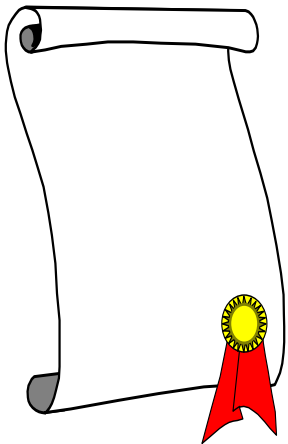


**Faculty  
of Economics, Management  
And Accountancy**

**University of Malta**



***MBA Dissertation Guidelines***

*As part of the degree formation you are expected to present a dissertation project. This booklet contains details of expected practice with respect to the completion of the MBA dissertation. Clearly general guidelines such as these may not cover all circumstances. Particular emphasis and minor adjustments may be necessary in individual cases.*

*It is thus imperative that you consult your tutors for specific advice and guidance on matters pertaining to the design and content of your study and of course, the reporting of it.*

*Nadia Theuma  
June 2001*

## **CONTENTS**

<b>PART 1:</b>	The MBA Dissertation .....	4
<b>PART 2:</b>	Structuring the Research Proposal .....	6
<b>PART 3:</b>	Notes on Specific Aspects of the Dissertation .....	7
<b>PART 4:</b>	Some Other Considerations .....	10
<b>PART 5:</b>	Sources for Further Reading .....	12

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1	Prototype of Title Page .....	13
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## **PART 1: THE MBA DISSERTATION**

### **1.1 General Framework of the Dissertation**

The following outline is indicative of the overall structure of a dissertation. Clearly it will have to be adapted to the particular study you have carried out.

<i>SECTION</i>	<i>PAGE</i>
Title Page	
Abstract	
Statement of Authenticity	
Acknowledgements	
Table of Contents	
List of Tables	
List of Figures	
CHAPTER 1	Introduction
CHAPTER 2	Literature Review
CHAPTER 3	Methodology
CHAPTER 4	Presentation of Data
CHAPTER 5	Analysis of Data
CHAPTER 6	Discussion and Interpretation of Findings
CHAPTER 7	Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations
References	
Appendices	

### **1.2 Word Length**

The total length of the dissertation is 20,000-25,000 words. This length is exclusive of title and contents page, figures, tables, appendices and references.

### **1.3 Plagiarism**

Plagiarism, that is, the willful representation of an other person's work, without the acknowledgement or the deliberate and unacknowledged incorporation in a student's work of material derived from the work (published or otherwise) of another, is **UNACCEPTABLE** and will incur the penalty of outright failure.

### **1.4 Planning Your Work**

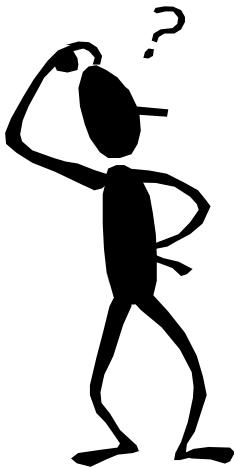
You are advised to begin working on your dissertation immediately. The lectures in Research Methods held during the first term of your course are useful in helping you to plan background material and to choose your methodology.

You should see your supervisor on a regular basis – at least once every two weeks in the beginning. It is also advisable to start writing as soon as possible. Do not worry if you feel that your material is not good enough, almost all early material is weak at the beginning. Starting to write at an early stage will enable

your supervisor to see what direction you are taking, where your weaknesses are and give you constructive advice and you will gain confidence from this feedback.

## 1.5 The Role of Your Supervisor

1. Discuss possible directions for the study and advise on aims and objectives
2. Suggest some general areas of research for consideration and where possible, any examples of current research relevant to the topic.
3. Be available for regular meetings
4. Examine written work and provide constructive criticism. It is not the responsibility of the supervisor to correct spelling mistakes, etc. other than to point out these are present: nor is it the duty of the supervisor to organise the presentation content of the work, although advice may be provided if enough work has been submitted.
5. Make student aware of inadequate progress or any other facts which could impede the completion of a successful piece of work.
6. Mark the dissertation, confer with the examiner and submit the agreed mark to the Chairman of the Dissertation Board.



## 1.6 Your Responsibilities

1. It is your responsibility to make appointments on a regular basis. If you difficulty in arranging appointments you must contact the Research Methods Course Co-Ordinator or the Head of Department.
2. Provide written work for your supervisor to comment on; maintain your own progress.
3. Where possible, submit your written work in advance of your appointment in order that your supervisor has time to offer you constructive criticism.
4. Comply with the regulations as detailed in this handbook.

## **PART 2:     STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

### **2.1     Introduction**

Although there is no single way of structuring a project or dissertation proposal the following structure identifies the areas which should be addressed within the proposal. If all of these areas are considered as part of the proposal then the actual research project should be more coherent and your research should be more productive.

The areas to consider in the research proposal:

The research question / problem /topic / hypothesis  
Introduction and rationale for research  
Research Objectives  
Research Methods

### **2.2.     The Research Proposal**

The areas covered in the research proposal are expanded below.

