

Dissertation Guidelines for Postgraduate Taught Degrees

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Note: All policies must be read in conjunction with all other SOAS policy, procedure and guidance documents. Printed copies of policies may not be the most up to date, therefore please refer to the policy pages on the SOAS external website or intranet for the latest version.

1. General Requirements

1.1. Scope of the Guidelines

- 1.1.1. The guidelines apply to all postgraduate taught programmes. These guidelines support the SOAS [Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes](#) and individual programme specifications and must be read in conjunction with these documents. There can be variation of practice between programmes, and it is the students' 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

- 1.2.1. 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.
- 1.2.2. 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).
- 1.2.3. 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 line with the relevant regulations. The mark for the re-submission – if of pass standard – will be capped at 50.
- 1.2.4. 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

- 1.3.1. 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.
- 1.3.2. Over-length dissertations will be subject to the Word Count Range and Marking of Overlength Coursework Policy. Dissertations must include a word count.

1.4. Submission Date

- 1.4.1. Submission deadlines for dissertations and where appropriate dissertation proposal are published on the relevant Moodle page.

1.5. Late Submission

- 1.5.1. The academic regulations for taught programmes outline the consequences for late submissions. Where coursework, including a dissertation or project, is handed in late and there are no approved mitigating circumstances, the work will be accepted for up to 7 days after the due date, with the mark reduced by 2 marks per day late. After 7 days, work will not be accepted, i.e. a mark of zero will be awarded.

1.6. Non-submission (without accepted mitigating circumstances)

- 1.6.1. Non-submission of the dissertation by the prescribed date without accepted mitigating circumstances will result in a Fail grade of zero being awarded. Students who have remaining assessment attempts will be permitted to undertake a reassessment at the earliest opportunity. The mark following re-submission will be capped at 50 unless mitigating circumstances apply.

2. Academic Requirements

2.1. Purpose of the Dissertation

- 2.1.1. 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

- 2.2.1. In programmes with a major/minor pattern (where applicable), the dissertation will be linked to the major taught module, and the supervisor will normally be involved in the teaching of that module.
- 2.2.2. In programmes without a major/minor pattern, the dissertation will relate to the specialism of the programme.

2.3. Choice of Topic

- 2.3.1. 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 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 an external supervisor.
 - b) For on-campus students, the topic must not require fieldwork abroad. Where field work has been approved (for on-campus and online students) ethical approval must be sought if required (see 2.4). Funding for fieldwork is not available.
 - 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 to enable students to complete them within the normal time frame. Complex topics which need extra time for completion will not normally be allowed.

2.4. Primary Research and Fieldwork

- 2.4.1. 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. Dissertation proposals are subject to SOAS' published policies and procedures on research ethics and supervisors are responsible for assessing whether the proposal constitutes primary research requiring consideration by the Research Ethics Panel.

2.5. Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism (including 'self-plagiarism')

- 2.5.1. 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 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. Provisional Title

- 2.6.1. Departments will inform students of the expected timelines for them to submit dissertation proposals for supervisors to be allocated. These timelines may vary between departments to accommodate other assessment deadlines. Supervisors and provisional dissertation titles should usually be confirmed no later than the beginning of the Easter vacation. 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

- 2.7.1. After selecting their topic, students should produce a brief plan for discussion with their supervisor. Departments will set deadlines for this which take account of when supervisors are to be allocated, and other assessment deadlines within the programme. This work 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 principal 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

- 2.8.1. 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 and by what date.

3. Responsibilities of the Supervisor

3.1. Responsibilities

- 3.1.1. Supervisors are expected to:
- a) meet with the student at least three times. This could be individual or in small groups.
 - b) approve the initial choice of topic and agree that it fits within the scope of the relevant postgraduate taught programme.
 - c) discuss with the student and subsequently approve the title, proposal and work plan (see 2.6 and 2.7 above).

- d) 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) offer advice on early drafts (up to 10% of the total word count) or outlines of the dissertation but not on the final draft.

3.2. Student's Own Work

- 3.2.1. 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 Supervisors Over the Summer Vacation

- 3.3.1. 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

- 3.4.1. The [Student Learning Centre](#) 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.

4. Presentation

4.1. General

- 4.1.1. 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

- 4.2.1. Students will submit their dissertation electronically via Moodle.

4.3. Sections of the Dissertation

4.3.1. 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.

This must be followed by the date of submission and 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 University's discretion. They are also agreeing to the following:

I have read and understood the University 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

- 5.1. Conventions vary from discipline to discipline. Students should seek further advice from their supervisor or their departmental office.