

Dissertation Writing Workshop



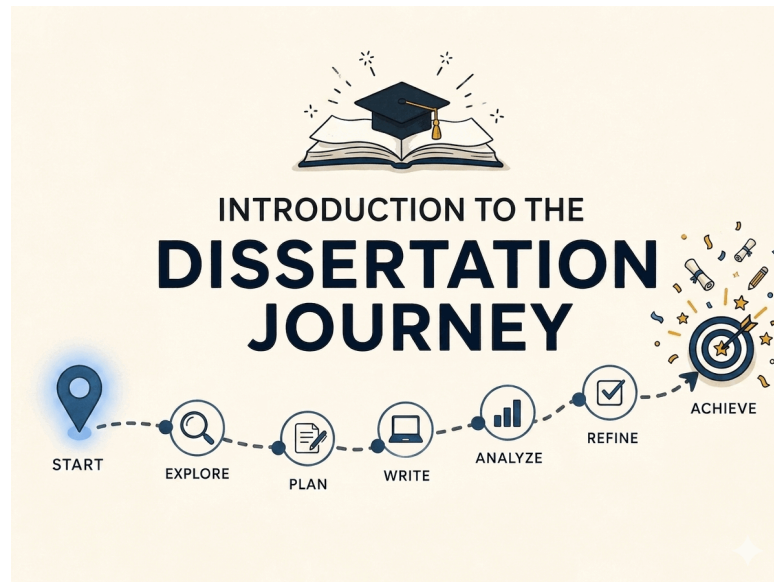
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Objectives



Introduction



Introduction to the Dissertation Journey and Topic Ideation



1. Understanding the Master's Dissertation

What is a Master's Dissertation?



A Master's dissertation is a **substantial academic research** project written at the end of a Master's programme. It investigates a **specific research problem** or question through a systematic process of **reading, analysis, interpretation, and argumentation**. In Literature and Civilization, the dissertation usually focuses on a literary, cultural, historical, social, political, or interdisciplinary issue and requires the student to engage critically with both primary sources and secondary academic sources. A dissertation is therefore more than a long piece of writing.

It is a **research-based academic argument** in which the student:

- Identifies a research area or problem
- Formulates a focused research question
- Develops a clear argument or thesis
- Reviews relevant academic literature
- Selects appropriate primary and secondary sources
- Applies an appropriate theoretical or analytical approach
- Analyses and interprets evidence
- Presents findings in a logical structure
- Acknowledges and documents sources correctly
- Reaches a reasoned conclusion.

A Master's Dissertation:

- ✓ Is the final project for a master's degree
- ✓ Describes the results of original research
- ✓ Contains a dissertation question & an answer to it



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Reminder

A dissertation is not simply a **summary of what other scholars have said**. It is an **opportunity to investigate a question and construct your own academically supported argument**

On the Purpose of a Master's Dissertation



The dissertation allows you to demonstrate that you can move from being a student who receives knowledge to a researcher who produces and communicates knowledge. At Master's level, you are expected to become increasingly independent in your research. A dissertation enables you to demonstrate your ability to:

- Identify a meaningful research topic.
- Narrow a broad topic into a manageable research problem.
- Formulate a research question. Engage with existing scholarship.
- Analyze primary materials critically.
- Construct a coherent academic argument.
- Use evidence appropriately.
- Apply relevant concepts, theories, or methodologies.
- Organize a sustained research project.
- Communicate your findings using academic conventions.

Note

Your dissertation **does not have to discover something that nobody in the world has ever discussed**. At Master's level, originality can take different forms. You may: examine a familiar text from a different perspective; apply an existing theory to a new corpus; compare texts, authors, periods, or cultural phenomena; revisit an existing debate; focus on an aspect that has received limited attention; combine perspectives from different fields; offer a new interpretation of existing material.

On the Academic Value of the Dissertation



The academic value of a dissertation refers to its contribution to knowledge, interpretation, discussion, or understanding within a particular field of study. For a Master's student, this contribution may be relatively focused. Your dissertation demonstrates that you can participate in an existing academic conversation.

Why is the Dissertation Important ?

A dissertation helps you develop:

Research skills → finding, selecting, evaluating, and organising academic sources.

Critical thinking → questioning assumptions, comparing perspectives, and evaluating arguments.

Analytical skills → examining texts, historical documents, cultural phenomena, or other materials closely.