#### **Title Page**

- Proposed Title
- Name of Student
- Course
- Supervisor's Name

#### **The Research Question / Problem / Topic or Hypothesis**

- identify your area of research keeping it broad enough to embrace existing literature but
- sufficiently narrow to allow a detailed investigation
- the area identified could form a working title

#### **Introduction and Rationale for Research**

- explain why you think this is a valid research topic
- what will the research contribute to the field?

#### **Research Aim and Objectives**

- the aim of the dissertation should indicate what you wish to achieve
- the objectives are a list of goals which must be completed in order to satisfy the aim (usually about 6)

**Eg.**     to provide a state of the art review  
          to determine how a particular market operates  
          to establish a typology  
          to assess the impact of something

#### **Research Methodology**

- choose methods which will allow you to meet each of the objectives listed above; justify your methods chosen and the disadvantages of the methods rejected
- try to use a mix of methods

## **PART 3: SOME NOTES ON SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE DISSERTATION**

What follows is an attempt to provide you with some rules, and some helpful advice on an acceptable practice. However you are still advised to consult your tutor for more specific advice in relation to your dissertation.

### **3.1 The Abstract**

An abstract should provide an overview of your study in all its aspects. It should be around 250-300 in words and should answer the following questions.

- What does this research set out to do and why?
- How did it seek to do it?
- What are the general findings?
- What do these suggest?
- What conclusions are reached?
- What are the implications of these?

### **3.2 Acknowledgements**

In this sections you should express thanks to those who assisted you in your research. These should be kept to a minimum and include academic supervisors and people who participated in the fieldwork, any funding bodies and probably a long-suffering spouse, friend or relative.

### **3.3 Introduction**

In the introduction you should introduce the reader to the background of the study and the nature of the problem being considered. It should therefore set the study in context explaining why this study is important, highlighting significant issues, problems and ideas. The aim and objectives should be stated clearly in this chapter.

### **3.4 Literature Review**

In a dissertation a student is expected to provide a critical review of the existing literature (published and unpublished) on the research area being investigated. This does not mean that you have to indicate every book and article that has been written on the subject but any you do read should be referenced appropriately. Nevertheless your review should indicate that you have studied existing and recent work in the field. The Harvard System (author/date) of referencing should be used. The literature review should be:

- **Relevant:** Literature used should support your arguments relating to your research question and aim and objectives of the study. It should uphold methodology. In some cases you may need to discuss literature review and its relationship to methodology in a separate chapter.
- **Up-to-Date:** Recent literature (not older than five years) is recommended unless you are referring to classical works in your field of study. Sources used have to be in their majority primary sources, secondary referencing may be used.
- **Comprehensive:** Demonstrate that you have read extensively without being overinclusive. Develop your ability to employ summary statements and to synthesize.

### 3.5 Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to indicate what you actually did in your research so that your reader may evaluate the design procedure and findings of your study. The methodology section should be well-structured, written in concise, matter-of-fact manner and should provide answers to the following questions - What actually happened - How? - To whom- With what result? - How were problems dealt with? Approach to data?

The following is an outline of the Methodology Section

- Review of Data Collection Methods
  - *Why were the data collection methods you chose the best suited to fit your research question?*
- Secondary Data
  - *What secondary data was used? How does it feed into the current research?*
- Primary Data:
  - *A detailed description of research conducted, design of the tool, description of fieldwork, you also need to mention any specific procedures used.*
- Criteria for Sample Selection
  - *Number of total sample, characteristics of sample and method of selection*
- Pilot Study
  - *To whom was the study administered, what changes were made to the research tool*
- Methods of Analysis-
  - *Briefly explain how you propose to analyse the data, if computer software is going to be used, a description of the type of software has to be included.*
- Limitations
  - *What were the limitations of this study and how did you overcome these limitations?*

### 3.6 Presentation and Analysis of Data

In the presentation of data you are to present the major findings of your research in a summarised form and the details of the analyses which have been performed. The content and style depend on the nature of the research method chosen, but in the case of both quantitative and qualitative studies, the object is to present the data collected to answer the research questions.

#### 3.6.1 Presentation and Analysis of Qualitative Research

1. Presentation of data is mainly descriptive and this is usually presented in a chronological order.
2. Analysis of data is conducted through the identification of themes. The research tools in qualitative research include open-ended descriptions, transcripts of interviews, essays and observations. These produce a mass of data which sometimes can be difficult to sift. A useful way to process this data is to keep the research question(s) in mind, to read through the data a couple of times until particular issues or themes present themselves. These can be suggestive of a structure for presenting the descriptive data. Useful source for this type of analysis are: Berg, B (1995) (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed.) *Qualitative Research for the Social Sciences* Allyn and Bacon, London and Boston; Wolcott, H. F. (1994) *Transforming Qualitative Data: Description, Analysis and Interpretation*. Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA.
3. Evidence is usually in form of quotations from the subjects being studied, discussions of people involved, illustrations, photographs – the variations are unlimited.
4. You may find that there is evidence of difference of opinion. Include variations in opinion and describe poles of belief. These add richness to qualitative research.



