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**MA CRIMINOLOGY (MACrim)**

**MA GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP, IDENTITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

**MA INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL POLICY (MAISP)**

**MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (MPA)**

**MA PUBLIC POLICY (MPP)**

**DISSERTATION GUIDELINES**

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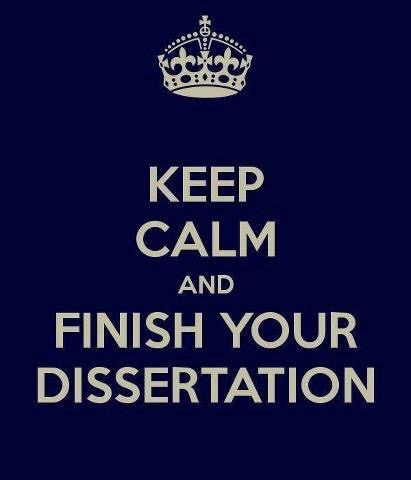
Recommended reading 16

* Bond A (2006) Your Masters Thesis 16
* Craswell G & Moore M (2012) Writing for Academic Success 16
* Creasley P (2011) Doing Essays and Assignments 16
* Creme P & Lea M R (2008) Writing at University: A Guide for Students 16
* Hornsby-Smith M (1993) ‘Gaining access’ in Gilbert N (ed) Researching Social Life pp52-67 16
* Hutchinson H (2010) Write Great Essays and Dissertations 16
* Lewis M & Reinders H (2003) Study Skills for Speakers of English as a Second Language 17
* Mauch J (2003) Guide to the Successful Thesis and Dissertation: A Handbook for Students and Faculty 17
* McMillan K & Weyers J (2011) How to Write Dissertations and Project Reports 17
* Moore S et al (2009) The Ultimate Study Skills Handbook 17
* Northey M (2001) Making Sense in the Social Sciences: A Student’s Guide to Research, Writing and Style 17
* O’Leary Z (2009) The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project 17
* Punch K F (2006) Developing Effective Research Proposals 17
* Rudestam K E & Newton R R (2007) Surviving Your Dissertation 17
* Silbergh D M (2001) Doing Dissertations in Politics: A Student Guide 17
* Thomas D & Hodges I D (2010) Designing and Managing Your Research Project 17
* Vithal R & Jansen J (2010) Designing Your First Research Proposal: A Manual for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences 17

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Dr Stephen Cope, October 2017

Updated by Bruce Stafford, August 2018



Part 1: Dissertation Proposal

Dissertation topic

It is important that you start to seriously think about your proposed topic for your Master’s dissertation. The *Research Methods and Research Management* module is primarily intended to support your dissertation by introducing you to a range of research methods and by requiring you to submit an assessed dissertation proposal. In this module, guidance and support is provided on preparing a dissertation proposal and the dissertation.

Key questions to address in choosing a dissertation topic are:

* is it **relevant**? – does your proposed topic directly connect with the study and practice of sociology, public administration, public policy, social policy or criminology?
* is it **resource-able**? – are there enough available books etc to do the dissertation research? If planning to do primary research (eg interviews, surveys), can it be resourced as the University will not reimburse expenses incurred in researching for and writing a dissertation?
* is it **do-able**? – is your dissertation topic (often best framed as a single question) sufficiently focused and manageable?
* is it **supervise-able**? – is there a supervisor within the School, with sufficient expertise of your proposed topic to supervise your dissertation?
* is it **grounded**? – is your proposed topic based on your existing academic knowledge? Does your proposed topic link with courses taken or to be taken?
* is it **interesting**? – does your topic sufficiently interest you to sustain your research efforts?
* is it **career-enhancing**? – does your proposed topic further your present career prospects or facilitate your intended career?

It is critical that MPA dissertations have a public administration/public management focus, MPP dissertations have a public policy/policy analysis focus, MAISP dissertations have a social policy/welfare policy focus, MAGCIHR dissertations have a sociology/human rights focus, and MACrim dissertations have a crime/criminal justice focus.

