

[Screen 1] - Introduction

Welcome to the dissertation proposal writing module! There are three main tasks and objectives for this first week:

1. Helping you to understand what a dissertation is and why you are being asked to do one: this is the interactive lesson you are about to do on Blackboard.
2. Reviewing your study and writing skills so you are best prepared for the challenges ahead: for this, you need to download and complete the study skills audit sheet (it's in the document folder for this week). [Link to study skills audit.]
3. Introducing you to the Proposal Template. The template is in the document folder together with a short description of how it works. You don't need to do anything with it this week but please take a look at it. You might want to save a copy to your memory pen if you have one, or email it to yourself. [Link to Proposal Template]

You will find it useful to have a pen and paper by the computer for making notes, but you do not need to print off anything this week.



Alicja Adwent - Autumn in Ontario

[Screen 1 (cont.)] – Introduction (cont.)

Before we get down to work, let's check everybody's here. Go to the discussion board and post a short announcement (50 words) about yourself. Say:

- Who you are;
- Why you are transferring from the foundation into the degree course;
- ... and give three key words or phrases intimately connected with you: these need not have anything to do with art, but choose carefully because we will revisit them later! The moderator will join in this activity.

If you choose to complete this unit in one go, it should not take you more than one hour.



Norman Foster - Reichstag, spiral walkway up dome

[Screen 2] - What is a dissertation?

Don't be afraid if you have never met the word **dissertation** before. You may also have heard, or not, of the terms **extended essay** and **thesis**. They are all roughly the same thing.

Embedded within this unit are a number of quiz style questions. So you understand how they work, we start with three examples.

When you've finished, click the feedback button.

The questions are not a test! They are for you to find out what you already know and partly for us to see the areas where you might need more help. So it's fine if your answers don't match the official ones.



Antonio Gaudi - Sagrada Familia

[Screen 3a] - Example question 1

Multiple choice. Choose one answer only:

The average length of an undergraduate dissertation in Fine Art is:

- a. Up to 5,000 words
- b. 5,000-10,000 words
- c. 10,000+ words

Feedback: The answer is b. Under 5,000 words is not much more than an essay, and dissertations over 10,000 words are usually only demanded at Masters level.



Henry Moore - bow-string sundial: "Man enters the cosmos"

[Screen 3b] - Example question 2.

Write a sentence in a text box. You will usually be limited to a certain number of words or characters!

Write a sentence (no more than 30) words about this topic:

“What would make me want to read somebody else’s dissertation?”

There is no ‘correct answer’ feedback, usually just a suggestion or two. Don’t worry if your answer seems entirely different: this type of question is only used where we want to make you reflect on, or think about your *personal* point of view.

Feedback - likely answers are: relevance to my subject area, lively style, keeps to the point, has something interesting to say.



BBC - Two men knitting

[Screen 3c] - Example question 3.

Choose from a list. Here you get several items and you are asked to check some of them.

Which three of the following problems do you think would have the most negative impact on the mark of a dissertation?

Bad spelling and grammar
Being under the word limit
Exceeding word limit
Irrelevant content
Late submission
No bibliography
No references in the text
Plagiarism
Poor IT presentation

Answers: All are serious problems which would reduce the mark, but plagiarism is definitely the worst, and would result in failure on its own. Lack of a bibliography would lead to suspicions of plagiarism and, if nothing else, indicates poor research. Late submission: marks are automatically deducted unless a formal extension or extenuating circumstances have been granted *ahead of the deadline*. We will explore the issue of plagiarism in week 2.



Hundertwasserhaus Vienna - detail

[Screen 4] - Your definition of a dissertation

1. Write one sentence here about what you think a dissertation is and how it is different from an essay? Then press save.

Test box: limited to 50 words?

We are going to revisit your answer at the end of the unit.

**MAN
ENOUGH
TO KNIT
STRONG
ENOUGH
TO PURL**

Poster from www.menknit.net

[Screen 5] What does a dissertation look like?

