

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

**PHILOSOPHY**  
**COURSE UNIT OUTLINE 2014-15**

**PHIL30000 Dissertation (20 credits) and  
PHIL30300 Dissertation (40 credits)**  
**Semester: 1 & 2**

- Course convenor:** Dr. Thomas Smith
- Room:** Arthur Lewis 4.028
- Telephone:** 0161 275 7886
- Email:** [thomas.smith@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:thomas.smith@manchester.ac.uk)
- Office Hours:** Semester 1: Mondays 10.30-11.30am and Wednesdays 10.30-11.30am.  
Semester 2: TBA. (Email to arrange an appointment outside of office hours).
- Administrator:** Caroline Harmer, UG Office, G.001 Arthur Lewis Building  
Tel: 0161 275 7129, Email: [caroline.harmer@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:caroline.harmer@manchester.ac.uk)
- Lectures:** Semester 1 - Week 1 and 2 only:  
Tuesdays 4-5pm and Thursday 1-2pm in Coupland 1 Pear Theatre  
Semester 2 - Week 3 only:  
Tuesday 12-1pm in Ellen Wilkinson A2.6
- Assessment:** PHIL30000 - 7,500 words dissertation (100%)  
PHIL30030 - 15,000 words dissertation (100%)

**\*\*\*IMPORTANT INFORMATION – PLEASE READ\*\***

- Pre-requisite(s):** PHIL30000: 40 PHIL credits at Level 2  
PHIL30030: 40 PHIL credits at Level 2  
Minimum level 2 grade point average of 60  
At least one level 2 philosophy grade of 70 or over

- Communication:** *Students must read their University e-mails regularly, as important information will be communicated in this way.*

Please read through this course outline very carefully as it provides essential information needed by all students attending this course

This course guide should be read in conjunction with the Philosophy Study Guide, available from the Philosophy Intranet: <http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/student-intranet/undergraduate/course-information/philosophy/>

# 1. ABOUT THE COURSE

## Summary

This course unit gives you the chance to write a 7,500/15,000 word dissertation on a question of your own design. The learning and teaching methods used are independent research and individual supervision.

## Aims

This course unit aims to:

- Improve students' research, critical analysis, independent study, time-management and presentation skills.
- Provide students with the opportunity for one-to-one philosophical discussions with an appropriate supervisor.
- Allow students to specialise in a topic that interests them and to develop intellectual independence.

## Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this course unit, students will be able to demonstrate:

- That they can produce, and present professionally, a substantial independent piece of research into a question of their own design.
- That they can present and defend their own view about a challenging philosophical issue.
- That they have the study skills necessary for focusing their topic and preparing the essay.

## Study budget

- For the 20 credit dissertation, University guidelines state that a 20 credit course unit requires 200 student study hours.
- For the 40 credit dissertation, University guidelines state that a 40 credit course unit requires 400 student study hours.

Dissertations are examined with these figures in mind. You cannot successfully do a 'rush job' in the last few weeks. You should be reading, thinking, writing drafts and meeting regularly with your supervisor throughout the year.

# 2. HOW IT WORKS

There are four submission dates for you to be aware of:

## **1. Dissertation Area of Study Form: by Friday, 3rd October, 2014, 2 pm.**

The completed form should be submitted to the UG Office (G.001, ALB) by the above time.

- On this form (at the back of this guide) you will nominate **three** dissertation areas of study, in order of preference. These topics can be very broad (e.g. 'ontology', 'normative ethics', 'philosophy of music'), but please try to make your listed topics as precise as possible at this stage. One of these will then become your dissertation area of study.
- We ask you for three areas of study because the work of supervising dissertations is evenly divided amongst the staff, and each staff member is competent to supervise only in certain areas. There is, then, unfortunately no guarantee that you will be allocated your first (or even your second) preference of area of study. So it is important that you give careful thought to all three of the areas you nominate.

Please note that a nomination will become your area of study *only if*:

- It is a *philosophical* area of study.
- We are competent to provide supervision in that area.  
(If you attend the dissertation lectures in weeks 1 and 2 and browse the Philosophy website, you will get an idea of staff members' philosophical competencies.)

If you fail to submit the form on time, you will simply be assigned a dissertation study area.

Supervisors will be allocated at the same time as study areas. A **list detailing these allocations will be posted on the PHIL30000/30030 Blackboard site by Friday, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2014.**

It is then up to you to make an appointment with your supervisor, and immediately get to work. You need to have decided on a precise working title by Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> November.

## **2. Dissertation Title Registration Form: by Friday, 7th November, 2014, 2pm.**

The completed form should be submitted to the UG Office (G.001, ALB) by the above time.

