



Department of
**Media and
Communications**

MC499.1

DISSERTATION

Guidelines 2021/22

For students on the following MSc programmes:

MSc Media and Communications (Including Research track)

MSc Media and Communications (Media and Communication Governance)

MSc Media and Communications (Data and Society)

MSc Media, Communication and Development

MSc Politics and Communication

MSc Global Media and Communications (with Fudan University)

MSc Global Media and Communications (with USC)

MSc Global Media and Communications (with the University of Cape Town)

MSc Strategic Communications

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1 INTRODUCTION

These guidelines provide important information and guidance on the practical procedures for the writing, supervision and submission of dissertations within the Department of Media and Communications. Please consult the [MSc Student Handbook](#) for further information regarding extensions, penalties for late submission, referencing and bibliographies, and assessment criteria.

You can find these guidelines, along with other sources of information relating to the dissertation, on the MC499 area of Moodle. You need to be signed up to MC499 on Moodle to receive updates from this module.

1.1 Who's Who

Staff in the Department of Media and Communications are responsible for aspects of the dissertation process as indicated below:

Role	Name		Responsibilities
Dissertation Convenor:	Dr Simidele Dosekun S.O.Dosekun@lse.ac.uk		Coordinates dissertation supervision and associated teaching events.
Dissertation Supervisor:	All teaching staff in the Department of Media and Communications, except those who are on sabbatical, supervise dissertations.		See section 2.2 below for information on the role of the Dissertation Supervisor.
Dissertation Officers:	TBC		See section 2.3 below for information concerning the role of the Dissertation Officers.

<p>Graduate Programmes Co-ordinator</p> <p>Deputy Department Manager</p>	<p>Mark Kingston</p> <p>All enquiries to: media.assessment@lse.ac.uk</p> <p>Nicole Garnier</p> <p>All enquiries to: media.msc@lse.ac.uk</p>		<p>Oversee administration related to dissertation supervision, submission and assessment.</p>
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1.2 What's What

MC499.1A	Lectures	Compulsory
MC499.1B	Group Supervisions	Compulsory
MC499.2B	Study Skills Workshops	Optional

2 PROCEDURES AND ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

2.1 Aims and Objectives of the Dissertation

Aims

To conduct an original investigation of an issue relevant to the content of your programme, under the supervision of an academic member of staff.

Objectives

- To construct a detailed plan of a research project
- To review relevant literature on the selected topic
- To identify relevant research question(s)
- To operationalise the research question(s)
- In the case of an empirical dissertation, to select and justify an appropriate research design in relation to an area of theory, to select and employ suitable methods/techniques to investigate the empirical questions, and to analyse relevant data
- In the case of a theoretical dissertation, to set out a coherent and focused argument that advances, clarifies and (where appropriate) reframes the theoretical questions

[NB: See the advice on theoretical dissertations below and make sure you have approval from your supervisor if you are pursuing a theoretical dissertation]

- To write a dissertation covering a review of the relevant theoretical and empirical literature, the research questions, an explanation and justification of the research conducted, and a discussion of the findings in relation to the background literature.

2.2 The Dissertation Supervisor

Late in Michaelmas Term, students will be asked to submit information about the topic that they intend to research for their dissertation, after which a supervisor will be allocated to each student.

From the beginning of Lent Term, dissertation supervisors will also take over the role of academic mentor for the remainder of the year.

The period of formal dissertation supervision runs from the beginning of Lent Term until the end of the Summer Term. There is also an additional period of two weeks following the end of Summer Term, when supervisors will continue to be available to their supervisees (typically by email) to answer any remaining questions and concerns. Each supervisor will communicate to their supervisees the details of their feedback and advice hours, and how they will run.

The role of the supervisor is to advise on all aspects of the research project, including:

- the topic area and relevant literature
- the feasibility of the topic
- the time scale of the research

- the specification of the research questions
- in the case of an empirical dissertation, the design and adequacy of methods, sources of data and access to fields of observation, and the analysis and interpretation of results
- in the case of a theoretical dissertation, the focus of the argument, its relation to and implications for the theoretical literature on which it draws, including its implications for future empirical research
- the structure and style of the dissertation

Students should be proactive in contacting their supervisors and making appointments to see them to discuss their dissertations, as well as to submit their two dissertation plans and ethics forms.