We are now going to give you four lists of possible characteristics of dissertations and ask you to choose what you think should be included in a dissertation. When you have chosen from each list, you can click the feedback button to get information about your choices.



Le Corbusier - Chapelle Notre Dame du Haut, Ronchamp

[Screen 6] – Parts of a dissertation

List 1

Tick which of the following you would expect to find in a dissertation:

- Abstract
- Appendix
- Bibliography
- Chapters
- Direct citation
- Headings
- Images
- Indirect citation
- Page numbers
- Paragraphs
- References in text
- Table of Contents
- Tables
- Thesis statement
- Title page

Feedback: you could find all of them! Some are mandatory e.g. a bibliography and page numbers. However, some dissertations may not require an abstract, nor may an appendix or tables be necessary unless you need to include research evidence. Headings may only be appropriate in a report style dissertation. You need to read the specifications carefully for what is required of your dissertation.

[Screen 7] – Dissertation language

List 2. Which four of the following kinds of language and writing do you think your supervisor will strongly *discourage* in your dissertation:

Abbreviations
Argumentative writing
Comparative writing
Contractions (e.g. don't, wouldn't)
Contrastive writing
Critical writing
Descriptive language
Developed sentences
Formal language
Objective language
Paraphrasing
Reflective writing
Subjective language
Using first person (using 'I')
Using third person (no use of 'I')

Feedback: Using first person, abbreviations, contractions, subjective language. These are all aspects of 'informal' language, whereas the language of a dissertation is expected to be very formal. Don't worry if you don't fully understand what the other writing types mean: we will work extensively on writing and language in week 6 of this module.

[Screen 8] – Dissertation research

List 3. Which research methods, sources or research would you expect to be used for an undergraduate art and design dissertation?

Correspondence with artists
Design and Applied Arts Index
Exhibition catalogues
Gallery or museum visits
Image databases
Interlibrary loans
Internet searches
Interviews
Journal articles
Library art section
Online journals (Athens access)
Other dissertations
Print journals
Questionnaires
Taking your own photographs
The Grove Dictionary of Art

Feedback: any of them, but very unlikely all of them at once. It depends which *type* of dissertation you choose e.g. a dissertation dependent on primary research is likely to use questionnaires and interviews, whereas a more traditional art history dissertation will make greater use of library resources and journal articles.

We will look at research methodology extensively in weeks 3 and 7, and you will get an induction into the resources of the Howard Gardens library on your campus visit in week 7 too.

[Screen 9] – What does a dissertation look like?

List 4. Which of the following IT and presentation characteristics would you expect to find in a dissertation?

- Automatic table of contents
- Blocked paragraphs
- Chapters starting on new pages
- Copy bound like a book
- Double or 1.5 line spacing
- Font-size 12pt
- Indentation
- Justified text
- Perfect proof-reading
- Printing on one side of the paper only
- Sans serif font
- Serif font
- Single line spacing
- Wide margins
- Wider left hand margin

Feedback: again, potentially all of them. However, margins should not be too wide (an inch all round is enough) and the font style doesn't matter provided it is suitably formal e.g. not Comic Sans MS! Justified text is often quite hard to read for those with dyslexia or other visual conditions.

As we go through the module, you will be completing a proposal template. We have put this in the format of a dissertation, so you should be able to learn the IT and presentation skills from this model.

[Screen 10] – How dissertations work

In this section of the unit we are going to give you three dissertation titles and three descriptions of how students might approach each title.

In each case, you will have to evaluate the student's work and make choices or brief comments about how each student has approached the research, structure or point of view.

The object of this part of the unit is to *show* you why it is so critical to get your working title right, and to map out your research before you start. We felt it was better to demonstrate through examples what a dissertation might be like, rather than just telling you.

