

Guidelines for the writing of your Dissertation (Final Thesis) Prof. Uoldelul Chelati Dirar

Introduction

Your Dissertation is a mandatory requirement to achieve your degree. It should be a scientific work, up to academic standards, submitted in a written form. It should be between **90 to 200** pages long and should be organised into 3 to 5 chapters. The dissertation, after having been revised and approved by your advisor will be defended in front of a commission composed of professors from your Department (and from the partner University in case of Double Degree programmes.)

Having said that, every students that starts writing her or his Dissertation tend to focus on a series of questions such as: where do I start? Which topic should I choose and how will I tackle it?

You will find here some broad guidelines on how to organise your research and writing activities. These guidelines apply to all Dissertation, though it should be clear that each of you will have to find out her/his own way do develop a specific topic and line of research. This is the main challenge behind whatever Dissertation and research activity at large.

Let's now look at some of the most important steps in the organisation of your dissertation:

1. Choosing your topic

First of all, you should identify a topic which must have the following features:

1. it should be consistent with your studies and with the subject(s) you choose (history, economics, sociology, law etc.);
2. it should be relevant to your subject and interesting to you
3. you should be sure that you are able to handle the methodology related to your topic
4. you should be sure that you have the time necessary to fulfil your research and writing. Do not start thinking about your dissertation few months before the end of your study program!!!
5. make sure that bibliographic material and primary sources are accessible to you

For instance, if you have decided to write on migrant labour in South Africa you might be able to satisfy the first four conditions but you might have problems in satisfying the fifth one as it might be quite difficult to have access to primary data from South-African ministry of labour & welfare. If you have problems in defining the topic of your research, please, read general literature related to it. Reading is the best way to clarify your own ideas and find inspiration as well as suggestions about sources. From ideas come ideas, from reflections come reflections...

Once, together with your advisor you have identified your topic: You should ask yourself what you want to focus on in your research. In other words you have to define your main RESEARCH QUESTION. For instance: how and why has the legal institution of a given State changed? What has been the impact of a war or an economic crisis on a society? In brief, you should ask yourself what you wish to address with your work. For instance, you may want to demonstrate that the policy behind the drafting and revising of legislation within a certain State has undergone changes due to...; that the representation of Africa in the Western press has changed according to...; that the reasons for the growth of informal economy in Africa are... To sum up, you ought to make sure that your Dissertation says something new over the available literature, and that you are capable of supporting your argument. This means you now have to find evidences for your research hypotheses.

2. Searching for materials

Looking for the right sources and defining your bibliography is an essential step in your work: pay attention not to underestimate the time you need to complete this stage.

Your search starts with finding the right places to visit: libraries, archives (both public and private), book-stores, the internet, research centres, etc.

When doing research in a library, make sure you check both virtual and paper catalogues. You can perform a subject search (i.e. by entering *colonialism*) or an author search (if you have identified an author who has written on the topic). When leafing through a book, you should pay special attention to footnotes and bibliography. Books that appear in most bibliographies on a specific topic are likely to be the most relevant.

For your research on Internet you can use the most popular research engines (i.e. <http://books.google.com/>) where you can find the most recent publications, or the online catalogue of Italian libraries (www.sbn.it) which shows you in which libraries your books can be found. You can also consult the online catalogue of specialised libraries such as the Centre Amilcar Cabral (<http://www.centrocabral.com/>). Please, remember also that the University grant you

free access to a number of online journals where you can actually do a great part of your bibliographic research. To have access to those journals you should go to: <http://www.jstor.org/>.

When you use other Internet based materials, please, check always the reliability of the sources: who is the author. Is he or she a scholar, a journalist or an amateur? Is he or she reliable Which kind of sources is using? Are his/her main statements substantiated by evidences? Whenever you use one of those sources, remember to write down the URL and when you accessed it. This will be very useful once you will have to write your final bibliography.