You are not required to undertake primary research for your dissertation; in fact, most dissertations are based on secondary research (i.e. literature-based). Primary research is only necessary if your research aims and questions cannot be fully addressed by the existing research literature. Where this is the case, you are encouraged to undertake primary research, but it is important that the planned primary research is manageable.

Furthermore, you are encouraged to seek advice from your personal tutor, your MA Plan Convenor, *Research Methods and Research Management* tutors and/or a potential supervisor on your ideas for a dissertation proposal. You can find the research interests of staff in the School of Sociology and Social Policy on the following webpage:

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/sociology/people/index.aspx>

Dissertation proposal

*Research Methods and Research Management* is assessed by a 5,000-word dissertation proposal. Masters students must obtain a mark of at least 50 per cent, excluding any late penalty deduction, to pass this course and before they are allowed to commence their dissertation.

**Students must submit an electronic copy of the dissertation proposal via Moodle by the set deadline.**

There can be circumstances outside your control that make it difficult to complete your coursework on time. In such circumstances, students can request an extension to an assignment deadline by submitting an *Extenuating Circumstances Form*. Extensions to deadlines can only be granted for good reason (eg illness, family bereavement, jury service). Extensions cannot be granted for part-time work commitments, computer/printer failure, holidays, etc. More details about extenuating circumstances, including an online *Extenuating Circumstances Form*, can be found at the following webpage:

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studentservices/services/extenuating-circumstances.aspx>

Students wanting to apply for extensions to coursework deadlines should contact Tracey Dipaolo, the Faculty of Social Sciences’ Student Welfare Officer. Her office is A106 in the Law and Social Sciences Building; her telephone number is 0115 95 15704; and her e-mail address is: [tracey.dipaolo@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:tracey.dipaolo@nottingham.ac.uk).

The dissertation proposal must:

* be word-processed
* be consecutively page-numbered
* be presented with one-and-half (or double) line-spacing
* contain no more words than the maximum wordlength (excluding the bibliography and any appendices)
* denote the word count
* be correctly referenced wherever necessary
* **comply with the required format outlined in ‘[Dissertation proposal format](#Dissertation_proposal_format)’ section**

Students **must** comply with the guidelines on bibliographic referencing contained in the *SSP Referencing Guidelines*. These are available on the [\_PGT Student Area Moodle](https://moodle.nottingham.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=75120#section-1) page.

It is very important that references are provided in the dissertation proposal to precisely indicate the sources of arguments, data, ideas, information, quotations etc. Incorrect referencing may lead to a deduction of marks given to your dissertation proposal. Furthermore, failure to provide references may constitute plagiarism, which is a serious academic offence. Though not plagiarism, students should not re-present work that has already been presented for assessment. The re-presentation of such previously submitted work may lead to a deduction of marks depending on its extent of replication and its fitness for purpose. Generally, the replication of the same work is unlikely to answer two or more coursework requirements.

You are strongly advised to run your draft dissertation proposal through Turnitin via Moodle before formally submitting your dissertation proposal.

Students are advised to download and keep a hard copy of any website material used in writing their dissertation proposal, and to retain an electronic and hard copy of their submitted dissertation proposal.

Dissertation proposals will be marked according to the following assessment criteria:

* approach to the topic/relevance to the question set
* descriptive and informational content
* analysis and criticism
* structure and clarity of argument
* presentation of data, support materials, referencing and bibliography

Marked dissertation proposals will be returned to students normally within three weeks of submission. Dissertation proposals are anonymously marked by the module convenor/seminar tutor (not your proposed dissertation supervisor) and ‘blind’ second-marked internally, and also a sample of dissertation proposals will be externally reviewed.

