

Description



The University of Manchester

MSc CH/HP Dissertation Handbook

DISSERTATION HANDBOOK

2025/26

For Students studying

MSc Clinical and Health Psychology

MSc Health Psychology

Division of Psychology and Mental Health

School of Health Sciences

Version 1

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1. Introduction

This handbook is intended for students who are undertaking a dissertation as part of the MSc in Clinical and Health Psychology or the MSc in Health Psychology.

A substantial and mandatory component of these MSc programmes involves the design and completion of a high-quality research project. The dissertation unit component represents 33% of the programme (i.e. 600 hours or four months of full-time study).

The aim of the dissertation is to develop critical faculties in research including:

- Cognitive skills (analysing, synthesising, critical thinking, evaluating and problem solving)
- Creativity (intellectual insight and argument construction)
- Knowledge (about subject area and research methods)
- Personal skills (perseverance, self-reflection, responsibility)
- Self-management (preparation, commitment, time management)
- Professional conduct (ethics, confidentiality, data protection, appropriate practices)
- Research management (project planning and delivery)
- Communication (written and oral dissemination)

It is achieved by completing a research dissertation, under supervision, in a relevant area. The research project is an opportunity for you to consolidate much of your previous learning and to pursue a specialist area of interest that may be relevant to your future professional life. This overarching aim can be broken down into several objectives:

- Conduct a critical review of the literature on the topic of your project
- Identify a gap in current knowledge on this topic and formulate (or refine) a clearly justified research question
- Design a study that will answer this research question Obtain ethical approval if required
- Collect the data (after piloting, if required) using carefully designed methodology
- Document the data and analyse them using appropriate statistical and or qualitative methods
- Interpret and critically consider the results of the analysis with published work
- Draw (and justify) conclusions of the findings
- Identify further research questions that lead on from your findings
- Consider the implications of your findings for clinical practice (where relevant)
- Present your findings in the format of a manuscript to be submitted to a peer-reviewed scientific journal and a lay summary of the project demonstrating your ability to communicate complex data to a variety of audiences.

At its best, the dissertation will provide you with the opportunity to focus closely on a research question or issue that bothers or excites you. It provides you with the luxury of focusing exclusively on your chosen topic and increasing your knowledge and understanding of it as well as developing new skills required by researchers. At this level, any research you undertake, by definition, will have to be small scale; however,

many of the MSc dissertations from these programmes have been presented at professional conferences and published in academic journals. Your supervisor will advise whether your project is suitable for publication. Note that your project (and data) belongs to the sponsor, i.e., the University of Manchester, and is not your personal property. This means that you require the permission of the university (usually your project supervisor) for any dissemination of your research findings.

To develop the important skill of writing for an academic audience, your dissertation project must be written in the style of a manuscript that is being submitted to a journal for publication. You will decide, along with your supervisor, which journal you are writing for and follow the guidelines of that journal to format your finished manuscript. Thus, students will not necessarily write their dissertations up in the same format. There are, however, key University regulations that must still be met. See appendix A for the required layout of your dissertation.

The length of your dissertation must not exceed 10,000 words and is likely to be shorter, depending on the methodology and materials used and the requirements of your chosen journal. Please note there is also a minimum word count of 5,000 words. Quality should not be equated with length. The best dissertations, like the best academic publications, are often short and easy to read because the student has acquired a concise writing style. To help develop your style appropriately, assume that you are writing for an academically able individual who is not particularly familiar with the finer details of your topic. A useful reference book is the Collins Good Writing Guide which was published in 2003. This has sections on grammar, punctuation, spelling and so on. You should also refer to the latest edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association since many journals require your writing to adhere to APA style. For your lay summary you need to assume that you are writing for a non-academic individual who is not familiar with your topic.

The guidance notes in this handbook are intended to help you plan your work and make an efficient start. They will guide you through the appropriate stages (i.e. design, planning, ethical approval, data collection, writing-up and submission) and help you to meet the deadlines. However, all projects are different, and you should discuss your circumstances with your supervisor and / or academic advisor where necessary. Specific queries not answered within these pages should be sent to the dissertation unit lead:

Dr Lynsey Gregg (lynsey.gregg@manchester.ac.uk)

In support of your dissertation work you will attend sessions on writing at master's level and gaining ethical approval (professional issues and academic skills unit). Several online courses and resources are also available to you. See your Programme Handbook for details of these. A range of podcasts and tutorials are also available via the library

[here.](#)

There are ten important points that you are required to follow to complete a dissertation successfully. These points are expanded upon in this handbook but are summarised here for quick and easy reference. You are encouraged to look at these regularly.

TOP TEN TIPS FOR SUCCESS WITH YOUR DISSERTATION

1. You lead and manage your dissertation, so success depends on your input and involvement
2. Each activity takes at least 2-3 times longer than you might expect so try to follow the timetable shown in Table 1
3. Identify the 'gap in knowledge' and state a clear research question
4. Carefully choose or design the methodology: mistakes cannot be easily rectified afterwards
5. Do not contact participants or commence data collection until you have ethical approval
6. Where possible, summarise your findings using graphs and tables before undertaking statistical procedures
7. Ensure that your manuscript adheres to the guidelines of the journal you have chosen and that you include these guidelines in the appendices
8. Read your work aloud to help identify poor grammar and muddled sentences
9. Allow time for someone with a critical eye to proof-read your complete dissertation before submission
10. Leave yourself ample time for the completion of your 'final checks'. These always take longer than anticipated.

The purpose of the project is to help you develop critical faculties in research. This is not an easy skill, even for some experienced researchers. It is also a time when you will be working independently of other students on the MSc programme; this can make you feel quite isolated. However, most students look back on their project work with a great sense of satisfaction and personal achievement.

Do not underestimate the importance of the dissertation and its demands on your time. There are a number of important deadlines, and it is certain that you will have to work hard to complete and submit your dissertation on time. Extensions to submission deadlines can only be considered if there are circumstances that could not have been reasonably foreseen by the student and supervisor (such as bereavement or personal illness). The most frequent requests for an extension are those associated with a delay

due to a late application for ethics approval or technical difficulties. Since these issues could have been reasonably foreseen (and hence avoided) they are not normally adequate justification for requesting an extension to the submission deadline.

2. How to choose a dissertation topic

You should by now have already received a list of potential projects and attended the 'choosing a dissertation' session or accessed the materials from it online. The project list comprises a series of brief project outlines along with a named member of staff who has a specific interest in each project (and who will ultimately supervise the project). You should identify projects that interest you and discuss these with the relevant members of staff if you need more information. This will help you to understand the nature of the project. Students may propose their own project, but agreement depends on the academic content and calibre of the proposal and the interests and availability of an academic supervisor. Depending on the nature of the project, you may be eligible to claim project costs up to a maximum of £750. See the policy on Canvas for details of costs that you can claim for.

You are required to choose ten projects in order of preference. These preferences should be submitted to the submission space on Canvas by 5pm on the 3rd of October 2025.

Projects and supervisors will be allocated shortly after this date and your allocation will be communicated to you soon after, typically within a week. Where possible, projects are allocated according to preference, but this depends on the availability of resources as well as the workload and availability of supervisors.

It is very important that you start work on your project soon after it has been allocated. You should devote a large part of your independent learning time (i.e., when you have no lectures or practical sessions) to your project. Ideally, you will be making some progress on your dissertation in most weeks of the programme.

3. What to expect from your supervisor

Once you have been allocated to a project/supervisor you should arrange to meet them as soon as possible.

You will receive a minimum of 16 contact hours from your main supervisor (face-to-face or online meetings; time spent addressing emails) plus non-contact supervision (e.g. reading and providing written feedback on drafts of your work).

At first, you should typically arrange to meet with your supervisor for 30-60 minutes at least every two weeks. Once the project is designed and progress is well under way you may not need to meet as frequently. Not all of your supervision will be face-to-face, expect to have some meetings with your supervisor online via MS Teams

Please note that initiative for requesting supervision meetings lies entirely with you.

Working with a supervisor is an important element of the dissertation process. Supervision is provided under the general principle that the dissertation must be the student's own work. Guidance and discussion throughout the supervisory process will enable you to develop and present your work, on an approved topic, effectively and within the norms of a dissertation genre. Your supervisor will provide you with the necessary support (e.g., technical issues, statistical advice) or direct you to an appropriate member of staff if there are issues outside their expertise.

Some students will have more than one supervisor, where this is the case, one supervisor will be designated the primary supervisor and will usually be responsible for, commenting on your draft presentation, your draft dissertation and marking the final dissertation. You have also been allocated an academic advisor. If you have concerns about your project, or any other matter, that you do not wish to discuss with your supervisor, then please contact your advisor for further guidance. Remember that the sooner you make us aware of any problems you are experiencing, the sooner we can begin to help you.

