
PGT Dissertation Handbook

University of Essex
Department of
Language and
Linguistics

Graduate Programmes
Co-ordination (Linguistics)

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Introduction

The PGT dissertation is a central component of the MA and MRes. Writing your MA and MRes dissertation is your chance to research a topic of your choosing with the guidance of an experienced researcher; often, indeed, this is what motivates students to take up graduate study in the first place and, in some cases, to carry on to do a PhD. At 16,000 words, the dissertation represents a substantial piece of writing and is the equivalent of two to three academic journal articles of the type you will have read during your programme. It therefore requires careful planning and research, and considerable determination to stick to a carefully worked out timetable.

Your supervisor will help you to do this, but in the end, the planning, the research, and the determination to stick to a timetable is your responsibility. This handbook will guide you through this process and further advice is available in your Departmental Handbook. Here is a brief summary of the stages. Please note the timeline is only meant to give you a general idea of the process; ***you will need to adjust this depending on your specific project, mode of supervision, and the advice given by your supervisor:***

Proposing the topic	by February:	Discuss a dissertation topic with a possible supervisor Fill in a <i>Dissertation proposal form</i> (available from the Departmental office, room 4.305; a sample form is included at the end of this document) Secure the signature of a possible supervisor and your Programme Director (see Dissertation proposal form below)
	March:	Submit a <i>Dissertation proposal form</i> to the Graduate Administrator by 3 pm on Friday of Week 23.
↓		
Dissertation Preparation	Mid –March:	Make sure you have planned the work you will do during the Easter period Make sure you visit the library and gather the materials you might need to consult during the Easter period
	Mid/End-March:	Meet your supervisor to discuss and/or refine your dissertation plan (before the Easter period)
↓		
Dissertation	End April-June:	Any data gathering (if applicable) would have normally been completed by the end of the Summer term. Most of the work and the dissertation supervision will take place in the Summer term
	July-August:	During the summer months staff usually work on their own research and take their holiday; therefore you should discuss specific arrangements for this period with your supervisor. Staff operate two systems of supervision: either all one-to-one supervision or a combination of individual and group supervision. Individual staff information can be found on the Departmental webpages; also see the link 'MA Supervision

Arrangements.'

September: Dissertations should be handed in by **16.00 hrs** on **Friday** of **Week 50**.

Proposing the topic

Proposing the topic by February: Discuss a dissertation topic with a **possible supervisor**

Fill in a *Dissertation proposal form* (available from the Departmental office, room 4.305, a sample form is included at the end of this document)

Secure the signature of a possible supervisor and your Course Director (see Dissertation proposal form below)

March: Submit a *Dissertation proposal form* to the Graduate Administrator by **3 pm** on **Friday** of **Week 23**.

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When do I start the process?

You should start thinking about a possible choice of topic as early as possible; at the latest by early in the Spring term. The selection of a suitable topic is your responsibility; you could start by re-visiting your lecture notes and bibliographies. During February, you must discuss a dissertation topic with a potential supervisor and have it approved by your Course Director. We want to ensure that what you have chosen can be done within the period of time available (approx. four months), that you have not chosen a topic which is too broad, or unfocused, or for which there is a problem in obtaining materials, e.g., library resources, corpus resources, etc. If conducting experiments or undertaking fieldwork, you also need to ensure you will be able to find participants.

How do I go about choosing my topic?

You need to select a topic which is related to what you have studied, and specifically to one or more of **the modules you have taken or are taking**. You also need to consider your knowledge and skills in relation to research methods. Also, think about a topic you find interesting and do not be tempted by choosing something you *think* will be 'easy.'

The topic must be one for which adequate library and supervision facilities are available within the Department/University. You will find notes on topic areas that members of staff are willing to supervise under 'staff information' through the Departmental Website <http://www.essex.ac.uk/langling/staff/academic.aspx>

The work must have an appropriate intrinsic linguistic or applied linguistic content, since your degree is being awarded by a Language and Linguistics Department and will therefore be judged (in part, at least) by the linguistic or applied linguistic insights it offers.