Please note the following limits on supervision:

- Supervisors will **not** read/comment upon final drafts of dissertations.
- Supervisors are **not** available during the Easter break or after the two weeks following the end of summer term, as they take research leave during this time.

2.3 The Dissertation Officers

After formal supervision finishes at the end of Summer Term, graduate teaching assistants (PhD researchers in the department) are available in the role of dissertation officers. They will be available to advise students on the final stages of the analysis and writing up of their dissertations.

Dissertation officers can provide assistance on structuring the dissertation and presenting findings; **they cannot provide substantive supervision**, so please make sure that you contact your supervisor for this during both Lent and Summer Term.

3 GUIDANCE NOTES ON THE WRITING OF THE DISSERTATION

As in other forms of assessment, it is the written text that is evaluated. However much time and effort has gone into the research work, the assessment stands or falls on the quality of the dissertation. To this extent the structure and clarity of the dissertation are crucial. There is no single correct way to write a dissertation because each dissertation is unique. That said, there are ways and means of writing a good dissertation and the following guidance notes set out the broad structure and other considerations to be taken into account.

Most dissertations have an empirical focus (i.e., based on data of some sort) and what follows generally assumes this. However, dissertations with a theoretical focus are also possible; here general guidelines are less useful, and students are strongly advised to discuss the structure of their dissertation and their time schedule with their supervisor.

3.1 Length

Dissertations can be anywhere **between 10,000 and 12,000 words** long. The minimum length of the dissertation, including footnotes, endnotes and abstracts but excluding bibliography, table of contents and appendices is 10,000 words. The maximum length of the dissertation, including footnotes/endnotes, but excluding bibliography, table of contents and appendices is 12,000 words.

***NB:** The section word-lengths below are suggestions only, and assume a 10,000 word dissertation. **They can be adjusted pro rata for 12,000 word dissertations**, and supervisors can advise on the overall balance of individual dissertations.*

For purposes of fair, double blind marking procedures, you must **make sure that your name or contact details do not appear anywhere** in the dissertation (including in consent forms and any acknowledgements).

3.2 Empirical Dissertations

Abstract (approx. 300 words)

Although the abstract is placed at the beginning of the dissertation, it should be revised on various occasions and finalised as the last piece of the dissertation. The abstract will succinctly summarise and present the research questions, the design and methods and the key findings.

Introduction (approx. 700 words)

The introduction sets the scene for the dissertation. It raises the questions that inspired your research interest and sets them in context. Whether the research is inspired by a contemporary or historical social/political/cultural/media (etc.) issue, or by a problem raised in the literature, it should be set in its broader conceptual context, and the potential contribution and import of the proposed research explained.

Theoretical Chapter including Statement of Research Question (approx. 3,300 words)

First, the relevant research literature should be critically reviewed (**approx. 2,500 words**), leading to a specification of the research questions or hypotheses. Clearly it is not possible to cover all the literature on most topics; a particular skill is to determine what is the relevant literature and what is not so relevant, constructing an argument throughout. Thus a judicious selection must be made, highlighting the key findings and controversies that provide the justification for the research that is conducted.

It is advised that this is followed by a statement (**approx. 500 words**) of the dissertation's theoretical or conceptual framework, that is to say, a statement of your understanding of the dissertation's key concepts and concerns, and how these inform your research questions and your research design or approach.

Finally, this chapter should end with a clear, concise statement (**approx. 300 words**) of the objectives of the research. The rationale for the research should be explained and its potential contribution outlined. What is your research question and/or hypothesis, and how will researching it contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon and go beyond what is already known?

Research Design and Methodology (approx. 1,500 words)

First, outline your research strategy (**approx. 1,000 words**) and present a justification for the particular approach selected to investigate the stated research questions. For media-related empirical projects, the research design might include a mix of approaches: e.g. content or discourse analysis, questionnaires or qualitative interviewing, appraisal of documentary and other evidence. Whichever approach you follow, it should be explained and justified: e.g., on the basis of what criteria was the method used considered to be appropriate? Why were other approaches rejected? Were there unexpected issues or problems that arose? How were these fruitful for the research? The methodology course [MC4M1/MC4M2](#) will give you the tools and the language to write this section that justifies your methodological choices and discusses the strengths and weaknesses.

Second, the particular methods and procedures adopted should be summarised (**approx. 500 words**). While research questions are normally of a general nature, in order to conduct empirical research these must be made concrete and amenable to empirical investigation.