The supervisor's role is to give advice and help on the nature and standard of the work and direct you to useful literature and appropriate methodology. But remember, the ultimate responsibility remains yours **and the success of the project depends on you.** Use the time wisely with your supervisor: listen carefully and follow the advice offered. **It is not their responsibility if you fail to attend meetings or miss deadlines.** This is part of your training in project management and managing the 'research process'.

Your supervisor will guide you through the research process and will suggest deadlines for submitting draft work. Make sure you do not miss these deadlines and take heed of the feedback since your supervisor will not be allowed to read multiple drafts of your work. Your supervisor will provide you with one set of comments on each section of your dissertation as they are completed OR they will provide overall comments on the full draft at the end. This should be agreed with your supervisor in advance. Be mindful that supervisors have multiple students and a variety of other commitments and will need to book time in their diaries to look at your work. If you send your draft too close to the submission deadline you may find that your supervisor does not have adequate time to

look at it, or you will not have time to incorporate the suggested changes. This will not be considered grounds for an extension.

There will be periods when your supervisor is not available, either because they are heavily committed with other duties such as examining, lecture preparation, administrative work, research or clinical work. . Therefore, if you wish to see your supervisor, you should make an appointment. Agree methods of getting in contact with your supervisor at the start: email is usually the best way. Supervision meetings always need to be prearranged: never expect on-the-spot supervision. Make sure that you and your supervisor are aware of each other's periods of absence.

Your supervisor will almost certainly be involved with a variety of other projects; therefore, you should not assume that they will immediately recall the last discussion you had together about your project. You may find it useful to take an agenda to each supervisory meeting (a short list of points you would like to discuss) and take minutes of the meeting (brief notes on what was discussed or decided and any action points for you and or your supervisor). Reviewing the minutes will help your supervisor and you recall what was discussed at the previous meeting. If you do not take minutes, it is a good idea to instead keep a logbook throughout the duration of project so that you keep a record of all discussions with your supervisor. This should document all aspects of work, and specifically the decisions made (e.g. why one methodology was chosen over another). You will be surprised how many of the finer details of your study become difficult to recollect by the time you are writing up your dissertation, so having a single place for future reference is a good idea.

Should your supervisor or advisor be absent unexpectedly without notifying you, please contact the dissertation lead for advice.

4. Managing your time

Table 1 gives an example of how you might typically organise your time. Bear in mind that each project is different and these times are only a guide, not deadlines. Do not underestimate the time taken to complete each of these activities: many years of experience have taught us that each activity will take 2-3 times longer than you first expect. Throughout the project you have several on-going commitments (for example, you will need to organise your time such that you are able to revise for assessment in January and in May/June). It will be clear by now that there is very little 'slack' in this timetable: any delay at the beginning of your project development time will cause accumulating problems later in the year.

You will be required to give an oral presentation outlining the proposed research in February (full time students) or June (part time students). The purpose of the

presentation is to focus your thoughts on the project and to ensure that your rationale and methods are sound. The feedback that you receive may enhance your study design. The presentation, which will be examined by the dissertation lead, also serves as a useful progress check which allows us to see whether you are on track and making the progress required.

5. The key dissertation unit assignments

There are four pieces of work to be submitted as part of the dissertation unit, all of which contribute towards the final grade:

1. Oral presentation of proposed research (10 minutes, plus 5 minutes for questions, 15% of overall grade)
2. Lay Summary (500 words, 5%)
3. Dissertation report, journal article format (5,000-10,000 words, 80%)

Marking criteria for these assignments can be found in the appendices.

Table 1. Suggested timeline for full time students

Project selection	List of projects circulated, and projects allocated	Sept- Oct
Ethical approval	Ethical considerations considered and application started	Dec â?? Jan
Oral presentation of proposed research		Mid Feb*
Introduction and methodology sections of report		End March
Data collection		April-Jun
Results	Complete analysis	Mid Jul
Discussion		End Jul â?? Early Aug
Full report	Draft manuscript to supervisor **	Mid Aug
Abstract and Lay Summary		End Aug
Final checks		End Aug

*Oral presentations are scheduled to take place 10th – 20th February 2026. Slides will be due on the 4th of February 2026. Please note these dates in your diary and ensure that you are available. Your exact slot will be confirmed in January. **DASS automatic extensions do not apply for this assignment.**

Note that the timescales above apply to full time students.

Part time students will present their proposals on the 15th of June 2026 and submit the final report and lay summary in early September 2027 (date tbc). All other deadlines should be discussed and approved with the study supervisor.

****Rules for commenting on drafts**

The supervisor can comment **on one draft only** of any dissertation assignment. Where there are two or more supervisors the draft presentation or dissertation may only be read once by one supervisor. This will normally be the primary supervisor, i.e., the supervisor who is responsible for marking the final submission. It is acceptable to ask for the second supervisor to look at some sections (for example if the second supervisor has methodological expertise that the first does not you may ask them to look at the methods) but each section must be looked at only once and your primary supervisor can no longer comment on this section.

The same rule applies for the lay summary. You must decide, along with your supervisors, which supervisor will provide comments. Note that comments on the lay summary will be less detailed than the comments on the manuscript. Supervisors may only comment on the overall appropriateness of the language used (e.g., too many complex sentences, too many technical terms).

Progress

Your supervisor will monitor the progress of your project. The dissertation lead, Dr Lynsey Gregg, will also review your progress across the year. You will be required to submit research monitoring forms to Lynsey via Canvas to facilitate this. These forms must be discussed with and co-signed by your supervisor so please schedule appointments in advance of these dates. Forms can be found on Canvas in the dissertation folder.

Research Monitoring Form deadlines

The dates in the table below apply to full time and part time students starting in September 2025 only

	Full Time Students	Part Time Students Year 1
RESEARCH MONITORING FORM 1:	2 nd December 2025	2 nd December 2025
RESEARCH MONITORING FORM 2:	16 th June 2026	December 2026 (tbc)
RESEARCH MONITORING FORM 3:		June 2027 (tbc)

Second year part-time students returning to study for their second year in September 2025 will be asked to provide progress updates on 2nd December 2025 (form 3) and 16th June 2026 (form 4)

5.1. The presentation and outline of proposed research

The aim of the presentation is to outline what is planned for your research project and provide justification for the project. See appendix B for the marking criteria. It is up to you how you structure your presentation, but it should contain the following aspects:

Background

- Outline the rationale for the study including relevant literature and a (brief) critical appraisal of it. What is the gap in the field your study aims to fill? Identify, specify and justify an appropriate research question or questions

Methods

- Describe and justify the study design and methods to be used in the project
- Include a power calculation if appropriate
- Describe the planned analyses, ensuring that the research question / hypotheses can be tested

Ethical considerations

1. Briefly outline the key ethical concerns relevant to your project and how these will be addressed

Timeline and key milestones

- Outline the timeline for the research in relation to the attainment of the key milestones (when data will be collected by; when the analyses will be completed, and written sections completed)
- If you have a contingency plan for your project (this is a good idea!) you should outline it here, including details of when the plan will be implemented. You should be able to demonstrate that you have planned for any anticipated issues.
- If ethical approval is required but not yet granted, please include the status of your application and anticipated approval date.

References

- References do not need to be included and will not be examined, though you may choose to have them on a slide at the end.

5.2. The Lay Summary

The lay summary requires you to describe your research in language comprehensible to a lay person in 500 words or less. It is submitted alongside the journal article. Guidance on writing the lay summary can be found in section 7.6

5.3. The Journal Article

As the presentation format is a journal manuscript, the dissertation format is based on the instructions to authors in the journal you have chosen (this decision should be made with your supervisor). This is consistent with, but extends, the guidance notes for the presentation of taught master's dissertations. You must ensure that all aspects of your written journal article adhere to the journal guidelines (citations; word limit; formatting of tables and figures and so on). Note the requirement that your dissertation must be between 5,000 and 10, 000 words long and you must therefore choose a journal that fits with this requirement (see below).

5.4. Feedback

Written feedback on the presentation will be provided by 6th March 2025 (full-time students) or by 29th June 2025 (part-time students)

Written feedback on the lay summary and journal article can be requested after the exam board has been held and grades ratified. Please contact the assessment team (shs.assessment@manchester.ac.uk) after you have been notified of your degree result if you would like to see examiner feedback.

Final exam boards are typically held in the third week of November with results released shortly thereafter.

If you have queries about any feedback you have received, please contact the assessment team in the first instance. Alternatively, please contact the dissertation lead, Lynsey Gregg.

