



WITH LOVE
FROM A DISSERTATION SUPERVISOR

Advice for the journey

With love from a dissertation supervisor

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Dedicated to all
our past, present and future students

Dear reader,

Very well done on getting to this stage. Just the dissertation now.

You are so close to that qualification.

We are sure you have learnt so much already.

The dissertation will help you bring all your learning together and apply it to a larger study than you will have been working on in previous modules on your programme.

We thought it might be useful to send you this open letter to help you on the final stretch of this exciting journey.

If you are working on a final project instead of a dissertation, this letter is also for you.

Let's make a start...

Check the requirement

Check the requirements for your dissertation first. There will be guidelines too. Study them carefully.

Familiarise yourself with the learning outcomes of the dissertation module itself and the assessment criteria your markers will use.

Revisit these at specific points to see if you are on track and evaluate your progress against them.

This is important because your markers will be using these too!

Support is available

Find out what support is available to you.

This will certainly include supervision so check out what your supervisor can do for you and what they can't.

Also, check out the support you can get with the writing of the dissertation. This may be provided by your School, the university library, or the university Language Centre and may be face-to-face or online.

It is understandable that you may not want to use it straightaway but keep it in mind for later.

If you find a useful resource, share with your peers and encourage others to share back when they find something that may be of interest.

Be realistic

Don't know yet what your dissertation will be about?

It is important you choose your topic carefully. You need to be realistic. Choose something you can complete within the time you have but don't just choose something because you think you can do it.

Select something that matters to you

Select a topic or question for your dissertation that really interests you; something that is important to you.

Remember you will be working on your dissertation over a few months or a bit longer, so investigating something that matters to you, will help you hang in there when things get challenging (as they will!).

Make a real contribution

Inquire into something that will be useful and could make a difference to your practice and others.

A dissertation should have a life beyond the mark you will get and the qualification it will contribute to.

We know that when we can influence practice more widely and make a real contribution, that gives purpose to what we do.

This is fulfilling and can boost our motivation at the same time.

Look after yourself

Your supervisor may have set up a study group if they are supervising multiple students.

If they haven't, consider setting one up yourself with some of your peers. Join it and engage. There is no better place to be than among peers who want to connect with others, learn and make a difference.

Make the most of your meetings with your supervisor.

Don't be afraid to tell them if you're finding things difficult. They will be able to reassure and support you – and sometimes, just telling them you feel anxious can help!

One day at a time

We know you want to finish your degree and get this dissertation submitted. And you will!

We also know that this is most likely a new experience for you, and you are going to find it emotionally demanding. Be mindful of this! Take it easy. Try not to get frustrated with yourself. You will get there!

You may feel a bit overwhelmed at the start as this will be all new to you, but the best way to cope with such a big task is to break it all down into a series of smaller, manageable tasks.

Remember to take it one day at a time!

You can do this! Look how far you have come already! Believe in yourself!

Visualise your thoughts

When you know what you want to research, capture your initial ideas on paper: make a mind map, create a poster, collage or mood board, draw a picture or something else that will help you visualise your thoughts.

It will really help you make connections you may not have seen yet.

It's all about connections!

Make a dissertation plan

It is important to make a dissertation plan so that you can manage time and tasks.

Work backwards. When is your submission deadline?

Check what other priorities you have, personal and professional and start putting that plan together for the weeks and months ahead.

Keep your notes in an organised and systematic way!

Consider starting a journal to capture these, your reflections and progress on your project.

Look after yourself

Looking after yourself will be important, so build in breaks and breathing spaces.

We all deserve a break and need it to re-energise.

Build movement breaks into your study time, and schedule time to do the things which help you feel rested and happy.

Set realistic targets

Set realistic targets, ideally daily ones and see how much you can achieve within a week this way. You will be amazed!

Mark your milestones, ok?

Treat yourself and celebrate when you have met your daily and weekly targets and move forward with a smile.

You will get there! You will.

Read a lot and widely

Read a lot and widely.

If you feel lost, keep reading. It will all start making sense!

You will need to make notes about what you read, even if these are very brief.

Through this process you will start identifying key authors and connections.

Consider using a reference management system to track your readings and bring the ones you will use into your dissertation!

Early conversations will be useful

When you have a seed of an idea and it is starting to grow roots and a few leaves, discuss it with somebody, as well as your supervisor.

These early conversations will be really useful to help you further refine, sharpen and focus what you will do, how and why.

Be mindful you can't resubmit the same work

Be mindful that you can't resubmit work you have submitted for another module!

This is really important to remember!

However, reviewing the writing and references of submitted work for other modules may reveal new connections.

Listen

Don't shy away from critical comments, encourage them! Don't take them personally!

