



The process of writing an undergraduate dissertation

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Objectives



- Explain what an undergraduate dissertation is
- Understand the difference between a graduate and an undergraduate dissertation
- Identify the process steps of writing an undergraduate dissertation

What is an undergraduate dissertation?



- An undergraduate dissertation is essentially an extended piece of research and writing on a single subject. Typically completed in the final year of a degree program, the topic chosen is based on the student's own area of interest. Students work with a single faculty supervisor that provides guidance and support to explore a narrow topic in greater depth.

What's the difference between an undergraduate and a postgraduate dissertation?

- First, the length on an undergraduate dissertation is considerably shorter, averaging 10,000-15,000 words. While it's much shorter than a Masters or PhD dissertation, it's still much longer than any other writing piece required in an undergraduate program.

What's the difference between an undergraduate and a postgraduate dissertation? (Cont.)

- Secondly, undergraduate students are not required to have the same sense of originality as graduate students. Students are still required to complete their research independently and cite their sources, but there's no need for new ideas. The most important aspect is to demonstrate critical thinking skills through research.

What's the difference between an undergraduate and a postgraduate dissertation? (Cont.)

- Lastly, the undergraduate dissertation also varies in the type of research conducted, with it being more focused on texts and documents rather than active field research. Students usually utilize and examine secondary sources or accessible primary sources instead of obscure or costly data sources.

Process of writing an undergraduate dissertation

- Topic selection
- Finding a supervisor
- Early research and research outline
- Refined research and writing
- Final dissertation, binding and submission

Topic selection



- At the end of the penultimate year of study, students get to select an area of research for their dissertation. It is important to choose a topic that will hold interest over a long period of time, as it is difficult to change a topic once research has begun.

Finding a supervisor

- Depending on the university, there might be a formal process of selecting supervisors or it might be as simple as students approaching a member of the faculty they have interest in working with. It is helpful to meet with potential supervisors beforehand, as they can answer any questions and give suggestions on the topic selected. Once the formal dissertation period begins, students meet with supervisors regularly to discuss progress and refine research.

Research outline and early research

- At the end of their penultimate year, students are also asked to complete a brief dissertation outline. This outline should be 2-3 pages in length and includes a summary of chapter and a full bibliography. Afterwards, most students begin reading on their selected subject. This usually occurs the summer before their final year. This period is key in developing awareness of the subject and preparing students for proper research once the school year begins.

Refined research and writing

- At this point, research is targeted to pursue the proposed dissertation agenda. Students should also begin the writing process as soon as possible, as most departments require a piece of writing in the 3,000-5,000 words range by the end of the first semester of the student's final year. It is important to submit a draft before the deadline in order to make the necessary revisions beforehand.

Final dissertation, binding and submission



- Once the writing process is complete, students must have roughly three to four chapters, as well as an Introduction and a Conclusion. It should all be formatted according to university guidelines and sources must be properly cited. Unlike undergraduate essays, undergraduate dissertations must be professionally bound before being submitted. This process is usually done some time before the submission deadline. The final due date is generally at the end of the second semester in the student's final year.

Conclusion:

- Undergraduate dissertations are extended pieces of research and writing on a single topic of interest at the undergraduate level.
- Dissertations differ at the undergraduate level when compared to graduate dissertations.
- There are certain aspects in the process of an undergraduate dissertation that are essential to its development and submission.

References:

- <https://www.ivoryresearch.com/library/dissertation-articles/bachelor-dissertation-undergraduate-dissertation/>

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