6. Dissertation Format

Dissertations should be formatted in line with the ‘‘Guidance for the Presentation of Taught Dissertations for UG and PGT provision’’ document <http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=2863> which specifies the mandatory content pages. Your lay summary should be placed after these pages, before the journal manuscript (formatted for the journal you have chosen with your supervisor).

Note that the final word count for the dissertation, to be inserted at the bottom of the contents page, should include the main body of the thesis i.e. the introduction, methods, results, discussion and conclusion including any tables, figures, in-text citations, footnotes and endnotes. Other pages, like the title, abstract, declarations, acknowledgements, table of contents, references and appendices are excluded. This word count is distinct from the word count for the journal article (which should be given on the manuscript title page).

The journal manuscript must follow the conventions of the Journal selected, the author guidelines for which should be included in the appendices. It usually includes:

- Title page (note that this is a separate title page to the title page of the dissertation and follows the journal formatting guidance).
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Methods ‘‘ with appropriate subheadings for sample/participants, procedures etc.
- Results
- Discussion
- Acknowledgments
- Tables & Figures ‘‘ journal requirements may specify that these are to be submitted separately or be positioned at the end of the manuscript. For your thesis, you may place them in the text where you want the examiner to see them.
- Reference list typically APA format. If you choose a journal that requires Vancouver (numbered) format, you may use Harvard referencing / APA instead, to assist your examiner.

- Appendices (which must include the author guidelines for the journal you have written the manuscript for and the relevant ethical approval documentation)
- Some journals may also request additional statements for publication purposes, including study highlights, copyright and author contribution statements. These do not need to be included in the submitted dissertation.

Since the space in academic journals is restricted, there is a level of detail that is normally not provided in the manuscript for examination purposes (e.g. tables of raw data and statistical analyses not included in the results section; extended quotes; copies of the materials used such as questionnaires and interview topic guides). Note that these supplementary appendices are for the purposes of the examination of your dissertation. They are not the same as the appendices that would typically be an essential part of a journal manuscript. Appendices do not count toward the word limit of the journal article OR the thesis overall but must not be used to prevent detail that should appear within the thesis to circumvent the word limit.

6.1 Word Limit and Journal Choice

You will decide with your supervisor which journal to format your manuscript for. The word limit of the journal must not be below 5,000 words. If the journal does not have a word limit or specifies instead a maximum number of pages then you must ensure that you do not write more than 10,000 words. Please note that in this scenario, the 10,000 word limit **includes** tables.

In some instances, it may seem that University guidelines and journal guidelines are in conflict. For example, a journal may state that there is a maximum word limit of 8,000 words including references when references are not normally included in University word counts. Where this occurs the journal guidelines are paramount and must be followed.

If your finished paper is longer than the journal word or page limit, then you have three options:

1. Edit it further to meet the guidelines
2. Choose an alternative journal with a larger word limit
3. Do neither but accept that your dissertation may be marked down on the presentation component for not meeting your chosen journal's guidelines.

These options reflect the 'real world' choices made by academics submitting their work to peer reviewed journals. For us, option 3 would not be chosen since this would mean instant rejection or return of the manuscript.

6.2 Writing style

When writing drafts of your dissertation, pay particular attention to the grammar and style remembering, for example, to use the past passive voice for most statements. It is helpful to phrase your aims, objectives and plans in the past tense (as if you have already completed the work) rather than the future – this will allow you to re-use the text for your final dissertation without having to change all the tenses. You may find it helpful to look at previous MSc dissertations to get an idea on style, length etc. A useful technique to aid good writing skills is to read your written work out aloud: this will help you to identify poor grammar and muddled sentences.

Supervisors are not to be expected to proofread or to correct spelling/grammar. Students are advised to buy-in or otherwise arrange such services if needed. Even if your supervisor reads your entire dissertation and you make the suggested changes, this is no guarantee that it is of a pass standard; the work is yours and its quality is dependent on your output.

7. The building blocks of your dissertation

The best way to deal with a research project is to break it down into several parts and work through the list systematically. This is the process that is used by experienced researchers: irrespective of the specific research topic, the building blocks are similar across all research projects. This section will guide you through the process

7.1 Introduction

You should first conduct a critical review of the literature on the topic of your project to orient yourself with the literature and develop the rationale for your research project.

There are several different ways of finding all the literature that you need to consult. Your supervisor may recommend some key articles to get you started and you will also want to read some of the papers referred to within the text of these articles. After reading the abstract (and maybe the conclusions), you will need to decide if an article is relevant and worth reading in its entirety. The more you read, the easier it will be to determine what is considered important work in your chosen area. For example, so-called “seminal” articles may be referred to in almost every paper you read. Also, you will be able to develop your own critical powers if you notice carefully how researchers evaluate each other’s work.

One of the most valuable methods to discover relevant articles is to use the various bibliographical services on offer in the library – e.g. citations indices and computer searches for writings in your topic area. The library staff will help you to choose what is appropriate for your aims and explain how to use the resources. You must do this search early since it takes a long time. Many of the papers you wish to read will be available

online and will be downloadable. Others may appear only in print journals and you need to allow at least two hours initially and preferably a half-day to find the titles you have turned up in the library. Also, you will come across books or journal articles that are not stocked by our library. You can order them from Inter-Library Loans but remember there will obviously be a time lag between ordering and obtaining such material. Don't make the mistake of thinking that because you cannot access the pdf online that you don't need to read the paper. There are many online databases available for your searches (e.g. web of science, pubmed). These are far more comprehensive than google scholar.

Your introduction should be a condensed critical synthesis of the most relevant literature. If you are unsure how to start to write this section, a good idea is to make a list of the key studies you intend to include. In addition to identifying and briefly describing each relevant study, you should try to briefly comment on the quality of the study: is it comprehensive? is it flawed? how does it fit in with other studies on this topic?, are you able to explain the findings?, how exactly has it contributed to the topic? And so on. This means that your introduction will be evaluative and critical of the studies that have a particular bearing on your own research. You may feel hesitant about criticising published work, but there is no need to; just because a study has been published, that does not necessarily mean it is superior to the one you are doing - nor that other authors are infallible! Given the word limit, your discussion of each study will range from a few sentences to a paragraph so you will need to write concisely. Your introduction should not simply be a regurgitation of what the journal article says: a good introduction will be critical of the existing literature and contain your interpretation and opinion of the literature. The order you write about each study is not necessarily chronological: there is normally some grouping of studies based on themes (for example, studies using clinical participants and non-clinical participants may be presented in separate sections).

Do not include everything you have read just because you have read it. There will be much reading around your topic as you begin to understand it but this is -background- information that will not appear in a succinct introduction. The number of references you will use in your dissertation will vary enormously across projects. In some cases, there will be a few highly relevant studies that you wish to summarise in detail. In other cases, there will be a huge area which is broadly relevant but does not have direct bearing on your own study. Be selective. If you are in any doubt about the relevance of some of the literature to your piece of work, write a sentence or two explaining why you think a certain area is relevant. Only articles that you have read or consulted should be included as a reference. It is not acceptable to copy long lists of references cited by other authors unless you have read them yourself.

It usually helps to have an opening paragraph that introduces the topic and indicates the nature of the study. It is normal to end the introduction with a paragraph that states the aim of the study. This final section of the introduction is perhaps the most important. This is where you summarise the literature and identify the ‘‘gap-in-knowledge’’. Here you are explaining why your study is necessary. A well written introduction will have hinted at the gap throughout i.e., that there is an issue or question that has still to be addressed. By the end of the introduction, you should be in a position to identify and clearly justify the research question you will answer in your study. For example, it may be that a particular clinical or research test has been validated on adult subjects. It may be useful to apply the test to children but it is not known if the results can be interpreted in the same way. You have therefore identified what is known (validated in adults), what is not known (i.e., gap in knowledge is that it has not been validated in children). Your research question, therefore, might be to find out if there are differences in test outcome in different age groups of participants. In the example above, a suitable ending might be: ‘‘No study has reported the prevalence of XYZ in children. This information is important because’’. Therefore, the aim of the study was to investigate the prevalence of XYZ in school-age children using the ABC test.’’ Often it is appropriate to provide a hypothesis here. You will note that the convention is to write the manuscript in the past tense as if everything has already been completed (‘‘the study was’’ is used instead of ‘‘the aim is’’).

Thus, your introduction outlines the nature of the problem (and why it is important), critically reviews the relevant literature, identifies the gap in knowledge (the rationale for the study) and states the aim of your project.

If you write the introduction early on (as expected), you must check it again later before submission to make sure it is all relevant. Remember that new papers are published all the time, and you should look out for new additions to the field before writing up your final draft.

