**DISSERTATION STRUCTURE**

**Acknowledgements**

The [acknowledgements](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/acknowledgements/) section is where you thank those who have helped and supported you during the research and writing process. This section is optional and should be no longer than one page.

Move from thanking the people most formally involved (supervisors, academics) to those who have supported you in other ways (friends and family).

If you include acknowledgements, make sure to thank your supervisor!

**Abstract**

The [abstract](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/abstract/) is a short summary of your entire dissertation. It concisely reports the aims and outcomes of your research, and is generally around 150-300 words long, or no more than one page. Write the abstract last, when you’ve completed the rest of the dissertation.

State your [research problem](https://www.scribbr.com/research-process/research-problem/) and [objectives](https://www.scribbr.com/research-process/set-objective-dissertation/):

* Briefly describe the problem or question your dissertation addresses.
* State your specific objectives.
* Use the present or simple past [tense](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/tense-tendencies-in-theses-and-dissertations/).

Describe your [methods](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/methodology/):

* Describe how data was gathered and analyzed.
* Use the simple past tense.

Summarize your key [results](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/results/) or arguments:

* Highlight the most important findings here.
* Use the simple past tense.

Present your conclusion:

* State the answer to your main research question.
* Mention any important limitations or recommendations.
* Use the present tense.

**Table of contents**

The [table of contents](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/table-of-contents/) lists every section that comes after it (i.e. notthe title page, acknowledgements, or abstract). A table of contents can be [auto-generated](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/table-of-contents/#automatically-creating-a-table-of-contents-in-word) in Word.

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# List of figures

A [list of figures](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/figure-and-table-lists-in-your-dissertation/) is included if you’ve used a lot of figures (e.g. graphs, images, illustrations) in your text. It lists the figures in the same numbered order as they appear in the text, and can be [auto-generated](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/figure-and-table-lists-in-your-dissertation/#generate-lists-automatically) in the same way as the table of contents.

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# List of tables

Much like the list of figures, the [list of tables](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/figure-and-table-lists-in-your-dissertation/) is included if you have a lot of tables, and lists them in numbered order as they appear in the text.

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# List of abbreviations

The [list of abbreviations](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/list-of-abbreviations/) is optional. It should be included if you use a lot of abbreviations that are likely to be unfamiliar to readers. Present it as an alphabetized list or table, e.g.:

ACS Accrediting Commission for Schools

FSCFundamental of science

HKEA Hong Kong Examinations Authority

**Glossary**

A [glossary](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/glossary-of-a-dissertation/) is optional. Include one if you use a lot of specialist terms (other than abbreviations) that readers might not know. Present terms and their definitions in an alphabetized list or table, e.g.:

**Compound interest** Interest calculated on the initial amount as well as on the  
interest of previous periods of a loan.

**Variable costs** Costs that change according to the amount of goods provided.

# Introduction

In the [introduction](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/introduction-structure/), set up your dissertation’s topic, purpose, and relevance, and tell the reader what to expect in the rest of the text.

Establish your [research topic](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation-writing-roadmap/choosing-topic-dissertation-8-steps/):

* Introduce your broad topic in an engaging way.
* Provide relevant background information to contextualize your work.

Narrow down the focus:

* Go into more detail about the specific area you’ll be focusing on.
* Define the scope of the research.

Discuss existing research:

* Briefly discuss the current state of knowledge on your topic.
* Show your work’s relevance to a broader [problem](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation-writing-roadmap/research-problem/) or debate.

[Research questions](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation-writing-roadmap/main-research-question-dissertation/) and objectives:

* State the questions you set out to answer in your dissertation.
* Describe your concrete objectives in conducting the research.

[Overview](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/tips-for-writing-an-overview-of-your-dissertation/):

* Give an overview of the structure of the rest of the dissertation.
* Use the present tense, e.g. “Chapter 4 discusses…”

# Literature review/theoretical framework

In the [literature review](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/literature-review/), you survey existing research on your topic, developing a coherent structure and argument that leads to a clear basis or justification for your own approach.

Survey the literature:

* Describe how much research has been done into your topic, and what kinds.
* Synthesize key findings from relevant studies.
* Assess the strengths and weaknesses of previous research.
* Highlight any gaps or limitations in existing research.

Show how your research does one or more of the following:

* Addresses a gap in the literature.
* Takes a new theoretical or methodological approach to the topic.
* Proposes a solution to an unresolved problem.
* Builds on and strengthens existing knowledge with new data.
* Advances a theoretical debate.

Present the [theoretical framework](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/theoretical-framework/):

* Discuss the theory that informs your research.
* Define key terms and explain relevant concepts.
* Present any relevant models that help interpret your findings.

# Methodology

The [methodology](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/methodology/) chapter describes exactly how you collected and analyzed your data, allowing your reader to assess the validity of your findings.

Introduce your overall approach:

* Is your research [qualitative or quantitative](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/qualitative-quantitative-research/) (or a combination of both)?
* What [type of research design](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/types-of-research/) did you use (e.g. [longitudinal](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/longitudinal-study/), [experimental](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/experimental-design/), [case study](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/case-study/), [ethnography](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/ethnography/)…)?
* The specific terms you use to describe your approach should follow the conventions of your field.

