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English Literature

Dissertation Handbook

2020-21

Dissertation Convener:

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Contents

Part 1: Deadlines and details

- 1.1 Important deadlines
- 1.2 Set text
- 1.3 Supervision and support
- 1.4 Submitting your dissertation
- 1.5 Plagiarism

Part 2: Getting started

- 2.1 What is a dissertation?
- 2.2 General Advice
- 2.3 Choosing a topic and writing a proposal
- 2.4 Refining your topic and preparing an outline
- 2.5 Recommended Reading
- 2.6 Contacting Members of Academic Faculty besides your Supervisor

Part 3: Frequently Asked Questions

- 3.1 Range of Material
- 3.2 Originality
- 3.3 Use of translated texts and other media
- 3.4 Relation of Dissertation topic to Core/Option courses and texts.

Part 4: Some Final Reminders

Note:

Arrangements for this course are subject to change in light of Covid-19 restrictions. Supervision meetings will mostly take place online. Students who need to make alternative arrangements for supervision in light of shielding or self-isolation should contact their supervisors in a timely fashion.

Part 1: Deadlines and details

1.1 Important deadlines.

DATE	SEMESTER 1
Welcome Week	Introduction to the Dissertation: video posted on Learn.
Week 1	<i>Students assigned to supervisors by end of week 1</i>
Week 2-3	<i>Workshop 1 .</i> <i>Small-group meeting with your Supervisor</i> (Supervisors will contact students with times and arrangements for meetings.)
Week 5	Submit a 500-word outline of topic and texts to Supervisor, via LEARN or by email, by 5pm Friday 23 October 2020. Students to settle topic/texts in 500-word submission to supervisor via LEARN or by email (as supervisor directs); supervisor to return comments to students by same means within a fortnight.
Week 6-7	Comments on the above to be returned by 6 November 2020 (via LEARN or by email)
Week 9	Submit an annotated bibliography of up to 15 secondary sources by 5pm, Friday 20 November 2020 (via LEARN or by email, as directed by your supervisor)
Weeks 10-11	Individual Supervisions 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. 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>

DATE	SEMESTER 2
Week 1	<p>Submit an updated plan/outline of your topic and a draft Sample of Work or Introduction to your Supervisor by 5pm on Friday 15 January 2021 (via LEARN or by email, as directed by your supervisor).</p> <p>Around 500 words for the outline, and 1000 for the Sample of Work: 1500 maximum overall.</p>
Weeks 2 -3	<p>Workshop 2</p> <p>Small group peer discussion of draft material with other students and Supervisor.</p> <p>(Supervisors will contact students with times and arrangements for meetings.)</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>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>
Friday 2nd April 2021 before 2pm	<u>DEADLINE: Submit final English Literature Dissertation to Turnitin dropbox on LEARN</u>

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

EXTENSIONS FOR THE DISSERTATION

If you are seriously unwell or suffering serious personal difficulties and unable to finish your Dissertation by the deadline after which late penalties are applied, you must apply for an extension in advance of the deadline. You should contact the Fourth Year Course Administrator in the first instance by completing the extension request form on this link: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/current-students/extension-request>

Extensions of longer than 7 days are **not permitted**. If you are unable to submit work within the extended deadline, it is vital you contact your Personal Tutor immediately with a view to

completing a Special Circumstances form. For more details see the following link:
<http://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/students/assessment/special-circumstances/procedure>

PENALTIES FOR LATE SUBMISSION OF THE DISSERTATION

It is University policy to penalise late work.

You must submit your work in advance of the deadline. Penalties are exacted for late submission using the following scale:

after 2 pm on Friday, 2nd April 2020 but before 2 pm on Saturday, 3rd April	- 5
after 2 pm on Saturday 3rd April, but before 2 pm on Sunday, 4th April	- 10
after 2 pm on Sunday, 4th April, but before 2 pm on Monday, 5th April	- 15
after 2 pm on Monday, 5th April, but before 2 pm on Tuesday, 6th April	- 20
after 2 pm on Tuesday, 6th April, but before 2 pm on Wednesday, 7th April	- 25
after 2 pm on Wednesday, 7th April, but before 2 pm on Thursday, 8th April	- 30
after 2 pm on Thursday, 8th April, but before 2 pm on Friday, 9th April	- 35
after 2 pm on Friday, 9th April	zero

1.2 Set Text

In order to help you to plan ahead and to provide a focus for Workshop discussions, you should consult:

Nigel Fabb 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 fundamentally an independent piece of work, students are supported by a member of academic faculty who acts as supervisor. Supervisors will 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 are not expected to be expert in the specific subject area of the dissertation, nor to advise about its content or judgements. For advice of this kind, see 2.6 below

Supervisors can be expected to comment upon Dissertation outlines and to offer advice about the bibliography and sample of work 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 sample of work submitted in the first week of semester 2.

