

School of English, AUTh

Dissertation Guidelines for MA students

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1. Types of Project

The MA dissertation is limited to a maximum of **18,000 words** and takes the form of one of the following projects.

- 1) **Empirical:** the student carries out a small-scale research project involving data collection, analysis, discussion of the results in relation to relevant theoretical frameworks and conclusions.
- 2) **Review of the literature on a chosen topic:** the student presents an overview of theoretical principles, relevant research work and provides a critical evaluation of previous research results.
- 3) **Application:** The student may attempt to work on a case to deal with a practical problem. This attempt might not necessarily be successful (i.e. solve the practical problem); however, the dissertation may demonstrate the ability to put to practical use some of the techniques learned in the course.

The dissertation should demonstrate:

- The ability to identify a problem, define it and work on it satisfactorily in the time available.
- Good command of relevant and well-chosen literature
- Integration of the thesis topic to past research
- Ability to express the thesis contribution, as well as its limitations
- Ability to acknowledge sources appropriately and show an acceptable style of referencing and bibliography
- Good structure, i.e. structure which serves the aims of the study well.
- Good exposition involving a logical analysis and development of relevant issues
- Good understanding of methodology adopted
- Ability to analyse and interpret the findings
- Ability to discuss findings within relevant theoretical frameworks
- Ability to relate the findings to the problem identified
- Good use of the English language

2. Layout of the Dissertation

2.1. General Schemata

The schemata below offer general guidelines and primarily target the first type of project (Empirical).

2.1.1. Dissertation Schema 1

typically appropriate in phonetics, psycholinguistics, etc.

Abstract

A summary of the problem, aims of the study, methodology adopted and main results

Introduction

Chapter 1

- Definition of the research question or problem
- Indication of the significance of the problem, the reasons that warrant the proposed study and the benefits the study will provide.
- Brief indication of the methodology to be used
- Brief review of the literature and comparison with previous similar studies.
- Brief analysis of the expected results of the study
- Road map to the rest of the thesis, i.e. chapter overview

Main body of Dissertation

Chapter 2

Detailed literature review. Sufficient coverage of the literature, proper referencing. Important: only include literature that is relevant to the research question. Listing references without connecting them to the research conducted disorients the reader.

Chapter 3

Analysis of the methodology adopted and discussion of the criteria for the selection of the particular methodology: advantages and shortcomings. Explanation as to why other methodology was not adopted.

Chapter 4

Presentation of the results. The chapter should contain graphs and tables for the adequate presentation of results. Where applicable, appropriate statistical analyses of the data need to be included.

Chapter 5

Detailed discussion of the results. Critical evaluation of the findings and interpretation in relation to relevant literature, as expounded in chapter 2.

Conclusion

Chapter 6

Overall summary and conclusions. Reference should be made to the research question/problem identified in Chapter 1, and the extent to which this was answered by the findings and analysis provided in the dissertation. Recommendations for further research should also be included.

Bibliography

A full list of bibliography should be provided. Appropriate formatting should be adopted.

Appendices

Appendices may be included. These may include tables, charts, and other addenda that are not absolutely necessary to be presented in the main body of the text. Appendices should appear after the bibliography.

2.1.2. Dissertation Schema 2

typically appropriate in phonology, morphology, syntax, typology, etc.

Abstract

A summary of the problem, aims of the study, main thread of the analysis, comparison to other theoretical approaches

Introduction

Chapter 1

- Definition of the research question, problem or puzzle and brief exemplification with data
- Indication of the significance of the problem and the reasons that warrant the proposed study
- Brief contextualization of the work in the light of past research
- Outline of the proposed solution and predictions made
- Brief comparison with previous similar studies highlighting your own contribution or advantages your solution offers
- Road map to the rest of the thesis, i.e. chapter outline

Main body of Dissertation

Chapter 2

Background knowledge (what are the basic components about the language/phenomenon, etc. the reader needs to know to follow the data). Detailed exposition of the empirical data and the problems/puzzles they produce. At this point, you usually need to contextualize your work, but don't need to offer an exhaustive literature review till later (see Chapter 4).

Chapter 3

Proposal and analysis. If this is a formal analysis, e.g. OT or syntactic structures, present your account step-by-step following logical argumentation and reasoning. Strive for 'flow' between each successive element of the proposal.

Chapter 4

Discussion. Demonstrate how your account relates to past work. What are its advantages and shortcomings? Show awareness of the available literature and stress the contribution you are making, as well as any limitations.

Conclusion

Chapter 5

Overall summary and conclusions. Reference should be made to the research question/problem identified in Chapter 1, and the extent to which this was answered by the findings and analysis provided in the dissertation. Recommendations for further research and predictions should also be included.

Bibliography

A full list of bibliography should be provided. Appropriate formatting should be adopted.

Appendices

Appendices may be included. These may include tables, charts, and other addenda that are not absolutely necessary to be presented in the main body of the text. Appendices should appear after the bibliography.

2.2. Variations

As mentioned, the schemata above offer general guidelines and primarily target the first type of project (Empirical). Every dissertation though is unique and may require some combination of the features above, or small or even significant modifications given the research topic. The main body of the dissertation may differ according to the objectives of the study. For example, a literature-based dissertation (Type 2) should make a much more detailed review of the bibliography, it should classify various theoretical frameworks and methodologies, and report empirical studies which support different theories. Finally a chapter should be allocated for a critical evaluation of the theoretical and empirical work. **Always discuss with your supervisor** which dissertation structure is appropriate!