Give the details:

* Where, when, and with whom the research took place (including your [sampling methods](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/sampling-methods/) if relevant).
* Your methods of [collecting data](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/data-collection/) (e.g. interviews, [surveys](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/survey-research/), archives).
* Your methods of analyzing data (e.g. statistical analysis, [discourse analysis](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/discourse-analysis/)).
* Tools and materials you used (e.g. computer programs, lab equipment).

Evaluate your methods:

* Discuss any noteworthy obstacles you faced in conducting the research and how you overcame them.
* Assess whether your approach was effective overall.
* If you used novel or unconventional methods, justify why this was the best approach to answering your research question.

# Results

The [results](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/results/) section is where you list the findings of your research. Report the results concisely and objectively, without interpreting their meaning.

In some types of qualitative research, the results and discussion sections may be combined.

Presenting [quantitative](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/quantitative-research/) results:

* Structure the results around your [research questions](https://www.scribbr.com/research-process/research-questions/) or [hypotheses](https://www.scribbr.com/research-process/hypotheses/).
* Report all results that are relevant to your questions, including any that didn’t fit with your expectations.

For each question or hypothesis:

* Summarize the relevant results, including [descriptive statistics](https://www.scribbr.com/statistics/descriptive-statistics/) and the results of any [statistical tests](https://www.scribbr.com/statistics/statistical-tests/) used.
* Briefly state how the result relates to the question or whether the hypothesis was supported.
* Don’t give subjective interpretations or speculation.

Tables and figures:

* Include tables and figures if they help the reader understand your results.
* Tables can be used to present exact values in a concise overview.
* Graphs and charts can be used to visualize patterns and relationships.
* Refer to all tables and figures in the text, and give them clear titles and labels.

Presenting [qualitative](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/qualitative-research/) results:

* Structure the results around research questions or key [themes](https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/thematic-analysis/).
* Make general observations about what the data showed.
* Mention recurring points of agreement or disagreement, patterns and trends.
* Highlight individual responses that were particularly noteworthy.
* Support with direct quotations.

# Discussion

The [discussion](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/discussion/) chapter is where you delve into the meaning and relevance of your results. Give your own interpretations and cite relevant sources to put your results in context.

Interpret your results:

* What do the results tell us?
* Did they meet your expectations? If not, why might that be?
* Are there any alternative explanations for your findings?

Discuss the implications:

* Are the results consistent with previous studies?
* Do the results support or challenge an existing theory?
* Why do these results matter?
* Are there any practical implications?

Acknowledge the limitations:

* What can the results not tell us?
* Does the data have limited generalizability (e.g. due to your methods or sample size)?
* Are there any potentially relevant variables that you didn’t take into account?

# Conclusion

The [conclusion](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/write-conclusion/) is the last part of your main text. It’s where you wrap up your dissertation, summarizing your main findings and recommendations. No new information or arguments should appear in the conclusion.

Answer the main [research question](https://www.scribbr.com/research-process/main-research-question-dissertation/):

* Clearly and concisely state the overall conclusion that your research has led you to.

Reflect on the research:

* To what extent was your approach effective in answering your questions?
* Did the research raise any new questions or unexpected insights?

Make recommendations:

* You can make recommendations for practice (e.g. in business or policy) or for future research.
* Frame practical recommendations as suggestions, not instructions.
* Be specific about research recommendations, explaining how future studies can build on your conclusions.

Emphasize your contribution:

* Show what new knowledge you have contributed.
* Leave the reader with a clear impression of why your research matters.

# Reference list

The [reference list](https://www.scribbr.com/apa-style/apa-reference-page/) (sometimes called a bibliography) lists full information on all of the sources [cited](https://www.scribbr.com/category/citing-sources/) in your dissertation.

Notes

* The format and exact information included vary according to the [citation style](https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/citation-styles/) used (e.g. [APA](https://www.scribbr.com/category/apa-style/), [MLA](https://www.scribbr.com/category/mla/), [Chicago](https://www.scribbr.com/category/chicago-style/)).
* Scribbr offers free citation generators to easily create your reference list in [APA](https://www.scribbr.com/apa-citation-generator/) or [MLA](https://www.scribbr.com/mla-citation-generator/).

# Appendix 1

Documents that do not fit into the main body of your dissertation but that may be useful to your reader (such as interview transcripts, full questionnaires, or [tables](https://www.scribbr.com/tips/tables-in-your-dissertation/) with raw data) can be added as [appendices](https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/appendix/).

* Only include appendices that are referenced in some way in your main text.
* Refer to appendices in the text with statements like “see Appendix 1.”
* If you have just one appendix, no number is needed; otherwise, they should be numbered Appendix 1, Appendix 2, etc.
* Give each appendix a clear, descriptive name.
* Start a new page for each appendix.
* Introduce each appendix with a sentence or two explaining what it is.