



Postgraduate Taught Degree Dissertation Guidelines

These Guidelines must be read in conjunction with the *Taught Degree Regulations*.

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1. General Requirements

1.1 Scope of the guidelines

The guidelines apply to all postgraduate taught programmes. There may be some variance for 2-year programmes and separate guidance will be provided for students on 2-year postgraduate taught degree programmes.

1.2 Contribution of the dissertation to the overall assessment of the degree

The dissertation accounts for a proportion of the total assessment for a programme:

- Four Component Degrees (45 credits)
- Six Component Degrees (60 credits)
- Ten Component Degrees (36 credits)
- 2-year degrees (45 or 90 credits depending on programme)

The mark for the dissertation is based on the dissertation alone, and follows the normal marking scheme for postgraduate taught programmes. Students are required to complete the dissertation to a satisfactory standard (minimum pass mark 50%). If a dissertation is marked below 50%, students have one opportunity to re-submit it in the following year.

1.3 Word length

The maximum word length of the dissertation is:

- Four Component Degrees (10,000 words)
- Four Component Degree LLM (15,000 words)
- Six Component Degrees (13,000 words)
- Ten Component Degrees (8,000 words)
- 2-year degrees where the dissertation is 45 credits (10,000 words)
- 2-year MRes degree where the dissertation is 90 credits (25,000 words)
- 2-year MA in Advanced Chinese Studies and MA Intensive South Asian Studies where the dissertation is 90 credits (20,000 words)

Over-length dissertations will be subject to the penalties outlined in the *Word Count and Over-length Coursework Policy*. Dissertations must include a word count.

1.4 Submission date

The dissertation is completed (i.e. written up) in the period between the end of the written examinations in May/June and the middle of September. It must be submitted no later than 16.00 on the 15 September.

1.5 Late submission

Late submission is covered by the Mitigating Circumstances Policy.

1.6 Non-submission (without accepted mitigating circumstances)

Non-submission of the dissertation by the prescribed or deferred date without accepted mitigating circumstances will receive a fail mark of 0. Students will have one further opportunity to submit the dissertation, in the following year, if this was the first attempt. The mark following re-submission will be capped at 50.

2. Academic Requirements

2.1 Purpose of the dissertation

The purpose of the dissertation is to enable students to demonstrate their capacity to carry out a substantial piece of independent academic research on a selected topic. Students will be assessed on their capacity to define a topic for research, to articulate a coherent scheme for researching this topic, to gather the necessary information, and to analyse and present this information in a way which satisfactorily assesses the topic which they have set themselves.

2.2 Choice of topic

- In programmes with a major/minor pattern, the dissertation will be linked to the major taught module, and the supervisor will normally be involved in the teaching of that module.
- In programmes without a major/minor pattern, the dissertation will relate to the specialism of the programme.
- There are separate regulations covering the dissertation in the LLM. The choice of topics is not unlimited.
- There must be a member of SOAS staff competent and willing to supervise the topic, and available at the times when supervisions are required.
- It is not possible for a dissertation to be supervised by a member of staff from another College
- The topic must not require fieldwork abroad.
- There must be adequate Library resources available.

2.3 Choice of topic

- (a) Students are encouraged to select a dissertation topic in which they are interested, and which reflects their own reason for taking the postgraduate taught programme. Topics should be clearly defined. A piece of work carried out over roughly three months can provide scope for only a limited amount of analysis. The more focussed the subject, the greater the opportunity to produce an interesting and independent piece of work. Supervisors will advise students if their initial choice of topic seems too broad or narrow for the requirements of a postgraduate taught dissertation.
- (b) Dissertation topics should be chosen so as to enable students to complete them within the normal time frame and submit them by 15 September of the appropriate year. Complex topics which need extra time for completion should not be allowed.

2.4 Fieldwork

Topics should not be allowed which would require a student to undertake fieldwork, although students will not be prevented from undertaking fieldwork if they choose to do so and are able to complete the work and submit it in the time allowed. Students should be counselled in respect of any proposals to undertake fieldwork in regions known to be dangerous

2.5 Academic misconduct and plagiarism (including 'self-plagiarism')

Students are reminded that all work submitted as part of the requirement for any module at SOAS must meet the requirements of the Academic Misconduct Policy. By submitting the dissertation students are agreeing to the following:

'I have read and understood the School Regulations concerning plagiarism and I undertake:

- *That all material presented for examination is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part by any other person(s).*

- *That any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged in the dissertation*
- *That I have not incorporated in this dissertation without acknowledgement any work previously submitted by me for any other module forming part of my degree."*

2.6 Deadline for deciding provisional title

In term 2, students should suggest a provisional dissertation topic in consultation with their supervisor, by the Monday following the February reading week. The supervisor will advise the student if the proposed topic appears to be inappropriate. Subsequently the student will draw up a plan of work for the dissertation in consultation with the supervisor, including a precise title.