We hope you enjoy the descriptions. All the titles are taken from the work of real students, several of the descriptions from real dissertations, and most of the 'students' and their situations are drawn from real life, so please respect the views and approaches contained in them, however strange some of these seem!



Berlin, Jewish Museum - 'Shalechet' or 'Fallen Leaves'

[Screen 11] – Approaches to research

Look at this short applied arts dissertation title:

Cast off: has knitting shed its old stereotypes?

Imagine three students have written this dissertation for themselves, using different approaches. Look at the three descriptions of the dissertation which follow and decide which sounds like the most *interesting and relevant* i.e. the one you would want to read.

Susan

The dissertation describes in detail the British revival of interest in knitting since the 1890s, and how a middle class past-time became a practical activity during the Second World War, when clothes were difficult to obtain. A chapter is devoted to the role women's magazines and published patterns have had in making knitting popular. There is a very short final chapter on the influence of Kaffe Fassett. The author has done thorough library research and her dissertation concludes with a substantial bibliography running to several pages.

Carli

The author surveys the knitting skills of 50 people drawn from her family and friends. She is surprised to find a large number of men who have been taught to knit by their wives and partners. She asks some of them to be a focus group to find out more about what motivates them to knit, and, through a series of interviews, she discovers; (1) they all enjoy the 'stress-busting' therapeutic value of knitting; and (2) the fact that the most famous current knitting designer is a man, has helped knitting shed its 'granny' image. The author concludes by relating her findings to some current theories of feminism, stereotypes and art therapy. An appendix includes the survey findings summarised in a table, and extracts from some of her interview transcripts.

Lawrence

For his research, the author visits four contemporary exhibitions of art-knitting, including one at a textiles trade fair in Germany. This colourful, illustrated, beautifully presented dissertation compares and contrasts the exhibitions, and critiques the artistic values of the exhibitors. The author obtains a rare interview with one of the artists, the American Arline Fisch, who makes striking knitted necklaces in metal threads, and devotes a substantial chapter to researching this artist's influences and techniques. The final chapter reflects on the future of artistic knitting and its possible impact on practical garment knitting. A substantial appendix includes material from the exhibitions and the internet sites of the artists. A short bibliography is included, mostly containing contemporary online sources.

Radio button quiz to choose:

Susan

Carli

Lawrence

Feedback: we hope you prefer Carli's. She has carried out some small-scale, achievable, but fascinating and hands on research, using local resources. She has followed up the most interesting result of her research and grounded her dissertation on this evidence. Her theoretical references have been determined by her research, not vice versa (an important distinction), and have led her into areas which escape traditional art history and criticism. This will have greatly reduced the time she will have spent in libraries and probably resulted in a compact, but relevant, body of material to work with. She summarises her research results in a form which makes sense to the reader, and provides interesting extracts from the interviews, rather than entire transcripts. The reader will definitely have learned something from this dissertation about men and knitting! The dissertation has an organic, complete feel to it, with a conclusion which answers the question raised by Carli's research.



Arline Fisch - Japanese knot bracelet, 1979

Susan and Lawrence both miss the mark in equal measure. Susan has fallen into the trap of writing a 'regurgitative' or descriptive piece, which works its way through the history rather than addressing the issue in the question i.e. has knitting stopped being a merely practical activity for 'women at home' and become an artistic and engaging hobby for all ages and sexes? She goes some way to the answer by focussing briefly on the pattern industry, and Fassett's work but neither chapter really connects with a common theme. Susan's problem is that she has over-researched without a clear plan. She needed to think through her topic much more carefully and decide what she wanted to prove by her writing first.

Like Susan, Lawrence has followed his enthusiasms rather than working out a specific plan for his research first (and he has gone all the way to Germany and the *Geschäftsmesse!*). He has collected an impressive amount of research, and persuading such an influential artist to give an interview is definitely to be praised. He wastes a lot of space describing the exhibitions; although he is looking for similarities and differences between them, why is this interesting? He attempts, in the final chapter, to look at a more global picture of where knitting is going, but this chapter really should have been earlier on, if at all. He has confused craft with art knitting as well – again, a definition which needed to be made much earlier. Though he has amassed some splendid research material, the lack of planning means he has no direction or specific context to work in.