(NB Academic faculty 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 and/or by email.
- Specific advice may be sought from fellow students, academic faculty, and, where not available from other sources, the Dissertation Convener.
- You may also wish briefly to contact a member of academic faculty who is **not** your supervisor for specific advice. See section **2.6** below

Submitting your Dissertation

Copies: You must submit an **electronic copy** to the appropriate Turnitin drop box on the LEARN site for the course.

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 (we suggest 1" or 2.54cm for all margins).

Page numbers: Pages should be numbered.

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. If citing material in other languages, the translation into English does not count in the final word count either.

Presentation and Contents:

The Dissertation should be presented as follows. A ‘Template’ MS Word document, illustrating these presentational requirements, will be available for you to consult/download from LEARN.

- **Title Page.** This should include: Title of dissertation, Examination number, Name of Degree, Name of supervisor, total word count (according to the rules on calculating word count set out above). **Your name should not appear anywhere on your dissertation.**
- **Abstract** – a summary statement of not more than 200 words. State the problem or issue or topic being addressed, the key questions examined in the dissertation and the central claims.¹
- **Acknowledgments** – if you need to thank any organization or individuals who contributed to your dissertation.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.
- The 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* available on a link from this web page:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/english-literature/undergraduate/current/handbooks>

Your primary texts (i.e. the literature you discuss) should be listed first, then secondary texts (i.e. 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, can be provided if preferred.

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.

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.

When you submit the electronic copy of your Dissertation you MUST:

- Identify your Dissertation on the Title Page only by your Exam Number (to be found on your student card) NOT by your Name. The Title Page should also mention the dissertation title, the name of your Degree, the name of your Supervisor and total word count (excluding abstract, bibliography, any appendix).
- Include your Exam Number (but NOT your Name) in the 'Submission title' field which you are asked to complete as you upload your dissertation to Turnitin. The preferred format is <YourExamNumber>-DissertationTitle e.g. B012345-HamletDissertation (It is fine to abbreviate a long Dissertation title.)
- Please make sure that your name does NOT appear anywhere on the Dissertation itself, so that this electronic copy can be marked anonymously.

Please be especially careful to click on the button to CONFIRM your upload to Turnitin and wait to make sure that you receive a Digital Receipt. You should see the following appear on the screen: "*Congratulations - your submission is complete! This is your digital receipt. You can print a copy of this receipt from within the Document Viewer*". You should also receive an email from TurnitinUK with the subject "This is your TurnitinUK Digital Receipt". If you do not, log back in to View/Complete on the Turnitin dropbox right away and check your dissertation is there. If it is not, you will be able to upload it. If you have any problems, please contact the Fourth Year course administrator.

1.5 Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct:

Plagiarism is the use of material taken from another writer's work without proper acknowledgement, presenting it as if it were your own. While it is perfectly proper in academic study to make use of another person's ideas, to do so under the pretence that they are your own is deceitful. It is theft of intellectual property. Plagiarism, whether in coursework or examinations, is always taken extremely seriously within the university as it is a form of cheating. Work found to be plagiarised may be penalised, assessed at zero, or not accepted, and may lead to disciplinary action being initiated.

Work undertaken for our courses is designed to help you develop your knowledge and understanding, and your own powers of analysis and argument. Essays, exams and exam essays assess these skills. Plagiarism therefore undermines the whole purpose of the academic study of literature. For all work for the department's courses, it is important to be aware of, and to acknowledge the sources of arguments and words. This applies to material drawn from critical books and lectures, but also from the work of other students (including tutorial or seminar discussions) and from the internet and other electronic sources. Tutors will check web-based material, as well as other sources, where they have reason to suspect that the writing a student submits does not represent their own ideas, words and arguments.

While deliberate plagiarism involves an intention to deceive and is easy to avoid, it is possible to fall unawares into practices which could constitute plagiarism if you are not familiar with the proper means of using and acknowledging material from other writers. Inadequate referencing and inappropriate use of others' material could inadvertently lay you open to charges of plagiarism. You should also be aware that the resubmission of previously submitted work is classed as misconduct, just like plagiarism, and will be treated as such. You can refer to work that you've previously submitted in a new submission, but you need to cite clearly this pre-existing material in your new submission.

