

Structure of a 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. While you build your own structure for the dissertation, this will be done around a specific layout. This will keep you focused, as each section has particular content you are expected to include. The layout of a dissertation depends on whether you are collecting your own data, or doing a literature review-based project, or another form of project (e.g. a practice-based arts dissertation). So check with your course for specific layouts.

The usual layout for a dissertation where you collect your own data is as follows:

1. **Title page:** the approved thesis title, your full name, the qualification for which the dissertation is being submitted, the date of submission, 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 modules guidelines for this. The abstract can be written last as it is telling the reader succinctly the purpose of the dissertation and an overview of the findings/conclusions.
3. **Acknowledgments:** 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.
5. **Introduction:** explain the purpose of your study, putting the area of work into its wider context. Set out your argument with the significance of the problem being addressed. Develop an outline of the dissertation, signposting the reader through each chapter.
6. **Literature review:** what have other people written? Show your grasp and understanding of the relevant theory and previous research. It should show also how the literature informs the proposed study.
7. **Method/methodology:** how did you collect your data? Cover your approach to the research and justification for this, materials and procedures followed, a description of any samples, and, importantly, any [ethical procedures](#) must be followed.
8. **Results/findings:** what did you find? Think about whether you want to begin with an overview of the result and then the detail, or go straight into the detail of the results.
9. **Discussion:** This is where you bring your research into context. You need to bring in the relevant literature, does the literature support your findings? Acknowledge any limitations and how these might have affected your results. In qualitative research, it's common to combine results and discussion but if you are following experimental or quantitative methods, keep them separate.
10. **Conclusion:** This is where you briefly restate the original issue, seen in the light of what has been learned. Pull all the threads of your argument together, perhaps make suggestions for further research. Don't introduce any new topics.
11. **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.
12. **Appendices:** These are items that you want the reader to see but do not need in the text, usually because it will interrupt the flow or take up too much space.

Literature-review based and practice-based arts dissertations will follow 1-5 and 10-12, but will organise the main body thematically. So you should expect to write between 3-5 chapters each of which relates to one important idea found in the practice or literature.