- On this form (at the back of this guide) you register your provisional dissertation title: a title that narrows down the broad area you originally chose into a clearly defined research topic. (The title can later be changed, with your supervisor's consent)
- *You will agree this title, and a research strategy, with your supervisor, who must sign this form before it is submitted.*
- Please note that your supervisor will sign off your title only if: you have not previously written either an assessed essay or examination answer on that topic, and you undertake not to write such an essay or answer this year.

If you fail to submit the form on time, you will simply be assigned a dissertation title.

## **3. Writing Sample (for those taking PHIL30030, the 40 credit dissertation, only): by Monday, 26th January 2015, 2pm.**

To confirm that you are making adequate progress, we require a sample of writing from the dissertation of at least 2,500 words, plus a detailed plan, by the above time.

- This should be e-mailed to the course convenor, [thomas.smith@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:thomas.smith@manchester.ac.uk)
- **Please note** that failure to submit both sample and plan will result in you being moved on to the 20-credit philosophy dissertation module. You will then have to enroll on other module(s), to make up the extra 20 credits required.

## **4. The dissertation itself: by Tuesday, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015, 2pm.**

**Three** copies should be submitted by the above time:

- Two **bound** copies to be submitted to the UG Office, G.001, Arthur Lewis.
- One **electronic** copy.

*To submit your essay electronically to Turnitin follow instructions on Blackboard at <https://online.manchester.ac.uk>*

*When submitting electronically the title of the file you upload should be your student ID number. Do not put your name in the filename or in the essay.*

Any student who, without sufficient reason, fails to submit a dissertation by the above deadline will be penalised by the deduction of 10 marks for up to 24 hours late and then 10 marks per day (including weekends) for up to 10 days. Any student who, without sufficient reason, fails to submit his/her dissertation by the end of the examination period will normally be awarded a mark of zero.

Students who have reason (*i.e.* mitigating circumstances with the necessary documentation) for not being able to submit their dissertation on time should collect a mitigating circumstances form from the SoSS Undergraduate Office (Arthur Lewis, G.001), which should be completed and returned there. See the *Philosophy Study Guide* for more about extensions and penalties for late submission.

### **3. PRESENTATION OF DISSERTATION**

Essays must be typed in at least 12 point in a readable font, and should be **double spaced**

## Layout

In addition to the text, the completed dissertation must have a title page, an abstract, a table of contents, references (or footnotes) and a bibliography.

- i. The **title page** must give
  - (a) your student ID number (**not** your name)
  - (b) course code (PHIL30000/PHIL30030),
  - (c) the full title of the dissertation,
  - (d) the year,
  - (e) the word count (the number of words of text)
- ii. After the title page, an **abstract** of no more than 400 words briefly summarises the dissertation.
- iii. After that, a **table of contents** gives the titles and page references of the chapters or sections.
- iv. You must use **references (or footnotes)** to credit the work of scholars that you have used.
- v. A **bibliography** of sources used comes at the end of the dissertation. The bibliography lists alphabetically by author all works used and provides full bibliographic information for each source.

## Referencing and bibliography

The lack of a proper bibliography and appropriate references (citations) will potentially greatly affect the mark for the work and may be considered plagiarism. For full guidance on how to refer to works you are citing and paraphrasing in your essay, and how to write a bibliography, is provided in Chapter 5 of the Philosophy Study Guide, available from <http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/student-intranet/undergraduate/course-information/philosophy/study-resources/>

You **MUST** follow this guidance. Bibliography and referencing conventions can vary from discipline to discipline. The ones in Philosophy may differ from those employed in other subjects you are studying.

## Word Length

A PHIL30000 dissertation must be 7,500 words. A PHIL30030 dissertation must be 15,000 words. These word limits include footnotes but exclude title page, abstract, table of contents and bibliography. You must indicate the word count on your title page: failure to do so will result in a deduction of 2 marks. If an essay goes over the word limit by 10% or more, 5 marks will be deducted.

## Reproduction of your own material

Dissertations must not reproduce in whole or in large part an assessed course essay and/or a previous extended essay. Any violation of this prohibition will be **severely penalised** by the deduction of marks, or even by a mark of 0 in serious cases.

If you are uncertain as to how to apply this rule, you should consult with your dissertation supervisor.

## 4. TIPS FOR A GOOD DISSERTATION

### a. It's not like writing a 3,000 word essay

It's longer, obviously. But it's not just that you need more *words*...

- (i) Because a dissertation is longer, its *structure* is more important. You have the space to (a) explain and defend your background assumptions, (b) develop a sustained argument for your conclusions, (c) say why these conclusions might matter (e.g. what might *turn* on them), and (d) respond to possible objections.
- (ii) Because the preparation time is longer, you have the time to read widely, think hard, and *experiment*. Good philosophical writing is often achieved through trial and error. So use the time to *try out* lines of thought, and ways of organizing them, and be prepared to change anything that can be improved.
- (iii) You are responsible for refining the topic and for deciding what material to read. That

means that you get to decide what to include and what to exclude. Part of the skill of writing a dissertation is knowing what *to leave out*, e.g. which philosophical questions may be ignored, which assumptions need not be defended, which philosophers need not be discussed. By leaving out what is inessential you give yourself the space to define the terms of the issue *as you see it*, to focus on what most interests you, and ignore irrelevant things.