For Masters students, a mark of 50 per cent or more constitutes a pass mark, a mark between 60 and 69 per cent reflects a merit mark, and a mark of 70 per cent or more represents a distinction mark. **Masters students must get a mark of 50 per cent or more (excluding any late penalty deduction) for their dissertation proposal to pass the module, *Research Methods and Research Management* and to commence their dissertation.**

If students ‘fail’ their dissertation proposal at their first attempt, then, they must submit a ‘resit’ dissertation proposal by the required deadline and before starting their dissertation.

If there are any queries arising from the mark for and/or comments on the dissertation proposals, students are advised to see the module convenor of the *Research Methods and Research Management* module for clarification. All marks for dissertation proposals are provisional until confirmed by the External Examiner.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances, students cannot significantly change their proposed dissertation research once the dissertation proposal has been submitted. You should contact your relevant MA Programme Convenor if there are exceptional circumstances necessitating a change of dissertation topic etc. In such cases, you will need to submit a new non-assessed dissertation proposal and possibly an *Application for Research Ethics Approval for Staff and Students*. Less significant changes to your proposed dissertation research (eg reformulated research questions, revamped chapter plan etc) should be discussed with your dissertation supervisor.

Research ethics

If primary research is proposed, your dissertation proposal must indicate that you have obtained agreement to interview people, to access documents, to attend meetings etc from the organisation/s you are planning to investigate.

**Students whose proposed dissertation topic involves primary research involving human beings (eg interviews, observations, questionnaires) must complete and return an *Application for Research Ethics Approval for Staff and Students* AND associated documentation before commencing their primary research.** The School’s research ethics policy and relevant documentation can be accessed at:

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/sociology/research/ethics/index.aspx>

The completed checklist form must be counter-signed by either the course convenor, seminar tutor, your MA Programme Convenor or your suggested dissertation supervisor before submitting your dissertation proposal and in advance of you commencing any such research. You will be notified as soon as possible if your submitted checklist has not been approved. Failure to secure approval before undertaking primary research is a serious ethical offence and attracts significant penalties for non-compliance. Postgraduate students, when undertaking primary research involving human beings, are required to conform to the research ethics guidelines of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Furthermore, you may need to conform to research ethics guidelines stipulated by other bodies depending on the nature of your proposed research. For example, if you are proposing to undertake any primary research within the National Health Service (NHS), involving NHS staff and/or patients, you will need to obtain the ethical approval from a Research Ethics Committee under the auspices of the National Patient Safety Agency’s National Research Ethics Service (NRES). If there are any queries about ethical approval for your proposed dissertation research, please see the course convenor, your seminar tutor, your suggested dissertation supervisor, and/or the School’s Research Ethics Officer.

You should conform to all research ethics guidelines relevant to your dissertation research. All participants (or guardians of ‘vulnerable’ participants) must give informed consent to their involvement with your research. Research participants should be given an information sheet outlining details about your research project and they should sign a consent form indicating their willingness to be involved in your research project. You must respect the anonymity of participants and/or the confidentiality of their responses if requested. You must ask permission in advance from those being interviewed to record interviews. You must faithfully reflect the views of participants when writing-up your dissertation thesis. You must cite the sources of such views in your dissertation thesis, even if it means coding such sources if anonymity was requested (e.g. a chief executive of a local authority, who was interviewed, could be coded as ‘LA1’ in the thesis) or if it means providing a general source if confidentiality was requested (e.g. an officer of a local authority believed that “local politicians are stupid”). You must keep research data (including signed consent forms, interview notes, interview recordings, interview transcripts, questionnaire returns) secure for the required period of time.

Please remember that your dissertation thesis is not a public document. A copy of your dissertation thesis is kept only within the School (and only for a limited period of time); a copy is not kept in the University’s Hallward Library.

