Dissertation Guidelines
for the Master of Science in
Psychology Programmes

For Students and Dissertation Advisers

Version 4.1
For students starting dissertation from 23-March 2017 and onward

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1. Introduction to the Dissertation module

The purpose of this guide is to help you to successfully complete the dissertation. Refer to it regularly when planning, researching, and writing the dissertation to ensure that it fulfils the School of Psychology requirements.

1.1. Glossary/Personnel

Several administrative positions in the University of Liverpool Online Programmes are referred to in this document according to their functions. The table below links the function/position title to the person who currently has that position.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programme Director (PD)</td>
<td>The PD is the Laureate Online Education academic responsible for delivery of the programme online.</td>
<td>Dr. Alina Perez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean of Online Studies (DoS)</td>
<td>The Director of Studies is the University of Liverpool academic responsible for overall management of the programme of study.</td>
<td>Dr. Victoria Vass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Dissertation Instructor (GDI)</td>
<td>The GDI is the Instructor who teaches the Research Training Methods (RMT) Dissertation module classroom.</td>
<td>Dr. Akhtar Wallymahmed and Dr. Angel Garcia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation Adviser (DA)</td>
<td>The DA is the Instructor who acts as the personal academic advisor for the student as he or she develops and writes the dissertation.</td>
<td>(various)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation Lead Faculty</td>
<td>The Dissertation Lead Faculty develop and support the Dissertation Advisers.</td>
<td>Dr. Akhtar Wallymahmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation Administration Coordinator (DAC)</td>
<td>The DAC confirms receipt of your final submission and arranges assessors for submitted papers.</td>
<td>Lucy Deady</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.2. Learning Outcomes

The dissertation is the final stage of the Master's program where students undertake a piece of relevant original research that is of interest to them and is pertinent to the theories, methods and concepts learned on the programme. Students will synthesise, interpret and critique existing evidence as well as conduct their own research into the area of interest.

The aim of the dissertation is to conduct and write a piece of original research that makes a contribution to knowledge in psychology relevant to the field of study. The dissertation should generate new knowledge (or new applications of existing knowledge), and this can include secondary data analysis. On completion of the dissertation, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate a critical understanding of current methodological approaches to research questions in psychology and how these affect the way the knowledge base is interpreted.
- Carry out independent empirical research, including defining a research problem; formulating testable hypotheses / research questions; choosing appropriate methodologies; and planning and carrying out a study efficiently.
- Demonstrate critical awareness of ethical issues and current codes of ethics and conduct; obtaining the appropriate ethical approval for their research.
- Demonstrate the ability to reason about the data and present the findings effectively; discussing findings in terms of previous research; and judging the appropriateness of the enquiry methodologies used, recognising and arguing for alternative approaches.

Also, on completion of the dissertation, students will demonstrate the following skills:

- Communicate effectively in written form in a range of complex and...
specialized contexts; articulating their ideas in an organised, clear and concise format; developing a cogent argument supported by relevant evidence; being sensitive to the needs and expectations of the audience; and maintaining an acceptable standard with respect to grammar, punctuation and spelling.

- Comprehend and use data effectively.
- Develop digital skills in the use of Internet resources, databases and word processing packages.
- Effectively retrieve data from a variety of sources and through a variety of methods—including a literature search and review—, identifying the most relevant information, and logically organizing it.
- Handle primary source material critically including appropriate citing and referencing of copyright material.
- Employ evidence-based reasoning to tackling and solving problems in a systematic and creative manner.
- Make critical judgments and evaluations, taking different perspectives, analysing arguments in a critical manner and arriving at supported conclusions.
- Be sensitive to ethical issues, individual differences and a diversity of viewpoints.
- Use effectively personal planning and project management skills, becoming more self-directed, self-motivated and pragmatic as learner.
2. Procedure

1.1. Duration and time management

The overall duration of the Dissertation module is 40 weeks from initiation (classroom allocation) to submission. Students will be penalised for late submission, following the Dissertation Late Work Policy in Appendix A.

During the process, students are entitled to request extensions based on serious and unforeseen circumstances that have significantly interfered with the planned time line and/or personal/family/medical/work emergencies. Requests for extensions must be initiated and submitted by the student, together with supporting evidence, using the appropriate form in the Centre for Student Success, and should have the approval of the DA (although approval is not necessary from the DA to initiate an extension request). Detailed instructions for applying for extensions can be found in Appendix B.

The dissertation carries 60 credit points, which means that, as a guide, the student is expected to spend about 600 hours of work. The dissertation calls for less online attendance than the regular core modules. Additionally, writing a dissertation is a creative process (and sometimes it does not progress along a straight path) and one that includes periods of different level of interaction and work.

Past experience has shown that work should proceed in well-planned steps and intermediate results should be shown to the DA. The completion of the student’s own research timetable is a key early activity: it specifies their own milestones, and it is agreed and signed off by the DA—so that each of them can plan their time accordingly.

It is strongly suggested that students keep an ongoing dialogue with their DA along with the required participation within the cohort Research Methods Training Dissertation module class—using both to gain feedback, ask questions or simply swap experiences and discuss progress. Maintaining regular contact with the DA and other dissertation students is fundamental to the successful completion within the time available.

1.2. Steps

2.1.1. Before the Research Methods Training (RMT) module

The Final Research Project preparation materials in the Centre for Student Success (https://success.liverpool-online.com/FinalResearchProjectPreparation/index) are a suite of self-guided resources to help students planning for their research as early as possible. By reading through these materials, students will learn what makes a good research question, what ethical considerations they will need to consider before they begin collecting data, what information literacy is and why it is important, what processes and policies are involved in the Final Research Project phase, what resources and services are available to help them, and about some research basics such as writing
a literature review, choosing a research methodology, and how to maintain a good working relationship with your Dissertation Advisor.

Students cannot take a break between modules for a period longer than 16 weeks without special authorisation. This means that students have approximately 4 months (i.e., 16 weeks) after finishing the last module to start working on the dissertation.

2.1.2 Research Methods Training (RMT) module (weeks 1 to 8)

First phase (weeks 1-5)

The dissertation begins with the 8-week Research Methods Training (RMT) Dissertation module phase, together with other students beginning their dissertation at the same time. The expected output of this module is the Dissertation Proposal.

The RMT module is conducted by a General Dissertation Instructor (GDI). The GDI oversees the class and ensures that students are able to work through the research support materials provided to write and upload drafts of the different components of their Dissertation Proposals. Students are expected to comment substantively and constructively on their classmates’ posts, and to receive as much feedback from as many of the other students as possible. The GDI will also provide formative feedback; however, submissions will not be graded.

Second phase (weeks 5-8)

On week 5 of the RMT, the student is assigned a Dissertation Adviser (DA) and is given access to the one-to-one DA classroom or module. The student will submit the most updated draft of their Dissertation Proposal to their DA, who will guide the student’s work on their dissertation throughout the last 3 weeks of the RMT and during the following 7 months. It must be noted that the RMT module will remain accessible to the student during the total duration of their dissertation, to allow the exchange of peer feedback and support.