When and how do I submit my topic formally?

When you have consulted your potential supervisor and your Programme Director, and have been given informal permission to pursue your chosen topic, you must submit your *Dissertation proposal form* to the Graduate Administrator. The form (see sample below) must be signed by your potential supervisor and your Course Director. The deadline is **Friday of Week 23**.

The title of your topic

The title should be as informative as possible. It is only a guide at this stage, and you will be able to modify it at a later stage if you wish, in consultation with your supervisor.

The proposed dissertation topic

In this section you need to provide an outline of your proposed research in around 300 words. The outline should identify a *specific* topic to be investigated and not just a general field. This summary of the proposed dissertation should include the main points you think you will be covering in the dissertation proper (the overall approach you wish to take, your research questions/hypotheses, and your methodology). There is also a section entitled 'Data' where you need to mention the type of data you need to collect or consult in connection with your research, and where, when and how this will be collected or accessed. Like the title, this is only a provisional statement of intent at this stage. Whatever you write here does not commit you irrevocably.

It is VITAL that you stick to the deadline (**Friday of Week 23**) if we are to be able to help you complete your Dissertation on time.

What happens after I have submitted the title and abstract?

The purpose of this preliminary stage is twofold. It is to get you thinking about your dissertation project proper; and it is to help us ensure all students are assigned a suitable supervisor. Although at this stage you would have already approached a possible supervisor, final responsibility for ensuring a reasonable distribution of workload rests with the PGT Student Co-ordinator and some adjustments may be necessary.

Dissertation Preparation

Dissertation Preparation	Mid -March	Make sure you have planned the work you will do during the Easter period
		Make sure you visit the library and gather the materials you might need to consult during the Easter period
	Mid/End-March:	Meet your supervisor to discuss and/or refine your dissertation plan (before the Easter period)

When and how do I go about meeting my supervisor?

Your supervisor will be confirmed a week or so after submitting the Dissertation proposal form.

You should immediately contact your supervisor to set up a meeting before the Easter break. If you have not yet done so, *it is vital that you should start a discussion on your topic and it is your responsibility to set this in motion, not your supervisor's*. The Easter vacation is a break from class-based learning, but not from reading, thinking, and independent work. Working effectively over the Easter period will reap dividends later.

The key issues to discuss are:



- the nature of the topic: should you limit or extend it - or is it fine as it stands?
- the (further) reading you need to do
- and other issues which you need to be considering

A P P R I L

When do I next see my supervisor?

During the break you will have engaged in extended reading and sketched out (or refined) an outline plan. After the break you must meet your supervisor. If you are doing an MA in Applied Linguistics or TEFL/TESOL and you opted for Seminar supported supervision (see the end of this document for further details), your supervisor would have given you a schedule for meetings which you have to adhere to.

For all other students, as was the case with preliminary meetings/discussions, *it is your responsibility to set up this meeting*. Please make sure that you do not delay setting this meeting up.

We view this stage of the process as perhaps the most critical. In most cases, it is the moment when you will decide, with your supervisor's help, on the overall remit and structure of your dissertation. You need to be able to discuss this at length, exchanging views in the light of your reading and thinking during Easter.

Do I need to prepare anything for this meeting?

This might have been decided between you and your supervisor in the previous meeting, but, in general terms, much of this meeting may involve 'brainstorming'. This, however, cannot happen in a vacuum; you must prepare for the meeting carefully. It is probably a good idea to email your supervisor an outline proposal (and key questions, if you have any) by attachment prior to the meeting. You cannot expect your supervisor to read through an outline plan for the first time at this meeting. Not only will this waste your time as the supervisor reads the plan, but it is most unlikely that your supervisor will be able to respond adequately to such a first sight reading. Either way, given that you have a limited span of time, you will waste it. You need to give your supervisor as much material as you can so that an informed discussion can take place.

