



English Literature

Dissertation Handbook

2015-16

Dissertation Convener:
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Part 1: Deadlines and details

1.1 Important deadlines.

DATE	SEMESTER 1 , 2015
Week 1	<p>Introduction to the EL Dissertation: Wednesday 23 September, Lecture Theatre 1, Appleton Tower, 1 pm</p> <p>Sign up for a Dissertation Supervisor (via LEARN) – Thursday 24 September, 8.30am - 5pm (There will be a limited number of slots for each member of staff, and students will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis)</p>
Week 2-3	<p>Workshop 1 . Small-group meeting with your Supervisor</p> <p>(Sign up for times via LEARN)</p>
Week 5	<p>Submit a 500-word outline of topic and texts to Supervisor, via LEARN, by 5pm Friday 23 October</p> <p>Students to settle topic/texts in 500-word submission to supervisor via LEARN; supervisor to return comments to students by same means within a fortnight.</p>
Week 6-7	Comments on the above to be returned by 6 November (via LEARN or e-mail)
Week 9	Submit an annotated bibliography of up to 15 secondary sources by 5pm, Friday 20 November (via LEARN)
Weeks 10-11	<p>Individual Supervisions</p> <p>During this period your Supervisor will be available to meet with each of you individually for half an hour to discuss your annotated bibliography and general progress.</p> <p>NB. It is the student's responsibility to make an appointment with their supervisor which they must arrange at least one week in advance.</p>

DATE	SEMESTER 2, 2016
Week 1	<p>Submit an updated plan/outline of your topic and a draft Introduction to your Supervisor by 5pm on Friday 15 January (via LEARN).</p> <p>Around 500 words for the outline, and 1000 for the Introduction: 1500 maximum overall.</p> <p>If you have good reasons for wishing to submit a sample chapter or section of your Dissertation, instead of an Introduction, you may arrange to do so with your supervisor.</p>
Weeks 2 -3	<p>Workshop 2</p> <p>Small group Peer discussion of draft introductions.</p> <p>You will be able to sign up for a one hour session via LEARN, or will be contacted by your Supervisor (who will be present at discussions)</p>
Weeks 4-5	<p>Individual Supervisions</p> <p>During this period your Supervisor will be available to meet with each of you individually for half an hour to discuss your topic, plan/outline and general progress.</p> <p>NB. <i>It is the student's responsibility to make an appointment with their supervisor which they must arrange at least one week in advance.</i></p>
Weeks 9-10	<p>Supervisors will be available for a 15 minute consultation if required.</p> <p>Members of staff will post available time slots for sign up on their office doors a week in advance, or can be contacted by e-mail.</p>
<p>Tuesday 5th April before 2pm <u>DEADLINE: Submit final dissertation</u></p>	

As the Dissertation constitutes a Final Honours examination paper, no extensions are possible.

Please Note: In order to offer all students as much time to work on their dissertation as possible, we have 'mainstreamed' all potential adjustment schedules for this project (in other words, we've made any specified 'extra time' automatically available to everyone, in the same way we do with lecture handouts, reading lists, etc.) and set the deadline as late as we are able, while still allowing us to properly assess the dissertations in time for graduation. If you have an adjustment that specifies extra time for proofreading or other assistance, this has been included in the current deadline and you should schedule it into your work to make certain you will submit by the published date. Students commonly ask proof-readers to look at their dissertation work as they complete final drafts of individual sections, and those employed by the Disability Service are willing to do this, rather than leaving it all until the very end.

Dissertations are marked by two members of the subject area. Your Dissertation may also be read by an external examiner.

1.2 Set Text

In order to help you to plan ahead and to provide a focus for Workshop discussions, you should regularly consult and ideally own a copy of:

Fabb, Nigel and Alan Durant. *How to Write Essays and Dissertations: A Guide for English Literature Students*. 2nd edition. London: Longman, 2005.