Please note that a DA will be assigned rather than chosen by the student—as it is important to get the right match for the student as well as the right balance and number of dissertation students for the DA.

All communications between the student and their DA will take place in the DA classroom. This is very important as the quality of teaching and student effort is regularly monitored by the Programme Director and the Director of Studies, and subsequently by the Monitors and the External Examiners.

The responsibilities of the DA, as well as the responsibilities of the student regarding the supervision of their dissertation by the DA, are outlined in the Dissertation Agreement (see Appendix C). In the DA module, the student must acknowledge they have read the document.

The target turnaround time for the DAs' responses to questions posed by the student is within 4 days.

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The first process that the DA will help students with is to define their Dissertation Proposal. The University of Liverpool sees the Dissertation Proposal as a key stage in the dissertation process and has specific requirements that the proposal must address (see Appendix D: Dissertation Proposal Checklist). The reason for this early emphasis is to ensure a strong foundation on which the rest of the dissertation can develop smoothly.

The DA’s role in developing the Dissertation Proposal is to offer advice and feedback on the required elements:

- Introduction/Background/Brief introductory literature review.
- Study research question, aims and objectives consistent with the discipline of Psychology (and with the student’s specialisation or programme).
- The ethical issues and approval process.
- Study design, recruitment and sampling procedures, data collection, and handling.
- Data analysis methods.
- Implications and relevance of the results to the area of Psychology in which the student is specialising.

The student will prepare their Dissertation Proposal utilizing the template in Appendix E. Submission of the proposal will take place within the DA classroom, to the student’s DA. The DA will review each draft of the Dissertation Proposal and will provide the appropriate feedback to the student; when needed, the DA will request a re-submission of the modified proposal. There is no limit to the number of re-submissions that the DA may request. Turnaround time for proposal reviews by the DA is 4 days, and it is strongly recommended that students try and maintain this same turnaround time for their answers and re-submissions.

Once the DA believes that the proposal meets the requirements established by the University of Liverpool, they will submit it to a Dissertation Proposal Advisory Panel (DPAP) and will communicate this submission to the student.

The DPAP is formed by another DA and the GDI. The role of the DPAP is to provide advice, comments or suggestions regarding the Dissertation Proposal to the DA. The DPAP will not provide feedback to the student. Its feedback to the DA is advisory, not prescriptive - the DPAP will not request modifications or resubmissions. The DPAP will provide feedback to the DA within 8 days.

Upon reception of the DPAP feedback, the DA will discuss its implications with the student. The DA may then (a) approve the Dissertation Proposal as is, (b) approve the Dissertation Proposal subject to minor amendments to be made by the student, or (c) suspend the approval until the student addresses the issues identified and submits a satisfactory Dissertation Proposal.

If the DA considers it necessary, they may request further advice from the DPAP before approving the Dissertation Proposal. However, note that the proposal approval will be decided on by the DA only.

The DA will post their approval for the student in the Proposal forum in the DA classroom. Students are expected to obtain approval for their Dissertation Proposals by week 8 of their dissertation. If the student has failed to gain approval by week 8, they will be using valuable time allotted to ethics approval and the development of the dissertation (recruitment, data collection and analysis, and chapter write-up) -

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additional time for the dissertation will not be granted through an extension request solely on the basis of the amount of time taken to achieve proposal approval (see Appendix B for further details on the extension applications process).

If the student has failed to gain approval by week 10, the DA will communicate this delay to the Programme Director via the Dissertation Lead Faculty. The Programme Director (PD) will make a decision, which depending on the circumstances may include one or more of the following: no further action, a warning to the student, a warning to the DA, or in exceptional circumstances, the replacement of the DA.

Any student who is unhappy about any aspect of their supervision should consult the Student Support Manager (SSM) as soon as possible. The SSM will discuss the issues with the PD. The PD will address the issues directly with the DA if necessary. In exceptional circumstances, the PD may approve a change of DA if it would not be unnecessarily disruptive to the student’s progress.

2.1.3 Ethics application and approval

Once the Dissertation Proposal has been approved, the ethics application can be submitted. However, students are encouraged to start early on completion of the ethics documents so as to not lose valuable time while awaiting feedback on the proposal.

Gaining ethics approval is a ‘must do’ for all dissertations before commencing any data collection, even if the research uses only publicly available data or archival data.

University of Liverpool/Laureate ethics approval

Ethics approval must be obtained, in all cases, from the University of Liverpool/Laureate.

The University of Liverpool/Laureate ethics approval may take one of the two following formats:

- **Expedited review.** This may be considered where it is judged that the potential risk of harm to participants and others affected by the proposed research is minimal; where non-vulnerable participant population is used (requirement for all Master’s dissertations); when the dissertation is based on a systematic review, and when archival or secondary data are used.

  In these cases, the ethics reviewer will provide their feedback in a period that may vary from 4 to 10 days - the application may then receive approval if found acceptable, or revisions (and subsequent re-submissions) may be necessary. This process usually takes between 2 and 4 weeks, but it may be shorter or longer depending on the characteristics of the research.

- **Full (Committee) review.** This will be considered where expedited conditions have not been met. The full review process involves one lead reviewer and a secondary reviewer
who in turn will discuss the application at the Laureate Online Research Ethics Committee (LOREC). Results are communicated to the student and DA by the Chair of the Committee pursuant to the meeting.

In this case, the period needed for feedback and approval may be substantially longer. Students are therefore advised to steer away from ethically sensitive research topics/design - even though applications for extensions based on documented waiting time for ethics approval may be favourably reviewed (however, ethics delays do not necessarily guarantee an extension will be granted).

The ethics approval form provides instructions on whether the application will be able to be expedited or if it should be sent for full committee review. These instructions should also be considered as a helpful guideline as to things to avoid in the study design. Questions that students may ask themselves at this point include, amongst others:

- Are the participants going to be deceived in any way? Is this justifiable?
- Could the questions cause distress or embarrassment?
- Could the questions result in someone revealing criminal activity which the student would then ethically be forced to report?
- Will participants be subjected to lengthy or stressful activities?
- Is covert observation used - which means that participants cannot give their informed consent?
- Are there any inducements (rewards) to be gained from the participants taking part?
- Are the participants considered a ‘vulnerable’ population?

Students are prohibited from using any vulnerable population for the dissertation. Vulnerable populations include individuals with mental illness, developmental delay, minors (18 years and younger), prisoners, individuals who cannot provide their own consent/those with guardians, wards of the court, individuals with positive HIV status or those with severe medical illnesses. This is not an exhaustive list - hence, students should consult with their DA on the population to be used.

If there is any confusion about whether the application can be expedited, students should ask their DA. All of the appropriate forms for expedited or full committee are available within the RMT module. Additionally, students are encouraged to read the documentation provided on the University of Liverpool ethics website.

However, in both cases of expedited and full ethical approvals, it is the responsibility of the DA to submit the ethics documents to the appropriate reviewer or committee when he/she feels the documents have met the requirements.

Local ethics approval

Additionally, some countries or organisations will require the completion of a second ethics procedure (local ethics). When that is the case, students must make application
there too - however, local ethics does not replace the UoL/Laureate ethics process (which must be completed in all cases).

