UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL | ONLINE PROGRAMMES

Management Programmes

Dissertation Student Guidelines

Guidelines for students undertaking dissertations as part of the University of Liverpool's online Management programmes.

LAUREATE ONLINE EDUCATION

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Roles in the dissertation process

Several Laureate Online Education or University of Liverpool roles are referred to in this document according to their functions. The table below explains the part each role has in the dissertation process.

Role	Acronym	Function
Academic Administration Coordinator	AAC	The AAC confirms receipt of your dissertation submission and arranges assessors for submitted papers.
Assessors	-	The people who grade the dissertation after submission. The Dissertation Advisor is the first assessor for the dissertation. Laureate Online Education assigns a second assessor.
Dissertation Advisor	DA	The DA is the faculty member who approves the dissertation proposal and acts as the personal academic advisor for the student as they develop and write their dissertation.
General Dissertation Instructor	GDI	The GDI is the faculty member who teaches the Research Methods (RM) module.
Online Librarian*	-	The online librarian is the University of Liverpool librarian assigned to assist online students. * onlinelibrarian@liverpool.ac.uk
Programme Director	PD	The PD is the academic responsible for delivery of the programme of studies.
Student Support	-	Student Support is a student's prime contact point for all non-academic issues. A student's personal student support manager (SSM) would normally handle most complex queries (or if they were unavailable an SSM from their team with the same level of specialist knowledge), but other members of the support team would handle simple requests for support to ensure a rapid response.
Student Administrator	SA	The SA is responsible for class creation and registering students in class.

Glossary

The following additional terms are referenced within the document:

Term	Acronym	Description
Dissertation Readiness Course	DRC	A self-study course that will be made available to you in Laureate LENS during your sixth module.
International Online Research Ethics Committee	IOREC	A committee that approves the ethical integrity of a dissertation.
Research Methods	RM	This is the module which all students must take before starting their dissertation.

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Dissertation student guidelines

Dissertation introduction

Your dissertation is the culmination of your Masters programme. It offers you the opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge you have acquired in your studies in an applied setting, and thus justify the award of a Master's level degree.

The dissertation is expected to be a scholarly work (that is, based on sound academic principles) that makes a contribution to a field of knowledge. It must demonstrate your ability to use learning derived from your studies to resolve a problem, answer a question or prove/disprove a hypothesis related to business, markets or organisations.

The dissertation should be between 15,000 and 20,000 words in length, excluding appendices and references. If the final thesis is marginally (<20%) outside these limits, the assessors may choose not to apply a penalty if the quality of the dissertation justifies it. If the thesis is substantially outside the limits (>20%) then the assessors will almost certainly penalise the thesis by a one-grade reduction once other criteria have been assessed.

Specialisation students only: Specialisation students will need to complete a dissertation in the area of their chosen degree specialisation (accounting and finance, marketing, HR, oil and gas, etc.) where relevant.

These guidelines explain briefly how the dissertation process works, the steps you need to take to embark on your dissertation, and the requirements which will be placed on you in this final stage of your Masters programme.

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An outline of the dissertation process, and expected outcomes

The key milestones on the route to your dissertation (subject to satisfactory progress) are described briefly in the following table, and in more detail in the sections that follow.

Those elements marked with an asterisk (*) are formal evaluation points in the process which you must achieve. Monthly milestones of progress (months 3-7) are guides to expected progress.

