**Basic Guidance for Layout and Content of Dissertation**

**Dissertation Cover must include:**

The Module Title

The dissertation title

Student’s full name and university registration number

Personal tutor’s full name and title

The date of submission

Word count

*And if needed* - Confidential

**Inside the cover should be the following sections/chapters.**

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| [Separate Sheet (s)] Abstract (400 words maximum) |
| [Separate Sheet (s)] Acknowledgements |
| [Separate Sheet (s)] Contents:List of Chapter Headings (pages where found)List of Tables (pages where found)List of Figures (where found)List of Appendices (pages where found) |
| [Separate Sheet (s)] Introduction |
| [Separate Sheet (s)] Literature Review; [Separate Sheet (s)] Methodology; [Separate Sheet (s)] Findings; [Separate Sheet (s)] Analysis and Discussion/Evaluation; [Separate Sheet (s)] Conclusions. |
| [Separate Sheet (s)] Bibliography |
| [Separate Sheet (s)] Full List of References – harvard referencing 40+ references |
| [Separate Sheet (s)] Appendices |

**1.0 Main Chapter Notes**

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| 1. **Chapter 1: Introduction**
* A statement about the topic and the specific research questions arising from it and the context in which your research questions will be placed. A brief summary in final section of introduction summarising each following chapter.
1. **Chapter 2: Literature Review**
* Critical review of the academic literature from which you formulated your research questions, using mainly peer reviewed journal articles.
1. **Chapter 3: Methodology**
* Clear brief restatement of your research question.
* Description of the research methods that you have chosen to investigate each part of your research problem.
* Explanation of why the methods are appropriate to answer the research questions posed.
* A description of how and where you looked for information should be included and of key words that drove your search.
* Must use academic methodology to support your explanation of methods.
1. **Chapter 4: Findings**
* May vary depending on whether you are using primary, secondary or mixed methods.
* Primary or mixed should present your key results and outcomes including summary diagrammatic and tabular information essential to the argument in your chapter text.
* Where secondary data findings are evident there should be a presentation and critical review of those empirical sources pertaining to the topic. This may involve some data manipulation
* You should place any figures, tables or copies of questionnaires that interfere with the flow or sense of your narrative in the appendices.
1. **Chapter 5: Analysis of Results** Your content at a minimum should provide answers to the following questions:
* Is your research question answered?
* What are the strengths and weaknesses of the approach that you took?
* How do your findings relate to the academic literature?
1. **Chapter 6: Conclusions ( and if appropriate your recommendations)** Your conclusion may include these 4 broad elements:
2. A summary of the results of your study.
3. A review of the implications of your study for practice.
4. Limitations of the research.
5. A review of the contribution your study has made to the development of the academic literature.
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**2.0 Completing the Key Components of your Dissertation:**

It is likely that the key components of your dissertation will possess the following broad characteristics:

**The Abstract**

An abstract is a **critically important element** of a dissertation. Its purpose is to summarise in a concise statement, the entire dissertation. It should provide broad answers to these questions.

1. What is the purpose of the dissertation?
2. What research have you undertaken?
3. What conclusions have you drawn and how have you managed the process that led up to those conclusions?

It will be the **first element** of your dissertation that will be read, therefore it must be a **model of clarity** and not something added as an afterthought. It permits your **examiner** quickly to understand what has been accomplished and it allows other readers to determine without reading the whole dissertation whether it will be profitable to continue reading.

You are likely to finalise it only when you have completed the rest of the dissertation and with the full knowledge of everything you have read and written. You will only have 350-400 words available and so you must use them well in order to summarise **succinctly but intelligibly,** a whole year’s work.

Normally an abstract does not contain references and it is customary to use the active voice in your abstract. This means using phrases such as, **“The dissertation examines (or examined) recent approaches to….”,** rather than using passive phrases such as, “Recent approaches to … were investigated.”

**Chapter 1: The Introduction**

This will explain the background to your dissertation and briefly outline the importance of your topic. It is **likely to include**:

1. the aims and objectives of the dissertation
2. definitions of key terms and concepts;
3. relevant background information such as history, financial circumstances, market type and competition conditions;
4. organisation structure and information relating to an industrial sector or a case study organisation or issue.
5. an outline of, and introduction to subsequent chapters

**Chapter 2: The Literature Review**

The Literature Review that you undertook in the Autumn Term will unlikely be included in the dissertation without changes. You are advised to update your version of the Literature Review included in the completed dissertation

**Please note,** not all material from refereed journal articles and higher level textbooks that is cited and used in the dissertation will form part of the Literature Review.

**For example** if a research question considers the relationship between strategy and structure in the Telecommunications’ sector, and it requires that contextual or background information is included in the ‘Introduction’, about the main competitors, the market structure, the regulatory environment and recent developments in technology or trends in consumer demand etc. then this will **not form part of The Literature Review.**

**For example** Secondary Empirical Sources (that are obtained as raw qualitative or quantitative data or summary data from Governmental, inter-governmental and business data bases) that you use as a benchmark or to support your argument in the Findings Section will **not form part of The Literature Review.**

**Chapter 3: The Methodology**

In a strategy and management dissertation this is a **key element.** Methodology refers to the choice and use of particular frameworks and tools for data gathering and data analysis.