Dissertation

Dissertation	End April-June:	Any data gathering (if applicable) would have normally been completed by the end of the Summer term
		Most of the work and the MA/MPhD supervision will take place in the Summer term
	July-August:	During the summer months staff usually work on their own research and take their holiday; therefore you should discuss specific arrangements for this period with your supervisor. Staff operate two systems of supervision either all one-to-one supervision or a combination of individual and group supervision. Individual staff information can be found on the Departmental webpages, also see the link 'MA Supervision Arrangements.'
	September:	Dissertations should be handed in by 16.00 hrs on Friday of Week 50 .

How does the supervision process work?

The majority of supervision takes place during the third (Summer) term.

The whole point of a dissertation is to give you the chance to demonstrate that you are capable of independent work - so you are not expected to rely too much on your supervisor!

The precise form that supervisions take (e.g. general discussion, feedback on a draft submitted by you) is a matter to be agreed between you and your supervisor.

Your supervisor will not normally read any given draft section of your dissertation more than once, and cannot be expected to proof-read or ghost-write the final version (for which you alone carry responsibility).

We offer an *alternative* mode of supervision available **ONLY** to students in the fields of **Applied Linguistics and TEFL/TESOL**. This option is called **Seminar supported supervision** and combines compulsory group (seminar type) supervision with one-to-one supervision. See the end of this document for further information on this type of supervision.

During the summer months, staff usually work on their own research and take their holiday; therefore you should discuss specific arrangements for this period with your supervisor. Individual staff information can be found on the Departmental webpages, also see the link 'MA Supervision Arrangements.'

See below "Guidelines for the preparation of the dissertation" for further information on the structure of the dissertation.

What do I need to know about submission of the dissertation?

The Guidelines which follow will tell you how to prepare your dissertation. In this section we will deal with procedural and presentation matters.

a) Length

Part of the art of writing an assessed piece of work (whether an essay-style assignment or dissertation) lies in accepting the discipline of producing a specific piece of work of a specific length by a specific deadline. The standard minimum and maximum length limits for dissertations in the Department are as specified below:

- For a 16,000-word MA dissertation, 13,000-19,000 words
- For a 22,000-word MRes dissertation, 19,000-25,000 words

The standard departmental penalty for over- or under-length assessed work is that 1 mark is deducted for every 100 words over the maximum or under the minimum specified length, up to a maximum penalty of 10 marks (e.g. work which is between 1 and 100 words over length will be penalised by 1 mark; work which is between 101 and 200 words over length will be penalised by 2 marks; work which is between 201 and 300



words over length will be penalised by 3 marks, and so on). You must indicate the length of the main text of any assignment or dissertation you produce (excluding bibliography and appendices) at the end of the main text (and on the coversheet). Word lengths should normally be determined by an electronic word count.

b) Submission date and late submission

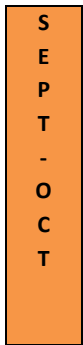
The departmental deadline for submission of MA/MRES dissertations is **16.00 hrs on Friday of Week 50**. Failure to submit by the dissertation deadline will result in a mark of zero. If students are unable to meet the deadline, for example due to health problems, they must contact their department **before** the submission deadline to discuss the possibility of getting a short extension. The department can grant an extension of up to one month – depending on the circumstances presented by the student; **you should speak with your supervisor** and have a supporting statement from them and medical documentation if applicable. Extensions beyond a month must go to the Dean for approval of a formal extension of their candidature (Please come and discuss this with the Graduate Administrator in the Departmental Administration Office, 4.305), but you should be aware that if extensions beyond a month apply, students may become liable for additional fees. This is because if you submit later than October you will need to obtain a partial registration via the Registry.

c) Format

The dissertation is submitted online only, however if you would like to print one as a donation to the Spicer Library you may do so and leave a copy with the Graduate Administrator.

d) Presentation style

It is important that your work shows clear evidence that you are familiar with the typographical conventions and style of presentation used in the relevant technical or professional literature. This means that you should set out your assignment in exactly the same way as a published article in the relevant field would be set out. As far as style is concerned, you should always use the appropriate technical terms and phraseology in discussion and avoid folk terminology. For further details consult your Departmental handbook.