Argumentation skills → developing and defending a position using evidence.

Academic writing skills → producing a sustained, coherent, well-documented research text.

Research autonomy → making informed decisions about your topic, corpus, methodology, and sources.

Professional skills → planning a long-term project, meeting deadlines, presenting findings, and responding to feedback.

The Dissertation in Literature and Civilization



A dissertation in Literature and Civilization investigates a focused question related to literary texts, cultural practices, historical contexts, societies, identities, ideologies, or the relationship between these areas. Because your speciality combines Literature and Civilization, your dissertation may approach a subject from one field or bring the two fields into dialogue.

Literature-oriented research may focus on: a novel, poem, play, short story, or collection; an author or group of authors; a literary movement; a genre; a literary theme; narrative techniques; characterization; symbolism; representation; identity; race, gender, class, or power; literary theory; adaptation; comparative literature.

Civilization-oriented research may focus on: historical events; political developments; social transformations; cultural practices; institutions; migration; colonialism and postcolonialism; national identity; cultural identity; social movements; media and popular culture; relations between countries or cultures; representations of historical or cultural events.

2. Navigating the Dissertation Process

From Choosing a topic to Defending the Dissertation



The dissertation process moves from selecting a topic to developing a research question, conducting research, writing and revising the dissertation, and finally presenting and defending the research.

Key Stages of Dissertation Writing



The dissertation process can be understood as a sequence of interconnected stages:

Topic: Selecting a focused area of interest to investigate.

Research Question: Formulating a clear question that guides the research. **Literature Review:** Examining and evaluating existing research related to the topic.

Methodology: Deciding how the research will be conducted and which methods or approaches will be used.

Data/Textual Analysis: Examining the selected data, texts, or sources to answer the research question.

Writing: Presenting the research, analysis, and argument in a clear academic structure.

Revision: Reviewing, improving, and proofreading the dissertation based on feedback and self-evaluation.

Defense: Presenting and discussing the research before an academic panel.

How the Stages Are Interconnected



Each stage builds on the previous one. A well-defined topic leads to a focused research question, which guides the sources, methodology, and analysis, ultimately shaping the argument and conclusion.

A Master's Dissertation:

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Overview of the Dissertation Timeline



The dissertation is a long-term process that requires careful planning. Students should set realistic deadlines, monitor their progress, and allow enough time for research, writing, revision, and defense preparation.

3. From Academic Interests to Research Topics

Identifying Academic and Literary Interests: Start by identifying subjects, authors, texts, periods, theories, or issues that genuinely interest you. Your interest provides the starting point for choosing a research area.

Exploring Areas of Interest in Literature and Civilization: Consider possible areas such as literary genres, identity, culture, history, colonialism, gender, race, migration, politics, or social change, and think about what you would like to investigate within them.

Narrowing Down a Broad Area: A broad area must be made specific and manageable by limiting it according to the text/corpus, period, place, author, theme, or concept you want to study.

Formulating a Potential Research Topic: Turn your narrowed area into a clear, specific research topic that indicates what you intend to investigate.



Example of narrowing down a topic: Identity → Cultural Identity → Cultural Identity in Contemporary African American Literature



Example of formulating a potential Research Topic: The Representation of Cultural Identity in Contemporary African American Young Adult Literature.

4. From Research Topics to Research Questions

What is a Research Questions?



A research question is a clear, focused question that defines what the dissertation aims to investigate and answer. It guides the research process and shapes the choice of sources and methodology.

Broad vs. Focused Research Questions



Broad: covers a large area and is difficult to investigate in depth.

Example: How is identity represented in literature?

Focused: specifies what, where, or how the issue will be investigated. **Example:** How is cultural identity represented in selected contemporary African American novels?

Characteristics of an Effective Research Question



« An effective research question should be: **Clear and easy to understand.**

Focused and manageable.

Researchable using available sources.

Relevant to the field of study.

Analytical, requiring investigation rather than a simple factual answer.



Research interest: Identity in African American literature



Focused area: Cultural identity in African American YA literature



Preliminary research question: How do selected African American YA novels represent cultural identity?

5. Academic Integrity and Ethical Research

What is Academic Integrity?



Academic integrity means conducting research and writing honestly, responsibly, and transparently, while acknowledging the work of others.

Plagiarism and Proper Attribution



Plagiarism is presenting someone else's words, ideas, or work as your own. Proper attribution means clearly acknowledging the original source.