### **3.6.2 Presentation and Analysis of Quantitative Research**

1. As a preliminary to working out results, any test given must be scored, data inputted into the appropriate computer programme and additional material gained from the sample must be sorted out. This is often purely mechanical work, and it takes time but must be done accurately.
2. The data presented must not be in their raw form (this is placed in the Appendices). The only time you would ever describe data on individual subjects is when you have done a case study.
3. In this section, the task is to summarise data meaningfully, through the use of descriptive statistics. These include mean scores, medians, ranges, standard deviations, correlation coefficients.
4. Visual presentation is very important in quantitative research. Graphs, tables, histograms, bar graphs are simple ways in which to present condensed data but they are also very effective.

### **3.7 Discussion of Results and Conclusions**

1. This chapter should draw together all the issues of the research and link back to the aim and objectives which were outlined in the Introduction and Methodology. Have the aims set at the beginning been met? If not, why not?
2. Evaluate how your findings bear on issues or points raised in the Literature Review.
3. What are the implications arising from the findings. Be careful with your generalisations and your interpretations. Recommendations should be based on evidence.
4. Do you have suggestions for future research in this area?

### **3.8 References**

Full details of all the books and journal articles cited or referenced throughout the dissertation should be included in this chapter. A reader should be able to identify the exact source and refer to it directly. The Harvard method of referencing is the recommended system.

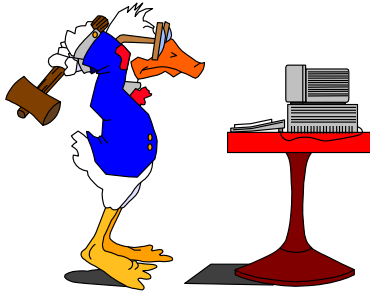
### **3.9 Appendices**

The Appendices should include selective, supplementary material which is distracting when placed in the main body of text. Only material which is necessary for a full understanding of your study should be included. These include important forms, questionnaires or interview schedules, description of equipment or settings, tables and lists of data supportive of the study.

## **PART 4: SOME OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

### **4.1 Presentation Layout**

- 4.1.1 General Text:** Text should be double-spaced using one side of the page only  
Font selected should be Times New Roman  
Print size 12  
Margins at least                    3.5cm on the left margin  
   2.0 cm on the right margin  
   3.0 cm on the top margin  
   2.5 cm on the bottom margin
- Page numbers:                    Centered at the bottom of the page  
   Roman Numbers (i, ii....) should be used from the first page (excluding the title page) until the main body of the text where the Introduction commences on page 1.
- Justified:                    Both left and right
- Paragraphs:                    No indentation  
   Start new paragraph after two returns  
   In-text emphasis: Use italics or bold typeface .
- 4.1.2 Headings:** Chapter Headings Print size 16 in bold typeface  
Sub-Headings Print size 14 in bold typeface  
Main Chapter headings in block capitals  
Chapter headings left justified at the top of a new page  
All other headings justified and followed by a single line space  
Sub-headings:                    Use sub-headings together with a numbering system used in this document thus giving structure to your work.
- 4.1.3 Quotations:** Single line-spacing  
Indented left and right  
Justified left and right  
Must include author name, date and page number referring to the parent text  
Must be preceded and followed by a line space.
- 4.1.4 Tables, Figures etc.,**                    Must be numbered according to the chapter (eg. Table 5.1 means that it is located in Chapter 5 and that it is the first table presented and discussed in this chapter)  
   Must have a title at the top and key (legend) underneath



## 4.2 Typing and Proof Reading

Always proof read your copies for good grammar and presentation before handing your work to your tutor. Special attention should be made to the final draft of your dissertation.

Be prepared for the unexpected such as hard disk failure, loss or corruption of diskettes and printer failure. Use back-up disks and always keep (updated) hard copies of your work in case of an emergency!

## 4.3 Binding

Three hardbound copies of the dissertation are to be handed in. The hardbound copies should have **a wine cover with gold lettering**. It is the students' responsibility to organize the binding and make sure that the copies are ready before the submission date.

## **PART 5      SOURCES FOR FURTHER READING**

You will be given course work material during the Research Methods Class. However, you are strongly encouraged to consult the following list of suggested readings. In addition, the Faculty has a number of books on research methodology, which you can consult for reference. Please refer to the Course Tutor for further information.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Blaxter L, Hughes C and Tight M. (1996)           | <i>How to Research</i> Open University Press  |
| Clark, M. Riley, M., Wilkie E. and Wood, R (1998) | Researching and Writing Dissertations in Hospitality and Tourism International Thomson Business Press |
| Cryer P. (1994)                                   | <i>The Research Student's Guide To Success</i>  |
| Miles, M.B. and Huberman A.M. (1994)              | Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Source Book (2 <sup>nd</sup> . ed. ) Thousand Oaks: Sage       |

## **Appendix 1: Prototype of Title Page**

**Title**

**(Subtitle)**

Blob Sample (student's name)

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
of Masters in Business Administration at the  
Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy  
University of Malta.

Month Year