[Screen 12] – Connecting a title to the dissertation structure

Here's another dissertation working title:

The evolution of the artistic building in the twentieth century.

Again, we give you three more descriptions, this time just about the contents of this dissertation. We give you a box after each description to jot down a short sentence about what you think the main problem is with each dissertation. When you have finished all three, think about what may have been the intrinsic problem in the original title.



Jorn Utzon - Sydney Opera House

[Screen 13] - Imran

Imran chooses three buildings: Antonio Gaudi's Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, Friedensreich Hundertwasser's village house in Vienna, and Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin. He devotes a chapter to each building, analysing each one using an identical template of headings: style, the design of the building in relation to its use, the design of the building in relation to its situation, the architect's awareness of the environment, the exterior compared to the interior, and the reasons behind the choice of the materials. He divides the word limit almost equally between the considerations of the three buildings. He opens and closes his dissertation with very brief introductory and conclusion sections (500 words each). The introduction elaborates on his template of descriptive headings, and his conclusion summarises in a few words what's in each chapter.

Text box (limit to 250 characters)



Daniel Libeskind - Jewish Museum, Berlin

[Screen 14] - Christine

A keen photographer, Christine assembles a huge dossier of photographs of about 12 cutting edge modern buildings over the summer before she writes her dissertation. She does some background research on each building she visits and its architect. Overwhelmed by the amount of material she has gathered, she decides to limit herself to one type of building e.g. residential buildings, or one architect. Though she has found a couple of good theoretical texts on residential architecture, information is easier to find on Norman Foster, so she decides to focus on Stansted Airport, the restored Reichstag in Berlin and the Swiss Re building ("The Gherkin") in London. She chooses four points of comparison, each to go in its own chapter: why the decision was made to create each building, the main design principles behind it, how it is now used by the public and the impact it has had on the surrounding context. She writes contrastively about all three buildings in each chapter. She concludes with some of her own observations on Foster's architecture, and reflections on the problematic dominance of the Richards-Rogers partnership on the current scene in British architecture.

Text box (limit to 250 characters)



Norman Foster - Skylight design, Stansted Airport

[Screen 15] – Gareth

As Gareth cannot afford to visit in person any of the buildings he wants to talk about (Jørn Utzon's Sydney Opera House, Le Corbusier's Chapelle Notre Dame du Haut in France and Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater in the USA), he decides to adopt an outsider's perspective and 'read' each building as a design icon through its media presence and what critics have said about it. He pretends he can't 'enter' each building and treats it as a shape or object. The result is three chapter length descriptions, with external illustrations, of the three buildings. His conclusion, which is quite long, tries to evaluate the impact the presence of each of the buildings has had on subsequent projects in the fields of entertainment, ecclesiastical and residential architecture.

Text box (limit to 250 characters)



Frank Lloyd Wright - Fallingwater

[Screen 16] – The problem with the original working title

Let's remind you of the original working title:

The evolution of the artistic building in the twentieth century.

Now you have read the three examples above, say what you think is the problem with this title:

Text box (limit to 250 characters)



Norman Foster - Swiss Re, London

Feedback:

Imran

Key problem: because each building is discussed entirely separately, this reads like three mini-dissertations, one on each building.

Solution: Imran's structure is in one sense admirable as he subjects each building to a kind of experiment. If he had chosen to write short chapters, treating all three buildings contrastively under each aspect of the experiment, he would have had conclusions to draw on. This was really down to an early stage planning problem. Descriptive writing is also a dangerous comfort zone: it is much easier to regurgitate information than to engage critically with material; however, criticism is what is required at this level.