1.3 Supervision and Support

The role of Supervisors:

Though the Dissertation is essentially an independent piece of work, students are supported by a member of staff who acts as supervisor. Supervisors may be able to give **advice** on practical issues such as: the subject and title of the dissertation, its organisation and structure, and on source material and a bibliography.

Supervisors can also be expected to comment upon Dissertation outlines and to offer advice about the bibliography and introduction in good time (normally within two weeks of receipt). However, a Dissertation is intended to demonstrate students' ability to **work on their own**, and supervisors are **not** expected to direct your work or to comment on any draft of it except the draft introduction submitted in the first week of semester 2.

(NB Staff will not normally be available to provide supervision outwith the timetable specified above (1.1)).

Students' responsibilities:

It is up to you to make arrangements to meet your supervisor – within the guidelines provided in 1.1 -- and to submit work no later than the deadlines noted on 1.1. ***If you do not submit material by the stated deadline, your supervisor will not comment on it.***

- You should read the general guidelines on the research and writing process of the Dissertation included in this booklet carefully.
- You should consider further advice about each part of the exercise which will be posted at appropriate times on LEARN
- You may wish to use the LEARN Discussion Thread, through which specific advice may be sought from fellow students, staff, and the Dissertation Convener
- You may also wish briefly to contact a member of staff who is **not** your supervisor for specific advice. See section **2.6** below

Submitting your Dissertation

Copies: You must submit one hard copy of your Dissertation to the English Literature Fourth Year Course Secretary (Undergraduate Teaching Office, Room 1.08, first floor, 50 George Square). You must **also** submit an electronic copy on the course's LEARN page. **Your Dissertation will not be marked unless both electronic and hard copies are submitted.**

Paper and Binding: Dissertations must be word-processed and printed on good quality paper. Most students choose to present their hardcopies in an inexpensive spiral or comb binding with plastic covers, though this is not a requirement.

Font: For legibility, we prefer you to use Arial or Times New Roman or a similar font in 12-point.

Spacing: You should use double-spacing and leave ample margins (as per the layout in this document).

Page numbers: Pages should be numbered (ideally as in the template, see LEARN).

Length:

The maximum length of the Dissertation is **10,000 words**.

This total includes the main body of the dissertation (that is, introduction, chapters, and conclusion) as well as any footnotes and/or the list of abbreviations.

It is also worth noting that Dissertations which fall substantially short of the maximum length are unlikely to have fulfilled the required criteria and may be penalised accordingly.

NB. The department does NOT operate a plus or minus 10% rule of any kind, at any time. The word limit of 10,000 is precise and definitive.

The information provided in the para-textual materials (that is, the title and cover pages, abstract, acknowledgements, table of contents/list of illustrations, bibliography/works cited, and any appendices) are not included in this 10,000 words; see 'Presentation and Contents' below for details on word count limitations for these areas.

Presentation and Contents:

The Dissertation should be presented as follows:

- **Cover Page** (separate and detachable) **and Title Page. Each should include:** Title of dissertation, Examination number, Name of Degree, Name of supervisor, total word count (excluding abstract, bibliography, any appendix). The detachable cover page, **only**, should also include your name.
- **Abstract** – a summary statement of not more than 200 words. State the problem or issue being addressed, the key questions examined in the Dissertation and the key findings.¹
- **Acknowledgments** – if you need to thank any organization or individuals who contributed to your research.²
- **Table of Contents** – listing any chapters/subdivisions in your Dissertation, with their titles and page numbers.
- **List of Tables or Illustrations**, if required. This should correspond to the table or illustration number and give the page number on which these appear.
- **Abbreviations** – if necessary, list any you have used **in references** throughout your dissertation.
- Then main body of the Dissertation
- **Bibliography/Works Cited**

This Bibliography/Works Cited should follow MLA style, as summarised on the Department's 'Stylesheet', to be found in the English Literature Writing Guide at http://www.ed.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.51555!/fileManager/English%20Literature%20Writing%20Guide%20final.pdf pp.11-16.