Dissertation proposal format

The dissertation proposal is very important in doing your dissertation. You are required to present your dissertation proposal in the following format:

TITLE OF PROPOSED DISSERTATION

*The title should be focused and involve a single question or statement to explore in the proposed dissertation.*

TOPIC OF PROPOSED RESEARCH

*The specific topic needs to be outlined.*

*Overall objectives and more specific, detailed aims of the research need to be stated.*

*Main research questions need to be outlined.*

*The significance (eg originality, novelty, relevance, topicality) of the proposed research needs to be examined.*

LITERATURE REVIEW (at least 1,500 words)

*Ten relevant research-based books, journal articles etc and/or relevant official publications, not textbooks, need to be critically reviewed as a discursive ‘mini-essay’.*

*Key research findings need to be examined – compare and evaluate research findings presented in the research literature.*

*Relevant concepts, models and theories need to be appraised – discuss key conceptual and theoretical approaches used in the research literature.*

*Key arguments, debates, issues, etc need to be assessed.*

*Gaps in the research literature need to be identified.*

METHODOLOGY REVIEW (at least 1,500 words)

*Two relevant research-based books and/or journal articles need to be critically reviewed – the two research-based publications can be selected from the ten publications reviewed above.*

*The research design and methods underpinning the two pieces of research need to be examined – outline the research design and methods of each piece of research; assess the strengths and weaknesses of the research; compare and evaluate their research methodology; critically reflect on the research methodology used.*

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

*The sources of data, information etc, including both primary and secondary sources, for the proposed research need to be identified.*

*The nature of the proposed research (eg primary and/or secondary research, qualitative and/or quantitative research, empirical and/or theoretical research, desk-based and/or fieldwork research, case study research, comparative research) need to be examined.*

*The methods of data collection and analysis need to be stated.*

*If applicable, the methods of sampling for interviews, survey questionnaires etc need to be discussed.*

*The justification of your proposed research methods needs to be outlined.*

FIELDWORK PREPARATION

*If primary research is planned, permission to access documents, meetings, organisations, people etc, which must be agreed in advance, needs to be indicated.*

*Any risks (including health and safety, researcher safety and insurance issues) in conducting the proposed research need to be identified and addressed.*

RESEARCH ETHICS

*Any ethical issues need to be identified and addressed.*

*If primary research involving human beings is proposed, an Application for Research Ethics Approval for Staff and Students needs to be completed and returned for approval. If ethical approval from other organisations is required, please provide details (eg name of other body/bodies, procedures, deadline for applying for ethical approval, etc).*

PROPOSED CHAPTER OUTLINE OF DISSERTATION THESIS

*The structure of the proposed dissertation thesis (ie chapter plan) needs to be outlined and detailed.*

*The chapter plan must include suggested chapter titles, brief outlines of chapter contents and proposed designated wordcounts for each chapter.*

TIMETABLE FOR PROPOSED RESEARCH

*An indicative timetable of when key tasks (eg doing the proposed research, drafting chapters etc) needs to be outlined.*

RESOURCES FOR PROPOSED RESEARCH

*Resources, and any costs in completing the proposed research (eg travel, photocopying), need to be highlighted. [NB The University is not liable to reimburse students for any expenses in doing the proposed research.]*

BIBLIOGRAPHY (excluded from the wordcount)

*An indicative bibliography of at least 30 key research-based books, journal articles etc (including and highlighting those cited in the Literature Review and Methodology Review sections) needs to be provided.*

If sections of this format above (eg fieldwork preparation, resources for proposed research) are not applicable to your proposed dissertation research, then, please write down ‘not applicable’ under these sections.

Part 2: Dissertation

Dissertation supervision

A dissertation supervisor will be allocated to you once your dissertation proposal has been submitted. Your dissertation supervisor, wherever possible, will be a member of academic staff, based in the School of Sociology and Social Policy, with the most research expertise in the topic that you are proposing to research.

**It is your responsibility to contact your allocated dissertation supervisor to arrange tutorials etc.** You are strongly recommended to make early initial contact with your supervisor to discuss your dissertation generally, the proposed dissertation thesis title, the proposed chapter plan for your dissertation thesis, a timetable for researching the dissertation and writing draft dissertation chapters, etc. You are strongly advised to see your dissertation supervisor well before you undertake any primary research. Your dissertation supervisor will be given a copy of your marked dissertation proposal.