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e) Assessment procedures

Your dissertation will be marked by two members of staff, your supervisor and a second internal examiner. These two internal examiners will agree a provisional mark. The External Examiner will then validate that mark along with all the other pieces of assessed work submitted. Your marks, and the grade to be awarded, will be considered by the Graduate Board of Examiners for your MA in November.

IMPORTANT: For M/PhD students, in order to be eligible to proceed to PhD level, you must achieve a mark of at least 65 for your Dissertation, and an average coursework mark of 65. These marks will then be assessed, along with your progress, and a decision will be made whether to allow you to proceed to PhD level.

f) Feedback

As an integral part of the marking process, members of staff are expected to give you written feedback on each coursework assignment you submit. General feedback (on the overall quality of your assignment, its major strengths and weaknesses): no norm is prescribed for the length of this general feedback, but 50-100 words are what you might expect to receive for a major assignment.

g) Failure of the dissertation

If you are awarded a mark of less than 50 (i.e. a fail mark), resubmission will ONLY be permitted in the following circumstances:

- either (i) substantiated extenuating circumstances accepted at the discretion of the Board of Examiners;
- or (ii) where the original mark is at least 40 and the Board of Examiners judges that the work required does not include any additional experimental or practical work.

Resubmission is subject to the following conditions:

- (i) A dissertation must normally be resubmitted within two months of the formal notification of permission to resubmit; in cases of extenuating circumstances, this may be extended to a maximum of 12 months.
- (ii) A dissertation which has been resubmitted because of a fail shall be awarded no more than the minimum pass mark; in the case of resubmissions because of extenuating circumstances, the full range of marks shall be available to examiners.

If you fail a Master's dissertation and are given permission to resubmit it, you will be entitled to receive a set of comments from one or more of the examiners on aspects of your work which need to be revised. You may request clarification of these comments if you wish (in person or by email), and your supervisor will read and comment on a draft of the revised dissertation before it is resubmitted (if you send it to your supervisor in good time).

We hope you will enjoy the experience of carrying out your own research and writing your dissertation!

Further information

Staff information: Follow the links through the Departmental webpages: <http://www.essex.ac.uk/langling/staff/academic.aspx>

Information about the PGT supervision policy is published on the following Website:

http://www.essex.ac.uk/langling/documents/current_students/ma_supervision_arrangements.pdf

Guidelines for the preparation of the dissertation

Please note that different types of dissertation, e.g., theoretical studies vs. empirical and/or practical investigations, will take different forms and their various components will be more or less important, relatively longer or shorter, and so on. The information below is only meant to give you a very general idea and will probably be a good starting point for discussion with your supervisor who is, ultimately, the best person to provide advice. Where issues of argument, structure of paragraphs, and general presentation are concerned (line-spacing, punctuation, references, pagination), some general guidelines for essay-writing in the PGT Handbook also apply to the dissertation.

The Abstract

The abstract should be around 250 words long. You should consider a second draft at the start of writing the dissertation, and a third and final draft after you have completed the dissertation, because in the course of writing, you may well end up changing the arguments you began with.

The finished abstract should do the following:

- State clearly and in specific terms what the dissertation is about. This will generally be more effective if you explain how the dissertation aims to answer some specific question or set of questions. Your research questions will help you to stay on target and to avoid being distracted by interesting (but irrelevant) digressions.
- If applicable, the abstract should say what the dataset consisted of and what methods were used to analyse it; in other words, give a clear summary of the means used to answer the research questions, e.g., data gathering and arguments or theories resorted to.
- Give a clear idea of the outcomes or conclusions of your research.

Introduction

A short Introduction or Preface is expected. This should say what the topic is and why it is of value; it might, for example, include a brief account of a teaching or other context where the research was conducted and which might benefit from it. It is also useful to include a general outline of what each chapter includes or addresses.