There are three issues here:

(i) The sampling or selection of data

Whether the design involves content analysis, discourse analysis, an experiment, a survey, a set of qualitative interviews or other methods, the issue of sampling needs to be discussed in detail. On what basis was the sample of texts or people or both selected, and why? For surveys this involves sampling respondents from some population, while for qualitative interviewing the issue may be one of sampling significant currents of opinion or sampling an appropriate range of media users or producers. Where media or archival material is being analysed, the procedure for selecting materials from a 'population' whose full extent may not be known should also be described. In the context of

an MSc dissertation, it may be helpful to outline the ideal strategy that which one might employ without time constraints, and then to state how the actual method was selected and what limitations in terms of data quality this more feasible and practicable strategy entails. In qualitative work, it might be sensible to outline why some data was rejected and other data included in the sample.

(ii) Design of research tools

Research tools refer to questionnaires, interview schedules, topic guides and thematic codes for analysis for interviews, and coding frames for content analysis. Whatever tool is used, it should be fully documented and any developmental/pilot work briefly reported. See the [MC4M1 Summative Assessment Assignment Guidelines](#) for details on piloting a research project.

In the dissertation, the procedures adopted in applying these methods should be summarised. The procedure is the recipe for conducting the research after all the ingredients are assembled. For example, how were the interviews conducted? Were they recorded and later transcribed? How was the coding done? How was the analysis undertaken?

Similarly, this section should describe why certain analytical techniques are used. For example, which statistical techniques (e.g., means comparisons, regressions) were used and why? Which qualitative analytical techniques (e.g., thematic analysis, semiotics, critical discourse analysis etc) were used and why?

(iii) Ethics and reflexivity

This section should include a description of the steps taken to make sure that the research is ethically sound – beyond stating that the ethics forms were signed and that there was informed consent. It should also include a section on reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to the positioning of the researcher in the research project and how this might have influenced the research questions asked, the sampling conducted and the design of the research tools, and so on.

Results and Interpretation (approx. 4,000 words)

Your dissertation needs fully to express the work that you have undertaken to produce it, and therefore this is a crucially important section. You should use this section to detail, explore and analyse your results and findings.

This means that you should devote sufficient space within it to a discussion of the results and findings of your empirical work, ensuring that you make it clear what you have found, what you have understood from your findings and how those findings relate to the questions, assumptions and hypotheses that you set yourself in the earlier sections of the dissertation. Allow sufficient space, therefore, to explore your results fully.

There are different ways of presenting quantitative and qualitative findings.

Quantitative Research

Results

Describe your main results here. These will follow the research questions as specified in a previous section of the dissertation and state whether the relevant hypotheses have been corroborated or not, how the research questions have been addressed, or a summary of the most significant results.

Discussion

In the discussion you must review your observations in relation to your objectives set out in the literature review. Explanations for hypotheses that were not supported should be offered and reflective comments on the research design and methodology given. Finally the implications should be discussed and further research outlined.

Qualitative Research using Interviews

In qualitative research the results and interpretation often go hand in hand, but in some cases it may be possible to offer results and discussion separately. Results may be based on the outcome of a manual analytic procedure or taken from the output of one of the computer packages for textual analysis. However, the interpretation is always researcher-led, for example, interview data needs to be analysed, not just presented.

Most commonly with qualitative research the results and the interpretation are reported simultaneously and integrated with the discussion. If so, it is advisable to move directly to the commonly occurring themes, illustrating these with direct quotations or images from the transcripts or texts being analysed. An explanation should be offered as to how the quotations were selected and the basis on which these are judged to be of importance.

If results and interpretation are to be presented separately, it may be useful to present the key findings from a set of interviews or texts in tabular form. In the case of thematic analysis of interviews, the topic guide issues would be the column headings and each row corresponds to one interview, with cells of the table offering a short summary of what the interviewees said on that topic. There would then follow the identification of the commonly occurring themes relevant to the broader research questions, which would be developed further through quotations from the transcripts (with references back to the tables for clarification). The MC4M1 section 'Literature on Analytical Methods' has [an example](#) of such a table.

However the data and basic analysis are presented, there should follow a discussion which reviews the key findings and sets these in the context of both the research questions and the literature outlined in the introduction. Explanations for surprising findings should be offered and reflective comments on the research design and methodology given, as well as discussion of the implications of the findings and analysis.