Regular tutorials should be arranged to discuss dissertation progress, draft dissertation chapters etc. You are advised, particularly over the summer vacation, to find out when your supervisor is on leave and/or away for research purposes so that you can work around these absences. You are not obliged to write your dissertation while at the University – you are free to write your dissertation at a distance. Dissertation supervision can be done by e-mail, telephone, etc.

Generally, dissertation supervisors will provide guidance on how to research the dissertation topic (eg approaches, references, contacts etc), feedback on draft dissertation chapters, and give support throughout the dissertation process. Furthermore, dissertation supervisors can be asked to provide a covering letter to support your requests for interviews etc if you are planning to undertake primary research.

Dissertation supervisors will not write, proof-read nor mark your draft dissertation, and should be given sufficient time to read and comment upon draft material before your final dissertation thesis is formally submitted. Dissertation supervisors’ comments on draft dissertation chapters should not be interpreted as an indication of any mark; instead, their comments are meant to provide constructive criticism and feedback to help students redraft their dissertation thesis. Dissertation supervisors will only read and comment on the first draft of each dissertation chapter; they will not read nor comment on re-drafted chapters and they will not read nor comment on a whole-draft dissertation thesis.

**Dissertation supervisors cannot guarantee to provide feedback on your draft dissertation within two weeks of the deadline for submitting the dissertation thesis.**

Dissertation supervisors will roughly spend about five contact hours with their dissertation students.

You are required to complete the *MA Dissertation Supervision Record Form* – see [Annex A](#ANNEX_A_MA) and on Moodle page. This completed, and counter-signed, form should be returned to the School Office when submitting your dissertation thesis.

Please contact your relevant MA Plan Convenor if there are any significant problems with the supervision of your dissertation.

Dissertation research

Before researching and writing your thesis, you need to give careful thought (with your dissertation supervisor) to the proposed dissertation thesis title. It is important that the title, whether framed as a question or as a statement, is relevant to your course of study, is sufficiently focused and manageable, and invites critical, evaluative and reflective analysis.

As well as library searches, the following websites are excellent sources of information for dissertation research:

* American Political Science Association [http://www.apsanet.org]
* American Sociological Association [http://www.asanet.org]
* Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management [http://www.appam.org]
* British International Studies Association [https://www.bisa.ac.uk]
* British Society of Criminology [http://www.britsoccrim.org]
* British Sociological Association [https://www.britsoc.co.uk]
* Economic and Social Research Council [http://www.esrc.ac.uk]
* Google Scholar [http://scholar.google.com]
* International Bibliography of the Social Sciences [http://www.ibss.ac.uk]
* International Political Science Association [https://www.ipsa.org]
* International Social Science Council [http://www.worldsocialscience.org]
* International Sociological Association [http://www.isa-sociology.org]
* International Studies Association [http://www.isanet.org]
* Office for National Statistics [http://www.ons.gov.uk]
* Political Studies Association [http://www.psa.ac.uk]
* Political Science Resources [http://www.psr.keele.ac.uk]
* Social Policy Association [http://www.social-policy.org.uk]
* Social Research Association [http://the-sra.org.uk]
* UK Data Archive [http://www.data-archive.ac.uk]
* University Association for Contemporary European Studies [http://www.uaces.org]

It is important to start the process of researching for your dissertation as soon as possible after your dissertation proposal has been marked and returned. It is particularly important to start this process early if your research involves primary research (eg interviews, survey questionnaires, etc) and/or involves analysing documents that are not in the public domain (eg annual reports of public sector bodies, minutes of meetings etc).

Primary research should be planned well in advance. For example, a schedule of interview questions (i.e. a topic guide) or a questionnaire should be drawn up and shown to your dissertation supervisor for comment. Furthermore, considerable attention needs to be paid to sampling issues if conducting interviews and/or administering questionnaires. You may want to ask your dissertation supervisor for a letter of support to provide to your proposed research participants.