- The **country** where each student carries out the dissertation in will determine the necessary local ethics approval. Students are encouraged to check this out thoroughly.
- This may also apply to the **organisation** that will provide the student with access to potential participants (recruitment) and/or will provide the student with secondary data: Does it have a specific ethics approval procedure? For example, in the UK, any research study that involves access to UK National Health Service (NHS) patients, staff, patients’ records, or health service facilities, will require the approval of an NHS local research ethics committee.

Students are encouraged to approach said committees and/or organisations early in the proposal development to obtain approval letters, as this can take some time - normally, this is done in parallel with the UoL/Laureate ethics application. Ethics committees usually meet no more than monthly, which has implications if the committee returns the research proposal for amendments and resubmission.

Letters of permission must be provided either in a written letter on letterhead or in an official email from someone within the committee and/or organisation authorized to provide such approval.

Where local ethics approval has been sought, this must be noted on the ethics approval application form and a copy of the ethics approval form MUST accompany the UoL/Laureate ethics application form. Students should post a copy in the DA classroom in the first instance.

Additionally, students must highlight the ethical considerations/processes addressed in their study in the **Methods** section of their dissertation, discuss these in the **Discussion** section, and submit written evidence on the decision for approval (or waiving of such approval) to proceed with the study in an appendix. Any permissions for reproducing/using materials, as appropriate, must also be included in an appendix in the dissertation.

Whilst awaiting ethics outcome, it is expected that students will continue to work on the introduction/background, and the literature review, as well as be planning their fieldwork/collection of data, in anticipation of gaining ethics approval.

**The following documents are required for both expedited and full ethics approval:**

- Ethics Application
- Participant **Information Sheet** (for studies using human participants)
- Consent Form (for studies using human participants)
- Written approvals from organisations where data will be obtained from or where recruitment will take place
- Surveys, measures, or interview schedules
- Advertisements
• **Evidence of local approval** if required (if university approval is required prior to local approval, student can still submit application for university ethical approval but will not attain formal ethical approval until local approval is granted)

• **Ethics Response Form**

*Students cannot begin collection of data until ethics approval has been authorised and communicated by the DA.*

2.1.4 Data collection, analysis, writing, and submission (weeks 12-40)

Once students obtain all required ethics authorisations, they are expected to begin their data collection, followed by data analysis and writing of results, discussion and conclusions. The output will be a draft dissertation.

Timings in this long stage can vary greatly depending on the nature of the design, the need for ethics approval, and/or the practical requirements for data collection. With this in view, a specific and realistic timeline will be agreed between the student and their DA and included in the Dissertation Proposal.

The timeline will include dates for the submission of well-crafted, complete drafts of each chapter.

The DA is expected to read and comment on one -and only one- draft for each complete chapter and one draft of the full final dissertation, and to provide adequate feedback in no more than 10 days after the drafts are submitted to the DA class by the student.

The student should check the accuracy of all drafts for typography, grammar, spelling, formatting, referencing, and data presentation before asking for comments on them. It is the student’s responsibility to correct any such errors and students should not expect the DA to correct them or to edit the text. The examiners will pay particular attention to such problems in presentation.

The final draft of the complete dissertation (excluding the discussion chapter) will be uploaded to the Draft Turnitin folder, as well as submitted to the DA in the DA classroom at least one month before the final deadline. Sending a DA chapters and/or the full document a week or two prior to submission deadline will not allow the DA enough time to properly review, and will not allow the student ample time to implement revisions. As with the chapters, the DA will review and provide feedback on one -and only one- full dissertation draft. Turnaround time for the DA’s feedback on the full dissertation draft is 10 days.

Submission of the final dissertation document should be made on or before the dissertation deadline in the student’s own time zone. The completed dissertation should be posted through the Final Dissertation Turnitin folder as a Word document in
the DA classroom as well. This is important in the event there are any technical issues upon submission of the dissertation. This must be completed for the dissertation to be graded.

As indicated above, timings for this stage will vary. However, the following timetable can be used as a reference as well as an example of the structure of the dissertation process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>RMT (see above)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Ethics approval (see above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>The aim for this stage is the completion of fieldwork/collation of data as well as drafts of 3 key chapters: draft introduction, literature review, and methods. The completed drafts for DA feedback can be submitted at this point. However, students are encouraged to work on and submit these chapter drafts while awaiting ethical approval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>During this time, students should carry out the data analysis as outlined in the Dissertation Proposal. Preliminary results should be shared with the DA for review. After discussion with the DA, students should complete the draft Results chapter, which can be submitted for DA feedback at this point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 5</td>
<td>Draft discussion/conclusion chapter is completed during this phase. If draft chapters were submitted prior to this stage, the student should work on revising the complete draft dissertation incorporating the DA’s feedback. If draft chapters were not submitted in prior phases, the student should submit the completed draft dissertation document in the DA classroom for review at the start of Week 36 at the latest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 6</td>
<td>Once feedback is received, students should revise the full document to address the feedback, prior to submitting the full, final document by the respective due date in week 40. The submitted dissertation must be written according to the guidance given in the document ‘Your dissertation’ (Appendix F)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.1.5 Marking

Once the final submission has been made, the student will receive an email confirming the receipt of their dissertation. This contains the final acceptance of their dissertation and marks the point at which communication between the student and their DA should end so that the grading process can begin. However, the student should monitor their classroom for 4 weeks after receipt, to address any questions that may arise as part of the grading process.

The dissertation will then be marked by the DA—as the first assessor—and by a second assessor appointed by Laureate. Grading will continue for several weeks once the dissertation is complete. All grades will be provisional until approved by the Board of Examiners.

Final grades will be released to the student as soon as possible after the Board of Examiners has met and agreed on a final award. This could mean a wait of several months, depending upon the deadline and submission date of the dissertation. Students will be contacted by their Student Support Manager with official confirmation of the results, once the Board of Examiners has made its decision.
3. Plagiarism, copyrights and policies

1.1. Citation and plagiarism

The dissertation needs to adhere to the same requirements for proper citation that were applicable in the other modules of the programme (i.e., style that is consistent with the current edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association). Proper credit to other sources should be present in the proposal and then continue throughout each stage of the dissertation. Proper citation must be an integral part of the final research project. Failure to adhere to the citation rules may be considered plagiarism.

The final draft of the dissertation, as well as the definitive document, will pass through the Turnitin application that checks for plagiarism. The DA and the second assessor are obliged to inform the academic department of any suspicion of plagiarism or collusion. An explanation will be requested from the student, and this explanation, together with the other evidence taken from analysis of the dissertation, will be brought to the Board of Examiners when it considers the assessment of the dissertation. The Board has the power to decide what final result should be recorded, in the light of the evidence, and also to consider whether further action is necessary. Thus, great care should be exercised when posting the final dissertation document, as no additional submissions or corrections are allowed after the final draft is submitted.

Upon enrolment in the DA class, the student will be required to read and express their agreement with the Academic Honesty Declaration attached as Appendix G. For more information, please see the ‘Plagiarism and Unauthorised Collusion Policy’ in the Student Handbook.