Your primary texts (i.e. the literature you discuss) should be listed first, then critical/background material. If you wish, you may include books you have found useful but not cited in your text, in which case your list should be headed 'Bibliography and Works Cited'. A straightforward listing of Works Cited, though, is all that is formally required.Note that the Department's Stylesheet is a deliberately basic guide. If you find that you need further advice on eventualities it does not cover (referencing interviews, or material from other media, for example) the Stylesheet offers a web address from which such advice should be available.
- **Appendices**, if needed.

A 'Template' word document, illustrating these presentational requirements, will be available for you to consult/download from LEARN.

¹ NB. The abstract has a *separate* limit of 200 words.

² The acknowledgements do not need to be included in the overall word count; however, these should not extend to more than one, short paragraph.

1.5 Plagiarism:

Dissertations must be your own work. Your Dissertation will be assessed for plagiarism using up-to-date detection software, and penalties will be applied if necessary. Do not take any risks. Use a consistent system of referencing and acknowledge all sources.

Plagiarism can be deliberate or accidental: neither is acceptable practice and both can result in penalties. Deliberate plagiarism occurs when students intentionally copy out passages verbatim from books or articles, or download material from the internet, without properly acknowledging the source. Unintentional plagiarism is usually the result of sloppy note-taking. Be sure to write down your sources carefully when taking notes and then cite that source in your Dissertation, using quotation marks where appropriate.

Copying other students' essays is cheating and also counts as plagiarism. Although discussion between students is encouraged, all coursework is accepted for assessment on the understanding that it is the student's own work. In short, failure to acknowledge other people's work will not be tolerated. Serious cases of plagiarism will normally lead to automatic failure of the whole course, and may also lead to action under the University's Code of Discipline.

Further information can be found at:

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/literatures-languages-cultures/english-literature/undergraduate/current/academic-matters/plagiarism>

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/students/undergraduate/discipline/plagiarism>

Part 2: Getting started

2.1 What is a dissertation?

Your Dissertation should be an independent piece of work. An undergraduate Dissertation is not expected to be a wholly original contribution to knowledge, but it must be original in the sense of being an independent piece of writing, based on wide reading, and giving evidence of your own understanding and analysis of your subject. It usually covers a narrower field than a course based on lectures and seminars, and requires more thorough reading. Students are expected to demonstrate their ability to engage critically and analytically with primary texts and literary criticism. While the Dissertation topic may vary in scope between individual submissions, all dissertations must have a clear focus with definable boundaries. You will therefore need to find a research question, engage with relevant literature, and plan a schedule.

Assessment is based upon a 10,000 word written paper, which involves an in-depth exploration of a particular topic. **Remember that a Dissertation carries a 40 credit weighting: this means it is equivalent to TWO of your Core or Option courses. You should therefore be putting as much time into it as you do to the equivalent courses.**

2.2 General Advice

- On any topic, there are huge numbers of books you could be reading. Remember that you don't have to read everything. You need to be self-disciplined and know when to stop.
- In guiding your time- and task-management, draw up a list of tasks that you have to do, and draw up a realistic timetable in which to fulfil them. (You should use the deadlines for submission of different elements outlined in 1.1 to help here.)
- Remember that you can't expect to hand in a piece of work and get it back from your supervisor the next day. Make sure you check the guidelines in 1.1 on this.
- In the first semester, your main aim will be to establish a topic, read your primary texts and explore existing criticism in your chosen field. You should take notes and begin to formulate your argument. (It may help to begin writing at this stage.)
- In the second semester, you should have a clear idea of the structure of your Dissertation and set yourself deadlines for covering the necessary materials. Be realistic. There is no point in setting goals that you will never attain. However, you should build in time for slippage as it may take longer to do a particular piece of work than you planned.
- You also need to make sure that you leave enough time for completion of a final draft, and for editing it. You should aim to complete a final draft at least two weeks before the deadline, leaving the remaining time for editing and for checking – including ensuring that quotations you've used exactly match the original text in the source from which you've taken them. ***Editing is as important as writing: be sure to leave enough time for this.***

2.3 Choosing a topic

This will be discussed in outline in the introductory lecture, and in detail in your first small-group meeting with your supervisor (week 2 or 3, Autumn Semester). You will also find useful advice on different ways of approaching your chosen material in 'Devising your own topic' (Fabb and Durant, 2005; see also **3.1** and **3.3** below). In terms of form, content and structure, the closest model for your consideration might be journal articles or essays in collections.