7.1.1 A note on plagiarism

When you are writing about other researchers’ work in your introduction, particularly when you are summarising the study and its findings, you must take care not to plagiarise their work. You may paraphrase what the author has said but you must not copy it word for word. Where you paraphrase an author you must appropriately reference them using an in-text citation. It is often difficult to paraphrase well-written sections in other people’s work. If you do not proceed carefully here, it may result in accidental plagiarism – i.e. the incorporation of large chunks of text written by other people into your work.

Unfortunately, plagiarism of both of the accidental and intentional kind is not uncommon. It is, of course, against the regulations, and if any of the text in your work is found to originate elsewhere, you will have to re-submit (if permitted) and your chances of graduating will be seriously jeopardised.

You may be unclear in your mind as to what constitutes plagiarism and what constitutes paraphrase. In general, using the same phrases and sentences as another writer, even if you have changed some of it, counts as plagiarism.

There are university guidelines and policies on plagiarism which can be found here:

[university guidelines and policies on plagiarism](#)

If you decide to include quotations from another author, you must ensure that it is clear to the reader that it is a quotation via the use of appropriate quotation marks and referencing (see section 7.1.2 below).

In general, you should use quotations sparingly, and only when you feel this is essential: for example, the author may have used a particularly apposite phrase, defined a term, or you may wish to quote a complicated conclusion to avoid being unclear or misrepresenting an author. While this is acceptable, the literature review should be predominantly your own writing and not a sequence of quotations bound together by your comments.

The dissertation, as with other assignments, is submitted online via Turnitin which highlights work that appears to have come from other sources (for example websites, and assignments submitted at this and other Universities). Turnitin gives each piece of work an originality score (expressed as a percentage).

Some students have been tempted to use free plagiarism checking software online prior to submission and have asked us what an 'acceptable' percentage is. There is no such thing as 'acceptable plagiarism' and a low percentage on one of these sites does not mean that there is no plagiarised content in your work. We therefore advise against the use of these sites. Furthermore, some sites have terms and conditions which allow for the distribution (or selling) of the submitted piece of work after you have uploaded it. Your ethical approval is unlikely to allow this form of dissemination, and you may be in breach of data protection laws. In short, using plagiarism software will not guarantee that your work is not investigated for plagiarism and may have other unintended adverse consequences. Therefore, you should avoid using these sites.

7.1.2. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence is a term that is used to cover a wide variety of different software, applications and techniques. Generative AI refers to software such as ChatGPT that can be used to generate text, images, music and code. The University of Manchester's position on generative AI is that you use it to help you learn, but you cannot use it to generate or falsify work. As such, Generative AI should not be used to write any part of your thesis.

The assignments in this unit (presenting your dissertation proposal orally and writing up the finished work for both an academic and a lay audience) were designed to develop and test your communication skills. The dissertation unit requires you to develop an academic writing style and to be able to show that you can communicate your research effectively to experts and non-experts alike. If generative AI is used to write some of your dissertation, these skills are not being properly tested which means that you are damaging your learning and skill development as well as breaching assignment guidelines. You also run the risk of committing academic malpractice, since the thesis you present should be your own work. Remember that academic malpractice is any activity, *intentional or otherwise*, that is likely to undermine the integrity essential to scholarship and research.

For example:

- **Plagiarism / misrepresentation** – occurs if you present generative-AI produced research or incorporate generative-AI produced (third-party) material as your own. You should not present content/text fully generated by AI in any assessed material as your own work. Your work must be original and authentic.
- **Fabrication or falsification** – if you use generative AI to create or manipulate data/imagery/consents/references for your research.
- **Proofreading** – if you use generative AI as a proofreading tool, you should be mindful of the university's [proofreading policy](#) and ensure that the tool is not used to change the content and meaning of your work. Note that you should never expose data collected for your dissertation (e.g. transcripts of interviews) to this type of checking as it will allow the AI tool to incorporate your data into its training data. This will also be outside of your ethical approval.

Additional problems with generative AI to be aware of:

- Generative AI is prone to making erroneous or incorrect claims (sometimes referred to as 'hallucinations'). These are not so much a bug or glitch as a reflection of how the software works. AI does not have any understanding of what is true or false but can only reproduce content that 'looks like' a response to a prompt. AI

generative tools also have the potential to fabricate ‘‘facts’’ or generate false information and can generate content that includes fictional sources or references.

- Generative AI is based on the work of others. It uses existing content to generate its responses (often without permission). This includes copyrighted or restricted material which is not appropriately cited. This means that using generative AI can lead to breaches of copyright and plagiarism, even if you explicitly acknowledge the use of AI in your work.
- Many content producers, including scientists, have complained about their work being stolen and re-used without recognition. Content producers from disempowered positions are particularly vulnerable to this and so generative AI widens power differentials within society.
- Generative AI can perpetuate and generate bias and discriminatory responses concerning minority groups e.g. Anaya (2024): [AI image generators often give racist and sexist results: can they be fixed? \(nature.com\)](#). It also favours Western perspectives as most training data is from Western sources.
-

The university policy on AI outlines some acceptable areas of usage of AI (e.g. correcting spelling/grammar mistakes; generating initial ideas; planning; supporting critical thinking skills) and we would support its use in this context but presenting work created by generative AI without suitable acknowledgement is plagiarism, and will be treated using the same principles and processes as plagiarism of a person, as outlined in your [academic integrity training](#).

Further guidance on AI use, and how to acknowledge it can be found here: [Can I use a chatbot or AI tool in my assignments? ‘‘ Library Help \(libanswers.com\)](#)

7.1.3 Use of references

The system of academic referencing is designed to anchor your work firmly in its research context, to prevent you from making unsubstantiated statements and to allow your readers to check all the information included for them. This should usually be a straightforward matter if you include a bibliography entry for every reference in the text. When you are setting out the ideas and previous research in your area, you often need to refer to one or more previous works per comment. For example:

Substance has long been recognized as problematic for people with psychosis (Smith, 1971). The substance use checklist has frequently been used to assess drug and alcohol use (e.g. Jones 1973; Evans 1982; Brown, 1985; Walker 1999). Its usefulness as a diagnostic measure of substance use dependence however, has been recently questioned (Harris, 2013). For a review of problems associated with the use of this measure see Harris (2014).

It is important to use appropriate references; for example, if a particular measure was first used as long ago as 1973, as the one in this extract was, you need to refer to the early and perhaps later uses. Don't just choose any old study you happen to know to back up a general statement such as the one in the extract. If in doubt, over-reference rather than under-reference in the first place, as it is obviously easier to cut out references than to add them at a later stage. You should have obtained a good idea of how to do it from your reading of research papers. If you feel uneasy about what you are doing, choose a good research paper that you know already, stop considering the content for a moment and just peruse the text thoroughly to see how it is written. This will help you with referencing and also with general style and structure.

It isn't a good idea to use secondary references in your work, i.e. don't rely on somebody else's version of a given study but always go back to the original where possible. On rare occasions, you might not be able to, e.g. an author might cite an unpublished or otherwise generally unobtainable document. In this case, include both the secondary reference and its source in the text, and include both references in full in the reference list:

Wright (1971, cited in Harris, 2013) found that...

The reference listed in the reference section at the end of the literature review will contain entries for Wright AND Harris.

The list of references at the end of your manuscript should follow the accepted referencing system of the journal you have chosen to submit to. For many psychology journals this will be the APA format more details of which can be found in the APA Publication manual of the American Psychological Association or at www.apastyle.org where you will find the APA style tutorial (Have a look at Learning APA Style > The Basics)

A useful guide can also be found here:

<https://www.softchalkcloud.com/lesson/serve/69dUWqLwCGFpNX/html>

You can get more guidance on APA style issues from the BPS style guide:

Citation of works within the main body of text

References must be cited in the text using names(s) of author and year of publication. Examples:

Anderson (1995); (Anderson & Jones, 1998). When a work has three or more authors, cite only the first author followed by *et al.* and the year.

Finally, you may wish to make a reference which appears not to have a written source. This may take the form: *It has been suggested that*. (J. Bloggs, personal communication). This does not appear in the reference list at the end of the manuscript.

Reference list

The list of references should be in alphabetical order and should commence on a separate sheet of paper with a separate line between each reference. References to journals should include (in this order): all authors' names with initials; year of publication; article title; journal name in italics; volume number; and inclusive page numbers.

You may find it difficult to believe that anybody reading your thesis will be so interested in these minutiae. They will. Don't forget that your supervisor and examiner will know most of the published work in the field already and anything that you refer to, they will either know already or want to know more about.

7.2 Methods

The methodology (sometimes referred to as experimental design) is a very important section and will require a lot of thought: rush or make a mistake with the design and the results of your project could be, at best, difficult to interpret. There are no second chances. It usually comes as a surprise to students to learn that many published articles belong in the bin. Few things are more dispiriting than to complete a study based on a good idea but with irremediable flaws in the methods. Remember that readers of your work will have no difficulty picking holes in your methods so do not underestimate the importance of getting this stage correct.