Timing	Action	Who
During module 6	• Complete Dissertation Readiness Course (DRC).	You will be notified by the Student Administration Centre when you can start.
During module 8	• Register for your Research Methods (RM) module	Contact Student Support
End of Week 3 of RM	• Topic area of dissertation approved	GDI
	• Dissertation Advisor agreed. • Assigned to a group classroom in your DAs class. • Aims, objectives, methods and literature review of proposal partially completed as assignments in the RM module.	GDI DA GDI
End of Week 8*of RM	• Submit proposal to RM module to receive DA approval to proceed. • Ethics form completed by Student and DA in the DA class. • DA proposal approval is copied to the DA class approval is confirmed by the GDI (end of Week 8). • RM module completed, final mark for RM awarded.	DA and Student Student/GDI GDI GDI
Month 3	• Research process designed. • Draft of literature review delivered. • Data sources identified.	DA and Student
Month 4	• Literature review amended. • Data collection underway.	DA and Student
Month 5	• Data analysis underway. • Interpretation of data delivered. • Month 5 Progress Report Submitted to the DA class.	DA and Student
Month 6	• Analysis/interpretive chapter delivered.	DA and Student
Month 7	• Discussion, conclusions, data tables (where appropriate) and Introduction delivered. • Month 7 Progress Report Submitted to the DA class.	DA and Student
Month 8*	• Final reviews and Amendments. • Reference list and appendices (where applicable).	DA and Student
Month 9	• Draft dissertation or consultancy project submitted in DA class using Draft Turnitin link at least 21 days before the final submission date. • Final dissertation or consultancy project submitted to Final Turnitin link in DA class.	DA and Student Student

*Some of the more detailed requirements and procedures are detailed below.

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Eligibility and pre-work

The dissertation can be undertaken as soon as you have reached 120 credits, the equivalent of eight modules. After finishing your final module, the maximum period of time you can wait to enter the dissertation classroom is 16 weeks. However, you are strongly advised to begin thinking of a potential topic for your dissertation well before you have completed the modules. As you are working through the programme, be attentive to topics that have particular interest for you and make notes of how you may turn these areas into a dissertation topic. It is extremely important that you find a topic with which you can engage, as you will be expected to spend approximately 600 hours working on it over the 9 months.

Enrolling for your dissertation – the Research Methods (RM) module

If you meet the eligibility criteria listed above, and you are ready to begin your dissertation, please do not hesitate to contact Student Support to discuss starting your dissertation. You will also be contacted by your Student Support regarding your dissertation registration as you approach the end of your modules to discuss getting ready to begin the dissertation, and to help you decide on an appropriate timeline for starting. Your Student Support can help you register for the appropriate class and will discuss how and when that registration is confirmed. If possible, you should complete the self-paced Dissertation Readiness Course to help with your dissertation preparation.

You will join two types of classes related to your dissertation. The first, which you will begin at the start of the dissertation period, is a Research Methods (RM) module, led by a general dissertation instructor (GDI). This module functions in a similar way to those you are already used to in your Masters programme. You will be enrolled with a number of other students embarking on the dissertation at the same time as you. In this module, you will:

- Choose your topic for the dissertation, and have it approved by the GDI
- Learn about research methods, structuring your dissertation and planning the research process
- Share your learning experience with your fellow students as you construct your draft dissertation proposal
- Get feedback on your proposed topic, and on early drafts of sections of your dissertation proposal (similar to the research projects you may have completed in your modules)
- Be evaluated on your understanding of basic research methods

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You will be given lectures and assignments, you will participate in discussions and you will submit work for assessment much like any other Masters module. Guidelines for participation in this module are exactly the same as for those of other modules. However, there are two important differences.

1. After Week 4 you will also join a DA class where you will work for the rest of your dissertation one-on-one with your DA. We will describe this in more detail below.
2. The RM module will stay open at the end of 8 weeks and remain available to you for the duration of your dissertation.

The advantage to you as a student of the RM module remaining open is that it allows you to maintain contact with your fellow students as you work through the dissertation, allowing you to share ideas and experiences with them and learn from each other's progress. You will also be able to refer to the RM module for all relevant dissertation forms and documents.

Research Methods (RM) module: learning objectives

The learning objectives of your RM module are as follows:

- Recognise and critically evaluate different management research designs and the assumptions upon which they are based
- Develop a structured programme of research in pursuit of your dissertation based upon informed choices about the research designs, techniques and procedures to be followed
- Conduct research in a rigorous and systematic fashion
- Synthesise data from a wide variety of sources and integrate appropriate knowledge gained from study in the taught modules into the dissertation.

