BA SINGLE HONOURS DEGREE BY DISTANCE LEARNING IN INTERIOR DESIGN

HANDBOOK FOR UNIT RB3: DISSERTATION

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This paper is an introduction to the Dissertation Unit. It explains in outline how the Unit is structured, supervised, programmed and assessed, as well as giving you some basic information on how a dissertation document should be presented.

In addition, you should read the Unit syllabus in the Course Handbook, which states the formal requirements for the Unit.

NB This Unit is worth 1.5 units towards the total requirement of 7 units, with the third segment of the Log Book worth a further 0.5 unit.

WHAT IS A DISSERTATION?

A dissertation is a substantial piece of written work in which a chosen subject is examined in some depth. It is the outcome of a process of organised independent study.

A dissertation is different from an essay in significant ways:

- it is normally substantially longer, and takes longer to produce;
- it deals with a topic chosen by you, the student (with tutorial guidance), not with a title set by the tutor;
- it requires in-depth research;
- it has special presentation requirements.

A dissertation develops through a process of research. The definition of an appropriate research topic, and the use of systematic research methods, are all important, and you will be given guidance on these through tutorial supervision.

FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The finished dissertation is normally a document which should be a minimum of 5,000 words in length, up to a maximum of 8,000 words. This is roughly equivalent to 14 - 20 sides of A4 with double-spaced typing. Work falling significantly outside these length limits may be penalised in assessment. Dissertations are normally written in a chapter or section structure, with an introduction and concluding section.

There are certain formal structural features a dissertation must have in addition to the main body of the text. These are as follows:

- Front Cover;
- Abstract (précis of contents);
- Acknowledgements;
- Table of contents;
- List of Illustrations;
Each of these elements will be explained in discussion with your tutor.

The dissertation must be illustrated with appropriate visual material.

Documents presented for final assessment must be word processed, or typed, not hand-written, and should be bound in a protective outside cover. The standard format is A4 size. Please note that extra marks will not be gained by luxurious document presentation. A sound professional/academic quality is looked for. Your tutor will assist you on selection of sources and methods of research as well as how to present your findings.

Non-standard formats may, exceptionally, be accepted. If you can present a strong case for offering your dissertation in the form (say) of a video, this must be agreed in advance with your tutor. Any non-standard presentation must be accompanied by a 1,000 word report which explains its rationale and research methods.

Finally, it is essential that a dissertation must be written in your own words (though you may, and should, quote from other writers). You must take care that you do not either deliberately or carelessly present the words or work of another person as if they were your own. This is known as plagiarism. London Metropolitan University’s academic regulations allow for disciplinary action to be taken in cases of proven plagiarism, including the withholding of awards.

ASSESSMENT

The Dissertation Unit is concerned with the process of research and communication as well as with the product - the dissertation itself: this fact should of course be reflected in your accompanying Log Book segment. Consequently, the assessment scheme for the Unit is staged and carries percentage weighting. The deadlines for each stage are very important - you may lose marks if you fail to meet a deadline without good reason.

The writing of a dissertation falls into three main stages: formal proposal and outline; draft; and final document.

The formal proposal and outline requires approval by your tutor and the Subject Leader for Interior Design at London Met. All the more important to get the choice of topic right first time! These aspects account for 20% of the marks available for the Unit.
The draft which you are asked to submit carries no mark weighting but it is vitally important as tutorial support and advice at this stage directly affects the quality of your final document. The dissertation as finally submitted accounts for 80% of the Unit marks.

When it comes to final assessment, your dissertation will be double-marked to ensure a fair evaluation. Examiners will be looking for qualities such as: clear evidence of personal engagement with the topic; systematic research; well structured arguments; effective communication; adherence to academic standards; and good presentation.

PROGRAMME AND TIME MANAGEMENT

It is important to manage your study time and work regularly so you do not fall behind with your research or writing. A dissertation is not something which can be produced at the last minute!

Broadly, you should aim to complete your background reading and research by week six of the Unit, and to concentrate on writing after that point.

Within the 13 week project period allocated, the programme for submission will be:

STAGE 1: Formal proposal and outline Week 2

STAGE 2: Draft submission Week 9
   (ie. 3 weeks after completion of reading and research)

STAGE 3: Final document submission Week 13

Finally: Researching and writing a dissertation is a challenge, but it should above all be an enjoyable challenge, and one that gives you a real sense of achievement on completion.