Of course, your supervisor will help you with all of this. But ultimately, it is up to you to address your topic *in your own way*, using whatever sources you think most relevant.

**b. Break the dissertation down into sections.**

This will enable you write a structured, focused piece. Each section should have a purpose: a way in which it contributes to the overall argument.

**c. Break your *work* on the dissertation down into sections.**

Some students use the following method when writing essays: first, do the reading, then, at the last possible moment, stay up late and write the essay. That's not a good method, even for essays, but it is a *hopeless* way of writing a dissertation. Rather, you should be reading, thinking, writing drafts and meeting regularly with your supervisor throughout the year. Try dividing the time available to you – i.e. from October to April – into “chunks”: 4-5 chunks for PHIL30000 students, 8-9 chunks for PHIL 30030 students. During each chunk of time you read, think (don't forget to think!) and write a draft section of your dissertation, then meet with your supervisor to discuss it. Then you think about what he/she has said, and how you might redraft what you have written in the light of this, and what you should read next. You then begin another read-think-write- meet cycle. Only by putting in this amount of care and attention will you do justice to your talents.

**d. Don't try to cover too much ground**

Try to avoid taking too broad and unmanageable a perspective on your chosen topic. A professional philosopher will not attempt to give us her last word on life, the universe and everything in 7,500, or even 15,000 words, and neither should you. Even once you have refined the scope of your topic you should be prepared to further restrict it, as you work, and to cut material that you were hoping to include. Almost every philosopher has had the experience of setting out to defend claims *a*, *b* and *c*, before discovering that, once they have explained and defended everything that they have to say on *a*, there is no space left for *b* and *c*.

You are likely to get *high* marks for a well-structured piece that explores an issue *in detail*, with argumentative rigour. A dissertation that attempts an overly broad survey of an area and ends up lacking precise argument and scholarship is liable to get *low* marks.

It might be best to focus the discussion of the dissertation on a handful (5 to 10) key articles or book chapters (though you should certainly read more than this). This should give your dissertation some focus and precision. In any event, take your supervisor's advice!

**e. Start writing early**

Too many students kid themselves by saying that the dissertation is ‘all there, in my head; it just needs to be written up.’ Philosophy doesn't work like this. Philosophical arguments don't really become clear until one starts to formulate them in writing. To write a successful dissertation, you will need to draft and re-draft each section, revising much of what you've written in the light of your supervisor's comments.

**f. Learn from your heroes and heroines**

If a philosopher *x* has written a paper or book that you think is excellent, ask yourself, ‘What *exactly* is so good about it?’, ‘What *skills* must *x* be using to write so well?’ Then try to cultivate those skills in yourself, by trial and error. You will not go far wrong.

**g. Don't bullshit**

If you are not entirely sure what you mean by a sentence, no-one else will understand it. Write another sentence instead: one that makes its meaning clear. Be clear and precise.

Be honest too. If you don't understand something, don't pretend to.  
If you don't believe that something is true, don't pretend to believe that it is true.

Be confident too. If you are sure of something, then say it clearly and boldly. But don't *just* say it! Give your readers reasons to agree with you. And try to anticipate concerns or objections that your readers might have, and to answer these concerns and objections.

More advice on how to write philosophy well is available in the Study Guide.

#### **h. Thoroughly correct the final draft**

Remember to check the final typescript for errors of spelling, punctuation, footnote numbering and typing. Do not underestimate how long this process can take.

**You cannot do a good job if you leave your dissertation to the last few weeks. You are unlikely to do a good job if you do not meet with your supervisor on a regular basis. But be warned: *no-one will tell you to do these things if you do not do them! It is your responsibility to manage your work-load!***

### **5. YOUR SUPERVISOR**

Dr Thomas Smith will assign you an appropriate supervisor once you have submitted your Dissertation Study Area Form. You should make contact with your supervisor as soon as possible, not least because you have to submit your provisional title – approved by your supervisor – **by Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> November.**

Please note that you do **not** have any right to be supervised by a particular member of staff.

You should *not* expect your supervisor to provide a final topic and/or a reading list. However, your supervisor is available to help you define a researchable question or problem and to provide advice about relevant sources. Hence, meeting with your supervisor should help ensure that your research remains focused on your chosen topic. In addition, the supervisor can help you with the structure of the dissertation and with planning your work schedule.