Students who perform poorly in the RM module

A student who does not demonstrate sufficient knowledge of research methods in the proposal will not be allowed to move to the next stage of the dissertation; the student will need to restart the dissertation process (if on the first attempt) or (if on the second attempt) will be offered a Postgraduate Diploma.

A student will not normally be allowed to repeat the RM module. Approval to repeat the RM module will usually be accepted only if the student has missed part or all of the RM module due to illness or on compassionate grounds, and has subsequently failed their dissertation as a result of these circumstances. Approval to repeat should be sought from the Mitigating Circumstances Committee, through Student Support.

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Students who fail to find a DA after 4 weeks:

Students will, with the help of Laureate academic and student support staff, continue to look for a DA. The deadline for approval of the proposal will not change, however, and the student will remain with the RM cohort with which he or she started. The consequence of being late into the advisor class is that the student risks missing the deadline for proposal approval (8 weeks) which will reduce the amount of time available for the balance of dissertation work.

Enrolling in the DA class

After the third week of your RM module you will have a topic for your dissertation approved by your GDI. If you do not already have a DA for the dissertation, during Weeks 3 and 4 of the RM module, you will communicate with DAs to align your topic with their interests and expertise. By Week 4, you should have a DA that has agreed to supervise your dissertation. You will then join the DA's class (management advisor class) at the end of 4 weeks of the RM module. Please see below for a more detailed description of how you will 'find' your DA.

The majority of your work on the dissertation will now take place in the DA class. You will, however, need to re-enter the RM module to obtain forms and submit your Final Proposal by the end of Week 7 with the approval message from your DA. The GDI will confirm this approval and inform the relevant parties so that you can proceed to work with your DA on your dissertation.

Proposal submission and approval

Before the end of the eighth week of your RM module (the end of your second month) you will need to have obtained approval for your dissertation proposal. Once you have agreed your proposal is ready with your dissertation advisor, the DA will post an approval note in the DA class. You will copy this message and submit it with your proposal to the RM module using the format and structure provided (using the Proposal Proforma Form).

This should be done no later than the end of the eighth week of your RM module.

You must also post an agreement to the Academic Honesty Declaration in the Final Proposals Discussion Board Forum. You must also certify that you have completed the ethical approvals process on your Proposal Proforma.

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This is the first formal checkpoint on your dissertation journey, and your progress will depend on getting through it. Approval is given by your DA. The key criterion for judgement is whether the DA believes you have demonstrated sufficient knowledge of research methods to be allowed to embark on the rigours of the dissertation itself. It is vitally important that you realise the responsibility for your work on your dissertation is entirely yours. Your DA will act as just that — an advisor — and you are strongly recommended to follow their advice. However, it is ultimately up to you to submit the required work on time and to the standards laid down in the student handbook. Failure to do so cannot be blamed on your DA.

You can find the link for the dissertation page for your programme in the right-hand menu of your programme homepage (either under 'Dissertation' or 'Final Research Project'.

If you don't already have the homepage for your programme bookmarked you can find it by going to the page for Management programmes and selecting your programme from the list, taking care to select the correct link if there are different links for your programme according to the date you started your programme.

Once your proposal has been approved, then you will be allowed to continue with the various stages of your dissertation.

Ethical policy

Laureate Online Education and the University of Liverpool are concerned to ensure that any research conducted as part of the award of a degree conforms to legal requirements and the University's own ethical guidelines.

The remit of the IOREC is to review all research proposals by online students and ensure they abide by the research ethics principles put forward by the Declaration of Helsinki (for medical fields) and the Economic and Social Research Council (for all other fields) as well as the University's good practice guidelines on the proper conduct of research, together with the codes of practice laid down by the relevant professional and learned societies in the field.