1.2. Copyrights

The UoL/Laureate official statement on copyright/ownership is:

Except in the case of students supported by outside bodies, where specific provisions relating to intellectual property are embodied in the conditions of the support, all postgraduate students are required to agree to assign to the university all their rights to intellectual property arising from their studies or research at the university... the University has a policy of sharing profits arising... with the staff and students concerned.

The principles that further materialise the statement above are:

i. Students are the effective copyright holders of their dissertation. Other than placing a copy in the library, the University/Laureate will not publish their work without their consent.
ii. Any published work arising out of a dissertation project should normally be viewed as collaboration between the student and the supervisor (the DA), and each has an obligation to discuss eventual publications with the other, and to agree on authorship and/or acknowledgements as appropriate.

iii. The UoL/Laureate has no rights over any publication, but it is expected that it will include an acknowledgement that the work was carried out as part of the student's studies with UoL/Laureate.

iv. In the case where a student's dissertation project is sponsored/supported by his or her employer, or relates directly to the student’s employment, UoL/Laureate will not make any claim on the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) of the work.

v. In any other case, the student is required to inform UoL/Laureate if any commercial exploitation of work carried out in the dissertation is planned. The UoL/Laureate will not normally assert its claim to IPR, however, unless there is a reasonable argument that the DA should share in the benefits of any exploitation.

In other words, all academic work completed at the university will generally be owned by the university. Specifically, all documents concerned with the progress of the dissertation (proposals, monthly reports, and interim dissertation drafts) are internal documents that are submitted to the University for assessment purposes. They should thus be regarded as coursework assignments, which belong to UoL/Laureate. However, it is not in the interests of UoL/Laureate to forcibly claim rights over a piece of work or information; at most, UoL/Laureate will request acknowledgement that the work was carried out as part of the student’s studies with the University.

1.3. Confidentiality

As indicated above, other than placing a copy in the library, the University/Laureate will not publish any student’s work without their consent. However, students who need to keep their dissertation confidential should include the following sentence on the same page that they make their declaration about plagiarism:

“This dissertation contains material that is confidential and/or commercially sensitive. It is included here on the understanding that this will not be revealed to any person not involved in the assessment process.”

Inserting this statement will also preclude the dissertation from being placed in any university Dissertation Library.

1.4. Outside help with language skills

The writing as well as the work presented should be the student’s own. It is acceptable for the student to ask the DA when reading a chapter to point out unclear sentences, problematic paragraph structure, etc., but it is not permitted to give the text to a professional editor for corrections. Even the most minor assistance should be clearly acknowledged in the dissertation preface. The University of Liverpool will treat the use of a professional editor as unauthorised collusion.

It is also not permissible to write the dissertation in another language and have it translated into English.

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APPENDIX A: DISSERTATION LATE-SUBMISSION POLICY

1. Purpose
All students of the University of Liverpool are expected to be familiar with its academic policies and the Student Code of Conduct.

2. Application & Scope
These guidelines apply to all students and faculty on all University of Liverpool Online Masters programmes delivered by Laureate Online Education.

3. Introduction and context

The University of Liverpool and Laureate Online Education need to be able to assure themselves that the standards of the awards delivered in partnership are consistent with the general expectations for such awards within the higher education sector nationally. Therefore, these guidelines are situated within external reference points such as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education’s UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They have been written to inform students and faculty, as well as individuals from outside the University, such as external examiners and external reviewers.

4. Guiding Principles
The University and Laureate require all students to submit assessed coursework by the deadline set by the assessor, or the revised deadline as communicated to the student in cases of extensions. The COPA allows that late submissions of work should be accepted for a set period beyond the submission deadline, but that a standard system of penalties for the late submission of work for assessment should normally be imposed.

5. Definitions
For the purposes of this document the following definitions are used:

**COPA**: University of Liverpool Code of Practice on Assessment

**Dissertation**: The final assessment towards a Masters degree. It may be an extended piece of writing structured in response to a central question or proposition, or may be an equivalent piece of work such as a Consultancy Project.

**Official submission deadline**: The final date on which the student must submit their work for assessment. This may vary from the Submission date (see below) due to a successful Mitigating Circumstances claim or extended deadline following a review by the Disability Centre etc.
Submission date: The official submission date for all student Dissertations is 40 weeks from the start of the Dissertation module.

Submission Time: The official submission time is considered to be midnight in the student’s country of residence as recorded in the University’s records. The same method will be used to determine when the dissertation is 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 days late. If the student is temporarily resident in a different time zone at the time of dissertation submission, he or she should have notified the University of that change in advance of submission. The appropriate time zone will then be used in calculating the deadline.

6. Guidelines
6.1 All student dissertations submitted up to 10 calendar days after the official submission date will be assessed.

6.2 Dissertations submitted after the official submission date but before the end of the 10-day penalty window will have their dissertations graded on merit by their assessors.

6.3 Where a student’s dissertation is found to have been submitted late, the penalties described in this document will be automatically applied to the work after it has been graded.

6.4 For every two calendar days after the official submission date, 5% of the total marks available for the dissertation component shall be deducted from the assessment mark, up to a maximum of 25% (ie. for work marked out of 100, five marks per two days will be deducted; for work marked out of 20, one mark per two days will be deducted).

6.5 If the student work has reached a passing standard on merit, the late penalty will not reduce the grade for the work below the Pass mark for the assessment.

6.6 Work assessed below the pass mark on merit will not be penalised for late submission of up to ten days.

6.7 All work submitted ten calendar days after the official submission deadline will receive a mark of zero.
APPENDIX B: EXTENSION APPLICATION PROCESS

Dissertation proposal approval

A student is expected to reach proposal approval within the first 3 months of the dissertation. If the student does not achieve proposal approval in this time frame, overall time allotted for completion of the full dissertation is diminished. Students get 40 weeks to complete their entire dissertation regardless of how much time it takes to achieve proposal approval. Therefore, it is important that student work diligently to gain proposal approval in the first 3 months of the process. If the student fails to meet the deadline for full dissertation submission, the student will be subject to the dissertation late work policy (Appendix A). If the student does not meet this deadline, then the student will fail Dissertation. This will be communicated to the student by the SSM. The student then has the option to submit an appeal to the University of Liverpool (UoL), re-sit with extra costs, or withdraw with a diploma.

Ethics application

If there is a delay due to lengthy deliberations within the ethics approval process (either within the UoL/Laureate process or within the student's own organisation/area/country procedures), the delay and reasons need to be documented in the DA class. All supporting documentation of delays must also be posted in the Ethics section of the DA class. Documented waiting time is essential evidence for submission of an application for an extension if necessary, and may be viewed favourably. However, it is important to note that extensions are not guaranteed solely due to ethics delays.