2.7 Work plan

After selecting their topic, students should produce a brief plan for discussion with their supervisor by the end of Term 2. This plan should include:

- (a) A rationale for the topic, indicating the question to be studied and reasons why it is worth studying.
- (b) An outline of the dissertation, indicating the principle chapters or sections into which it will be divided.
- (c) An indication of the sources which it will be necessary to consult, and of their availability, consisting of a basic bibliography or a list of the libraries, document collections, or other resources which are to be examined.

3. Responsibilities of the Supervisor

3.1 Responsibilities

- (a) to meet with the student at least three times
- (b) to approve the initial choice of topic, and agree that it fits within the scope of the relevant postgraduate taught programme
- (c) to discuss with the student and approve the dissertation plan (see 2.6 above)
- (d) to help the student with any problems and difficulties which arise in preparing the dissertation, give guidance on the sources to be used and their availability, and to advise on the methods of transliteration and citation
- (e) to offer advice on early drafts of the dissertation but not on the final draft

3.2 Student's own work

The supervisor does not have any responsibility for the preparation of the dissertation itself, for the ideas and material that it includes, or for the standard that it attains. The dissertation must be entirely the student's own work. The help given by the supervisor must necessarily be limited.

3.3 Availability of supervisor over the summer vacation

Students cannot expect supervisors to be necessarily available over the summer. Departments normally designate a member of staff to be available for general consultation and advice during this period.

4. Presentation

4.1 General

The presentation of the dissertation in a clean and correct form is an important part of the dissertation-writing process, and examiners may take this into account in awarding marks. The final text should be carefully examined for keyboarding errors. Word processing is strongly recommended as it permits easy amendment and correction in the course of preparation.

- Dissertations must be word processed or typed
- The main part of the dissertation must be double spaced
- The footnotes and the bibliography should be single spaced

4.2 Submission

Students will normally submit their dissertation electronically via Moodle. Some departments may require students to submit one or two hard bound copies instead. If students are required to submit hard copies they must be bound in secure and firm folders. These copies are non-returnable. Students are advised to make additional copies for their own use.

4.3 Sections of the dissertation

The dissertations should contain the following sections:

(a) Cover/title page

This must state the title of the dissertation, the name or candidate number of the student, the programme for which it is submitted, and the statement: *'This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of LLM/MA/MMus/MRes/MSc [insert full title of the programme for which you are registered] of SOAS, University of London'* followed by the date of submission. It must also include a word count.

(b) Declaration

By submitting a dissertation for marking, a student is giving permission for a copy of their dissertation to be held for reference, at the School's discretion. They are also agreeing to the following:

'I have read and understood the School Regulations concerning plagiarism and I undertake:

- *That all material presented for examination is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part by any other person(s).*
- *That any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged in the dissertation*
- *That I have not incorporated in this dissertation without acknowledgement any work previously submitted by me for any other module forming part of my degree."*

(c) Table of contents

This must list the contents of the dissertation by chapters, with sections where appropriate, and the page number for each, together with the page numbers for the notes, bibliography and any maps, figures, and tables.

(d) Abstract

This must provide a brief statement (not more than 200 words) of the main themes or findings of the dissertation.

(e) Acknowledgements

Students may wish to acknowledge any help that they received in the preparation of their dissertation.

(f) Main text

Each main heading (chapters, references, bibliography) must start on a new page. Sections within chapters may continue on the same page.

(g) References

Footnotes should be numbered consecutively and the references to which they refer should be placed either at the bottom of the relevant page or at the end of the dissertation, and before the bibliography.

(h) Bibliography

The bibliography must list all works used in the preparation of the dissertation, including all those noted in the references.

5. **Bibliography, References, Footnotes, Abbreviations and other Conventions**

Conventions vary from discipline to discipline. Students should seek further advice from their supervisor or their Faculty Office.

Document Version

Valid from	Author	Changes	Published
2015/16	John Peck, Head of Registry and Quality	annual update	September 2015