Students who are studying **Single Honours Scottish Literature** should write on a Scottish topic. This counts as ONE of the SIX Scottish Literature courses you are required to take. Students who are enrolled for a **Joint Degree in English and Scottish Literature** may choose to focus on either subject (or, indeed, a combination of both). If you chose to write on a specifically Scottish topic, then your Dissertation will count as ONE of the FOUR Scottish Literature courses you are required to take

2.4 Refining your topic and preparing an outline

You are required to prepare a **500-word** outline of your proposed topic and primary texts for submission to your supervisor by week 5 of the first semester: 5pm, 23 October. This should be revised and expanded by week 1 of semester 2.

2.5 Further Recommended Reading:

As well as

Nigel Fabb and Alan Durant. *How to Write Essays and Dissertations: A Guide for English Literature Students* . 2nd edition. London: Longman, 2005.

the following may be helpful:

Fowler, Alastair. *How to Write*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006

Greetham, Bryan. *How to Write Better Essays*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001.

Taylor, Gordon. *A Student's Writing Guide: How to Plan and Write Successful Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

2.6 Staff Interests and Contacts

In addition to working with your supervisor, you may wish to seek **specific** advice from another member of staff, by e-mail or in one 15-minute session during an office hour. The list below is intended to help students identify a member of staff who may assist in this way with bibliographic or other advice. Note that as some members of staff may be on leave, not all of those listed below will be available every session. Only those staff whose names are **highlighted** in the list below will be available in 2015-16.

Academic Staff – Contact Details				
	Tel.	Room	Areas of Supervisory Interest	Email
Sarah Carpenter	650 3608	2.10	Pre-Restoration English or Scottish literature; performance and theatre history; drama (of any period)	sarah.carpenter@ed.ac.uk
Dermot Cavanagh	650 3606	2.18	Drama and poetry, 1500-1700; modern and contemporary drama; historical fiction; theories of adaptation.	dermot.cavanagh@ed.ac.uk
Simon Cooke	651 3996	3.07	Modernism and contemporary English and comparative Literature	simon.cooke@ed.ac.uk
Paul Crosthwaite	650 3049	2.35	Modern and contemporary literature; American literature	pcrosthw@staffmail.ed.ac.uk
Rebecca Davies	650 8930	2.08	C18th fiction; modern fiction	Rebecca.davies@ed.ac.uk
Sarah Dunnigan	650 8304	2.26	Medieval and Renaissance English and Scottish Literature; fairy tales; fantasy; children's literature; Scottish women's writing	s.m.dunnigan@ed.ac.uk

Academic Staff – Contact Details

	Tel.	Room	Areas of Supervisory Interest	Email
David Farrier	650 3607	2.52	Colonial and postcolonial writing and theory; contemporary postcolonial literature; literature of exile, asylum and displacement; C20th and C21st British writing.	David.farrier@ed.ac.uk
Penny Fielding	650 6309	2.19	C18/19 th English and Scottish Literature; Modern and contemporary British literature; literary and critical theory.	penny.fielding@ed.ac.uk
Alan Gillis	650 3050	2.41	Modern and Contemporary Poetry; Modern and Contemporary Irish Literature; Modernist aesthetics	alan.gillis@ed.ac.uk
Keith Hughes	650 3048	2.42	American Literature; African-American Literature.	keith.hughes@ed.ac.uk
Katherine Inglis	650 3617	2.05	Literature and Medicine; C19th Literature	K.inglis@ed.ac.uk
Robert Irvine	650 3605	2.20	C18/19 th Scottish and English Literature;	r.p.irvine@ed.ac.uk
Carole Jones	650 3068	2.01	C19th and contemporary Scottish fiction; C20th Women's writing; feminism; LGBT and Queer writing; Queer theory; contemporary Irish fiction; Black-British fiction.	cjones6@staffmail.ed.ac.uk
Aaron Kelly	650 3071	2.37	Irish literature; working-class literature; detective fiction; migrant writing; literatures of decolonization.	aaron.kelly@ed.ac.uk