Final submission

Extensions will not normally be granted, except in clearly unexpected circumstances beyond a student’s control, such as in cases of illness affecting the student, bereavement or serious illness affecting a close family member, and other unforeseeable or unpreventable events. Excluded events, which do not form sufficient grounds for an extension, would be holidays, weddings, inadequate planning and time management, and any event that could have been reasonably foreseen. The case for an extension will need to be made in writing with supporting documentation. Applications may be rejected if there is insufficient or inappropriate evidence. Such requests should be discussed with the DA and the SSM who will advise on a formal application via the Online Dissertation Extension Form, which can be accessed via the web page http://success.liverpool-online.com/ContactSupport and the Formal case submission link at the bottom of the page. The maximum extension that can be granted is 12 weeks. Many students will need only 4 weeks.
APPENDIX C: DISSERTATION AGREEMENT

The working relationship between a dissertation student and his/her GDI and DA is an important one. The Dissertation Agreement document found in your DA class (and the CSS: https://success.liverpool-online.com/ResearchPortal/DA/DissertationAgreement) summarizes the key responsibilities of DAs and students during the various phases of the dissertation. You are expected to indicate that you have read and accepted the agreement by replying to the ‘Dissertation Agreement’ in your DA’s class.

APPENDIX D: DISSERTATION PROPOSAL CHECKLIST

Purpose of this checklist: The Outline Dissertation Proposal is given high importance at UoL/Laureate on the basis that a good, clear outline is likely to yield a good, clear final dissertation. This checklist should be used by students and DAs to evaluate their proposals prior to submission to the Review Panel.

Please note that proposals should not exceed 1500 words (excluding the reference section)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Is the title reflective of the study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does the title align with the Research Question, Aim, and Objectives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are all of the words spelled out? (Words in full rather than using acronyms, e.g. HIA, PAR?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Does the introduction include a clear link to psychological research and policy/practice in the area of chosen study? The case needs to be clearly stated, even if it seems obvious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does the introduction include sufficient evidence from the literature and empirical studies to support the significance of the problem?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is the intent of the research clear? In other words, is the overall purpose of the study clearly stated at the end of this section?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Does the background information provided support the development of the research question (RQ)?

- Do the studies reviewed support the aim of your study? Have you addressed how the studies reviewed are relevant?

- Does the summary identify any gaps in research? If yes, how will this study add to the understanding of the question?

- Has a critical analysis of the research been provided? More than a summary of research findings should be included.

**Research Question (RQ), aims and objectives**

- Is the RQ clearly stated and is it actually a question (as opposed to a statement or question set-out in lay terms?). For instance, a proper RQ could read:
  
  “How does childhood parental neglect affect attachment styles?”
  
  Question in lay terms could read: “Does a parent not paying attention to a child affect the relationship between parent and child?”

  A research question is a clear and concise question that guides the research study. It focuses on presenting a question about the relationship between variables, which subsequently can be answered through the methods.

- Is the RQ specific and focused on a narrow topic of interest? For example:
  
  **Quantitative projects:** Specific RQ: “Do stereotypical beliefs about individuals with low socioeconomic status affect how individuals treat the homeless?”
  Too General RQ: “Do individual beliefs affect how the public treats the homeless?”

  **Qualitative projects:** Specific RQ: “How do individual experiences during pregnancy impact how women interact with their infants’ post-partum?”
  Too General RQ: “How does pregnancy impact the parent-infant relationship?”

- Is the research question “arguable?”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>• If there is more than one question, are they separated appropriately?</strong></th>
<th>They still need to be linked so that they are not two separate studies.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>• Does the RQ accurately reflect the conclusions from/identify a gap in the literature?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>• Does the RQ align with study Aim, Objectives, and Title?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>• Is the overall goal or aim(s) clearly articulated in a sentence? The aim(s) should begin “To...”</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>• Is the aim clearly distinct from the RQ? The Aim should not be a restatement of the RQ.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>• Are the objectives clearly articulated? Are they steps to achieving the aim(s), i.e., setting out a “road map” to achieve the aim(s)?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>• Are the objectives specific enough, and do they achieve the overall Aim of your study?</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Method**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>• Does the study use quantitative methods or qualitative methods?</strong></th>
<th>PLEASE NOTE:- For students enrolled on the Applied Psychology and Forensic Psychology Programmes, qualitative methods will only be allowed on a case-by-case basis if the student has prior experience conducting qualitative research and can provide UoL with evidence of such. Mixed-methods are not allowed for the dissertation for any programme.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>• Is there a summary and justification of the methods that will be used? Have you stated the study design that you are using? Have you considered the strengths and limitations of the methods used?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>• Do the study methods match with the RQ or Hypothesis? Have hypotheses been clearly articulated? A hypothesis is a statement that articulates a proposed answer to the research question. There should be at least one null and one alternative hypothesis listed. A hypothesis focuses on the actual predictions made by the researcher and the manipulation of the variables.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>• Is the sample clearly defined? Include how many participants, sampling method, and sample size justification through reference to the existing literature.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
- Are dependent and independent variables identified when appropriate? For instance, DV and IV are needed for ANOVA analysis, but predictor variables are needed for Regression analysis. Correlation analysis will not have identified IV or DV. Are operational definitions for each provided?

- Are data collection methods described, including pilot-testing (i.e., what you are actually going to do)?

- Are data analysis methods described? Are these methods appropriate for analysing the type of data that will be collected?

- Have inferential, multivariate, and multilevel data analysis methods been used? In other words, have more than one analysis method been proposed? Methods should include as much as possible use of multivariate and/or multi-level analysis. Inferential data analysis methods must be used. Descriptive methods alone are not appropriate.

- Are the methods ethical? Does it conform to the expedited criteria set out by University of Liverpool (i.e., avoids sensitive issues, does not use vulnerable populations, invasive clinical interventions, provide proper in-depth analysis of the data, etc.)?

- Are confidentiality and anonymity protected and is it described how? Has permission to access data been granted already by proposed collection site or is there a plan identified for attaining permissions?

- Are ethical considerations addressed?
  To work directly with children in the UK (interviews or focus groups), the researcher will need Criminal Records Bureau clearance (CRB certificate). It is essential that the student states whether this project is eligible for an expedited review and why.

Research Outcomes

- Are the intended outcomes described?

- Is it clear how the outcomes will contribute to society or to knowledge?

Costs
- Is there a total cost figure, as well as line-item costs?
- Is there a statement acknowledging how additional costs will be paid?
- Does the cost estimate appear too unrealistic?

### Timetable

- Is the timetable realistic? Is there enough time for each part of the dissertation to be realistically achieved? Are you aiming to complete the first full draft at least a month before it needs to be handed in?

### References

- Are key references listed in APA style?
- Are all sources listed in the proposal referenced in the reference list?
APPENDIX E: DISSERTATION PROPOSAL PRO FORMA

Instructions for Students: Complete each section of the Proposal Pro Forma completely. If a question is not applicable to your study, please enter N/A. Forms that are not completed entirely will be returned without review.

Instructions for DAs: Review each section of the Proposal Pro Forma. If the student has not adequately addressed the section, include comments using track changes in the section box. If the student has addressed the section adequately, comments do not need to be included.

STUDENT ________________________________

DISSERTATION ADVISER ____________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Title</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Version</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. Date of submission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Background</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1. What is the general topic of the study?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. Summarise in no more than two paragraphs the state-of-the-art of research on this topic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3. Summarise in one paragraph what are the main limitations of the research above?