There is, in theory, no point in testing a scientific question that someone else has already proved. However, in real life, science is seldom cut and dry. Most studies (if the methods are sound) add a little piece to the bigger jigsaw. The questions the examiners will be asking are:

- Is your study bigger, continued longer, or otherwise more substantial than the previous one(s)?
- Is your methodology more rigorous (in particular, does it cover any specific methodological criticisms of previous studies)?
- Is the population studied any different from other studies (for example, different age groups, different ethnic groups, and different severity of symptoms?)

The purpose of this methods section is to make crystal clear to the reader how you did your experiment or study so that anyone else can come along and replicate it exactly: in effect, it is a recipe for ‘‘making your cake’’. The one difference is that you can’t just list the ingredients: you must explain everything in sentences, taking care to justify important decisions (for example, why test 20 subjects, why just males etc). Again, the overall length will depend on the nature of your study and your supervisor will help you.

When describing your method, it is also usual to write in the passive form (e.g. ‘‘Twenty children were tested’’) rather than ‘‘I tested twenty children’’. There may be occasions when you need to write ‘‘I’’; or you can use ‘‘the author’’ if you wish to retain distance.

Design

Summarise the type of design you have chosen.

Participants

Describe who the participants were that were recruited. Who was included/excluded? What screening procedures, selection criterion did you apply? How did you arrive at the number of participants in each group? (Describe power analysis or otherwise provide a justification of the sample size e.g. you might refer to the concepts of data saturation and information power in qualitative research). Were participants paid for taking part? Where did you recruit participants (for example, student population or hospital records)? Remember to make it clear that you obtained ethical approval (see below).

Materials

Describe all materials (such as tests, questionnaires, topic guides) and equipment.

Procedure

Describe the order tasks were completed. Where was the study carried out? How long did assessments take? What instructions were given to the participant? For complex designs you may wish to include a summary table or flowchart.

Data Analysis

You should finish with a section describing how you treated and analysed the data i.e. what statistical and/or qualitative methods were used.

The type of qualitative data analysis must be stated clearly and the processes to be undertaken must be outlined in detail including the different roles of the student and the supervisor in the analysis process. A reflexive statement describing the positioning of the research team should also be included.

7.3. Analysis of data / results

Quantitative data

The analysis of results should begin with exploration of your data to produce summary information and graphs (e.g., summary statistics such as mean and standard deviation, mean difference between your experimental groups etc). Do not present your supervisor with mountains of raw material and computer printouts without having also tried to understand what the data / results mean. Allow one or two weeks for this part of the analysis. It is only after you have discussed this summary information with your supervisor that you should proceed to formal statistical analysis. Allow a further two weeks (depending on your level of skill) for this part of the analysis.

Qualitative data

You must leave a suitable amount of time for data analysis which will need to be planned at the start of the study with your supervisor(s). If qualitative research methods are new to you then your supervisor may provide some training (e.g., analyse the first few transcripts alongside you). Depending on your sampling technique you may be conducting analysis alongside data collection and transcription so make sure you manage your time well. As a very rough rule of thumb it takes $\approx 5\times$ the amount of time to transcribe an interview (i.e. 1 hour interview = 5 hours transcription) and roughly a day per interview to analyse thoroughly.

You should send data to your supervisor in advance of any meetings so they can read / analyse it (if appropriate) and make informed comments on your interpretation.

Please note there are strict guidelines regarding the storage and transmission of your data. You should be aware of the university policies and the ethical approval BEFORE you undertake this work.

The results section merely reports the findings: there is no discussion or interpretation (in the case of quantitative data) as this is dealt with in the discussion section which will

follow. Explanatory text should be used to identify and describe the tables and figures of relevance. Tables of numbers are useful, but if these are copious and not all interesting, be selective and include the rest in appendices.

Tables should be numbered consecutively using Arabic numerals (Table 1, Table 2 etc). Each table must be cited in the text in numerical order. It is also appropriate to indicate in the text just where the table (or figure) should appear, if your journal requires you to present tables or figures at the end of the paper. For example, at the end of the paragraph where a table is described, you may add a line of text in italics that says "Insert Table 1 here". Each table would then appear on a separate sheet towards the end of the manuscript. A brief legend with sufficiently detailed explanatory title should appear above each table.

Figures should also be numbered consecutively in the order they appear in the manuscript. When referring to these in the manuscript, you should refer to these as "Figure 1" (not "figure 1", "fig 1" or "Fig 1"). Again, indicate in the text where this should be inserted. Each figure should appear on a separate sheet and these are situated immediately after the tables, unless your journal specifies that they be presented in-text or you decide (with your supervisor) to place them in the text.

It is recommended that you have a separate appendix in your dissertation for additional information that did not appear in the main body of the text. You should discuss the content of this appendix with your supervisor but examiners would probably benefit from the following information:

1. Evidence that you checked the data for "normality" (or other relevant assumptions) before proceeding with parametric statistics
2. Additional figures and tables of results such as summary tables of analytical statistics
3. Additional quotes or thematic diagrams for qualitative data

Don't worry if your results aren't what you predicted or don't show anything you expected. Such results are just as valid as predictable ones (assuming your methodology was sound). Your thesis will not be failed because your study did not have a particular outcome. Don't be tempted to pick out interesting bits of the findings to try and prove a point if the evidence isn't there.

7.4. Discussion

This is where you are trying to make sense of your results. The purpose of this section is to discuss and interpret your results: were your research questions answered? were your initial hypotheses supported or not, if not why not?, how do they compare with similar

studies? Begin this section by summarising your findings. You may need to do some further literature research to fill in details that arise from the results. Don't forget to give references, even though you will have already mentioned some in earlier sections. You should also relate your findings to practical applications in the real world: there is a difference between statistically significant results and meaningful differences. Within this section, you may also recommend how others could extend your work and make some recommendations for clinical practice. The strengths and limitations of your study should be discussed and you should put forward suggestions for future research.

7.5. Abstract

Although this appears immediately after the title page in your manuscript, it will probably be the very last page you will write before submitting your dissertation. It is vitally important that you make a good impression. This may be the only page that a reader will look at in your dissertation. It is certainly the first page that an examiner will look at so make a good job of writing this page. The abstract should consist of a brief factual account of the study, giving the important details.

Some journals require structured abstracts (with standard headings such as objectives, design, methods, results, conclusions) and others are unstructured (a single paragraph outlining the study). You must follow the guidelines for the journal you have chosen.

7.6. Lay summary

The lay summary, like the abstract, is one of the first items presented in your submitted thesis but one of the last to be completed.

The lay summary requires you to describe the research presented in the manuscript in language comprehensible to a lay person in 500 words or less. It is used to explain complex ideas to people who have no prior knowledge about the subject. It should be aimed at a general population audience (i.e. not the target population or sample of your dissertation). Your writing should be suitable for a 14-15 age range (as per the Flesch-Kincaid reading level).

A lay summary does not include scientific terms or jargon and should instead be written in everyday language (Plain English). For example, in a lay summary instead of 'participated' we would say 'took part in'. Sentences should be short, and complex grammar should be avoided. If technical terms and acronyms cannot be avoided, they should be explained. There are several useful guides and resources available online. See for example:

<http://www.dcc.ac.uk/resources/how-guides/write-lay-summary>

Writing a plain language (lay) summary of your research findings – Health Research Authority Plain English free guides

The National Institute for Health Research has some examples of lay summaries here: <https://evidence.nihr.ac.uk/>

The lay summary should answer the questions **who, what, where, why and how** and include:

1. Brief background/context and aims of study (Why?)
2. Methods (Who? how? and where?)
3. Results (What?)
4. Conclusions/ Implications

– What do we know as a result of this study that we did not know before?

– Why was this study important?

Note that the lay summary should not contain in-text citations or references

7.7. Acknowledgments

This is your opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed to your project; notably participants, services, schools, (they may be appearing anonymously in your text so make an appropriate anonymous acknowledgment); not only your supervisor but other academic staff who may have helped with references, statistics or even providing data, technical staff who have assisted with or provided equipment, perhaps your fellow students for text-checking, ideas, or support. Don't forget to acknowledge anyone who has helped fund your research.

Doing this is a salutary experience, because it reminds you how much collaboration is required to complete even a small project. Note that you may wish to provide acknowledgements at the beginning of your dissertation which cover the help and support you have received throughout your studies (not just your research project). It is good practice to provide acknowledgements in your manuscript (restricted to the help and support received as part of your research project). Where you place these depends on the author guidelines for your chosen journal but it is typical to situate this immediately after the main body of text but before Tables, Figures and references.