Conclusion (approx. 500 words)

This should comprise a short statement highlighting the key insights and implications (theoretical, methodological, empirical) of the dissertation, with an outline of the possibilities for further research.

References

All references in the text should be fully and consistently cited in alphabetical order. Consider using the “Endnote” bibliographic software available on the LSE network at an early stage in the dissertation work.

See also section 3.4 ‘Guidelines for Essay Writing’ in the [MSc Student Handbook](#).

Appendices

Appendices are meant to provide further information and evidence on data collection and method. What to include differs by topic and method. If you are unsure about what to include, please ask your supervisor during the supervision period.

Below are best practices on what to include in your appendices:

For content analysis:

Original coding frame and revisions, a selection of 5 of the texts used (URLs acceptable for audio-visual texts)

For interviews and focus groups:

Interview guide(s), between one and three full interviews (up to you)/ one focus group transcript (translated into English if the text is in another language), coding frame (if one is used) or thematic analysis grid, and one copy of an unsigned and anonymized consent form, and information letter (if one is used)

For questionnaire and survey-design:

The questionnaire(s), descriptives (frequencies of responses) of the variables in the questionnaire, and one copy of an unsigned and anonymized consent form

For audio-visual analysis:

Provide all still used for analysis or URLs for audio-visual material; at least three images or image stills should be annotated

For discourse analysis:

At least three examples of analysed articles with annotation in pen or colour ink (scanned or done electronically); or a grid which exemplifies analysis; and coding frame (if one is used)

Appendices do not have to include the ethics checklists, but dissertations dealing with complicated ethical considerations should discuss ethical approval in the methodology section.

For reasons of double-blind marking, **make sure that your name or contact details do not appear anywhere in your appendices!**

3.3 Theoretical Dissertations

A theoretical dissertation is one that does not rely upon the collection and analysis of empirical data to answer its research question, but rather relevant theory and academic literature. Otherwise put, it is a dissertation that asks a question that does not need to be answered with empirical data: e.g., it could be a question about the state of or new directions in the field of media and communications; it could be interrogating the history or meaning or analytic value of a certain concept, etc. This is not to say that there can or should not be any empirical data in a theoretical dissertation at all (e.g., discourse analysis of texts or archival analysis of documentary materials), rather that empirical data are not at the *heart* of the work.

The approach, content and organisation of theoretical dissertations vary greatly. It is particularly important to agree the detailed structure of these dissertations with your supervisor. Possible structures include

The advice given above in section 2.4 on ‘introduction’, ‘statement of research question’, ‘conclusion’, ‘abstract’, ‘references’, and ‘appendices’ applies equally to theoretical dissertations. While theoretical dissertations might take various forms, **we require that any theoretical dissertation is directed towards clarifying what are the most important directions for future empirical research.**

Additionally, evidence of the contribution of the dissertation to the chosen theoretical area needs to be highlighted succinctly in the conclusion. ‘After reading this dissertation, people will be enabled to think differently about...’

Note: The assessment criteria for both empirical and theoretical dissertations are the same, as outlined in section 4 below.

3.4 Dissertation planning and assignments

For the dissertation you will have to complete **two dissertation plans** which are the **formative assignments** for MC499. These are designed to help you work on your dissertation throughout the year and make sure you complete the process in time with feedback from your supervisor.

The templates for these can all be found on the MC499 Moodle page:

1st Dissertation Plan: In this document, you give a general outline of what you propose to do in your dissertation work, in terms of the key concepts and theories you are building on to answer your research question and some indication of the methodological approach (for empirical dissertations) that you are likely to take.

2nd Dissertation Plan: This plan includes an outline of the central research question and its relation to relevant literature; fieldwork or sampling: how you have gained access to the field and selected the

sample so far; how you intend to analyse your data. It also includes a detailed outline of the literature in the field, including key authors and their positions, in order to identify how your project will be positioned, and which elements you are planning to include in your conceptual frame.

For your second dissertation plan (and the MC4M1/MC4M2 assignment), you have to submit a research ethics review application and get approval for your research from your supervisor. If your methodology changes, it is again your responsibility to have a new version of the form approved.

Note that your ethics application must be approved before you begin any data collection for your dissertation.

For further information about research ethics and processes at the LSE, please read through the school's [guidance](#).

Further information on the ethics review process for the 2021/22 academic year will be communicated to you by the MC499 convenor at the start of Lent Term.