The ethics review steps are outlined in a separate document and must be followed before a proposal may be approved and before the student begins to conduct any investigations.

Students who fail to achieve proposal approval after 8 weeks:

Students are expected to have their proposals approved by the end of Week 8 of their RM module. Failure to do so will reduce the amount of time that you have to work on the chapters of your dissertation.

In the event that the student has failed to achieve proposal approval at the end of Week 8 of the RM module, the DA should indicate the reason for the delay to the GDI.

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Students who are absent from the DA class, or who otherwise fail to meet the minimum participation requirements

If the DA finds during any given month that the student has been unacceptably absent from the class, the DA will refer the case directly to Student Support for follow up with the student.

Submission of draft dissertation

You will be expected to submit a full draft of your dissertation to your DA class at least 21 days before the deadline for final dissertation submission. The DA will review for formatting and structure only at this stage.

You will find in your DA class a link to submit your draft dissertation through the Turnitin plagiarism checking tool. This is to enable you to review your draft for compliance with our plagiarism guidelines and make any minor adjustments to your citation practices before your final submission. As this is a draft submission, your dissertation will not be added to the main Turnitin database and will not be matched against your final submission. Please note that this checking process is your responsibility and will not involve your DA.

Submission of final dissertation or consultancy project

You should submit the final version of your dissertation or consultancy project to the Turnitin link by clicking on the 'Final Submission tab' in your DA class before the 28th day of the tenth month of your dissertation (counting the month you started as your first month). You should also submit your final dissertation, clearly labelled, to your RM group room.

Marking your dissertation

Your dissertation will then be marked by your DA, as the first assessor, and by a second assessor appointed by Laureate. Once the final submission has been made, you will receive an email confirming the receipt of your dissertation. This contains the final acceptance of your dissertation and marks the point at which communication between you and your DA should end so that the grading process can begin.

Grading will continue for several weeks once the dissertation is complete. Final grades will be released to you as soon as possible after the Board of Examiners has met and agreed on a final award. This could mean a wait of several months, depending upon the deadline and submission date of the dissertation. You will be contacted by Student Support with official confirmation of the results once the Board of Examiners has made its decision.

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Dissertation deadlines

The dissertation deadline is also referred to as the submission date. The official submission date for all student dissertations is the 28th day of the ninth month from the start of the dissertation (Research Methods) module. As an example, a student starting the dissertation module on 17 March will have a submission date of 28 December.

The official submission time is considered to be Midnight Blackboard time, which is Eastern Time Zone time, on the day of the official submission deadline. There will be an additional 6-hour window for students living west of the Eastern Time Zone as far as the International Date Line (American Samoa) in order not to create an unfair disadvantage

Extensions

Extensions will not normally be granted except in clearly unexpected circumstances beyond student control, such as in cases of real personal/family/medical/work emergencies, or in instances where the Disability Centre have authorised an extended deadline following a review. Please contact student support or view the support website for details of making a claim for Mitigating Circumstances to be taken into consideration, or to learn about the Disability Centre.

Late Submission

1.1 All student dissertations submitted up to 10 calendar days after the official submission date will be assessed

1.2 Dissertations submitted after the 28th day of the month (the official submission date) but before the end of the 10-day penalty window will have their dissertations graded on merit by their assessors.

1.3 Where a student's dissertation is found to have been submitted late, the penalties described in this document will be automatically applied to the work after it has been graded.

1.4 For every two calendar days after the official submission date, 5% of the total marks available for the dissertation component shall be deducted from the assessment mark, up to a maximum of 25% (ie. for work marked out of 100, five marks per two days will be deducted; for work marked out of 20, one mark per two days will be deducted);

1.5 If the student work has reached a passing standard on merit, the late penalty will not reduce the grade for the work below the Pass mark for the assessment.