Remember, everybody wants you to do well. Listen to the comments carefully, critically and creatively. Then decide what you want to do about these.

This point is really important as it is your work.

Review, refine, polish

Check out how best to articulate a research question, ok? It needs to be specific and contextual. And you may have more than one but be realistic. Review, refine, polish.

Remember your research question is your compass for the adventures you will have; your quest.

Your research question(s) and who you are as a researcher will help you decide which methodology is most appropriate. You should discuss this with your supervisor, who can help you to make an informed decision.

This will help you to get it right!

Familiarise yourself with the methodology families

When you know what questions, you want to answer, you will need to do some reading about methodologies.

Don't shy away from reading!

It will be important to familiarise yourself with the methodology families so that you can decide which one to use.

Which one would help you best in your inquiry to answer your research question(s) and how do you know?

Think carefully about data collection

You need to think about data collection.

Once you have decided on an approach and methods, start planning in detail how you will use them. This is a chance to put some of your learning into practice!

Think of your methodology as a ‘recipe’ for your research, which your reader should be able to follow.

You may need ethical approval before starting data collection

If you are planning to do an empirical study, you will need to get ethical approval.

Completing the ethics form will guide you through this process.

Don't delay completing it! Work on it systematically and share your draft so that you can get feedback and help to finalise it.

Remember you can't start data collection before you have secured your ethical approval.

Be patient and get that ethics form completed and approved!

Explain and justify your choices

Think carefully about every stage and aspect of your data collection.

For example, how will you recruit your participants? How will you interview them? What questions will you ask? How will you record? And so on, until you have covered everything!

It is really important too that you can explain and justify your choices.

Make novel connections

Continue to read and read widely. This is really important.

The more you read, the quicker you will start recognising key authors in a field and make novel connections. These connections are vital in helping you gain new insights that will be invaluable for your study.

Reference appropriately

When discussing the literature you are using in your dissertation, remember to reference appropriately. This means making sure you mention all the sources you have used in your work and showing how you have used them.

Some might be 'primary' sources you have read directly. Some might be 'secondary' sources you have read about in your primary sources. From some sources you may be taking ideas, from others you may be taking exact words.

It is up to you to make sure you acknowledge each and every source you have used and show through your citations and referencing how you have used them.

This is fundamental to academic integrity.

Give and seek feedback

Need help? Reach out. Reach out to your peers and your supervisor. Share a draft of your work. Seek feedback. But first give yourself self-feedback.

Also provide feedback on your peers' work. This process works best when it is reciprocal.

Sometimes it is more helpful to see somebody else's work-in-progress than a polished, high-scoring example.

We learn a lot about our own work when reviewing somebody else's work.

Systematically analyse your data

Be systematic in the way you analyse your data. You will have worked this out at least provisionally in your research design, but you may find dealing with your data makes you modify your approach.

Remember that describing your analysis is not just about describing your procedure.

You also need to show what you're looking for in the data, and why (usually with reference to your literature review).

Whatever you do, remember that you need to be able to explain your decisions.

Handle your data with care

Depending on the kind of data you collect, try to find tools to help you store and analyse it.

Consider using analytical software such as JASP if you are generating numbers ('quantitative analysis') or NVivo for non-numerical or 'qualitative analysis'.

Whatever data you work with, handle it with care.

You must be scrupulous about storing it safely and analysing it in accordance with your ethical commitments, for example maintaining the anonymity of participants through systematically using pseudonyms.

If you use GenAI be transparent

You may wish to use generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools for different purposes in your work. This is fine as long as you do so *within the limits* specified by your programme and university.

Generally speaking, this will mean you can use GenAI to help you learn but not to write your assessed work for you.

Please make sure that you check first and confirm with your supervisor.

If you do use GenAI, be transparent and document your use of GenAI in the acknowledgements section at the end.

Remember to critically engage with GenAI like you normally do with other tools and resources you use for your learning.

Be transparent throughout your study!

Notify your supervisor

If something unexpected happens and you may need an extension, notify your supervisor and the School as soon as

possible. It is important that you have sufficient time to do your work well.

Remember, your supervisor is here to help!

Use a journal to track your journey

All projects have ups and downs. Learning and writing can be hard. For all of us.

Remember you are moving forward when you keep engaging, when you keep questioning. So be curious!

At times it may not feel that you are moving in the right direction or that you are moving at all.

If you track your journey in a journal, you will literally be able to map your path and everything you are learning and see how far you have come already. Is this something you could try?

Check the submission deadline

When you are nearing submission, make sure you have checked that you got the right submission date and time.

Check if you are in the same time zone at the time of submission and what this means if you are not.

Could you consider submitting a day early to avoid any last-minute accidents?

Anything missing?

Check all your formatting.

Proofread carefully.

Is anything missing?