Christine

Key problem: this has become a dissertation about Norman Foster, not the artistic building concept! It is a classic example of enthusiastic research (without a specific plan) leading its devotee badly astray.

Solution: cutting down to a themed dissertation was a good idea, it's just that Christine made the wrong choice by giving in to the 'more information = better' view of Foster. If she had more confidence in her own critical abilities, she would have made do with what she found on residential architecture, and been more creative about looking for supporting sources. Her themed structure was also a good idea, but it failed to lead anywhere interesting because the only connecting factor was Foster himself.

Gareth

Key problem: the resources required to do the research required are beyond the scope of the student.

Solution: it is *essential* that you are realistic about the resources available. Gareth may have *liked* these three buildings the best, but flying to France, Australia and the US for one short dissertation is hardly feasible! He could have found three 'artistic buildings' within walking distance here in Cardiff e.g. The Millennium Stadium, The Millennium Centre, and at a stretch the new Welsh Parliament. The local focus would have given him instant connections and many other themes could have arisen e.g. evaluating the impact of charismatic buildings on the rebirth of a city, their contribution to the new Welsh nationalism etc. Research sources would have been on the doorstep too, and he could have done some interesting primary research collecting local opinion.

Overall key problem:

This is a working subject area, not a topic. It does not contain a challenge or question to be answered. Let's imagine Gareth had decided to exploit his local resources and reworked the subject working title into a more specific topic title, containing an issue:

The impact of the artistic building on the cityscape in the late twentieth century: a case study of three new Cardiff landmarks.

[Screen 17] – Point of view

Here's the third and last dissertation working title – this time there's nothing wrong with it!

Is the computer a valid artist's tool within a fine art environment?

This time we are not asking you to say which of the three descriptions is better or worse, or to look for a problem. This is, in a sense, an 'open' section where your justified opinion about any of the three is entirely valid.

Read each description for its approach to the topic, and its point of view or angle. Note carefully how each author sets up the context in which s/he will discuss the issue. Also note how each approach connects to the person involved, and their unique circumstances: for this reason we give you quite a lot of information about each student personally.



Computer artist, from jupiterimages.com

[Screen 18] – Jonty's dissertation

Jonty is a mature student. He has had substantial experience of watching the development and acceptance of digital art over the past 30 years. His computer literacy in the field of CAD and graphic design is excellent as he worked for many years for a commercial graphic designer. He believes artists from time immemorial have exploited technologies to improve their work, citing the example of the concave mirror projection (camera obscura) now known to have been used by Renaissance artists such as Caravaggio, following the vast improvements in lenses and optical technology from the fifteenth century onwards.

Using the theories of Ray Kurzweil, Jeff Talman and Roy Ascott, Jonty would like to argue that as all technologies are extensions of the human mind which created them, the creation of art can only benefit from an increased range of available tools and skills. He will prove this thesis chronologically, using examples from the history of modern art as it has related to the advent of reproduction technology e.g. how the printing press, photography and other more sophisticated media such as video have contributed to art alongside generating their own art forms. The computer is just another example of a technology generating an art which was hitherto impossible, as well as being a tool for artists.



Caravaggio - The Calling of St Matthew

[Screen 19] – Jean-Marie’s dissertation

Jean-Marie’s two part dissertation will start with a theory section using as a starting point Walter Benjamin’s 1936 essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' to argue that reproduction is not incompatible with creation, as all art involves an element of mimesis. She will also refer to Jeff Talman’s theory (“For the artist who makes work that is meant specifically to be reproduced, the reproduction is the art itself, and any of the reproductions are seen as valid representations of the work itself”) to back up her argument that the aura of preciousness surrounding non-replicable art cannot, and must not, be expected of the art of ideas. She will argue that there have always been art forms such as origami where the aesthetics of the idea are prized above the worthless paper which ‘realises’ the idea.