1.6 Work assessed below the pass mark on merit will not be penalised for late submission of up to ten days.

1.7 All work submitted ten calendar days after the official submission deadline will receive a mark of zero.

1.8 Dispensation (without penalty) for the late submission of work may be granted on medical or other exceptional grounds in accordance with the Policy on Mitigating Circumstances.

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Dissertation Assessment Criteria

90% to 100%	Theoretically or practically significant topic; clearly defined research question, meticulous literature review, careful execution of research design, high quality analysis, discussion and conclusions. Signs of originality in selection of question and / or approach to research. Presentation excellent. Makes a significant contribution to knowledge. Potentially publishable.
80% to 89%	Very carefully designed and executed study. Sound theoretical framework based upon good literature review and carefully formulated approach. Clearly articulated research question, use of appropriate methodology, reflective and thorough discussion, defensible conclusions. Displays mastery of the subject matter and of appropriate theories and concepts. Presentation excellent. Useful contribution to knowledge. Potentially publishable with some refocusing.
70% to 79%	Very carefully designed and executed study. Sound theoretical framework based upon good literature review. Carefully formulated approach and evidence of independent critical ability. Clear conclusions, detailed recommendations for practice. Good critical grasp of relevant theories and concepts. Presentation excellent.
60% to 69%	Well designed and executed study. Adequate literature review and framing of study and good effort to collect data. Ability to reflect upon weaknesses in approach. Clear conclusions, detailed recommendations for practice. Presentation good.
50% to 59%	Generally adequate design and execution. Generally adequate literature review and framing of study and attempt to collect data but may contain weaknesses in approach, for example, poor alignment of research question and methodology. Failure to obtain all of the requisite data, conclusions lame, recommendations for practice weak or omitted. Presentation satisfactory.
40% to 49%	Inadequate evidence of independent research (e.g. inadequate design and execution). Literature review partial, framing of study imprecise, data collection partial, poor alignment of research question and methodology. Conclusions lame, recommendations for practice weak or omitted. Presentation barely satisfactory.
30% to 39%	Makes some attempt to conduct independent research but is significantly deficient in one or more of the following: adequacy of literature review; design and methodology; data collection, analysis, discussion and conclusions and general standard of presentation.
0% to 29%	Submission contains serious weaknesses on one or more of the following counts: adequacy of literature review; design and methodology; data collection, analysis, discussion and conclusions and general standard of presentation.

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Some Questions and Answers

You said it must be an original work. What does that mean?

The dissertation must constitute an original application of theory to a business problem or situation. Originality implies that you should contribute something to the knowledge of the topic area, often through the work involved, such as interviews, surveys, observing a situation or obtaining and analysing data from a source such as a government department. Usually, the practical work that you do, such as interviewing people in your workplace, will ensure that the study is original. It must, of course, be original also in the sense of not being copied from an existing source.

Does the dissertation have to involve doing practical work? Can I just study something and write about that?

If you simply studied something, for example the present state of the economy, then it might not be an 'original application of theory'; it could be simply an extract of existing sources. If your study applied previous knowledge to a new situation, then it could contribute something original.

What are research methods and are they the same as research methodology?

Research methodology and research methods are not the same thing. Research methodology is the overall approach that you adopt in your study. Research methods are the specific ways by which you go about collecting data to answer your research questions. For example, if one of your research questions was 'Do employees feel happier under the new culture of the company?', then the methods for answering this question might include interviews, focus groups or surveys, and possibly, less directly, analysis of staff turnover figures.

Contrary to the impression some people gain from some texts, reviewing published research is not a method of research, and it belongs in the literature review, not the methods section.

Documentary research is not a literature review, but it is the extraction of information from public or other documents—for instance, population statistics from census data.

I am not in business. I work in the not-for-profit sector. Is this a disadvantage?

Although we often speak of the business or the firm, this normally includes the public sector, charities, colleges, universities, etc. You should not find this to be a disadvantage, as there is ample scope to apply the business disciplines to these areas.