1. **Data gathering methodologies** include interviews, questionnaires and observation.
2. **Data analysis methodologies** include content analysis, discourse analysis, semiotic analysis and statistical analysis.

There are **many varieties of each methodology** and you must specify the methodological tools that you employ. For example, interviews can be classified as, ‘structured’, ‘semi-structured’, and ‘open-ended’ and **you must specify which you are employing** and indicate which (if any) of the studies considered in your Literature Review, employed the same methodology.

You must include a rationale for your choice of methodology both for gathering data and for analysing it. In doing so, you provide an ‘audit trail’ for your work and you are more likely to produce a good methodology chapter. Methodological theory must be used to support and justify choices and decisions made. In broad terms your rationale for choosing a particular method or research instrument should include answers to some of the following sort of questions:

1. Why did you choose interviews?
2. Why did you choose semi-structured interviews?
3. Why did you use audio recording?
4. Which relevant study approached interviews in a similar fashion?
5. How did you select your participants?
6. Which reputable study selected participants in a similar manner?
7. Why you did not include certain segments of the population within your sample?
8. What are the limitations of your sample?
9. Where there any ethical issues and how where they dealt with?

In this way your methodology chapter shows that you understand the use, and limitations of certain research instruments.

In more general terms you must explain how the investigation was carried out:

1. You must explain your approach to achieving the aims set out in the introduction.
2. You must outline clearly how you approached and utilised the secondary data.
3. You must explain your overall research design.
4. You must justify your chosen method(s).
5. You must consider issues of sampling and indicate how representative your study is.
6. You must outline your approach to the data analysis.
7. You must present the methods of data collection that you considered and rejected.

Above leads to consideration of alternative methodological tools that you might have employed and where these were employed in studies you considered for your Literature Review then you must explain their limitations for your own methodology.

**Chapter 4 & 5:****The Findings/Analysis**

The precise ways in which you report your ‘findings’ will depend heavily upon the methodologies employed, so it is difficult to provide little more than the most general of guidelines. That said, in all instances it is important that you go beyond a basic description of the data (e.g. simply reporting which strategies were employed by which companies). Findings and Analysis can be two separate chapters or one combined chapter.

With that warning in mind the following guidelines might be considered when reporting data:

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| **FINDINGS GUIDELINES** |
| 1. Data should be presented as **clearly as possible** and if possible sufficient data should be included in an appendix for the reader to replicate your approach and evaluate it.
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| 1. Select only the **most important tabular data** for inclusion in the main body of your text.
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| 1. Use a **varied format for presentation** of your data: graphs; tables; figures or illustrative quotes and remember to label them.
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| 1. **Avoid any reference to ‘statistical findings’** unless you can specify their ‘statistical significance’.
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| 1. Do not just restate the contents of the data in the text but help the reader to **make sense of the patterns in the data.**
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| 1. Constantly **refer back to your research questions** so that you can interrogate the findings consistently and logically.
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| 1. Use your findings and **relate them to the published studies that were outlined in your Literature Review.** Where there are differences between the two you must provide an explanation.
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| 1. Indicate the general **limitations of your study** and the specific limitations of your **sample**.
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| 1. Point out the extent to which your **findings are specific to one context** and how your interpretation has been influenced by the theoretical assumptions of a published study.
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| 1. Indicate any **insights revealed by your study** and what others may be able to learn from them.
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| 1. Finally, explicitly **restate your theoretical framework before discussing any broader implications** arising from your work, so that it is clear that the implications relate to that framework and are not just logical consequences of the work you have undertaken.
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**Chapter 6: The Conclusion**

There is a tendency to do one of two things in the conclusion:

1. To repeat every major point made throughout the dissertation in as succinct a manner as possible.
2. To assume that you have said everything that needs to be said and therefore to finish with a few perfunctory remarks

TS Eliot (1925) The Hollow Men, in the conclusion to the first stanza of his great work writes,

“This is the way the world ends

Not with a bang but a whimper”

But Eliot was discussing the world and not your dissertation and if he had been he might have written,

“This is the way the essay ends

**Not with a whimper but with a bang”**

That does not mean that you introduce anything new that you have not discussed before or tell a joke or include a fatuous quotation but what it does mean is that you make the conclusion worth reading so that your reader is glad that he/she has taken the trouble to do so. Remember and you may think that I am stating the obvious here, that this is the last element of your work that the reader reads. You can ensure that they carry away an impression of the internal coherence of your work as you draw it all together and of the clarity of your thinking. Psychologically, you have the opportunity to remind him/her again of the quality of your work just before he/she awards it a mark.

For this reason you should give your conclusion as much attention as you gave to your abstract: the first element of your work encountered by the reader.

At a bare minimum your conclusion should:

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| * 1. Summarise your findings.
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| * 1. Highlight the key issues to emerge and in particular any new implications.
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| * 1. Consider whether you accomplished your aims.
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| * 1. Discuss the broad limitations of your research and if appropriate, indicate any areas for further research and make any recommendations.
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**Appendices**

* Must include a completed and signed ethics form.
* Can include data
* If using a questionnaire to gather data, include a blank version in the appendices