

in the viva. In addition, Tables 12.3 and 12.4 make reference to the dissertation marking scheme and the problem of plagiarism.

There are other matters that you need to consider when completing your dissertation, from picking a topic that is of genuine interest to you, to creating a dissertation template at the start (to give you an idea of what lies ahead), to making the most of meetings with your supervisor, to keeping an eye on your word count. Above all, doing a dissertation ought to be an enjoyable experience, an opportunity to show what you can do, but it requires serious effort on your part. It is an intellectual journey that demands your active participation: passengers rarely pass. Being forewarned about the common pitfalls to avoid, together with the skills required to get through the dissertation process, will allow you to start off on your dissertation odyssey with confidence.

## Dissertation writing: summary of good practice to adopt and bad practice to avoid

Table 12.1 Dissertation writing – summary of *good* practice to adopt

Phase	Summary of good practice to adopt
Dissertation Proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Provide background information on research topic</li> <li>– Justify the need for your study</li> <li>– Identify overall research aim and specific research objectives</li> <li>– Outline your research methods</li> <li>– Estimate duration of dissertation phases</li> </ul>
Abstract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Write it last!</li> <li>– Identify the problem/issue that you investigated</li> <li>– Outline how you did your research (i.e. your research methods)</li> <li>– State your main findings/conclusion(s)</li> <li>– Indicate your recommendations</li> <li>– Include keywords</li> <li>– Keep to one paragraph (it is not an essay!)</li> <li>– Apply the abstract template!</li> </ul>
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– As in Dissertation Proposal, and:</li> <li>– Show initiative (in sourcing information)</li> <li>– Produce clear, achievable research objectives</li> <li>– Emphasize the value of/need for your research</li> </ul>
Literature Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Remind the reader of your research objectives</li> <li>– Let the reader know about the topics you intend covering</li> <li>– Develop meaningful discussions, providing evidence of critical evaluation (offer views, support views)</li> <li>– Use wide variety of sources (websites, journals, books, reports, etc.)</li> <li>– Reference sources properly</li> <li>– Avoid dissertation <i>drift</i> – keep focused on your research objectives</li> </ul>

Systematic Reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Summarize main Lit. Rev. findings and highlight emerging issues</li> <li>– Provide link (and justification) for empirical research</li> <li>– Frame your research question using PICO</li> <li>– Find literature to meet your research question, adhering to Evans's hierarchy of preferred evidence</li> <li>– Exploit online resources (e.g. MEDLINE)</li> <li>– Justify exclusion of literature</li> <li>– Pool data</li> <li>– Place findings in context</li> <li>– Use AMSTAR checklist</li> </ul>
Research Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identify your research strategy (case study, survey, grounded theory, experimental research, etc.)</li> <li>– Justify why your chosen research strategy meets your research needs</li> <li>– Describe your data collection techniques (interviews, questionnaires, documents, observation, types of experiments, etc.)</li> <li>– Explain where you will get your data, and state your sample size</li> <li>– Summarize the above, using diagrams where possible</li> <li>– Explain how you will analyse your collected data (framework for data analysis)</li> <li>– Outline limitations/potential problems (but explain why your work is valid and reliable)</li> </ul>
Findings and Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Keep it simple: describe the data, compare/contrast with Lit. Rev. findings</li> <li>– Stick to your framework for analysis (if you have one!)</li> <li>– Keep focused on relevant research objective(s), thus avoiding <i>drift</i></li> <li>– Summarize main empirical findings</li> <li>– Place evidence of (non-confidential) empirical research in appendices (questionnaires, interview transcripts/notes, experiment results, etc.)</li> </ul>
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Remind reader of your initial research objectives</li> <li>– Summarize Lit. Rev. and Empirical Research findings (related to research objectives)</li> <li>– Elicit main conclusions from your findings</li> <li>– Offer recommendations (specific to your research objectives), including ideas about implementation</li> <li>– Include self-reflection (limitations of study, lessons learnt, advice to others)</li> </ul>

Table 12.2 Dissertation writing – summary of *bad* practice to avoid

Phase	Summary of bad practice to avoid
Dissertation Proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Lack of subject focus</li> <li>– Vague research objectives</li> <li>– Over-ambitious</li> <li>– Unrealistic timescales</li> <li>– Not justifying need for research</li> </ul>
Abstract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Write it without having a clue what you are supposed to be doing!</li> <li>– Engage in mini Literature Review (not the place for that)</li> <li>– Fail to provide basic information about your work</li> <li>– Write an essay (it is an <i>abstract</i>, not an essay)</li> </ul>

*Continued*

Table 12.2 (Continued)

Phase	Summary of bad practice to avoid
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Paying scant attention to Background reading</li> <li>– Too dependent on supervisor for research ideas</li> <li>– Devoting too much attention to Background reading!</li> <li>– Lack of continuity between sub-sections</li> <li>– Unconvincing rationale (or no rationale!) on the value of the work</li> </ul>
Literature Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Ill-structured</li> <li>– Superficial, skeletal sub-sections (lists, simple descriptions, lack of discussion)</li> <li>– Concentrating almost exclusively on web sources</li> <li>– Not offering, or justifying, your own views (i.e. devoid of critical evaluation)</li> <li>– Lack of development of ideas</li> <li>– Inconsistent referencing styles</li> <li>– Plagiarizing work</li> <li>– No sense of direction</li> <li>– No obvious relevance to research objectives</li> <li>– No evidence of need for empirical research</li> <li>– Ends abruptly with no obvious link to next section (Research Methods)</li> </ul>
Systematic Reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Vague research question</li> <li>– Unmethodical literature search process</li> <li>– Publication bias</li> <li>– Focusing at the lower end of Evans's hierarchy of preferred evidence (uncontrolled trials, expert opinion, etc.)</li> <li>– Inappropriate pooling of data</li> <li>– Failing to place results in context</li> </ul>
Research Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Spending the bulk of your time describing a whole realm of research strategies (case studies, ethnography, experimental research, surveys, etc.)</li> <li>– Not justifying your chosen research strategy</li> <li>– Misunderstanding the nature of qualitative/quantitative research</li> <li>– Introducing unexplained philosophical terms!</li> <li>– Producing a long descriptive monologue on the different ways that data can be collected (questionnaires, interviews, etc.) but:</li> <li>– Lack of detail on how and where <i>you</i> will collect data or what <i>you</i> intend doing with the data once you get it</li> </ul>
Findings and Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Having an unstructured, confusing approach to analysing your collected data or using inappropriate analysis techniques, or using appropriate techniques incorrectly!</li> <li>– Coming to conclusions without any evidence of meaningful discussion</li> <li>– Not relating your findings/discussion to your research objectives/Lit. Rev.</li> </ul>
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Not revising your research objectives to check on whether or not you have achieved them (as a result of your Lit. Rev. and Empirical Research)</li> <li>– Not linking your conclusions, if you have any, to your Lit. Rev. or Empirical Research findings</li> <li>– Not summarizing your work</li> <li>– Offering no recommendations on the way forward</li> <li>– Treating your Conclusion as if it were another Literature Review!</li> <li>– Ending abruptly!</li> </ul>