Throughout any fieldwork research, you are strongly advised to consider any relevant health and safety issues, including researcher safety issues). For further guidance on health and safety issues see the School’s Research Ethics web page

If away from the University (e.g. on fieldwork), please provide your contact details and dates away to your dissertation supervisor.

It is permissible to use another person, or other persons, to assist you in the data collection process (eg conducting interviews, administering questionnaires, transcribing interviews) but it is not permissible to use another person, or other persons, to assist you in the research design, data analysis and/or writing-up of research findings processes. If the assistance of others has been used in collecting data, then, such assistance needs to be explicitly acknowledged and detailed in your dissertation thesis.

Dissertation writing

Writing a long dissertation can seem daunting, especially as the wordlength is five times the normal length of essays submitted for taught courses. Generally, it is best to plan your chapter structure before you embark on your research. With the possible exceptions of the introductory and concluding chapters, chapters should be roughly of equal wordlength.

In drafting your thesis, it is often best to draft the first chapter first and the second chapter second etc. The introductory chapter is often best drafted last after other chapters have been drafted. Each draft chapter can then be submitted to your dissertation supervisor for comment. After each chapter has been drafted, the whole thesis can then be drafted by combining and editing the set of chapters drafted before formally submitting your dissertation thesis.

This process breaks down the writing process into several relatively discrete stages – please remember that, when you are drafting a chapter, it is only a draft and that you can come back to that chapter at a later stage to add new material etc. It is important at the drafting stage to let go and get on with the next draft in order to keep within your timetable.

Your timetable should be regularly reviewed, with your dissertation supervisor, in light of progress made and the ever-looming submission deadline. When setting a timetable, please ensure that fieldwork and analysis of research findings (if applicable), drafting and redrafting dissertation chapters, drafting the whole thesis, and proof-reading (if applicable) are addressed.

Your first introductory chapter should include, at least, a brief exploration of the context and background to your research, a discussion of the research aims of your dissertation and research questions addressed in your thesis, an outline and a justification of the research design and methods used, and a synopsis of the structure of your thesis. You may want to briefly reveal your concluding argument/s and/or research findings in this introductory chapter, as this helps the reader navigate through your dissertation thesis.

Furthermore, if conducting primary research, you may want to present details about your research design and methods in a separate chapter. You should detail your research design (including sampling methods and ethical approval) and you may want to reflect in your discussion on any methodological and other issues encountered in undertaking your research.

Occasionally there may be a need to have a separate chapter surveying and reviewing the literature on the topic of your dissertation. However, it is often best to review the literature throughout the dissertation thesis rather than having a relatively ‘stand-alone’ literature review chapter. Your dissertation thesis needs to extensively engage with the relevant research literature.

Your last concluding chapter should include, at least, a summary of your research and analysis and your final arguments, observations and recommendations on the topic researched. The concluding chapter should also be critically reflective, particularly if you have undertaken primary research – you need to reflect on the question, ‘what you would have done differently, and why, if you started afresh again now knowing what you know?’. This concluding chapter should not be too brief – it is the ‘icing on the cake’.

Chapters should be numbered and titled; and they should be also listed in the contents page. All diagrams, figures and tables should be numbered, titled and sourced; and they should be also listed in the contents page.

The dissertation thesis should not be presented in report format (ie numbered paragraphs) as this format disrupts the flow of arguments etc. Generally, chapters should have section and subsection headings.

Please ensure your thesis is spell-checked and proof-read. It is often useful to get someone else to read your draft dissertation before submitting it. Students whose first language is not English can use a professional proof-reader to check their thesis. If using a proof-reader, you are advised to identify a suitable proof-reader sooner rather than later and to leave yourself sufficient time before the deadline for proof-reading.

You may wish to form a study group with other students writing a dissertation on a similar topic.

You are strongly advised to run your draft dissertation thesis through turnitin via Moodle before formally submitting your dissertation thesis.

Please remember that you are writing a dissertation thesis for your Master’s award (and not for your employer or sponsor).