2.4. What is the gap in current knowledge that you intend to investigate? What is the original contribution of your work?

### 3. Research question, aims and objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.1. What is your research question?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.2. What are the aims of the study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 What are the objectives of the study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4. What are the hypotheses? (if quantitative design)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.1 Select which design you plan to use</th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
4.2. Summarily justify your decision above

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.3. Select which of the following methods/procedures will be used in the study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archival research or secondary analysis of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews (including focus groups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiments on human participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires (including surveys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other(s) – Please specify</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4. If you are using questionnaires, indicate which one(s), briefly describe them (including main psychometric properties) and justify your decision

4.5. If you are using other materials (e.g., photos, drawings, measurements equipment, etc.), describe them and justify your decision

4.6. Describe the participants in your study (what are the inclusion criteria?)

4.7. What are the exclusion criteria?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.8. Justify your exclusion criteria</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.9. State the total number of research participants to be recruited (sample size)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10. Describe how the sample size was calculated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11. Please describe the procedure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.12. Will the study involve the discussion of sensitive topics that may cause distress or embarrassment to the participant?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.13. What are the arrangements for obtaining consent from participants (please tick)</td>
<td>Information sheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consent form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (explain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.14. Will you require the ethical approval of bodies or institutions other than the University of Liverpool?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.15. If the answer above was YES, please indicate which are the bodies or institutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.16. Are there any additional ethical issues you would like to discuss that are not mentioned?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.17. What ethics approval process do you consider corresponds to your study?</td>
<td>Expedited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.18. Describe how you will analyse your data, and justify your decision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. What are the expected outcomes of the research?

6. Timetable

7. References
APPENDIX F: YOUR DISSERTATION

The following document is written directly for the student as a step-by-step guide. It does not replace the GDI’s or the DA’s advice, but intends to complement them.

1. Your Dissertation Proposal

The topic to be investigated

You should choose an area of study according to your own interests, but you must be able to demonstrate its relevance to the area of psychology in which you are specialising. As you will devote so much time to your dissertation, it is essential that you choose a topic that you will enjoy and find interesting. It is also important to consider the practical aspects of the proposed study. Some topics may simply not be researchable because the necessary skills, procedures, and techniques are not feasible, available, or ethically acceptable, or would take too long or involve too many people. In addition, you should consider the value of the proposed study in terms of providing new and meaningful insights. This may contribute to your own career development and may provide material for a peer-reviewed publication or preliminary work for a higher research degree. Looking at potential dissertation topics might help you to choose your area of work.

Students are required to share their dissertation ideas within their Research Methods Training Dissertation module in order to receive feedback on their ideas from the group prior to submitting a Dissertation Proposal to the DA, who once satisfied with the proposal, will approve it.

The format of the Dissertation Proposal should be as follows (see the Dissertation Proposal Checklist in Appendix D and the Dissertation Proposal Pro Forma in Appendix E):

1. Title.
2. Background.
3. Research question, aims, and objectives.
4. Methods (including summary of study design; sample and sample size calculation/justification; recruitment strategy and procedures, including setting; data collection, including measures to be used; anticipated data analysis techniques; ethical aspects, data protection and storage and confidentiality issues.
5. Expected outcomes.
6. Timetable.
7. References.
The appendix of your dissertation MUST include the final, approved, Dissertation Proposal and the approval letter from the relevant ethics committees.

Reviewing the background research

It is essential to review the relevant literature to inform your hypothesis/research question/study aim(s). This will provide you with a sound theoretical basis, ensure that your proposed topic has merit, and will suggest alternative methods and techniques for conducting your research. A comprehensive review of previously published research should inform your approach and prevent time-wasting.

Use the collections of the University of Liverpool Online Library to access e-journals, e-books, and databases. These are available through the Digital University (https://student.liv.ac.uk/Login.aspx?ReturnUrl=/) and the Online Library home page (http://www.liv.ac.uk/library/ohecampus/). If you are not sure how to access information specific to psychology, ask the online librarian: onlinelibrarian@liverpool.ac.uk. Discuss your keywords and search strategy with your DA. Do not forget to search seminal articles for useful references and to check whether their keywords help you to refine your search strategy.

Formulating your research question

It is crucial to identify a clear research question before starting the study. The research question is simply the question that you intend your study to answer, in part or in full. It should follow on from the previous research questions identified by the studies in your literature review and should provide an overview for the study aim and objectives that you have identified. You should try to articulate one overall research question.

Stating your aim and objectives/research question/assumptions

It is also essential that you clarify the aim of your research. You need to develop a clear idea of what you are hoping to investigate and how this is to be done before you start your research. It might be helpful to start by trying to articulate the overall research question that you are interested in tackling.

The study aim(s) and objectives are crucial to your proposal. The study aim should describe the overall purpose of the project and the objectives should outline specific elements (not methods). Keep the objectives concise and restricted in number. Long lists of objectives result in (or from) confusion and do not get done! The objectives can often take quite a while to get right, so do not be surprised or disheartened by the iterative process involved in designing them.
If your study involves testing a hypothesis, define your hypothesis clearly and ask yourself whether the hypothesis is testable and whether the proposed study is feasible. Be aware that how you frame your research question and, for example, whether you have a hypothesis to test, will be guided by certain assumptions that you make about the nature of ‘knowledge’/‘the truth’ and possible study design. You need to note what assumptions underpin your work and clarify the implications for your research approach and findings.

Deciding how you will carry out your research

Once you have carried out a thorough literature search, you must then formulate a plan for conducting the research. First, consider the main research design, e.g., whether the research involves, for example, a quantitative study design, or a qualitative approach.

NOTE: Qualitative research is approved on a case-by-case basis for Forensic Psychology and Applied Psychology programme students; if a student from one of these programmes would like to use qualitative methods they should have prior experience with this methodology outside of what was provided in the programme. This can be through outside work, research, or courses taken externally; a request to use qualitative methodology should be made to the GDI in the Research Methods Training Dissertation module.

For research involving questionnaires, you need to plan the instrument very carefully and this can take a lot of time, especially as you should allow time for piloting. Discuss and obtain advice from your DA as soon as possible and keep testing out your new ideas.

Having formulated your study design, you then need to establish how the data are to be analysed, e.g., using appropriate statistical tests, clarifying the philosophy underpinning any analysis of data collected by a qualitative approach. Try to avoid complicated research designs or studies that involve long or indeterminate waiting times to receive data.

Once you have a clear idea in your mind of the design and methods of data collection and analysis, you should consider how many participants/cases will be included in your study, if they are required. This will be influenced by the feasibility given the overall time involved and the requirements of your particular study. You may already have a clear idea of the numbers that you require from previously published literature, but you must demonstrate a clear rationale, other than just feasibility, for deciding on that particular sample size and type. There are also statistical tests for determining the number of participants you need, such as a power analysis. If in doubt, take advice from your Dissertation Adviser.
Do not forget to consider the cost of various components including, for example, travel, telephone, stationery, survey forms, etc.