Since different subjects involve different uses of material, and may have different conventions about how it should be acknowledged, it is important that in each of their subjects students consult departmental guidelines about the purpose and presentation of written work in that discipline.

Aside from plagiarism, you must also avoid all other forms of academic misconduct. These include **collusion**, the unauthorised and unattributed collaboration of students in a piece of assessed work; **falsification**, the attempt to present fictitious or distorted data, evidence, references, citations, or experimental results, and/or to knowingly make use of such material; **cheating**, the attempt to obtain or to give assistance in an examination or an assessment without due acknowledgement. This includes submitting work which is not one's own; **deceit**, the use of dishonesty to gain an advantage; and **personation**, the assumption of the identity of another person with intent to deceive or gain unfair advantage.

Further information can be found at:

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

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/students/conduct/academic-misconduct>

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 an 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 and articles—both contextual and critical—which 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 might 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/polishing 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 and polishing is as important as writing: be sure to leave enough time for this. Try to make the Dissertation a pleasure to read.***

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, Semester One). 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 TWO 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 TWO 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 5 pm on Friday of Week 5 of the first semester. 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

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*, 4th ed. (New York: Norton, 2018).

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 Contacting Members of Academic Faculty besides your Supervisor

In addition to working with your supervisor, you may wish to seek **specific** advice from another member of academic faculty whose interests align with your topic. You may do so on no more than **two** occasions, either by e-mail or in a 15-minute session during an Office Hour. An up-to-date list of staff interests, contact details, and office hours is maintained at <https://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/english-literature/staff>. Note that as some academic staff will be on leave for part or all of the year, not all of those listed will be available throughout both semesters.

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, perhaps, *The Canterbury Tales*, *Paradise Lost*, 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/case and a sense of direction and purpose. It should combine some close textual analysis with an engagement with broader historical contexts or conceptual ideas. 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 ask and/or to answer?’ ‘What am I trying to show here, and why does it matter?’ This last point is of particular importance.

3.2 Originality

See 2.1.

3.3 Use of translated texts and other media

Because your Dissertation is being written for the Department of English Literature, it must be at least 51% on English Literature. In turn, it cannot 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 translated material should occupy less than 50% of your attention. There are some exceptions to this: for instance, W.G. Sebald, who was an active collaborator in the English versions of books he wrote in German, or Samuel Beckett, who translated some of his own works from French into English.

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. Again, there are some borderline cases, such as graphic novels or rap lyrics, which might be suitable for study from a literary point of view. If you’re unsure whether the material you wish to make a focus of your study is eligible, you should raise this matter with your supervisor at an early stage.

It is general practice in English literature not to put foreign language material into italics in indented quotations but, usually, to do so in in-text references (e.g., ‘This line reminds the reader of Virgil’s *sunt lacrimae rerum*’).

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 might not have had the chance to study elsewhere in the degree. However, you might wish instead to **expand on texts, theories or issues which you have been introduced to over the previous three years**. Remember 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). Nevertheless, it is perfectly reasonable to use the Dissertation to develop ideas from taught courses already taken.

3.5. Copyright and referencing

If you need images (or other media) from the internet, please give the web resource in full and date of last access. If you have taken images yourself (for instance of a painting that you are discussing), do please indicate that it is your own work. There are rarely copyright problems with using material in an educational context such as a Dissertation but raise this with your supervisor if you think there might be one. Similarly, if you wish to cite unpublished material—e.g., manuscript material—it is best to check with the manuscript owner whether formal permission is needed from the copyright holder. There is normally no issue with a dissertation that is not destined for publication.

3.6. Ethics Clearance

The School of Literatures, Languages, and Cultures requires dissertating students to submit a Level One Ethics Clearance form for their dissertation project. This can be done at any time between the start of Semester One and submission of the dissertation. The form is available at <https://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/forms/level-1-ethics-form>, and is linked from the LEARN page.

The form provides a series of yes/no questions about your research. The vast majority of UG dissertations in English literature involve no ‘participants’ apart from the student writing the dissertation. For this reason, ethics clearance is usually straightforward, and most students will answer ‘no’ to all questions on the form. If your dissertation is one of the rare cases where there are ethic considerations that come into play, your supervisor will be able to advise you about the ethics clearance process.

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 at University – reading critically, analysing arguments, assessing evidence, and writing effectively and elegantly.

The Dissertation requires you to develop your own arguments, 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, balance your argument, 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 recent years have stressed the advantages of thinking ahead towards a topic during the summer vacation of 3rd-4th year, and of 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 can be challenging, but also very rewarding, and thoroughly deserving of the time and effort.