On Moodle, via the *Research Methods and the Research Management* module folder, you will be access copies of distinction-standard dissertations for guidance on what an excellent dissertation looks like.

In May, a Postgraduate Study workshop is arranged to discuss dissertation research and writing.

Dissertation format

**Your dissertation thesis should be NO more 15,000 words in length (excluding abstract, contents page, bibliography and appendices).** Please denote the wordcount in your dissertation thesis. Appendices must not be used as a way of bypassing the wordlength: instead, appendices should be used for essential supporting material (eg large sets of data, supporting source and other documentation, interview topic guide/s and questionnaires if relevant).

Dissertations should be properly referenced wherever necessary – please comply with the guidelines on bibliographic referencing contained in the *SSP Referencing Guidelines*. Also, sources of material used in the thesis (eg diagrams, figures, tables) should be acknowledged. It is very important that references are provided in the dissertation thesis to precisely indicate the sources of arguments, data, ideas, information, quotations etc. Incorrect referencing may lead to a deduction of marks in the final mark given to your dissertation thesis. Furthermore, failure to provide references may constitute plagiarism, which is a serious academic offence. Though not plagiarism, students should not re-present work that has already been presented for assessment. The re-presentation of such previously submitted work may lead to a deduction of marks depending on its extent of replication and its fitness for purpose. Generally, the replication of the same work is unlikely to answer two or more coursework requirements.

Your dissertation thesis should be word-processed; should be presented in single-sided form using a 12-point font size and one-and-a-half line-spacing, with a one-inch left margin space; and should be consecutively page-numbered.

The first page, ie the frontsheet, of your dissertation thesis should contain the following details:

* School of Sociology and Social Policy, The University of Nottingham
* your student number (please do not write down your name)
* title of Master’s programme (i.e. MA Criminology, MA Global Citizenship, Human Rights and Identities, MA International Social Policy, Master of Public Administration or MA Public Policy)
* title of dissertation thesis
* date submitted

The dissertation thesis should contain the following:

* frontsheet (as detailed above)
* contents page (including chapter and section titles, appendices, and a list of the numbered diagrams, figures and tables contained in the thesis)
* glossary page (a list of acronyms used in the thesis if needed)
* acknowledgements (if preferred)
* abstract (a 200-word summary of the introduction and conclusion of your thesis)
* chapters (including introductory and concluding chapters)
* bibliography
* appendices (if required; and including, if applicable, participant information sheet, blank consent form)

Dissertation submission

**Students must submit an electronic copy of their dissertation via Moodle.**

If there are extenuating circumstances, students can request an extension to an assignment deadline by submitting an *Extenuating Circumstances Form*. Extensions to deadlines can only be granted for good reason (eg illness, family bereavement, jury service). Extensions cannot be granted for part-time work commitments, computer/printer failure, holidays, etc. More details about extenuating circumstances, including an online *Extenuating Circumstances Form*, can be found at the following webpage:

* <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studentservices/services/extenuating-circumstances.aspx>

Students wanting to apply for extensions to coursework deadlines should contact Tracey Dipaolo, the Faculty of Social Sciences’ Student Welfare Officer. Her office is A106 in the Law and Social Sciences Building; her telephone number is 0115 95 15704; and her e-mail address is: [tracey.dipaolo@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:tracey.dipaolo@nottingham.ac.uk).

Late submission of a dissertation thesis, without an extension granted, will be penalised – five marks will be deducted for each day late (excluding weekends and bank holidays). Please remember that the Board of Examiners meets in mid-to-late-October for December graduands and in early-to mid-March for January graduands. This Board determines Masters’ degree awards, and therefore late submission of dissertations (whether with or without an extension granted) may delay your graduation.

Students are advised to download and keep a hard copy of any website material used in writing their dissertation, and to retain an electronic and hard copy of their submitted dissertation.

Dissertation marking

60 credits are awarded to students who pass their dissertation. The dissertation is therefore **very important** in determining your Master’s degree award.