The Literature Review

The literature review chapter (or chapters) must include a critical review of the literature pertaining to your topic. This serves as the research context for your own work, indicating what has been done, as well as what has not been done in the area you are investigating. It is the springboard for your work. The quality of your work will, to a large extent, depend on how extensive and how focused this review is; also note that the literature review for an empirical investigation normally requires 'focus' rather than 'breadth'. The work for this should already have been started well before the beginning of the dissertation proper, and this is why it is important to think about a topic linked to the modules you have taken or are taking. At this stage, the survey of the critical literature would have allowed you to do the following:

- to decide on the issues you wished to address
- to become aware of appropriate research methodologies
- to see how research on your topic fitted into a broader framework
- to prepare you for approaching the literature review

Now, however, you will inevitably need to extend this work for the literature review proper.

a) What is the Literature Review for?

Clearly, if you are new to research in the field you are not in a position definitively to evaluate the work of experienced researchers on the basis of your own knowledge of the topic or of research methodology. Where you are reporting on well-known research closely related to your topic, however, some critical comments may well be available from other established researchers (often in textbooks on the topic). These criticisms of methodology, conclusions, and so on, can, and should be reported in your review, as should published reactions to these criticisms.

However, the use of the term *critical* is not usually meant to suggest that you should focus on criticising the work of established researchers. It is primarily meant to indicate that your material is not just a *descriptive* list of a number of research projects related to the topic, but that you are capable of thinking critically and with insight about the issues raised by previous research. Its functions include most of the following, and often in the following order, all of which can be subsumed under the general heading of *demonstrating your grasp of the topic*:

- to indicate major questions in the topic area

- to provide definitions of key terms
- to indicate what researchers in the field already know about the topic, and also gaps in knowledge
- to draw together the main themes and arguments covered by them
- to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the literature relevant to your own research
- to draw out key issues essential to your own research

You should try to do all of this while also developing an argument in the Review.

b) How much should I cover?

Unfortunately, there is no simple answer, as you will have to decide what is appropriate in your case, in discussion with your supervisor. Generally, for empirically-based dissertations, not more than a third of the whole dissertation should be literature review, but clearly this does not apply to theoretical or bibliographic studies. As a start, think about providing answers to questions of this type:

- What has been done in my field of research?
- What is relevant in terms of my research interests/objectives/questions?
- What do I *need* to cover given the scope of my topic, my level of study and the time I have available to write my thesis?
- Why might I cover certain bodies of literature and not others?

You will be expected to

- cover the most recent, relevant publications available
- focus on key writers in the field, which, remember, may not be that recent, but may still be widely cited

c) What if there isn't much on my topic?

If you have chosen to work on a relatively new issue, area, phenomenon or language, you may well find that there is not much material. You would then be expected to cover the main related theoretical material and, if appropriate, rely on teacher experience, non-research literature, and so on.

d) Where should I put the material?

A further issue that arises in the context of coverage is what to cover where. You may find it difficult to decide what material to cover in a literature review chapter, and what to cover in other chapters of your dissertation, once again, it all depends on the type of dissertation you are writing. Empirically-based projects will normally have one main literature review chapter, whereas for theoretically based dissertations, it may help to think in terms of the writing having different levels, and so different objectives:

Literature Review chapter	Specific chapter level
• Your purpose in this chapter is to provide a broad-based review of the literature as it applies to your <i>overall</i> research objectives. • In the process of this review, it may at times be necessary to signal your intention to reserve more <i>detailed</i> discussion of points or aspects of studies for relevant chapters.	• At the level of the chapter, you could undertake <i>detailed</i> discussion of aspects of the literature relevant to the <i>specific</i> objectives of the particular chapter you are writing. • Your use of the literature in specific chapters is likely to be integrated throughout your discussion to advance and support points you are developing. • But you might want mini-literature reviews at the beginning of each chapter.

e) How should I structure my review?

There are different ways of organising a literature review; some writers, for example, opt for a thematic, conceptual or methodological approach; others organise their review around key issues or debates that they want to engage with. The key issue is to let the interests and objectives of your own research determine the most appropriate structure for you. As with all other writing, do not forget to tell your reader, at appropriate points, what you are doing and why you are doing it.