7.8. Appendices

Appendices typically contain supplementary material for your project (statistical analyses; materials such as questionnaires and topic guides). At the bare minimum you must include the notification of ethical approval (letter from the University or NHS committee confirming that ethical approval has been granted for the project) and the author guidelines for your chosen journal. Your appendices should be labelled with a capital letter (Appendix A, Appendix B, Appendix C etc.) in the order given in the text. Each appendix must have a title. Begin each appendix on a separate page. Centre the word Appendix and the identifying capital letters (A, B, C etc.) at the top of the page.

7.9. Final checks and submission

Before you submit your dissertation, you should make sure that the title you have been using up until this point in time is the most suitable for your project and your manuscript. You have now been working on this topic for many months and you may have decided on a better title. The title should give a clear indication of what the dissertation is about for the sake of other scholars wishing to read it. It should be brief, usually not more than 15 words. It should be in good English, properly punctuated and without any unnecessary technical terms.

You need to check your draft for what might be termed continuity errors. Roughly speaking, this means checking that the whole text is consistent with itself from beginning to end. To help you eliminate such errors, here is a checklist:

1. Are the headings & sub-headings in the contents listing the same as those in the text?
2. Have you given lists of tables and figures as well as chapters in your contents?
3. Are they all numbered consecutively? Numberings from earlier versions may persist and you may have two sections with the same number
4. Are all the cross-references to other sections of the study correct?
5. Do all the references cited in the text have a corresponding entry in the reference list, with the same date as the reference in the text?
6. Where you refer to an article within an edited collection, have you included the full book reference, with editors, as well as the chapter reference?
7. Are all the references complete, i.e. have you included the publication date and place, as well as the publisher's name?
8. Tables: check that their numbers and titles are correct, and that references to them in the text are correct;
9. Figures: as for tables
10. Have you checked all the calculations in your tables?
11. Have you got correct totals in the tables?

12. Is there enough labelling information in your tables and graphs? (e.g. if you refer to percentages, is it clear exactly what they are percentages of? Do you make it clear whether raw scores or percentages are being referred to?)
13. Have you calculated all the numerical figures to the same number of decimal places?
14. Are you consistent about abbreviations?

Note that none of these proof-checking tasks is the responsibility of your supervisor.

Do not underestimate the time it takes to make these final checks: don't leave them to the last minute. Correcting ungrammatical English is not the job of your supervisor.

Do spend adequate time proof reading, and all the better if you can find a second reader – it's difficult to spot errors in a text yourself when you are beginning to get weary of seeing that text. Don't imagine that the examiners will not notice the errors – they will. In particular, be conscientious about spelling names in the reference list and double-check all the figures in the tables. Inaccuracies give an extremely bad impression and if there are too many of them, this could affect the mark awarded to your work.

Finally, all of your ethics paperwork including consent forms should be given to your supervisor. You should also provide your supervisor with the hard copies of any questionnaires or other materials. Any electronic data (e.g. databases and NVivo files) should only be stored on the university's secure network and never on hard drives of personal machines. **You must ensure that your supervisor has a copy of the data before you finish the course.**

8. Submission and examination of your thesis

Only students who have passed all their examinations may submit a dissertation. As with all forms of written assessment for the MSc, the pass mark for dissertations is 50%. The examination report is provided in Appendix E. Two markers will normally mark dissertations, independently, and each will produce a separate report. These markers will usually be internal staff. You may ask to see the written feedback on your project/dissertation.

Dissertations are moderated by the external examiner. The external examiner will see a sample of all dissertations/projects which include:

1. dissertations with a fail mark.
2. dissertations which are borderline between marking categories.
3. dissertations from candidates who are recommended for a distinction.
4. All dissertations over which there is unresolved agreement about marks

5. Any dissertations that the external examiner wishes to see
6. Any dissertations that the internal examiners wish the external examiner to see
7. A representative sample that allows the examiner to assess the quality of the assessment

The external examiner will see at least five dissertations from any cohort of students.

At the recommendation of the Board of Examiners, students will normally be allowed one resubmission of a failed dissertation if a first mark of 40% or more is achieved. (See your programme handbook for details).

9. Publication in a peer reviewed journal

You may find that your supervisor considers your project worthy of submission to a peer-reviewed academic journal. This is a considerable achievement. Some theses, though highly worthy of an MSc degree are not appropriate for publication due to methodological problems, insufficient sample size etc. If submission to a journal is something your supervisor considers appropriate (remember, this is a substantial amount of work and there is no guarantee that it will be accepted by the journal editor) then they will discuss this with you. Remember, even if you no longer work/study at the University, the data you collected for your project do not belong to you – data are the property of the sponsor who is the University of Manchester and any published work must be published with the University address.

Writing for a journal is a key skill and the format of presenting your dissertation in the format required by an academic journal will be a significant help to you, should you and your supervisor decide to submit your work for publication. It is easy to underestimate the effort that is required to prepare and submit the article, deal with reviewer comments (if they do not reject it), read proofs, deal with any questions raised by readers etc. It is no exaggeration to say that this whole process can be as time demanding and taxing as writing your dissertation. You need to discuss who will take the lead on this (and therefore who will be – first author –) with your supervisor. If you would like to take the lead and be the first author your supervisor will typically give you 6-12 months to deliver the draft publication. If you take longer, or do not wish to submit your work for publication, your supervisor may take the lead in writing the paper. If this is the case then you should expect your supervisor's name to appear before yours on the author list. Likewise, if you submit the paper for publication but you are unable or unwilling to complete the suggested revisions your supervisor may agree to make them for you and the author order may change.

You should not submit your paper for publication without the approval of your supervisors and coauthors.

10. Conclusions

In this document, we have tried to give you the benefit of our experience, both from conducting our own research and helping our students to conduct theirs. The aim was to help you to avoid some common pitfalls and to indicate the delimitation line between your supervisor's role and your own. In summary, the responsibility for producing a thesis lies firmly with you, while a supervisor is there for guidance only. This means that you have the opportunity to work independently in a specific area. You will benefit much more from this challenge if you regard it as a learning experience rather than just a means to a qualification. Once your exams are over, you can concentrate your energies on the area of your choice, an opportunity rarely afforded in one's working life, so make the most of it! Good luck!

11. Mitigating Circumstances/ Extensions

If you have circumstances which unexpectedly interfere with your progress with your dissertation, you should let your supervisor know as soon as these arise. If it becomes impossible or inadvisable for you to submit your dissertation on time you should discuss this with your supervisor. You will be expected to predict when you plan to submit but this will require your supervisor's permission and may require the Faculty's permission with your supervisor's support.

In addition, you may be required to re-register. On the other hand, if you do not inform your supervisor of good reason but merely fail to submit you may find you are not eligible for the submission of your thesis for the degree of MSc when you have reached this stage.

Generally speaking, you will not be able to use library facilities after Sept 30th at the end of your course. In some circumstances, such as a period of bereavement or illness it may be possible for to apply for a period of "interruption of studies" in order to have your current registration suspended until you resume study.

For extensions and interruptions please see the School Handbook;

[Click here to access.](#)

You will need your University of Manchester login.

The student handbook has been developed as a resource for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught students completing degree programmes within the School of Health Sciences (SHS).

This resource should be used as the first point of reference for questions concerning your programme, support and advice, or academic policies and procedures.

12. Policies and Procedures relevant to your dissertation

Lone Working Procedure

If your project requires you to work alone without close or direct supervision and without contact from others whilst testing or interviewing participants this is classed as 'lone working'. It can take place both out of hours and during the normal working day. There is no legal prohibition on lone working but there is a requirement for a risk assessment in order to identify if lone working is acceptable. The ethics committee will want to see that you are not taking unnecessary risks when conducting your research and that you are following University guidelines for lone working. Students in the School of Health Sciences (SHS) are to follow the SHS lone working guidance which can be found in the resources folder on Canvas. Please also speak to your supervisor about lone working or the dissertation unit lead.

Ethical approval

Research governance is the broad range of regulations, principles and standards of good practice that exist to achieve, and continuously improve, research quality. All research involving human participants must comply with the highest ethical standards and to this end should be reviewed by an ethics committee. The university has a code of good research conduct outlining the minimum standards of research practice:

<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=2804>

This link will also take you to the code of practice for dealing with complaints of potential research misconduct which outlines fair and robust procedures for the investigation of any such allegations.

The University has a policy on the ethical involvement of Human participants in research:

<http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/governance/ethics/>

This page also contains information on the various types of ethical approval; whether approval is required and how to apply.

Depending on the nature of your research your study may require internal ethical approval (University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee) or an amendment to an

existing ethical approval (e.g. NHS Research Ethics Committee). Your supervisor will advise which of these is appropriate.