All dissertation theses are second-marked – your dissertation supervisor will act as the first marker. All dissertation theses are marked and second-marked ‘blind’. Furthermore, a sample of dissertation theses is externally moderated.

Your dissertation thesis will be marked according to the following assessment criteria:

* approach to the topic/relevance to the question set
* descriptive and informational content
* analysis and criticism
* structure and clarity of argument
* presentation of data, support materials, referencing and bibliography

Dissertation theses that are over the maximum word-length will be penalised.

A mark of 50 per cent or more constitutes a pass mark: a mark between 60 and 69 per cent is of merit standard, and 70 per cent or more is of distinction standard. All marks for dissertation theses are provisional until confirmed by the External Examiner. You must get a mark of at least 50 per cent for your dissertation for the award of your Master’s degree.

Marked dissertations, unlike essays etc, will not be normally returned to you within three weeks of submission.

The School awards a prize to the student who submits the best dissertation thesis. This prize will be awarded at the School graduation party held on the day of the winter graduation ceremony.

Recommended reading

* Bell J (2005) *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First Time Researchers in Education and Social Science*
* Bhatt C (2004) ‘Doing a dissertation’ in Seale C (ed) *Researching Society and Culture* pp409-430
* Biggam J (2011) *Succeeding with Your Master’s Dissertation: A Practical Step-by-Step Handbook*
* Blaxter L et al (2006) *How to Research*
* Bond A (2006) *Your Masters Thesis*
* Bui Y N (2009) *How to Write a Master’s Thesis*
* Burnett J (2009) *Doing Your Social Science Dissertation*
* Cottrell S (2003) *The Study Skills Handbook*
* Craswell G & Moore M (2012) *Writing for Academic Success*
* Creasley P (2011) *Doing Essays and Assignments*
* Creme P & Lea M R (2008) *Writing at University: A Guide for Students*
* Hart C (2004) *Doing Your Masters Dissertation*
* Hornsby-Smith M (1993) ‘Gaining access’ in Gilbert N (ed) *Researching Social Life* pp52-67
* Hutchinson H (2010) *Write Great Essays and Dissertations*
* Kelly M (1998) ‘Writing a research proposal’ in Seale C (ed) *Researching Society and Culture* pp111-122
* Kelly M (2004) ‘Research design and proposals’ in Seale C (ed) *Researching Society and Culture* pp129-142
* Kirton B (2011) *Brilliant Dissertation*
* Levin P (2005) *Excellent Dissertations!*
* Lewis M & Reinders H (2003) *Study Skills for Speakers of English as a Second Language*
* Luck M (2001) *Your Student Research Project*
* Mauch J (2003) *Guide to the Successful Thesis and Dissertation: A Handbook for Students and Faculty*
* McMillan K & Weyers J (2011) *How to Write Dissertations and Project Reports*
* Moore S et al (2009) *The Ultimate Study Skills Handbook*
* Northey M (2001) *Making Sense in the Social Sciences: A Student’s Guide to Research, Writing and Style*
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ANNEX A: MA DISSERTATION SUPERVISION RECORD FORM

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**SCHOOL OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL POLICY**

**MA DISSERTATION SUPERVISION RECORD FORM**

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| **NAME OF STUDENT:** |  |
| **MA COURSE:** |  |
| **NAME OF DISSERTATION SUPERVISOR:** |  |

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| **DATE OF TUTORIAL (OR EMAIL TUTORIAL)** | **STUDENT COMMENTS\* (if applicable)** | **STUDENT SIGNATURE** | **SUPERVISOR** **COMMENTS\* (if applicable)** | **SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE** |
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**[\* comments include concerns relating to the supervision process, student progress, etc; please use overleaf for additional comments]**

**THIS COMPLETED DISSERTATION RECORD FORM SHOULD BE RETURNED BY THE STUDENT TO THE SCHOOL OFFICE WHEN SUBMITTING THE DISSERTATION THESIS.**