All your chapters in place? In the right order?

All references there?

Your contents page?

Your figures and tables? Clearly labelled?

Fix any issues you notice and submit!

Very well done!

Please remember to celebrate your success!

Have you got the bug now? What could you do next?

Would you consider a higher qualification?
Discuss with somebody you trust and check out related opportunities.

With love

from a dissertation supervisor

We are delighted to release this open book. It has been co-authored by four scholars in the School of Education at the University of Leeds to support master's students working on their dissertations.

What you will read in this book is based on the scholars' experiences supporting students as supervisors and what they have observed and learnt individually and collectively over the years in relation to dissertation supervision.

The book is written in a conversational style to connect directly with those reading and using it as a resource during their dissertation journey.

While this book has been written with students in Education in mind, the book may also be useful for students in a range of disciplines and professional areas, also where final projects may be used instead of dissertations.

This book could be used by dissertation students and supervisors alike. Supervisors may also wish to use numbered pages 1-30 as a flashcard set in seminars when preparing students for working on their dissertation. It could also form the basis of a board game and other playful workshop activities to support students. Check out the licence to identify how you can use, repurpose and build on it.

We would like to thank past and present students who kindly reviewed this book and are grateful for their comments and suggestions as well as our colleague Dr John Hammersley from Art and Design for his advice on basic design principles and Margy MacMillan our critical reader for her valuable final suggestions.

If you would like to get in touch about the project, please contact [c.nerantzi @ leeds.ac.uk](mailto:c.nerantzi@leeds.ac.uk) (without the spaces).

Chrissi, Delyth, Simon and Lou

Co-authors

Dr Chrissi Nerantzi (NTF, CATE, PFHEA) is a [GO-GN](#) alumna and a Professor in Creative and Open Education at the University of Leeds. She is a Senior Lead of the [Knowledge Equity Network](#) and the Academic Lead for Discover and Explore at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. Chrissi is the founder of the international [#creativeHE community](#) and her research interests are in the area of creative and playful curriculum design, open networks and communities and boundary-crossing collaborative learning.

Dr Delyth Edwards is a Lecturer in Inclusion, Childhood and Youth in the School of Education at the University of Leeds. Her academic interests and areas of research supervision broadly focuses on the Sociology of Everyday Care Experience, and this intersects with Childhood and Youth, Participation, Society and Culture, Identity, Class, Personal Lives and Memory.

Dr Simon Green is an Associate Professor in Language Education at the University of Leeds. His academic interests concern academic discourse and academic literacies, second language teaching and learning, and the philosophy of science.

Dr Lou Harvey is an Associate Professor of Education at University of Leeds. Their academic work focuses on the communication of the unsayable and how to listen beyond and besides language, using methodological approaches based in creativity and creative practice. Lou is a practising neuroqueer and cheerful iconoclast who loves writing, singing, bluebells, and lemon things. They are at their best in the sea.

“As a former MA Education student, I can see how *With Love from a Dissertation Supervisor: Advice for the Journey* would have been extremely useful during my own dissertation process. This practical guidance takes you through the key stages of this journey, from topic selection to final submission. It addresses both the academic and emotional aspects of the dissertation, providing you with much needed reassurance and advice. This resource will allow you to stay organised, motivated, and confident throughout, ensuring you make the most out of your academic experience.”

Mark Grattan, MA Education graduate, School of Education

“Being a current MA student in Digital Education starting soon a dissertation, I have acknowledged the value of *With Love from a Dissertation Supervisor: Advice for the Journey*. This booklet is more of a conversational companion guiding you from the first until the last steps of the dissertation process. Thus, I felt confident by reading it before starting to work on my own dissertation, since this booklet highlights, among other things, the importance of splitting work into smaller tasks, seeking for help in any possible way and proper planning. Its advice relieved my stress regarding this crucial point in every MA student’s studies, by reminding me that a dissertation is above all a personal piece of work that is much more than a grade and, thus, we should enjoy it.”

Maria Pavlopoulou, MA Digital Education student, School of Education

“I feel it would have been a useful read for me before starting my dissertation. I like the encouragement and the sense that you will be supported as a student which made me feel it could be a text introduced very early on in a dissertation module. In fact, I immediately thought it might be used as an introductory teaching tool - read it before your first class and pick the 3 things you found most useful to share in groups. Would get everyone off to a positive start!”

Duncan Ogilvie, MA TESOL graduate, School of Education

“Preparing and writing my dissertation was at times incredibly overwhelming, so I can’t stress enough how important it is to stay on top of the workload (especially when it comes to reading). This guide encapsulates all the important tips and tricks that will help you not only achieve your qualification but help you to make the most of the time you have researching a topic that you’re passionate about!”

Amy McKay, MA Childhood Studies, School of Education