhance legibility please use a 12 pt font and at least one and a half line spacing. Make sure that you do not exceed the word limit - and provide a word count on the front page of the Research Dissertation. As already note, you should use APA (American Psychological Association) style for your report.

However, it is worth underlining the fact that different types of research generate differences in reports: for example, a study quantitatively testing an experimental hypothesis will be written up in a different way from a study which is based on questionnaire data that are correlational in nature, and both will be very different from a project that uses qualitative data or case studies. In preparing to write up your project, look at published studies with a similar design to your project, and use these as models for writing up.

Your report should include the following sections:

Title

The title should be precise and self-explanatory, detailing the central research topic

Abstract

The objective of the abstract is to provide an effective précis of the aims, method and results of your study, in not more than 120 words. You are advised to look at a number of published abstracts from work in an area similar to your project, and use these as models.

Introduction

The aim of the introduction is to explain the specific background to the particular research you have carried out. It should outline whatever previous studies are necessary to highlight why your own work is necessary/interesting. You should explain how your research relates to previous research and what it adds to previous research. The introduction should finish with a clear statement of your aims/objectives/hypotheses. The aim of the introduction is thus to explain and justify the research rationale that motivates your study.

Method

A good tip here is to model this section on a published example of research of a similar design. Use the usual subheadings (where appropriate):

Participants, Materials, Design, Procedure, and Ethical Issues. You need to describe your methods in sufficient detail so that the reader could replicate exactly what you did. Explain who your sample were, how you recruited them, how you briefed and debriefed them. Describe your materials fully and explain how they were constructed, and explain exactly what your procedure was.

Results

The results section of your report should be structured around answering the questions which motivated your study - and which you have spelt out in the introduction. The structure and order of your results should mirror your hypotheses at the end of the introduction. Summarise the data relevant to each hypothesis to be tested, and report on the analyses you have done of those data. Double check your statistics: have you chosen the right statistic to test the hypothesis? Is it the right statistic for the kind of data you have? If in doubt, check with your supervisor. Describe your results fully, but save interpretation for the Discussion. Tables and/or Figures are likely to be useful in helping you communicate your results to the reader.

Discussion

Discuss (but not redescribe) your results in relation to the hypotheses and issues which motivated your study, and then in the light of any broader implications they may have. How do your results fit in with findings from existing studies in the literature? What do they add to the literature? What new questions do they raise? Be careful not to over-interpret your data: do not make claims about the implications of your research that are not justified by the data. Think about any demand characteristics of your procedure, the reliability of your data collection procedure, the implications of your findings and how subsequent research could extend or clarify your work. Demonstrate awareness of the shortcomings of your specific research, but do not engage in endless faultfinding!

References

Use the usual APA (American Psychological Association) style.

Appendices

Include a copy of your ethical approval form, questionnaires, interview schedules, consent forms, etc. in your appendices. One diskette (CD or floppy) containing your raw data and SPSS outputs should be attached to one of the two copies of the reports that you submit. *Do not* include computer print-out of statistical analyses.

Submission. Two copies of the Research Dissertation will be required at submission, to the Psychology Office. There are various forms of binding (e.g., pages of the dissertation held together in a soft cover by an adhesive spine), but all that is required is that the Dissertation is held together in a sensible way. A coversheet must be affixed to the front of each copy (available from the Psychology office).

Programme-Specific Guidelines and Submission Requirements

The word limit for the Research Dissertation differs slightly by programme. It is:

- 6,000 words for the MSc in Experimental Psychology
- 7,000 words for the MRes in Psychological Methods
- 7,000 words for the MSc in Applied Social Psychology
- 7,000 words for the MSc in Cognitive Neuroscience

7,000 words for the MSc in Foundations of Clinical Psychology and Mental Health

7,000 words for the MSc in Health Psychology

Assessment criteria for Research Dissertations

Assessment criteria for Dissertations are provided on the School website.

Detach, complete and submit!

PSYCHOLOGY MASTERS PROGRAMMES

RESEARCH DISSERTATION 2011-12

SUPERVISOR PREFERENCE FORM

Student Name: _____

Masters Programme: _____

Please list THREE supervisors in order of preference.

You **MUST** speak to your first choice supervisor before completing this form.

	Name	Already discussed a topic
First choice:		YES/NO*
	_____	_____
	Name	Already discussed a topic
Second choice:		YES/NO*
	_____	_____
	Name	Already discussed a topic
Third choice:		YES/NO*
	_____	_____

Signature/Date: _____

*Delete as applicable

Submit this form to the Psychology Office, Pevensey 1 2A13 by

Friday, 11th November 2011, 4pm