Academic Staff – Contact Details				
	Tel.	Room	Areas of Supervisory Interest	Email
Michelle Keown	650 6856	2.17	Postcolonial literature and theory; the literature of empire; New Zealand and Pacific literature; diaspora literature and theory; the body and literature; psychoanalysis and literature; translation studies; women's writing.	michelle.keown@ed.ac.uk
Anouk Lang	651 1716	2.38	The intersection of digital humanities and C20th/C21st literature	Anouk.lang@ed.ac.uk
James Loxley	650 3610	2.16	Renaissance literature; C18th literature; C20th poetry and drama; performance theory; literature of the 1930s; science fiction.	james.loxley@ed.ac.uk
Simon Malpas	650 3596	2.15	Restoration literature and culture; Romanticism; drama and theatre; aesthetics; critical theory; postmodernity.	Simon.Malpas@ed.ac.uk
Doyeeta Majumder		3.38	'Early modern literature -- especially drama, law and literature, the Victorian novel, subcontinental English fiction (Indian/Pakistan/Bangladesh/Sri Lanka)'. '	Doyeeta.Majumder@ed.ac.uk
Kenneth Millard	650 6875	2.25	American Literature	K.Millard@ed.ac.uk
Tim Milnes	650 3615	2.06	Romanticism; C18 and 19 th poetry and fiction; Modernism; Shakespeare	tim.milnes@ed.ac.uk

Academic Staff – Contact Details

	Tel.	Room	Areas of Supervisory Interest	Email
Tom Mole	650 4283	2.04	History of the Book	Tom.Mole@ed.ac.uk
David Salter	650 3055	2.02	Medieval and Renaissance Literature; Shakespeare.	David.Salter@ed.ac.uk
Lee Spinks	650 3616	2.27	Post-Colonial and Postmodern literature and theory; Contemporary American literature; C18 to 20 th American Literature.	Lee.Spinks@ed.ac.uk
Allyson Stack	650 4290	2.50	U.S fiction in the C19th and C20th; expatriate American writers; the novel as form; contemporary fiction; feminist and psychoanalytic theory.	Allyson.Stack@ed.ac.uk
Randall Stevenson	650 4288	2.24	modernism; literature and the Great War; narrative theory; fiction and drama in Britain throughout the C20th century; postmodernist fiction	Randall.Stevenson@ed.ac.uk
Andrew Taylor	650 4584	2.28	American Literature; C19th British literature; Contemporary fiction.	Andrew.Taylor@ed.ac.uk
Olga Taxidou	650 3611	2.23	Modernist theatre and performance (including revisions/adaptations of classics); gender and performance	Olga.Taxidou@ed.ac.uk
Alex Thomson	650 3058	2.43	C19 and 20 th Scottish and English literature (poetry and prose); Literary, Critical and Cultural theory.	Alex.Thomson@ed.ac.uk

Academic Staff – Contact Details				
	Tel.	Room	Areas of Supervisory Interest	Email
Suzanne Trill	650 4291	2.34	Renaissance literature; Shakespeare; women's writing, 1500-1700; C17th devotional literature; C17th history of the book; C19th and 20 th women's writing; feminism; history of sexuality.	S.Trill@ed.ac.uk
Anna Vaninskaya	650 4284	2.07	Victorian and Edwardian literature and culture; C19th/20th fantastic, utopian/dystopian, and socialist literature; reception; the history of English as a discipline.	avaninsk@staffmail.ed.ac.uk
Greg Walker	650 3049	2.21	Medieval literature; early modern drama; Renaissance Literature; cinema in the 1920s and 30s; historical detective fiction.	Greg.Walker@ed.ac.uk
Jonathan Wild	651 3191	2.11	Victorian and Edwardian literature; popular fiction; readers and reading practices; C20th history of the book.	jwild@ed.ac.uk