Once you know what your study design will be, you will need to apply for Ethical Approval. Ethical approval is an essential step in the research study process. All projects involving human subjects require the approval of an Ethics Committee unless you are using existing data from a study which was previously granted approval. This is the case whether the data is obtained from the participant by carrying out tests; from a questionnaire or interview; from a video or tape recording or from case records. When data are obtained from any of these sources then the participant must give written consent stating that they have agreed to take part in the study. All data obtained during the course of any study must be treated in the strictest confidence. This means that in any written report it must not be possible for anyone to identify the individual concerned. When referring to individual cases the person should be referred to as case 1 or 2 etc, or by initials/names that are not their own. The information must not be passed on to any other person including the individual's doctors and teachers without the person or, in the case of a child, the parent's consent. You must not, under any circumstances, contact participant/patients or commence data collection until you receive approval to proceed. This means that it is to your advantage to submit the proposal for approval as soon as the study design is established. There is a formal process of applying for ethical approval. This is not a trivial process since it involves the preparation of a project outline, participant information sheet, consent form and associated materials. Do not underestimate the time taken from submission of your application until approval. However, it can be a long and protracted process (there is no guarantee that approval will be received without modifying the design) and it is best to submit a request for ethical approval as soon as the design has been agreed with your supervisor.

It is your responsibility to complete the ethics application paperwork (though some supervisors may already have approval in place). It is usual for supervisors to help you with this process by providing example ethics applications for you to view; discussing the form with you and answering your queries.

Note that you cannot submit an ethics application without the approval of your supervisor. There are several 'quality check' procedures in place to ensure that your application is of an appropriate standard. In the case of University approval your application must be reviewed and signed off by an appropriate signatory prior to submission to the committee. Follow the link on the application form for this.

APPLYING FOR EXTERNAL ETHICS APPROVAL

Where research is to be carried out at a different institution (e.g. NHS), or involves recruiting participants from external institutions, then external ethical approval should

already be in place. Submission of any amendments will be the responsibility of your supervisor but you may be asked to complete or contribute to the amendment paperwork.

Research work in NHS premises or involving NHS patients or staff requires formal permission from the NHS Trusts you wish to recruit participants and/or collect data from. Some trusts may not wish for you to use their patients or facilities (they may be short-staffed or their patients may already be involved in several studies) and permission may not be granted even though your study is ethically sound. Most trusts require, amongst other things, that you have recent DBS Clearance and an occupational health check (see following sections) so it is a good idea to submit your application to the DBS and arrange your occupational health check as soon as you are aware that external ethical approval is required.

Some projects may involve children as participants and they may not have come via an NHS hospital. For example, you may approach a local school for participants. In this case, you may need to apply via the Association of Directors of Children's Services for ethical approval. This is a relatively new system but full details can be obtained under the research link on <http://www.adcs.org.uk/>. Your supervisor will advise if this is the case.

APPLYING FOR INTERNAL (UNIVERSITY) ETHICS APPROVAL

For all projects that do not require approval of an external Ethics Committee (for example, a study carried out within university premises and using fellow students as participants), you should use the university research ethics system. Ethical applications using this process should be submitted using the University's online system:

<http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/governance/ethics/new-online-system-for-ethics-review-erm/>

Two levels of review are available: school level and university level.

Divisional review is available to Psychology students in the Division of Psychology and Mental Health. Divisional review is appropriate for psychological research projects conducted by students under the supervision of academic staff in this division. This level of review is only for studies that DO NOT involve high ethical risks. If a Division reviewer or chair deems that the details of the application fall outside the scope of the template, you will be asked to resubmit your application to a University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) for approval.

Applications that pose some degree of risk e.g. by including participants who are vulnerable, or using procedures that are invasive or high in physical or psychological

risk, can only be approved by a university level committee (UREC)

The application process for both levels is the same. Applications must be submitted online via the ERM (see link above).

Applications considered at the divisional level do not require you to attend an ethics committee and may be approved comparatively quickly (within 30 days). Applications considered by a UREC may require attendance (usually you and your supervisor will attend together, either in person or online) and a longer timeframe can apply

There are five UREC committees and one committee meets every week (BUT note that there may be fewer meetings during the summer months so do not delay with your ethics application). The process is rather time consuming and you should allow a minimum of six-eight weeks for your application to be considered. Please remember that your application will be read by researchers who may know nothing about your topic (or even psychology) thus avoid any jargon! Pay extra attention to the PIS and consent form.

You will then be contacted and given a date and time to attend one of the University's Ethics Committee meetings.

UREC also has the option of 'proportionate review' for lower risk projects. These are reviewed by the UREC committee members, but without the need for an applicant to attend a committee meeting. This process is typically much faster. Your supervisor will advise on the type of ethical approval needed.

You should only commence data collection when your supervisor gives you explicit instructions to do so. On completion of your study, the department must keep a copy of your signed consent forms. Your participant consent forms (and raw data) will be retained by your supervisor, probably within a locked filing cabinet in their office. A copy of your ethics approval should be included as an appendix in your dissertation.

12.3. Student Experiment Participation Scheme (SEPS)

Manchester undergraduates take part in the Student Experiment Participation Scheme (SEPS) which aims to provide an opportunity for students to gain first-hand experience of participating in psychological research. SEPS ensures that 3rd year undergraduate students have access to a pool of research participants. It is possible for some students on the MSc programmes to access this pool of participants (typically 1st and 2nd year students). To access this pool of potential participants you must apply to be allocated 'credits' with which you can reward participants. Each study is allocated SEPS credits based on the length of time required for participation, with 15 minutes of participation equating to 1 SEPS credit. If you are entitled to use the SEPS your study

will be advertised on the SONA system <https://manchester-psych.sona-systems.com/Default.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2f>

If you want to use the SEPS scheme discuss this with your supervisor and remember to include it in your ethics application. Please note that the SEPS scheme usually only runs until early March each year and the participant pool will not be available after this date.

There is a dedicated e-mail address for all queries relating to this scheme:

psy-credits@listserv.manchester.ac.uk

12.4 The Research Passport

Some students working with clinical populations for their dissertation may require an honorary contract or letter of access for the NHS trust(s) the participants will be recruited from. It may therefore be necessary to apply for a research passport. The research passport confirms that you have completed the necessary checks (such as occupational health and DBS clearance).

Before work begins on a research study within the NHS you or your supervisor should contact the relevant R&D department to find out if you need a research passport (RP) as not everyone will need one. Guidance notes on the RP can be found here:

<https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/best-practice/research-passport/>

Your supervisor will guide you through the process of obtaining a research passport if one is required. Note that some key documents and approvals will be required to obtain one (e.g. curriculum vitae, DBS clearance and details of any relevant training such as the good clinical practice certificate). You may need to provide evidence of an occupational health check in order to receive your research passport. Further details are available here:

<https://www.occhealth.manchester.ac.uk/>

You may also need Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance. As with occupational health clearance, the sooner you apply for your DBS certificate the better as there are sometimes long delays in processing these applications. The DBS check involves checking that you do not have a criminal record that would mean you cannot work with vulnerable groups. A fee is payable for the service and you will need to provide proof of your identity (originals rather than copies).

Appendix A. Required Dissertation Format

<INSERT TITLE OF DISSERTATION>

A dissertation submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of
Master of Science in the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health;

<INSERT YEAR>

<INSERT YOUR NAME>

School of Health Sciences

<INSERT DECLARATION HERE>

Copyright Statement

<INSERT RELEVANT COPYRIGHT STATEMENT HERE>

List of Contents

<INSERT CONTENTS LIST HERE>

<INSERT ADDITIONAL LISTS HERE â?? OPTIONAL>

Acknowledgements and dedication

<INSERT YOUR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND /OR DEDICATION HERE â?? OPTIONAL>

LAY SUMMARY

<INSERT LAY SUMMARY HERE>

JOURNAL MANUSCRIPT

<Insert title of manuscript here>

Prepared for <Insert journal name here>

<Insert your name here>

School of Health Sciences,
University of Manchester,
Oxford Road,
Manchester M13 9PL

Email: <Insert your university email address here>

Word count: <insert word count here>

Abstract

<Insert abstract formatted as per journal guidelines>

Key words (if required by journal)

<Insert 3-5 keywords, one per line>

The main body of your manuscript commences here. Some journals may require you to use the heading 'Introduction'. Others will not. Subsequent sections (e.g., Methods, Results, Discussion, Acknowledgements, References and Appendices) will all have headings. Note that some journals require figures and tables to be placed at the end of the manuscript. Where this is the case, you will normally be asked to indicate where in the text where they should be placed for example:

[Table 1 to be inserted here]

Figures and Tables

Each Figure and Table typically appears on a separate page but you also have the option of placing them in the appropriate place in the text for your dissertation)

Remember to give each figure and table a title

Appendices

Some journal manuscripts will have appendices that are an integral part of the manuscript e.g., describing an algorithm or scoring scheme, and these should appear at the end of the manuscript after the reference list. However, you will have additional appendices that are required for examination purposes e.g., ethics approval letter,

details of a pilot study, information concerning calibration, statistical analyses showing that it is appropriate to use parametric statistics etc.