4 DISSERTATION ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

4.1 Assessment criteria

In general, assessment criteria for the dissertation are the same as for coursework [please refer to section 3.6 'Formative and Summative Assessment Criteria and Marks' of the [MSc Student Handbook](#)]. Students should also note that examiners are looking for a number of qualities in a successful dissertation:

Argumentation and understanding would include the following:

- quality and breadth of literature review;
- the fit between your assessment of the literature and your choice of empirical research focus;
- the appropriateness of research design and strategy;
- selection, discussion and implementation of methods and techniques;
- data integration and data analysis;
- interpretation of results;
- identification of research gaps and shortcomings;
- discussion of further research.

Analysis (and methodology) would include the following:

- depth of interpretation;
- theoretical knowledge and sophistication;
- conceptual clarity;
- critical appraisal;
- justification and reflexivity in relation to the methodological design;
- thoroughness of analysis;
- imaginativeness/flair/boldness.

Organisation and presentation would include the following:

- clarity of expression;
- a coherent and consistent structure (with appropriate chapters, titles and subtitles);
- satisfactory abstract;
- complete, correct and consistent referencing, see 'Guidance for Essay Writing' in the [MSc Student Handbook](#).
- satisfactory appendices (including, as appropriate, coding frames, code books, individual interviews and focus groups topic guide, questionnaires, statistical tables, annotated images, and transcripts judged to be essential in the evaluation of the main text, including a full transcript of one sample interview (translated into English if necessary), with other transcripts to be available on request).

Plagiarism and editorial assistance

Students must refer to 'Avoiding Plagiarism/Academic Dishonesty' in the [MSc Student Handbook](#) and be aware that plagiarism is a serious offence with serious consequences for those found guilty of academic misconduct.

4.2 Dissertation Prizes

There are two Dissertation Prizes which may be awarded to MSc students:

Best Dissertation Prize

Criteria: to be awarded to the candidate receiving the highest distinction-level mark (70+) in module MC499 Dissertation, regardless of marks in other modules and overall degree classification.

Silverstone Dissertation Prize

Criteria: to be awarded (regardless of marks in other modules and overall degree classification) to the candidate receiving a distinction-level mark (70+) in their module MC499 Dissertation, which continues the work of the late Professor Roger Silverstone. **This dissertation should address the key theme of Roger Silverstone's intellectual legacy, media and morality, and should engage with an ethical aspect of mediation, in its production, representation or consumption dimensions, in order to show how the ethical perspective may inform the practices of journalists, audiences and/or media users.**

The Department reserves the right not to award the prize in any given year where there is no suitable candidate (e.g., where there is no candidate with a mark of 70+ in the dissertation).

5 DISSERTATION SUBMISSION

Dissertations are due in mid-August 2022. Please see the MC499 Moodle page for complete details. Below are a few important points.

Deadlines/Extensions/Penalties for Late Submission

Deadlines for submission can be found in the key dates section of the [MSc Student Handbook](#). Please also refer to the handbook for full information concerning penalties for late submission and extensions.

Length

Dissertations which are under 10,000 words or over 12,000 words may attract a penalty. The word count must be recorded on the coversheet and must be the length of the document taking account of the inclusions and exclusions listed in section 3.1 of this handbook.

Format/Style

Dissertations must be type-written using a font size 12 or larger, 1.5 or 2-line spacing, must include a full bibliography and an abstract, and laid out on A4, or American letter-size, page. Apart from this, style and format are up to individual students.

5.1 Submission Instructions

Submission of the dissertation for MC499 consists **of an electronic copy uploaded within the MC499 Moodle area. Submission by email is not permitted. Please be sure to only submit one copy of your dissertation.**

Refer to the [MSc Student Handbook](#) section 3.3 for instructions on how to name your file before uploading to Moodle. You must **adhere strictly to this file naming convention** and must not use your own name, the name of your course, or the title of your dissertation.

The first page must be the MC499 **coversheet** and plagiarism declaration, which you can find on Moodle.

The following information must appear on the **first page** of your dissertation, *after* the coversheet:

- Title
- Candidate number (**not** your LSE ID number)
- Supervisor's name
- Sentence along the lines of: "Dissertation (MC499) submitted to the Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics, August (Relevant year), in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc in"

All raw data and source materials relating to assessed assignments must be kept until students graduate from LSE (i.e., until the date of the first presentation ceremony after the relevant exam board).