See also

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/literatures-languages-cultures/english-literature/staff/academic>

Part 3: Frequently Asked Questions

3.1 Range of Material

In terms of scope there is no simple rule for the number of texts to be included, but a study of a single text is **not** likely to be appropriate. If you specify as few as two primary texts, you would need to ensure that there is an engagement with historical, theoretical or cultural contexts sufficient for the essay to constitute a substantial and challenging piece of work. Only in some exceptional cases (such as *The Canterbury Tales* or *Ulysses*) would the study of one or two texts alone be sufficient.

Equally, you should be careful to establish the kind of focus within your chosen field that will make the project manageable. You should not attempt a Dissertation that is too ambitious or which cannot be delimited in a way that is appropriate to a 10,000 word exercise in independent study.

Most of all, the Dissertation needs a clearly-signposted argument and a sense of direction and purpose. It should combine some close textual analysis with an engagement with broader historical contexts or theoretical paradigms. Although your final title might not be phrased as a question, you should nevertheless ask yourself tacitly: 'what question is it that I am seeking to address or to answer?' 'What am I trying to show here, and why does it matter?' The department is not necessarily expecting something entirely original (see further below), but a good, independent critical argument about your chosen subject.

3.2 Originality

Your Dissertation does not need to be an entirely original contribution to scholarly knowledge, and does not need to produce readings or contextualisations of literary texts that are completely unprecedented.

Originality is only as significant here as it is in our marking criteria for all work. So you will not be advantaging yourself by choosing to focus on recently published texts, or those which have not generated much critical comment. In fact, the existence of a solid body of secondary material on your chosen texts may be more of a help than a hindrance, insofar as it helps you to shape your research questions and your conceptual vocabulary, and to sharpen your own responses to both texts and questions.

3.3 Use of translated texts and other media

Because your Dissertation is being written for the Department of English Literature, it should not be entirely on primary works in translation (for example, the plays of Ibsen or the novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez). However, you may include some work in translation in comparison to works in English (to continue the above examples, say, Ibsen and Shaw or Marquez and Rushdie) though this material should occupy less than 50% of your attention. Likewise, though you may wish to include analysis of other media, such as film, television, or fine art, any such material should occupy less than 50% of your attention

3.4 Relation of Dissertation topic to Core/Option courses and texts.

The Dissertation offers you an opportunity to write on an area of your own choice which you may not get the chance to study elsewhere in the curriculum. However, you may wish instead to expand on texts, theories or issues which you have been introduced to over the previous three years. Remember, though, that there is a general rule that material must not be repeated in final assessments; thus, you should make sure there is **no** direct overlap (if you are uncertain on this point, please make sure you discuss it with your supervisor).

4. Some Final Reminders

In writing your dissertation, you will draw upon all the skills you have been developing since you started studying English Literature – reading critically, analysing arguments, assessing evidence and writing effectively.

The Dissertation requires you to develop your own research question, focusing on a topic of interest to you.

See your supervisor as a resource: their job is not to tell you what to do, or to say ‘that’s good enough’ but to help you make your work better – by helping you focus your question, locate the best sources, and write more effectively. It is up to you to raise questions with them, and to obtain from them any advice you need. Always think in advance of any session what questions you would like to be considered.

In responding to questionnaires, almost all students taking the Dissertation in 2014-15 stressed the advantages of thinking ahead towards a topic during the summer vacation of 3rd-4th year, and for good time-management thereafter, ensuring work and research continue steadily through Autumn semester and plenty of time is left for writing and revision in Spring.

Writing a Dissertation is challenging, but also very rewarding, and thoroughly deserving of the time and effort.