Computers and the internet, she says, are forcing a welcome shift from custodial art where value is largely economically driven e.g. the next eye-watering price of a Van Gogh at auction, to a democratisation of art ownership where potentially infinite digital reproduction re-empowers the concept or idea. She cites the recent profitable sale of Damien Hirst’s diamond-encrusted skull as the ultimate cynicism: “He perfectly well knew that only a handful of people could ‘own’ it”.

A Dutch national, speaking several European languages, Jean-Marie has had good opportunity to observe the ‘Van Gogh industry’ at work in her native Amsterdam. In a daring departure from the norm, she will use the second half of her dissertation to speculate on what Van Gogh might do if given a computer. “The supreme irony of Van Gogh,” she says “is that he sold one painting in his lifetime for 25 francs. The dead Van Gogh’s work commands the highest prices in the world and the biggest crowds in the museums. If Van Gogh began to generate new art, in whatever physical form, and his intention was it should be replicated to the nth power, he might return art to a state where all humankind can enjoy the ‘real thing’. And bankrupt Sotheby’s.”



Van Gogh - Chair

[Screen 20] – Gordon's dissertation

Aged just 21, Gordon was diagnosed with severe dyspraxia as a young child. This learning disability – frequently confused with dyslexia – means that activities involving cross-body co-ordination can be profoundly challenging. Gordon has never allowed the condition to limit his aspirations, and has evolved into an outstanding young sculptor. Earlier this year, he was a finalist in a competition to design a series of sculpted seating places for part of Cardiff Bay's waterfront development. As his condition makes physically drawing or painting next to impossible, he has relied 100% on computer aided design (CAD) packages such as Rhinoceros to design and plan his projects, which are then usually built all, or partially, by other people such as ceramic mould experts and metal-workers.

Gordon feels that CAD-dependent artists do not have to defend their use of computers as tools: rather they should concentrate on foregrounding their concepts for critical evaluation. He decides to develop a method of critically 'interrogating' a work of computer-generated art for its conceptual values. He will apply this method to examples of relatively early computer art: Erwin Redl's digital light installation *Matrix*, Robert Lazzarini's *Skulls* and Lillian Schwartz's *Mona leo* and *Japanese baby*. He expects that each of these three relatively simple creations will 'pass' his 'interrogation' but this does not bother him: his aim is to show that by taking a value-driven approach we can overcome the idea that computer-generated art doesn't have a real artist behind the keyboard.

Gordon will conclude by subjecting one of his own pieces to the 'interrogation'; a sundial with Braille inscriptors which respond with sound according to whether the light is on them or not. This was commissioned by a school for the blind who wanted its pupils to get a closer physical connection to the seasonal and meteorological changes of daylight. Gordon regards it as installation art.



Robert Lazzarini - Skull (2001)

[Screen 21] – Conclusion to week 1

Imagine you were working on this dissertation for several months. Which approach and/or point of view would appeal most to you and your way of working? You may even find something which appeals from all three examples.

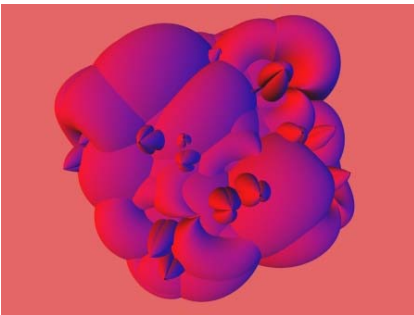
Post your views on the message board for this week – please keep to 100 words!

Lastly, click the button below to go back to your original definition of a dissertation. Think how you may have changed your mind or reinforced your initial ideas.

When we meet up again next week, we'll be talking about potential titles so please jot down any ideas you already have (or put them on the message board if you don't mind sharing them).

Now visit the Study Skills Audit (click on the link to take you there, or go to the documents folder). Complete the audit and post it back to your documents folder.

Take a quick look at the Proposal Template – we will be starting to input a small amount of information into this document next week.



Superformula, from digitalstar.net