Responsible Use of Sources



Use reliable and relevant sources, evaluate them critically, and represent authors' ideas accurately without misquotation or distortion.

Ethical Considerations in Humanities Research



Researchers should respect intellectual property, privacy, consent, cultural contexts, and the responsible representation of people and communities.

Referencing and Citation



Citations and references give credit to sources, allow readers to verify information, and demonstrate the academic basis of your research.

From Idea to Research Question and Thesis Statement



1. From Academic Interest to Research Idea

Choosing a dissertation topic begins with identifying what interests you as a student and researcher. However, an academic interest must gradually be transformed into a clear, specific, and researchable idea. This section will guide you from a general area of interest to a focused research direction in Literature and Civilization.

Identifying Areas of Interest



Identify literary, cultural, historical, or social subjects that interest you within Civilization and Literature.

Generating Research Ideas



Research ideas can emerge from texts, authors, themes, theories, historical events, cultural issues, or current scholarly debates.

Connecting Interests to Scholarly Issues



Relate your interests to existing research, academic discussions, or questions that remain open for investigation.

Moving from General to Specific



A broad subject must be narrowed into a specific and manageable area of investigation.



General subject → Area of interest → Research idea → Specific area

2. Narrowing Down the Research Idea

A research idea often begins as a broad subject, but a dissertation requires a focused and manageable area of investigation. Narrowing your idea helps you define exactly what you want to study and ensures that the project is relevant and feasible.

Broad vs. Focused Topics Broad:



Broad: Identity in African American literature

Focused: The representation of racial identity in selected African American YA novels

Identifying a Specific Focus



Narrow your topic by selecting a specific text, author, period, movement, theme, issue, or cultural phenomenon.

Scope, Relevance, and Feasibility



Ask whether the topic is:

- Manageable within the available time and length.
- Relevant to Literature and Civilization.
- Researchable with sufficient academic sources.



-Avoid Overly Broad or Descriptive Topics

-Avoid topics that try to cover too much or simply describe a text, author, or phenomenon without analyzing a specific issue.

Broad topic → Specific focus → Manageable research idea

3. Formulating a Research Question

What Is a Research Question?



A research question is a clear and focused question that the dissertation seeks to answer through research and analysis.

Topic vs. Problem vs. Question



Research Topic: The general subject you want to study.

Research Problem: The specific issue, gap, or difficulty within that topic that requires investigation.

Research Question: The question you formulate to investigate the problem.

Characteristics of an Effective Research Question



An effective question should be clear, focused, researchable, relevant, manageable, and analytical.

Types of Research Questions



Common types include:

Descriptive: What / Which?

Comparative: How does X differ from Y?

Analytical: How / Why?

Interpretive: What does X reveal or mean?

Application: From Research Idea to Research Question

Research idea: Cultural identity in African American literature

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Focused area: Cultural identity in contemporary African American YA novels

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Research question: How do selected contemporary African American YA novels represent cultural identity?

4. Developing a Thesis Statement

Once you have formulated a clear research question, the next step is to develop a thesis statement. The thesis gives direction to your dissertation by stating the main argument or position you intend to develop and support through your research.

What Is a Thesis Statement?

A thesis statement is a clear statement that expresses the central argument or claim of your dissertation.

Research Question vs. Thesis Statement

Research question: What do I want to investigate?

Thesis statement: What do I argue about it?



Question → Investigation → Argument

Characteristics of an Effective Thesis Statement

A good thesis should be specific, clear, arguable, focused, and supported by evidence.



Research question: How do selected African American YA novels represent cultural identity?

Thesis statement: Selected African American YA novels represent cultural identity as a complex process shaped by family, community, history, and experiences of racial discrimination.



Developing Your Thesis Your thesis should not simply repeat the research question. It should provide a possible answer or argument that your research will investigate and support.

5. Connecting the Research Question and Thesis Statement

How the Research Question Guides the Investigation



The research question defines what you need to investigate and guides your choice of sources, methodology, and analysis.

How the Thesis Provides the Central Argument



The thesis statement presents the main argument that your dissertation will develop and support through your research.

Alignment Between Topic, Question, and Thesis



These three elements must work together: Topic → Research Question → Thesis Statement

The progression of the lectures So Far



Academic Interest

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Research Idea

↓

Focused Topic

↓

Research Question

↓

Thesis Statement