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I am a management student and I work in the computing department and want to do something in this area. Is computing a business discipline?

A dissertation that studies the implementation of a system would be within the scope of the management Masters, if it is concerned with, for example, financial appraisal or employee motivation, but if it was concerned only with computer programming, for example, it would not be.

I have looked in the library and there is nothing on Bluetooth technology, which is what I want to write about.

We assume you are not writing about Bluetooth technology as such because that would be a computer topic, so we assume your dissertation is about a business application of Bluetooth technology. If you are studying the effect of the new technology on marketing a product, then there is material in the library on marketing an innovative product. If you are studying the effect of a new technology on competitive position, then you could look up disruptive technology. Every topic has a theoretical foundation that can be found in the literature, but it may not be easy to identify. You should refer back to your Information Literacy module, ask your DA and, if still stuck, ask the online librarian.

Do I have to use primary data? Can I use other people's data?

You do not have to have numerical data at all, and you can make use of data collected by, for example, government departments or any other reliable source. You can also use work done by other people, but this must form a minor part of the dissertation and must be clearly denoted and not form the main research.

Is the length of 15,000 to 20,000 a strict rule?

If a dissertation is less than 15,000 words, then the markers will penalise any inadequacy resulting from the length, but not the word count specifically. If it is between 20,000 words and 24,000 words excluding appendices, then unnecessary verbosity will be penalised. However, if it is over 24,000 words, the grade will be reduced by one grade and by two grades if over 30,000 words.

Can I publish or sell my dissertation?

The University of Liverpool's policy on the intellectual property rights of student dissertation is that, while all postgraduate students are required to assign all intellectual property rights to the University, the students are the effective copyright holders of their dissertations. The University will not publish a student's work, or place a copy of the work in the Library, without the author's consent.

In cases where students wish to publish or sell their dissertation, the University has no rights over such a publication. However, the work should be viewed as a collaboration between the student and DA and the student and DA should reach an agreement regarding authorship and acknowledgements. It is expected that the author will include the University of Liverpool, Laureate Online Education and the DA in the acknowledgements.

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Students are required to notify the University/Laureate if any commercial exploitation of their dissertation work is planned. The University will not assert any claim of intellectual property rights, however, unless there is a reasonable argument that the DA should share in the benefits of any exploitation.

In a case where a student's dissertation is sponsored by their employer or relates directly to their employment, the University will not make any claim on the property rights of the work.

In short, it is not in the interests of the University to forcibly claim rights over a piece of work or information. At most, the University will request acknowledgement that the work was carried out as part of the student's studies with the University.

My employer wants my dissertation kept confidential.

Confidentiality can only be offered to a limited extent. All dissertations must be made available to DAs/CAs, second assessors and members of the Board of Examiners. Our policy of transparency allows the classroom to be read by all Instructors.

Can I send a questionnaire to all the other students as part of my research?

We agree in our contract with students to use their personal data including email addresses only for the purposes of the course, so we cannot allow dissertation students to use the online classroom in Laureate LENS for sending out questionnaires generally. However, students have put messages in the Student Community in Laureate LENS asking for volunteers.

My dissertation concerns some private products. Is that a problem?

Students should seek advice from the University through the director of online studies if any ethical problem is at all probable. This should emerge from your completion of the ethical checklist, as part of your proposal approval process. Some, but not all, of the areas to be aware of are questionnaires that ask for personal, medical, sexual or racial data, or where you are expecting to work with children.

If it emerges from completing this checklist that your dissertation topic is likely to raise an ethical issue, you should discuss this with your DA. There are two possible outcomes:

1. You will be required to seek full ethical approval from the University of Liverpool's Ethics Committee. This may take a while and you may not receive the necessary approval to continue depending on the issue.
2. You adjust the scope of your dissertation to remove the ethically sensitive element. Sometimes a small change to your intended scope or methods will remove the potential for an ethical problem.

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