

## 1. What is a dissertation?

### What defines a dissertation

Follow this link to the Centre for Sociology, Anthropology and Politics *Companion for Undergraduate Dissertations* and listen to social science lecturers talking about what defines a dissertation.

<http://www.socscidiss.bham.ac.uk/vidpages/s2vid1.html>

### Differences between a dissertation and an essay

The Royal Literary Fund hosts pages which support the development of dissertation writing skills. Amongst this support is a short article which outlines the differences between a dissertation and an essay

[http://www.rlf.org.uk/fellowshipscheme/writing/undergraduatedissertations/what\\_is\\_a\\_dissertation.cfm](http://www.rlf.org.uk/fellowshipscheme/writing/undergraduatedissertations/what_is_a_dissertation.cfm)

### Dissertation checklist

It's important that you have a clear understanding of what the dissertation in your department. Complete this checklist to make sure that you have all the information that you need before you start. Keep the document safe as it will be a useful future reference point.

Question	Answer
How many credit points or module equivalents is the dissertation worth?	
Does the dissertation have any special status in the calculation of your final degree classification?	
When do you need to start planning the dissertation formally? (Some degree programmes start this process in the second year, others in the final year.)	
What is the submission date for the final piece?	
Are there any key interim dates when (for example) outlines, sections or requests for the ethical approval of proposed research have to be submitted?	
How long is the dissertation (and does the word count include the bibliography and appendices)?	

Are there any lectures, seminars or workshops associated with the module?	
Will you have a dissertation supervisor?	
How are supervisors allocated?	
How often are you allowed to meet with your supervisor?	
Is there a schedule of meetings that you have to attend or do you arrange them with your supervisor?	

### **The shape of a dissertation**

In this video clip, which was produced for students at Heriot-Watt University by the Educational Development Unit and the Institute of Petroleum Engineering, Karen Smith describes the shape of the dissertation. She then introduces an exercise which will get you to think about what goes into the different parts of the dissertation.

<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=00EfiHFBrk>