We look forward to helping you to achieve your goals.

2.0 CHOOSING A DISSERTATION TOPIC AND TITLE

The single most important decision you will make in the dissertation Unit is the initial choice of topic. It is worth spending time, research, thought and discussion with your tutor, in order to arrive at a clearly defined topic which is right for you. Personal enthusiasm for a particular idea will need to be balanced against practical considerations of time, accessibility of information sources, tutorial expertise, and relevance to your degree study as a whole. You may quite possibly wish to relate the topic of the dissertation to an aspect of your Major Design Project RB2. Your tutor may advise you against committing yourself to a subject which, although it
may look superficially attractive, experience has shown is likely to lead you into serious difficulties somewhere down the line, when it is too late to start something new.

It is perfectly normal to begin your subject choice with an unstructured, broad idea - or several ideas. If it looks to have a good potential, your tutor will help you to focus your best idea into a manageable proposal which can be defined, and explored through research. Often the best dissertations begin with questions: Why? How? What if? Starting from a question may help you to define a topic which goes beyond being merely factual or descriptive, and has the potential to become an in-depth study involving critical analysis.

Your formal proposal is drafted according to the format shown in this Handbook (section 4). Written proposals are considered by an Approval Board, which includes the Unit External Moderator. Once your proposal has been approved, you can proceed with research. In the rare event of a proposal being rejected, you will be given the reasons why, and asked to submit a new one.

Your dissertation proposal requires you to formulate a working title. This title should be drafted to give the clearest and fullest statement of your topic. Often, a short title with a longer, explanatory subtitle, carries information most effectively. For example: Plastics in interior finishes and furnishing: the impact of new technologies and materials on the domestic market between 1940 and 1970.

You will certainly find that you will want to develop your initial ideas as your research explores the subject in greater depth, and your original working title can be re-drafted at a later stage to reflect your fuller understanding.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

INTRODUCTION

Before you begin research you should clearly define your purpose and subject as these definitions largely determine the material you select for research. You may find it helpful to answer the following questions while defining your subject:

- What do I already know about the subject?
- What might I focus on within the subject?
- What subject headings are central to this subject?
- How will I approach this subject?

Once you have defined your subject and purpose you need to begin gathering information on it. Decide, perhaps with your tutor’s guidance, which material is essential to your subject and what to read first. Your dissertation may require you to examine primary sources, such as original pieces of furniture or buildings. In these cases a secondary source might take the form of an account of a furniture design.
designer's work or an appraisal of an architect's buildings. Ultimately you should aim to examine both primary and secondary sources.

When defining a subject you should have drawn up a list of subject headings you intend to research. Keep this list firmly in mind and use it to stop yourself spending too much time browsing over interesting but irrelevant material. However, do not let this stop you from looking for material which isn't obvious or recommended.

Once you have selected and collected relevant material you need to evaluate it for purpose. The questions you answered above will help in this.

USING RESEARCH MATERIAL

Before you begin working with your own material you need to preview it in order to familiarise yourself with its general organisation, content and presentation. At this stage it is vital that you develop a filing system that will keep your material in order. Card indexes that briefly summarise the contents of individual items are often useful.

After previewing your material and organising a filing system you can begin thoroughly to evaluate the items you have collected. This isn't easy; you need to consider the purpose, content, structure and presentation of the material for its general quality and for its specific relevance to your subject and purpose. Not all of the material you have selected will be as relevant as you would have hoped, some if it will not suit your definition of your subject area and some of it may present ideas you disagree with. Don't reject this material; you may be able to incorporate a criticism of it into your dissertation.

Try to develop your ability to interpret primary sources and offer opinions on secondary sources. It may help to practise the following:

- Get to know your primary sources thoroughly - see what ideas and interests this sparks off in you.
- Use secondary sources to clarify points you're unsure of in the primary material.
- Critically examine other people's interpretations of the ideas or data you're studying.
- See if the secondary sources throw up any new insights or unexpected connections.
- Trust your own judgement.

ORGANISING AND INTEGRATING IDEAS AND INFORMATION

The following method is one way of integrating and organising the ideas you find.