Planning your research timetable

It is essential in planning research that you specify the estimated length of time required at each stage. Obviously, you cannot be exact in your time predictions because all sorts of unforeseen circumstances may cause delays. Obtaining ethics approval, for example, can take more than a few weeks and can involve numerous changes to your original intentions. Hence, it is better to take this into account right at the beginning in formulating a non-sensitive focus. A timetable enables you to plan the project and focus on its essential components. Remember that wishful thinking at this stage can lead to serious stress later.

2. The structure of your dissertation

The dissertation structure provided below is to be used as an example. It does not need to be followed exactly. Some aspects of the structure may be more relevant to quantitative dissertations. Students wishing to undertake a qualitative dissertation are advised to talk about the structure in detail with their DA.

Abstract

This is a 300-word, concise, but comprehensive resume of the dissertation. It is a very important part of the report. Select this text carefully, as the abstract gives the reader a framework on which to orient the details of the report and allows the reader to ‘dip in’ and find out the main purpose, design, outcomes, and ‘so what?’ of the piece of work. Take care to craft the abstract very carefully as it may well be the first part (and the last part!) that a reader accesses. The abstract should therefore convey the reason for the investigation, the key research design features, important results (with supporting evidence, as appropriate) and conclusions. The abstract should contain all the keywords, if possible, that might be useful in an information retrieval system. It is your responsibility to include sufficient specific detail to convince the casual browser through ‘Dissertation Abstracts’ that your work is credible, your findings are interesting, and your report is worth reading. Write your abstract using a structured format (or semi-structured format, as appropriate) such as that used in reputable academic psychology journals. You must keep within the specified word limits. You should also list five keywords on your abstract page that best describe the content and process of your research.
Acknowledgements

You should acknowledge (usually at the beginning of your dissertation-report) people/agencies who/that have contributed to the intellectual content, data collection, etc. of your dissertation (this excludes domestic support, but includes those people who have helped directly with the project). Specify the contribution for which you are acknowledging them. This is additional to any formal thanks that you feel that you should convey in writing directly to the appropriate people/bodies concerned. You must be very careful here that you do not accidentally ruin your requirements to maintain the anonymity of your participants. For example, by specifying the hospital or prison or police department where your research took place you may have inadvertently given away exactly who took part in the study.

Introduction and background

The short opening section of your dissertation should explain clearly to the reader why you have decided to embark on this area of research and summarise any necessary background. The introduction should justify the reasons for doing the work to be described and should also provide the context about the ‘problem’/situation generating the research question. The emphasis is on setting the scene that existed at the start of the project so that the purpose of your research and the psychological nature of the problem is made clear.

The background should provide more detail on the issues outlined in the Introduction, reviewing some of the literature critically. The background should provide a foundation for your study from the existing literature. The background should conclude with a clear statement of the study aim(s) and objectives, hypothesis, and a specific research question where relevant. Be explicit about the research context of your study and the rationale for that specific research question/study aim. Having written your research question/aim/objectives (and acknowledged, outlined, and justified your theoretical assumptions), everything else should follow logically on from there.

Literature Review

The aim of the literature review is not only to identify what you have read about your topic, but also to demonstrate your ability to critique the literature. A comprehensive review of the relevant research on your topic should be provided in this section. You should highlight flaws in the logic or argument,
method or analyses in such research reports. You should be able to present a balanced appraisal of research approaches and the evidence base for your topic, and how this leads to your research aim. Furthermore, try to outline what you hope to achieve through carrying out this research. A mere summary of the research would not suffice.

Methods (What did you do?)

The methods must be designed to meet the objectives. This internal consistency is very important for a good project design. Key aspects of the methods include:

- The study design - and why this was appropriate for your study
- Identify the source(s) of information such as routine data sources, an existing research dataset, or new data from survey work that you wish to carry out.
- If you intend to collect new data, define the population that you will use, the sampling method, and sample size and justification. Inclusion and exclusion criteria should be included for your sample.
- For all data (whether existing or to be collected), think about definitions and ‘validity’, including any possible sources of bias, and the data collection method that you intend to use. If you intend to use a questionnaire (semi-structured, structured, etc.), consider whether to design a fresh or use a tried and tested instrument. If you design one yourself, allow time to develop it and to pre-test through a pilot study to check the acceptability, validity, etc. When at all possible, it is preferred that students use established measures and not design one of their own.
- It is also useful to think through how you would handle, present, and analyse the information that relates to your key objective(s). Try and imagine what that part of your report will look like in terms of tables, graphs, quotations from participants, etc.

The methods section should tell the reader exactly how the study was undertaken. Ethical considerations/processes must be highlighted. A written statement from the ethics committee consulted should be included (in an appendix) to indicate that ethics approval was given or not required. You must state clearly what tests/questionnaires/interview procedures/observation techniques were used and how they were constructed so that a reader could replicate the approach if necessary. In order to clarify what was done, methods could, for example, be subdivided into the following sections:

- Participants—Should be described giving all the relevant details, e.g., sex, age, etc.; how they were selected; and any inclusion/exclusion criteria
• **Design**—This section should *summarise the design* (e.g., observational study, case-control design) and then describe all aspects of your data collection and ways in which you addressed sources of bias (random sampling, etc.). If you have conducted a survey, describe the design and distribution of questionnaires.

• **Materials**—If a questionnaire was used, summarise the main features of its design. The instrument itself is usually best put in an appendix. Reliability coefficients should be provided for established measures.

• **Procedures**—This section should include a clear, logical, and detailed description of what was done. The reader should be able to replicate the study.

• **Analysis**—This section should clearly show all of the steps taken to analyse the data in order to meet the study objectives. This should include consideration of the type of data you are using, the statistical tests used, any assumptions of the tests and reasons for their inclusion.

**Results (What did you find?)**

This section should only include the straightforward reporting of results. Generally, do not comment on or discuss your data in this section; simply present it in a clear and meaningful way. Be selective in highlighting the key findings. Summarise the data, e.g., in tables, graphs, text boxes. Make sure that you are not just repeating the same information in a different format e.g. table and graph. If required, present any examples of raw data (non-identifiable) or statistical calculations in an appendix. Note that negative results are acceptable.

Ensure that summary material (tables, graphs, line drawings, text boxes, and photographs) are self-explanatory and can ‘stand alone’, requiring no reference to the text for the reader to understand them. This means that headings, captions and legends must be carefully composed so that they are succinct and self-contained. This is *not* to say that the results section should only consist of tables and figures or only consist of quotations. At the very least, you must guide the reader through the data, indicating which tables/figures/text boxes, etc. illustrate a particular statement: “X% of the population agreed that Y was more important than Z (Table A), but did not include Y in their overall top five rankings (Table B).” Do not describe the results merely in terms of ‘Table A shows that... and Table B shows that...’ as if the section is merely a guided tour of the tables, etc. Avoid repetition of the material presented in the tables in the text; only highlight the important elements. The results should be a summary of the important findings, with due reference to the summary material. Be clear whether material is integral to the reader’s understanding of the text or whether it is a stand-alone summary-element (table, text-box, etc.) to which the reader can refer for further information. Where you are
presenting quotations, you must be selective and be clear about what concept a particular selection illustrates. If you are analysing quantitative data, you should also be aware of, and pay attention to, the dangers of multiple statistical significance testing.