Appendixes: please, remember that a good dissertation might also include appendixes where you will include copies of the original documents you used during your research including iconographic materials which you deem relevant to strengthen the relevance of the statements and thesis discussed in your dissertation. Appendixes, if well organised can add value to your research.

An extremely useful exercise that I recommend you to do regularly, when reading your materials (books, articles, internet based sources) is to create short data sheet (on paper or on your computer) where you should record the following information:

1. main thesis discussed by the author
2. sources that he/she has utilised
3. consistence or discrepancies in the discussion of the topic
4. relevance with regard to the topic you're interested in
5. _other personal comment (you liked it or not; was it boring or not, was it relevant to your research etc...)

3. Organising the material collected

Once you have finished collecting your materials you will discover that you have a lot of stuffs to organise. At this stage you will understand how much material related to your research is actually available. If you did not find enough materials you should ask yourself if you choose a topic too specific or if you did not organise your search for materials in a proper way. In any case remember that to change ideas and approach during research activity is normal and is actually one of the most challenging and creative aspects of doing research.

Once you have organised your materials you should start organising your thoughts. A way to do it is to write down a draft index (table of contents) inclusive of the main themes you plan to discuss, organised in chapters and sub-chapters. You should submit your draft index and a tentative bibliography to your supervisor and discuss it with her/him. For a successful dissertation it is important that you keep in touch regularly with your supervisor and share with her/him your thoughts, doubts and achievements.

4. Writing your dissertation

When you have finished with all these preliminary activities, you can start writing. I suggest you to start writing from the topic you feel more confident with, even if it is not the first chapter in your index. What really matters is just to start writing and get familiar with that activity.

When you write you should always be clear and must always explain the meaning of technical terms, acronyms, and foreign words that you might have used. Moreover, through your footnotes and bibliography, you must also make clear that your reader is able to retrieve the sources that you have used during your research.

5. Structure of the Dissertation

Your dissertation, tentatively, should have the following structure:

- 1 – Index (table of contents)
- 2 – Introduction: here you explain briefly what is the topic of your dissertation; why you have chosen it; what is your main point; what is your methodology; which sources you have used ((books, articles on journals, websites, archival research, fieldwork, interviews etc...)) how do you think you can contribute to further expand the knowledge about the topic you choose. The Introduction should ALWAYS include the following sections:
 - Background of the study
 - Aim of the Study
 - Research question (s)
 - Relevance of the study
 - Research method and methodology
 - Organization of the study

3 - Theoretical Framework and Literature review

4- The core of the Dissertation where you discuss the main points of your topic and which should be divided into three or four chapters.

5 - Conclusions: on the basis of what stated in the Introduction (2) and of the analysis developed in the core of the thesis (3) you should come out with some broad conclusions which sum up the main points of your dissertation and might also suggest new lines of research to be pursued.

6 - You might include an Appendix where you can insert copies of the most relevant documents (text of treaties, articles of legislation, correspondence, photographs etc.) utilised in your discussion. And which you deem of paramount relevance.

7- Bibliography

6. Bibliography

Please, remember that the index and the final bibliography are what first strikes the reader of your dissertation. Therefore they should be organised and written very carefully. There are different bibliographical styles. I expect you to follow meticulously the style that is shown below, making sure that you include all the information I listed. Quoted sources must be listed alphabetically according to the family name of the author.

Style format:

Books

- Full name of the author(s) or editor(s)
- *Title of the book or article* (always in *italic*)
- Place of publication
- Publisher
- Date of publication

Articles

- Full name of the author
- "Title of the article" (always between " ")
- *Name of the journal* (always in *italic*)
- series number
- issue
- (publication year)
- : pages

Examples:

Books with one author:

Janice E. Thompson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994.

