

# 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. These guidelines support SOAS Taught Degree Regulations and individual programme specifications. There can be variation of practice between programmes and it is the student's responsibility to ensure that they are following the requirements for their registered programme. Students should seek advice from their dissertation supervisor should they have any questions about their dissertation.

### **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. Dissertations are normally worth 60 credits, although there may be exceptions for 2-year postgraduate taught degree programmes. Students should always refer to the relevant programme specification.

Marking of the dissertation module follows the normal marking scheme for postgraduate taught programmes. Students are required to complete the dissertation module to a satisfactory standard (minimum pass mark 50).

If a dissertation module is assessed by the dissertation only, and this dissertation is marked below 50, students have one opportunity to re-submit it in the following year. The mark for the re-submission – if of pass standard – will be capped at 50.

Some modules may include an assessed dissertation proposal, which will contribute to the overall module mark for the dissertation module. The normal reassessment rules outlined in the [Taught Degree Regulations](#) apply if a dissertation module that includes an assessed proposal is not passed overall.

### **1.3 Word length**

The word length of dissertations varies depending upon the subject being studied. For the required word length of the dissertation, students should refer to the information on the dissertation module for their specific programme.

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. The deadline for the electronic submission of postgraduate dissertations is 11:59pm on 8 September of the year in which the dissertation is undertaken.

### **1.5 Late submission**

Dissertations must be submitted by the deadline specified above. Late submissions are only permitted where a student has had mitigating circumstances accepted. Students should refer to the [Mitigating Circumstances Policy](#) for information about the procedure and details of what would constitute acceptable mitigating circumstances.

### **1.6 Non-submission (without accepted mitigating circumstances)**

Non-submission of the dissertation by the prescribed date without accepted mitigating circumstances will result in 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 Major/minor**

- (a) 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.
- (b) In programmes without a major/minor pattern, the dissertation will relate to the specialism of the programme.

### **2.3 Choice of topic**

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. Whilst SOAS seeks to enable students to research areas of interest and relevance to them in order to ensure proper academic support there are some guidelines for dissertation topic choice as follows:

- (a) 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.
- (b) The topic must not *require* fieldwork abroad. (see 2.4)
- (c) There must be adequate library resources available.
- (d) 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.
- (e) Dissertation topics should be chosen so as to enable students to complete them within the normal time frame and submit them by 8 September of the appropriate year. Complex topics which need extra time for completion will not normally 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 will 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.

## **2.8 Assessed proposal**

An assessed proposal (see 1.2) is not the same as a work plan. On dissertation modules that include an assessed proposal, students should follow guidance from the dissertation module convenor on whether a work plan must also be submitted.

# **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.

### 3.4 Support for Academic Writing

Learning & Teaching Development provides general advice and training on academic writing and good academic practice. Information about how to access this support is available from their [website](#). There are also resources on Moodle. The demand for personal support from Learning & Teaching Development is high and students may have to wait for support, therefore it is recommended that students seek assistance at an early point in writing the dissertation.

## 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.

- The main part of the dissertation must be double spaced
- The footnotes and the bibliography should be single spaced

### 4.2 Submission

Students will submit their dissertation electronically via Moodle.

### 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
2017/18	Eva Peters, Curriculum & Regulations Officer	removed reference to different PGT structures in 1.2 and 1.3; clarified 1.2 in regards to dissertation modules that include an assessed proposal; PGT dissertation deadline amended to 8 September in 1.4 and 2.3(e); amended 2.2. to give information on major/minor structures only; amended 2.3 to give information on choice of topic only; added 2.8 to clarify relationship between assessed proposal and work plan; updated submission information in 4.2. Approved by LTQC Chair's Action 05.09.2017.	August 2017