The end of the review is not necessarily the end of the introductory chapters. Your introductory chapters must not only say who has said what about your topic, and give a context for your discussion, they must also show that you are able to build on this groundwork and suggest ways forward which justify your own approach.

f) Remind me why I have done all this

By the end of your first main chapter, your reader should be able to see that

- the scope of your review is appropriate for your degree level
- you have reviewed the sources relevant to your research topic
- there has been full critical engagement with the literature
- it is clear how your research objectives/questions fit in with previous scholarly work
- it is clear how you will proceed in the following chapters

It might be useful to conclude this chapter with the research questions/aims/hypotheses of your study.

The Chapters

Dissertations based on empirical/practical work are normally structured as follows: *Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, Discussion, and Conclusion*. Other types of dissertation might have a series of chapters on different theoretical issues, or theories about the same issue, different related syntactic structures, different linguistic analyses of the same phenomenon, and so on...before the Conclusion.

Each chapter, however, should end with a reference to what will be covered in the following chapter and how it relates to your general focus. Similarly, each chapter should begin with a more extended version of exactly the same kind of reminder. This is called 'flagging' or 'signposting', and is even more crucial for longer pieces of work than it might be for essays. You do not want your dissertation to appear to the reader to be a haphazard collection of mini-essays.

Conclusion

Your dissertation must have a conclusion. Do not just stop abruptly after the last chapter. The point of the conclusion, just like for an essay, is to ensure that your readers understand where you have taken them. You therefore need to remind them about your research questions and the framework in which these questions operate, as well as what your investigations have revealed. A good way to complete the conclusion is to suggest 'ways forward', or aspects that you are well aware that you have not been able to cover given the restricted scope of your work. Such 'where now' statements are not easy to write; they can often sound rather banal, or seemingly state the obvious, so be prepared to try out several drafts before committing yourself. Shortcomings and implications (e.g., pedagogical) should also be mentioned if relevant.

Further advice on dissertation structure and content can be found at the links listed below. However, you should bear in mind that various ways of structuring your dissertation may be more or less appropriate, so you should consult your supervisor about the advice provided in this document and at these links:

<http://www.essex.ac.uk/myskills/skills/writing/dissertationChecklist.asp>
<http://linguistlist.org/studentportal/presentwork.cfm>

A useful book you might want to consult is:

Hart, C. (2005). *Doing your Masters Dissertation*. London: Sage.

Ethical Approval and Data Collection

[Note: Where the information provided here is in conflict with the University's ethical guidelines, the University guidelines take precedence. Where the information provided here is in conflict with the Dept. webpage on Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants, the webpage takes precedence since it provides fuller information and is updated during the year.]

Who should apply for Ethical Approval?

All students planning to undertake a research project involving human participants (e.g. a project involving tests, questionnaires, interviews, reaction time experiments, etc.) must obtain ethical approval **BEFORE STARTING** data collection.

How to apply for Ethical Approval

The steps you will need to undertake include:

- Develop your data collection design well in advance of beginning data collection
- Consider the ethics of it carefully; consult relevant readings from your courses
- Consult with supervisor about your plans for ethical research. Your supervisor is the primary point of contact for information and advice on the ethical approval process

Research involving collecting data in the UK from children below age 18, or adults who may be considered vulnerable, may require CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) clearance, even with your friends or members of your own family. CRB clearance is done centrally by the University and adds extra time to your clearance process. CRB checks cost money which the student must pay (e.g. £60 in the past – current cost may differ). The Ethical Approval process may recommend that you seek CRB approval, but it is a separate process. If you are recommended to get CRB clearance, it must be obtained from Registry after speaking with the Departmental Administrator.

Download and complete an Application for Ethical Approval Form from the Department's Ethical Guidelines webpage. A Model Form with some suggestions and advice for answering the questions is available on the webpage.

Prepare an Ethics Participant Consent Form appropriate to your project. Examples that can be modified are available from the webpage. **DO NOT** simply copy an existing consent form – you **MUST** ensure that the form you develop complies with the principles on the REO Participant Information & Consent webpage. You may adapt model forms, but a copied form is likely to prove inadequate and cause your application to be rejected.