Books with two or more authors:

Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, *Regionalism in world politics: regional organization and international order*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995

Paper published in edited books:

David Pool, "The Eritrean People's Liberation Front", in C. Clapham (ed), *African Guerrillas*, Oxford, James Currey, 1998, pp. 19-35

Articles on scientific journals:

Stephen Ellis, "Writing Histories of Contemporary Africa", in *Journal of African History*, 43,1(2002):pp. 1-26

Articles on Internet:

Cheryl Chan, "China in Africa – Spreading the Wealth", *Canada Asia Commentary*, 44 (2007) <http://www.asiapacific.ca/sites/default/files/archived_pdf/commentary/cac44.pdf>, accessed on Friday 25th January, 2013 (This date refers to the day when you read or downloaded the document)

7. Footnotes

Footnotes are used to acknowledge your sources and might also be used to further clarify issues discussed in the body of the text. To quote your sources is basic and crucial task which strengthen your arguments and give them scientific relevance by showing to what extent you consulted primary and secondary materials. Please, quote your sources extensively. Remember that to acknowledge the sources of your information is a mandatory intellectual practice and that not abiding by it amounts to plagiarism, which is an offence taken very seriously by academic institutions.

Sources **MUST** always be quoted according to the following models:

Sources that you quote for the first time:

use the criteria explained in section 6 adding the number of page to monograph books:

Examples:

- Janice E. Thompson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 22
- David Pool, "The Eritrean People's Liberation Front", in C. Clapham (ed.), *African Guerrillas*, Oxford, James Currey, 1998, pp. 19-35
- Stephen Ellis, "Writing Histories of Contemporary Africa", in *Journal of African History*, 43,1(2002):pp. 1-26

Sources already quoted in previous pages:

Examples:

- Thompson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns*, cit. p 20.
- Pool, "The Eritrean People's Liberation Front", in C. Clapham (ed.), *African Guerrillas*, cit. p. 21.
- Ellis, *Writing Histories of Contemporary Africa*, cit. p. 18.

If you are quoting the same book or article in the following footnote and in the same page use: *Ibidem*.

If you are quoting the same book or article in the following footnote but in another page, use: *Ibid.*, p. xx.

8. Styles guideline

1) Font: Times New Roman with the following sizes:

- Chapter's titles: **16**
- Text: **12**
- Quotations or footnotes: 10
- Superscript number for footnote: **10**

2) Page margin settings: left: **3,5 cm** (in order to bind the thesis); right: **2,5 cm**; top 2,5 cm; bottom: **2,5 cm**.

3) Line spacing: **1,5**.

4) Italic within the text should be used only for non English words or to indicate the title of books, name of journals)

5) Quotations: Quotation shorter than three lines should be inserted within the body of the text between quotation marks ("...") as in the following example:

"Most Europeans nations decided to contribute to 'Operation Atalanta' rather than its North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) equivalent, 'Operation Ocean Shield'"

Quotations longer than three (3) lines you should be arranged using a different line-spacing (single), a margin of 2 cm from the left and right side; 0,50 cm margin from top and 0,50 cm margin from bottom; a smaller font (10) as in the following example:

Most Europeans nations decided to contribute to 'Operation Atalanta' rather than its North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) equivalent, 'Operation Ocean Shield': only the Netherlands and Denmark, which is not involved in 'Operation Atalanta', have provided 'Ocean Shield' with ships. Even though other European nations may be participating indirectly to NATO's operation in the Gulf of Aden, a strong majority has chosen to engage forces under the EU's CFSP. Both operations have nevertheless reached a certain level of coordination through the 'Shared Awareness and Deconfliction' (SHADE) initiative.

9. Timing and bureaucracy

Your supervisor has the task of reading and correcting your work. Therefore you should submit your chapters to her/him regularly and providing for adequate time for her/him to read it. If you submit your chapters at the last minute your supervisor might decide to postpone your graduation to a successive session.

Remember that, in order to graduate:

- you have to submit to the Registrar Office (Segreteria) a written request, signed also by your supervisor, **60 days** before the graduation day;
- you have to present to the Registrar Office (Segreteria) your complete dissertation **15 days** before the graduation.

Having said that, I wish you a fruitful (and possibly pleasant) research activity!!!

Good luck!!