**Your supervisor will read and comment upon dissertation plans and drafts of sections of the dissertation. A supervisor has no obligation to read a draft of the entire dissertation. Your supervisor will only read and comment upon material submitted before Monday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 (i.e. roughly one month before the final submission date).**

### **6. ASSESSMENT**

#### **Assessment Criteria**

For the assessment criteria for all PHIL course units, see the *Philosophy Study Guide*, which also provides further guidance concerning the assessment criteria.

#### **Marking of Dissertations**

Your dissertation will be marked by an internal marker, and in every case your supervisor will act as a second internal marker. The external examiner adjudicates, if the two internal markers cannot agree upon a mark, and also when the dissertation is a borderline case (39, 49, 59, and 69). In addition, the external examiner reads all possible first class and fail dissertations. The internal markers complete a dissertation comment sheet and attach this to the dissertation when it is returned to you **after graduation.**

#### **Receiving your Mark**

In order to ensure equal treatment of students, individual supervisors will **not** inform you of your mark. Therefore, you must not ask your supervisors for your mark. Rather, you must wait for

official notification from your degree programme after the meeting of the appropriate examination board.

## **Feedback**

The School of Social Sciences is committed to providing timely and appropriate feedback to students on their academic progress and achievement, thereby enabling students to reflect on their progress and plan their academic and skills development effectively. Students are reminded that feedback is necessarily *responsive*: only when a student has done a certain amount of work and approaches us with it at the appropriate fora is it possible for us to feed *back* on the *student's work*. The main form of feedback on this course is through meetings and e-mail correspondence with your dissertation supervisor.

## **Return of Marked Dissertations**

Your dissertation can be picked up from the SoSS UG Office, G.001 after the date of graduation.

## **Authorship**

Submission of a dissertation bearing a student's name is not sufficient evidence that the submitted work is actually the student's. A student must establish authorship of the submitted dissertation (a) by writing on a topic agreed with her/his supervisor, (b) by meeting regularly with her/his supervisor to discuss the agreed topic, sources, arguments, the student's progress, etc., (c) by submitting draft chapters, (d) by retaining and, if requested to do so, submitting notes on her or his reading and research and/or drafts, and/or (e) if requested, by taking a viva (oral examination) to answer questions about her/his dissertation to the satisfaction of the examiners.

For this reason, you must keep your notes and drafts until the mark for the dissertation has been confirmed by the examination boards and must submit them if requested to do so by the School.

A student who does not meet sufficiently with her/his supervisor and/or who does not submit draft chapters (or an outline or plan) to establish authorship of the submitted work may be asked to submit draft chapters and/or notes and/or to take a viva in order to establish authorship of the submitted work. When requested to do so, failure to provide the requested notes and/or drafts will normally result in a mark of 0 and will also constitute probable evidence of plagiarism.

The School of Social Sciences may require any student to attend a viva (an oral examination) to answer questions about her/his dissertation in order to help establish whether the submitted work is the student's. In a viva, a student's inability to answer, to the satisfaction of the examiners, questions about the content of her/his dissertation and also the sources used to write her/his dissertation will normally result in a mark of 0 and be taken as probable evidence of plagiarism.

**The University of Manchester**

School of Social Sciences

**Philosophy**

**PHIL30000 / PHIL30030 (Please delete as appropriate)  
DISSERTATION AREA OF STUDY FORM**

It is your responsibility to complete and submit this form to the SoSS UG Office (G.001, Arthur Lewis Building), by **Friday October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014**.

I confirm that:

- I have read, understood and agree to abide by the University's guidelines on plagiarism (see *Philosophy Study Guide*), and that the work submitted is my own work.
- I have read, understood, and agree to abide by the regulations of the School of Social Sciences governing PHIL 30000/30030 dissertations.

**Student** (print legibly) :

**Degree programme:**

**Signature of student:**

**Registration number:**

**Date:**

**Dissertation topic preferences:**

**Preference 1:**

**Preference 2:**

**Preference 3:**

**The University of Manchester**

School of Social Sciences

**Philosophy**

**PHIL30000 / PHIL30030 (Please delete as appropriate)  
DISSERTATION TITLE REGISTRATION FORM**

It is your responsibility to complete and submit this form, **signed by your supervisor**, to the SoSS UG Office (G.001, Arthur Lewis Building) by **Friday November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2014**.

I confirm that:

- I have read, understood and agree to abide by the University's guidelines on plagiarism (see *Philosophy Study Guide*), and that the work submitted is my own work.
- I have read, understood, and agree to abide by the regulations of the School of Social Sciences governing PHIL30000/30030 dissertations.
- My dissertation is not on a topic on which I have written either an assessed essay or an examination answer during my undergraduate degree.
- I will not write an assessed essay or examination answer on my dissertation topic this year.

**Student's name** (print legibly):

**Degree programme:**

**Signature of student:**

**Registration number:**

**Provisional dissertation title:**

**Supervisor:**

**Supervisor's signature:**

**Date:**