Discuss both the completed application form and the participant consent form with your supervisor. Their approval and signature is required before your application can be acted on.

Send your application form (signed by your supervisor) and participant consent form to the Graduate Administrator, in **BOTH** email **AND** signed hard-copy forms. Leave adequate time (e.g. 2 weeks) for the form to be processed, including potentially being returned to you for improvements and resubmission.

The Dept. Ethics Coordinator will pass his decision to the appropriate Administrator. You will receive notification of the decision by email from the Graduate Administrator. You may also receive information on revisions required before your application can be approved. When it is signed off by the Dept. Ethics officer and returned to you, **THEN** you may begin research.

WARNING: DO NOT collect data BEFORE the date that your application is approved. There can be no retroactive approval of research involving human participants.

The Ethics Coordinator for the Linguistics Dept. is currently Professor Monika Schmid. Please consult the Dept. webpage on Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants for more details, and for any changes or updates to procedures. It contains further information on the application and approval process and on CRB clearance, and links to University of Essex and external webpage's on research ethics. You can also download relevant information and forms relating to Research ethics from the Departmental "Documents and Resources/Ethical Approval" for Current students through this link: <http://www.essex.ac.uk/langling/current/default.aspx>

Finally, Six Key Tips

You do not have to start writing at the beginning

Although it is helpful to have written a draft literature review before you start the dissertation proper, it sometimes helps, especially if you suffer from writer's block, to begin with what you are most comfortable with. Then move about in your writing by completing various sections as you think of them. At some point you will be able to spread out in front of you all of the sections that you have written. You will be able to sequence them in the best order and then see what is missing and should be added to the dissertation. This approach builds on those aspects of your study that are of most interest to you at any particular time. Go with what interests you, because that will help you engage with your focus.

Never stop writing

Even if all you can write is notes, do not yield to the temptation of saying to yourself: 'I just need to read another two books before getting the right ideas'. The right ideas are not other people's ideas; they are your own.

Use Word's 'Table of Contents' and 'Headings' facilities

This allows you to see your structure on one page, and if necessary move whole chunks of text around with one click.

Read your draft out loud to yourself once you have written a first draft

If you get lost in the argument, the argument is not clear, even though it might have seemed so to you. If you lose your breath, you are writing sentences which are too long and complicated, or you are not punctuating your text properly.

Save or print out draft versions frequently

...and remember to date-stamp them. This way you can constantly compare and contrast different approaches. You should also save your work in different places, e.g., your own computer, your m-drive, a USB stick.

The end is the beginning

Write the Introductory chapter last of all. And then review your abstract. It is only when you arrive at the end of the journey that you can understand and explain to others (i.e. your reader) how to get there.

Sample Dissertation Proposal Form

MA/ MRes /1st Year NRPhD DISSERTATION PROPOSAL FORM

Graduate Students who wish to proceed to prepare an MA/MRes/1st Year NRPhD dissertation should complete this form. For MA students, the form must be signed both by a member of staff who is prepared to supervise the proposed dissertation (if he/she can accommodate you) and also by your Graduate Programme Director. For MRes and 1st Year Integrated PhD students, only the supervisor needs to sign this form.

The signed form must be returned to the Graduate Administrator by 3pm on Friday of Week 23.

FAMILY NAME: _____ FIRST NAME(S): _____

REGISTRATION NO. _____

DEGREE COURSE (TEFL/AL/ etc): _____

PROPOSED TITLE:

PROPOSED DISSERTATION TOPIC: Provide an outline of your proposed research in around 300 words. The outline should identify a *specific* topic to be investigated and NOT a general field.

PROPOSED DISSERTATION TOPIC (continued)...

DATA: What data will you collect in connection with your research, and where, when and how will this be collected? What kinds of linguistic and/or statistical and/or computational techniques will you use to analyse the data?

RELEVANT BACKGROUND: Please list the modules you have taken, and then circle those that are relevant to your dissertation topic.