3. What is a good dissertation?

3.1. Desirable Qualities / PROs

Introduction

- Clear definition of the problem/research questions

- Definition of the scope/aims of the essay

Main Body

- Good presentation of theoretical literature
- Ability to analyse the problem on the basis of the theory
- Awareness of nuances and complexities
- Thorough knowledge of key sources
- Sound methodology
- Arguments well-supported by appropriate references or research data
- Clearly structured and logically developed arguments
- Evidence of independent research and analysis
- Use of relevant data and examples
- Good organisation, presentation (tables, etc) and discussion of data
- Ability to synthesise sources
- Ability to recognise existing alternative views and identify ambiguities
- Theoretical implications of research

Conclusions

- Synthesis of points made in the main body of dissertation
- Derivation of logical conclusions
- Clear answer to research questions
- Discuss limitations of research and suggest avenues for further research

Throughout

- Proper citation to other people's work / no plagiarism!
- Flawless and easy-to-follow text
- Extensive proof-reading

3.2. Faults / CONS

Introduction

- No or inadequate introduction
- Vague description of the problem / misinterpretation of the key questions
- No statement of the aims of the study

Main Body

- Shallow or no presentation of theoretical literature
- No use of theoretical frameworks in the analysis of the problem or simple description instead of analysis
- Oversimplification and superficiality

- Inadequate knowledge of key sources
- Weak methodology
- Arguments presented as personal views without theoretical support or based on research data
- Unstructured and illogical arguments
- Plagiarism or compilation of extracts from sources
- Irrelevant data and examples
- Bad presentation of data, no discussion of data (tables, figures)
- Poor synthesis of source materials
- Dogmatism, expression of absolute statements
- No discussion of theoretical implications of research

Conclusions

- No synthesis of points
- Conclusions too general, unjustifiable, or unrelated to preceding arguments
- No discussion of research questions
- No discussion of limitations and suggestions for further research

4. The supervisor

The supervisor should:

- explore the student's research interests and suggest relevant literature for a preliminary study
- ask for a dissertation proposal where the specific research topic is stated
- give feedback and agree on the specific topic
- ask for an extended outline of the dissertation which contains
 - the aims and the objectives of the study
 - a summary of the review of the literature
 - a proposed structure of the dissertation
 - the proposed methodology
 - a list of bibliography that the student intends to cover
- agree on the outline or propose changes
- advise students on methodological issues and on how to overcome difficulties
- meet regularly with the student, keep track with the pace of his/her work, ask for drafts and provide feedback
- support the student but also promote student independence and autonomy in carrying out the research
- evaluate the final report by assessing the level of understanding, clarity in the exposition of the issues analysed, the quantity and the quality of the bibliographical sources used, the soundness of methodology, the discussion of results (see below) as well as the degree of independence of the student in carrying out the research.

5. General Assessment Criteria

The supervisor needs to evaluate:

- The structure of the dissertation (i.e. presence of introduction, review of literature, main body, discussion, conclusion)
- The content (extent and quality of bibliographical research, analytical ability, methodology, critical synthesis of results and validity of conclusions)
- Overall presentation (specified length, legibility, accurate spelling, correct syntax, correct punctuation, appropriate presentation of references)

6. Referencing, Plagiarism and Ethical Issues

Make sure that throughout the dissertation you report and cite relevant research appropriately. Failing to do so constitutes plagiarism, a serious academic offence. You can read more about plagiarism and how to avoid it here: <https://www.lib.auth.gr/el/πνευματικά-δικαιώματα-λογκλοπή>.

It is better to paraphrase (always with appropriate citation) than quoting from your source, however you may use a limited number of short quotations that you think are very important; in that case, you need to enclose the original text taken directly from the source within quotation marks and provide the reference and page number, e.g. “Because phonological theory dating back to work by Trubetzkoy (1939), Hockett (1955), Jakobson (1962), and Jakobson et. al. (1963) has characteristically been concerned with explaining and modelling cross-linguistic variation, typology has become largely inseparable from most research in phonology” (Gordon 2016: 1). When paraphrasing, use your own wording to describe research work and cite the relevant sources, e.g. “Smith (2015) reported that”.

In terms of citation conventions, you may follow the format adopted by the APA (<http://www.apastyle.org/manual/index.aspx>), the LSA guidelines (see Section 7 below) or any of the major journals of the field, e.g. *Journal of Phonetics*. Consult with your supervisor. Regardless of your choice, ensure that you follow the style suggested by the *same* source for both in-text citations, as well as for the full bibliography at the end of the dissertation.

Finally, you should ensure that your research conforms to the University Code of Deontology (esp. Chapter 4) available at: https://www.rc.auth.gr/Documents/Static/OperationFramework/research_deontology_principles.pdf.

7. Additional Helpful Resources

- Pérez Cañado María Luisa and Barry Pennoch-Speck. 2010. *Writing and Presenting a Dissertation on Linguistics, Applied Linguistics and Culture Studies for Undergraduates and Graduates in Spain*. Universitat de València.

- Practical Guidelines for Writing a Paper in Linguistics, 2010. University of Jena:
http://www.anglistik.uni-jena.de/wp-content/pdfs/linguistik/Practical%20Guidelines%20for%20Papers%20in%20Linguistics_2010.pdf
- How to write an essay in Linguistics, 2013-4, University of Edinburgh
<http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/~lhlew/WritingGuidance.pdf>
- How to write abstracts: Model abstracts by the Linguistic Society of America (LSA)
<http://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/model-abstracts>
- How to provide glosses for linguistic data: The Leipzig Glossing rules (ed. 2015)
<https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/pdf/Glossing-Rules.pdf>
- Guidelines for in-text citation and full bibliography following the LSA Unified Style for Linguistics (2007)
http://www.linguisticsociety.org/sites/default/files/style-sheet_0.pdf

8. Formatting Guidelines

We have prepared a sample document that outlines the main formatting conventions you should follow in preparation of your dissertation for submission. These can be found here as [.docx](#) or [.pdf](#) files, respectively.