Discussion (What do your results mean?)

Ensure that you comment on the strengths and limitations of alternative approaches, methods chosen (e.g., Why did you choose to use a questionnaire, or focus group, or semi-structured interview, etc.? How well were ethical challenges addressed? What theoretical assumptions underpinned your approach to this research?), and results reported, alternative interpretations, and how this all relates to your original research question/study aim(s). Within the discussion, you should make clear the lessons that you have learned as a result of carrying out this research. Here, your work and the results obtained should be related to the knowledge base from earlier published material discussed in your review. You should demonstrate that you have reflected on the literature in relation to your own findings. You must not present new results in this section, but may need to refer back to tables or synthesize your emerging ideas into diagrammatic format. By acknowledging caveats, you should place your findings in context and suggest how improvements could have been made. Above all, this section should demonstrate your ability to interpret and argue the importance of your findings in an applied psychological context.

Conclusion and recommendations (So what?)

This section should summarise the conclusions arising directly from your study, and those arising from further discussion in relation to other work. The conclusion should be linked to the aim of the study as stated in the introduction and clarify ‘lessons learned’. You should also add some suggestions and recommendations for further work (where these clearly follow your findings) or changes that you would make if the study were to be repeated. Be explicit about the implications of your study.

Reference list

This should list all written sources referenced in the text. Use the APA style of referencing and be consistent. A useful web page is: Guide for referencing from the University of Liverpool Online Library for Laureate students (http://libguides.liv.ac.uk/onlineprogrammes/referencing). This guide also provides
information about using the online reference management tool, RefWorks, which is freely available to all University of Liverpool students.

You should only quote references that you have consulted and verified fully.

The appendices

These should contain details, for example, of data collected if appropriate (non-identifiable), questionnaires, ethics committee approval (and other permissions), statistical calculations, additional data, or additional reflections as appropriate to the research approach. The appendices may also contain additional material about: (i) methods; (ii) data or results; and (iii) correspondence; but should be kept to a minimum and be selective. Each item included must be justifiable. You must include a copy of your final proposal in your appendix.

3. General format

Presentation

Good presentation of your dissertation is crucial. When writing and editing your dissertation, consider the person reading your work for the first time. Careless presentation will raise doubts in the reader’s mind about the quality and accuracy of the work itself and will obscure the main messages even where content is good. Presentation covers everything from the strategic considerations of selection of material for inclusion to the structuring of your dissertation. The key points are careful selection; organisation; emphasising your most important material; and clear, concise writing without grammatical or typographical errors. Use short and succinct sentence and paragraph construction, not long and tedious text. Use a dictionary and thesaurus to prevent overuse of common words. Make sure that you proof read it carefully.

Word limit

The type of research design, style, and content of a dissertation will influence the length of the finished document. The dissertation should demonstrate succinct writing, clarity of thought, critical analysis, and the depth of enquiry required for the award of a master-level degree. You must keep within 10,000
words, excluding self-contained elements such as figures, tables, headings, ‘stand-alone text boxes’, appendices, reference citations, and reference list (and of course the abstract). Dissertations over the word limit will incur grading penalties. Please note that inappropriate use of text boxes, figures, tables, and appendices is not a substitute for careful editing and will be penalised.

Title page

This should contain a succinct title that accurately describes the project, your name, the institution to which your dissertation has been submitted, and the date.

Declaration

The following signed declaration is required following the title page:

No portion of this work has been submitted in support of an application, for degree or qualification of this or any other university or institute of learning.

Signature

Contents page

This should contain a full list of page numbers for different sections of the dissertation (and subsections, if appropriate) including a full list of tables and figures (and other such stand-alone elements).

Typographical detail

Be consistent and accurate in your grammar, punctuation, capitalisation, abbreviation, and underlining practices. Use capital letters (uppercase) for proper names only and the initial word of titles in citations. Additionally:

- Use double-spaced typing (except for quotations, as appropriate).
- Use the Times New Roman or Helvetica/Arial font, size 12.
- You must state the overall word count at the end of the Abstract (and provide a separate count for the Abstract itself).
- As noted previously, the dissertation must not be more than 10,000 words (± 10%).
Pagination

Pages must be numbered consecutively in Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3…) throughout the dissertation, beginning at page one of the Introduction. The preliminary pages should be numbered in lowercase Roman numerals (i, ii, iii…) and be placed in the following order:

- Title page
- Declaration
- Abstract
- Acknowledgements
- List of abbreviations
- Glossary (if appropriate)
- Contents page
- List of tables
- List of figures
- List of other illustrative material

All page numbers must be placed in the centre at the bottom of the page.
APPENDIX G: ACADEMIC HONESTY DECLARATION

Please read the declaration below and reply to this message stating "I agree to and accept this declaration". This posting will acknowledge that you have read the declaration and agree to abide by the content.

A student submitting work for assessment is not permitted to plagiarise the work of others; to present fabricated data; or, without official approval, to co-operate with another person in the production of work which is then submitted as the student’s own.

The definitions of Plagiarism, Collusion and Fabrication of Data can be found in the Student Handbook which also provides links to the full policy and guidelines, as well as a link to a citation and referencing guide. The University treats the decision as to whether plagiarism, collusion or the fabrication of data has taken place as a matter for academic judgement. Students found to have committed plagiarism, fabricated data or to have colluded in the production of work for assessment are liable to receive a Fail grade for the assessment concerned. Subsequent offences will attract more severe penalties, including possible termination of studies. Each student is asked to respond to this declaration in order to affirm the following: I have read and understood the University’s policy and procedures for dealing with plagiarism, collusion and the fabrication of data – available at:


I have read and understood the guide to citation and referencing – available at: http://www.liv.ac.uk/library/ohecampus/referencing/referencing.htm

I understand that my contributions to discussion, as well as my assignments, must be work written by me. I must clearly cite (in the text) and reference (at the end) each and every source that I use in the preparation of my work. Where I use the actual words of a source, I must put those words inside quotation marks. I understand that if I am suspected of major plagiarism, collusion or fabrication of data, I will be informed of the allegation and be given the chance to explain the circumstances of the alleged offence. For this purpose, it is my responsibility to check regularly for incoming messages at my.ohecampus.com email address. I understand that committing plagiarism, fabrication of data or collusion may have serious consequences and that the University may choose not to award a Degree or other award to those students who have committed one or more of these acts.

Excessive amounts of quotations: The inclusion of quotations in any piece of work only adds academic value if they are discussed and analysed, or compared and contrasted with other materials. If more than 30% of your submission was copied, you are unlikely to receive a grade above C; and if more than 50% was copied, you are likely to receive an F grade even if all the copied materials were correctly quoted, cited and referenced.

Re-using previous work: Work submitted for assessment should be work written by you specifically for this class. Although copying your own work is not regarded as plagiarism, you will not receive a passing grade for the new submission unless you have included substantial further discussion and analysis. The grade penalties indicated in the previous paragraph for excessive quotations will also apply if you copied from work you previously submitted to another class.
(even if you had dropped out of the other class, and regardless of whether or not you completed that class successfully).