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 8. _____ |

Include any relevant modules you audited here:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ |
|----------|----------|

	NAME	SIGNATURE	DATE
STUDENT:	_____	_____	_____
POSSIBLE SUPERVISOR: (Subject to ratification at the Supervisor Allocation Meeting)	_____	_____	_____
PROGRAMME DIRECTOR:	_____	_____	_____

Resources

Departmental Library (Spicer Library)

The Department has a library of its own housed in room 3.111 (called the **Spicer Library**, founded in memory of Prof. Sam Spicer, Emeritus Professor of Applied Linguistics), which we will open by the beginning of week **three**. Most of the books in the collection are in the general field of Applied Linguistics/English Language Teaching and there is also a collection of past MA and PhDs from the Department. Lexa Olivera-Smith is the member of staff in overall charge of the Spicer Library. Check notice boards for opening times and how to register. The library is run by student volunteers.

Academic offences (e.g., plagiarism)

Students are required to reference their sources properly and failure to do so can lead to an allegation of an academic offence. When submitting any piece of work (e.g., essay, report, dissertation, or thesis) you will be required to acknowledge any assistance received or any use of the work of others. Guidance on how you can avoid plagiarism is available in your Departmental handbook (see p. 45) and also online at www.essex.ac.uk/plagiarism; the latter includes definitions of plagiarism, an online test, and some common mistakes in academic writing.

Other resources

You might want to consult Phil Scholfield's 'Checklist for reporting a piece of empirical work on language'. This is available through the Departmental website, academic staff, or at <http://privatewww.essex.ac.uk/~scholp/report.htm>

You might also want to use some of Kate Exley's resources below to help you get organised.

Planning a Masters Dissertation

Write a list of the processes involved in completing your research project and dissertation, e.g. developing a research proposal, refining research questions, obtaining ethical approval, designing data collection instruments, etc. Then, use the chart below to organise and plan the process of completing your dissertation by the deadline.

Processes involved in completing a research project and dissertation:

- Develop a research proposal
- Refining research questions

Planning a Masters

MONTHS	WEEKS 1	2	3	4
1 February				
2				
3				
4				
5				

Developing a Research Proposal and Framing Research Questions

Research focus / problem:

Research sub-questions:	What information is needed?	Where / from whom can I get the information?	How can I get the information?	How will I organise and analyse the information?	Ethical issues / considerations?	Probable findings?
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						

Seminar supported supervision

If you are doing an **MA in Applied Linguistics or TEFL/TESOL** you will be able to opt for this mode of supervision which primarily consists of compulsory group (seminar type) supervision led by a group of academic staff including your supervisor, but also includes individual supervision as outlined below. Whilst the amount of supervision received will be equivalent to what all other MA students receive, by taking this option you will also benefit from collective discussion and feedback.

Supervision will consist of SIX supervisory meetings as follows:

Meeting 1 (end of Spring term): Individual meeting with your supervisor to discuss your final Research Proposal and if relevant revise/refine your research questions. If required you will also receive advice on initial readings for the literature review and agree on a plan of work for the Easter break.

Meeting 2 (week 31): Seminar. Group session for students to present oral summaries of their literature review drafts, research questions and hypotheses as relevant, and receive feedback and advice from their supervisor and other members of the group.

Meeting 3 (week 32): Drop in advice surgery. Students are offered advice on Methodology.

Meeting 4 (week 35): Drop in advice surgery. Students are offered advice on Data analysis.

Meeting 5 (week 37): Individual meeting with your supervisor to discuss any questions you might have regarding your work to date.

Meeting 6 (week 39): 15-minute conference style presentation by students of the work they will be reporting in the dissertation with a focus on their findings and conclusions drawn from them. Feedback and advice from their supervisor and other members of the group will be offered.

Please note that after each seminar your supervisor will give you written feedback as appropriate; therefore, you can only expect your supervisor to read and comment on a sample (e.g., a draft chapter) of your written work. This will have to be submitted to him/her by week 40.