Appendix B: Marking criteria for presentation

Criteria	Score
1. Explanation of background literature and justification of research questions	
a. Critical/ thorough understanding of relevant theory and relevant research findings	0/5/10
b. Coherent, and specific research questions based on the literature presented	0/5/10
c. Consideration of implications of the proposed research	0/5/10
2. Explanation and justification of research design	
a. Clear and comprehensive description of methods (design, sample, materials, procedure)	0/5/10
b. Data analysis plan clearly outlined and appropriately matched to research question(s) / hypotheses	0/5/10
c. Appropriate justification of design (methods and analysis) including, where appropriate, consideration of alternatives	0/5/10
3. Understanding of ethical considerations	
a. Appreciation of key ethical issues applicable to the project	0/5/10
b. Explanation and justification of steps taken to mitigate the ethical issues identified	0/5/10
4. Delivery of presentation	
a. Clear and professional presentation of written information (including infographics, where applicable). Appropriate font size, good use of colour and images	0/5/10
b. Clear communication of spoken information (e.g. well-paced and with appropriate volume). Completed on time, with all material presented.	0/5/10
Total (Sum of sections 1-4)	/100

Appendix C: Marking criteria for Lay Summary

Lay Summary Marking Criteria

Mark	Descriptor	Details
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74, 80, 90	Distinction	An excellent lay summary which describes the study well. Text is ordered logically and flows naturally. No /little unnecessary detail is included. Uses short clear sentences (25 words or less) and contains no /few unexplained scientific or technical words or phrases or complex grammar. Grammar and spelling are accurate. Makes very good use of Plain English. A good /very good lay summary which describes the study well. It mostly adheres to the qualities of a distinction level lay summary as outlined above but may contain some unnecessary detail, some overly long or complex sentences or has (minor) instances of language that could have been simplified further.â?¬May contain minor inaccuracies in grammar or spelling.â?¬
62, 65, 68	Merit	The study is adequately described (perhaps with some minor omissions) and the writing is largely in â??Plain Englishâ?? but contains some overlong sentences and instances of complex grammar or unexplained scientific or technical words or phrases.
52, 55, 58	Pass	Most of the study is adequately described but the summary contains several instances of complex wording/phrasing such that it can no longer be considered to meet the requirements of â??Plain Englishâ?? and may be difficult for a lay audience to follow in places.
42, 45, 48	Diploma pass, potentially compensatable for MSc	Is not suitable for a lay audience containing numerous complex sentences and / or too many technical or scientific terms to be comprehensible by a lay reader. The study is not sufficiently well described or contains a large amount of unnecessary detail.
32, 35, 38	Fail, potentially compensatable for diploma	No attempt to make the summary suitable for a lay audience or the study is very poorly described.
30 or lessâ?¬	Clear fail	

Appendix D: Marking criteria for dissertation

Marking Grid for Empirical Study Based Dissertation Format

For formats including:

• Empirical Study, • Analysis of existing data • Qualitative study • Systematic Review	Critical Review of Literature and Justification of Research Question (25% of marks)	Design of study and Methods (20% of marks)	Presentation and Analyses of results (20%)	Discussion and Conclusion (25%)	Overall Presentation and Structure of dissertation and Referencing (10% of marks)
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Section Marks

(*0.25)	(*0.20)	(*0.20)	(*0.25)	(*0.10)
TOTAL MARK:				

Resolution of Discrepancy â?? Only complete this section if required

Comments/how resolved:

Agreed

Final Mark

Signature:

Name

Date

Faculty Marking Scheme

Mark	Explanation
PASS	90-100% Exceptional work, nearly or wholly faultless for that expected at Masters level. Perfect presentation.
	80-89% Work of outstanding quality throughout. Exceptional presentation.

70-79% Work of very high to excellent quality showing originality, high accuracy, thorough understanding, critical appraisal. Shows a wide and thorough understanding of the material studied and the relevant literature and the ability to apply the theory and methods learned to solve unfamiliar problems.

60-69% Work of good to high quality showing evidence of understanding of the research topic, good accuracy, good structure and relevant conclusions. Shows a good knowledge of the material studied and the relevant literature and some ability to tackle unfamiliar problems. Good presentation.

50-59% Work shows a clear grasp of relevant facts and issues and reveals an attempt to create a coherent whole. It comprises reasonably clear and attainable objectives, adequate literature review and some originality. Presentation is acceptable, minor errors allowed.

FAIL, REFERRAL	40-49%	Work shows a satisfactory understanding of the research topic and basic knowledge of the relevant literature but with little or no originality and limited accuracy. Shows clear but limited objectives, and does not always reach a conclusion. Presentation adequate but could be improved.
	30-39%	Work shows some understanding of the main elements of the research topic and some knowledge of the relevant literature. Shows a limited level of accuracy with little analysis of data or attempt to discuss its significance. Presentation poor.
	20-29%	Limited relevant material presented. Little understanding of research topic. Unclear or unsubstantiated arguments with very poor accuracy and understanding. Presentation unacceptable.
FAIL, NO REFERRAL	10-19%	Limited understanding of the research process. The topic is largely without evidence to support its exploration for research and the arguments are supported by poor sources of evidence. The dissertation is disjointed and does not demonstrate logical coherent thinking with unacceptable presentation.
	0-9%	The text demonstrates no understanding of the research process. The topic is totally inappropriate and there is not evidence to support its exploration as an area of interest for research. Presentation is extremely poor and is not in an appropriate format for submission as a Masters dissertation. The topic would need to be reconstructed and totally rewritten if it were to be presented for resubmission.

Faculty Marking Descriptors

	Aims/Objectives/Introduction	Project Design/Methods	Presentation of Results	Interpretation of Results
90-100% (Distinction)	Perfect understanding of the aims and objectives of the project. Outstanding critical knowledge and understanding of the field evident.	Publishable methods/project design.	Publication standard illustration of data.	Publication standard description interpretative data.

80-89% (Distinction)	Excellent report demonstrating a near perfect understanding of the central issues in the field and the relevance of the project. Precise aims.	Excellent, accurate methods/project design.	Near-publication standard illustration of data.	Near-publication standard description and interpretation of data.
70-79% (Distinction)	Very good comprehensive review showing breadth/depth of knowledge. Clear understanding of material studied. Aims very well defined.	Very good detail of methods/project design. Covers all methods and materials used. Cites sources of materials where appropriate.	All figures are very well formatted and have self-explanatory figure legends.	Figures are accompanied by salient descriptive text. Very good interpretation of data.
60-69% (Merit)	Good accurate summary of the field. Clear aims and relevance to project. Good understanding of the research topic.	Good methods section/project design, including sources of materials if appropriate. All methods used are described.	The majority of figures are formatted, appropriately sized and accompanied by comprehensive legends.	Good description of results and good accurate interpretation of data.

50-59% (Pass)	Work shows clear grasp of relevant facts and understanding of research field but with limited evidence of original thinking. Aims are stated in full. Information may be presented as blocks of text.	Methods/project design adequately described though may be in point format and may lack some detail in places.	Results are generally well presented. Figures/Tables are well drawn with adequate figure legends. Minor formatting errors only.	Adequate description of results with sufficient text to highlight the key points.
40-49% (Fail)	Some limited understanding of the research topic and basic knowledge of the literature, possibly some omissions. Aims are stated but limited.	Methods/project design described but may not convey full understanding. Some methods used may be omitted. Possible some errors in study design.	Some figures/tables may lack legends. Limited accuracy. Formatting not consistent. Figures may be badly drawn with inappropriate scales.	Basic description of results with some attempt to interpret data. Data may be over interpreted.
30-39% (Fail)	Inadequate knowledge of relevant literature and understanding of the main elements of the research topic. Aims are unclear.	Incomplete methods/project design. Sections shows lack of sufficient detail. Methods poorly explained.	Results presented with limited level of accuracy and little consistency in formatting.	Little interpretative data. Accompanying descriptive text is incomplete.

0-29% (Fail)	Inadequate knowledge of subject area. Superficial or no aims. Evidence of lack of understanding.	Limited/no description of methods/project design.	Minimal presentation of results. Very poor accuracy. Little attention to detail.	Descriptive is deficient contains unsubstantiated arguments. Very poor understanding
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