- Write each of the separate ideas onto separate pieces of paper or card.
• Arrange the cards under appropriate headings.
• Add new headings if you need to and don’t be afraid to delete items which become insignificant. Expect to rearrange your ideas and information frequently.
• Ensure that you are able to cover all of your major points satisfactorily, with plenty of evidence, examples and explanation.
• Allow time for your information to sift and settle, examine your notes as a whole and review the information you have selected.
• Write an outline of your dissertation and submit this for assessment.

The overall structure of your dissertation should now be quite clear and all of the information you need should be at hand. You can now begin to write your first draft.

WRITING YOUR DISSERTATION

In your first draft concentrate on saying what you want, in the order you want and as accurately as you can. Leave the niceties of style, spelling and conventions until your final draft. Sit down and start writing!

When your first draft is complete you need to check it. Consider the following points:

• Is your subject clearly defined and does your material fit your definition?
• Have you enough or too much material? Have you repeated yourself? Avoid repetition at all costs.
• Have you been too biased or subjective in the selection of your material? Does your material incorporate your own ideas - as it must - and are these properly supported?
• Have you followed the prescribed structure and does this logically and effectively develop your theme and definition?
• Does your work integrate your ideas and information and develop your main points clearly?
• Does your conclusion
  - reflect the material and theme presented in the dissertation?
  - relate to your introduction?
  - finish smoothly?
  - suggest any further areas or questions to be followed up without introducing any new major ideas?

• Have you expressed your ideas clearly and is your writing style your own?

Once you have completed the above you will be able to develop your rough draft into a final draft. Complete the writing process with thorough proof-reading, preferably by somebody else.
SOURCES OF INFORMATION

There are many information sources available today, not all of which will be relevant to all dissertations. Conventional literature searches using some or all of the sources mentioned below will be universally applicable, whilst the suitability of others will very much depend on the nature of individual dissertations. Other information sources include social inquiry methods such as questionnaire, interview and observation. Audio-visual tools may be relevant both as a means of recording information and for primary searching, although again not for all projects. Nowadays much valuable research material is contained in electronic format on CD ROM or on the Internet.

Major international and local sources include:

- university libraries
- other libraries, e.g. Public, Company, Institutional
- indexes and abstracts on the World Wide Web (WWW)
- museums
- design centres
- exhibitions/conferences
- trade associations and their publications /magazines
- Standards organisations, e.g. BSI (British Standards Institute) or appropriate local equivalents
- Photo/picture libraries and archives
- Statistical institutes
- Professional associations (design and architecture) and their magazines and other publications.
Dissertation Outline Proposal:

Name:

Registration Number:

Date submitted:

Date Approved:

Approved by:

1. TITLE

2. RATIONALE (Explain why you have chosen this subject, its relationship if any to your Major Project, and give a brief outline of the proposed nature and scope of the dissertation)
3. INFORMATION SOURCES (List the Libraries, publications, [including electronic sources], organisations, people you anticipate using and give details of any arrangements made- for example, for access to specialist libraries, or employers. Give a short indicative bibliography)

4. OTHER RESOURCES (If your dissertation requires external access to workshops, laboratories, special materials or equipment, explain the arrangements made to ensure its feasibility)

5. GUIDANCE NOTES

Your tutor is available to advise you on all aspects of the content and structure of your dissertation, including such aspects as:

• choosing your dissertation topic
• obtaining reference information
• how to acknowledge reference sources
• preparing a dissertation outline
• what form the final dissertation should take, both textually and visually.
Dissertation Title

by

Student’s Name

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts (Single Honours) by Distance Learning in Interior Design

Rhodec International/
London Metropolitan University

Date

Student’s Name

Year
6.0 STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

Dissertation (RB3)

I hereby do solemnly declare that:

The work presented in this dissertation has been carried out by me.

Except where specific reference is made, this dissertation contains no material, written, drawn or rendered by computer, which has been published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a dissertation by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work, either written, drawn or rendered by computer, has been used without due acknowledgement.

This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

The work I have presented does not breach any existing copyright.

I undertake to indemnify London Metropolitan University and Rhodoc International against any loss or damage arising from breach of the foregoing obligations.

Signed

Name

Registration Number

Date