

# Sociology Dissertation

## Guide for Students

This document provides useful information about the Sociology Dissertation

If you have further queries or would like to discuss your topic ideas in more detail, please contact the Sociology Dissertation Coordinator Owen Abbott: [owen.abbott@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:owen.abbott@manchester.ac.uk)





## Credits & Prerequisites

### Who can take the Sociology Dissertation?

All third year BSocSc Sociology students must complete a dissertation as part of their final year assessment. Linguistics & Sociology students, and BASS students (who have completed 40 credits of sociology in year 2) can take a sociology dissertation if they have taken at least 20 credits of sociology methods modules in year 2 ([SOST20012](#), [SOCY20091](#)). History & Sociology students can take a sociology dissertation, although the methods they can use depend upon what sociology methods modules they took in year 2.

### How many credits is the Dissertation worth?

There is a 20 credit dissertation in Sociology and a 40 credit dissertation in Sociology. Depending on your programme, you can choose between these. See below for guidance.

**BSocSc Sociology** students, **BASS** students, and **Linguistics & Sociology** students can choose to do a dissertation counting for either 20 credits or 40 credits.

**History & Sociology** students are required to complete a 40-credit dissertation.

All joint honours students should check that their choice is permitted within their home programme.

For the 20 credit dissertation select SOCY30920 from the student self-service system, and for the 40-credit dissertation select SOCY30930.

### What is the Difference between the 20 and 40 credit dissertation?

The 20 credit dissertation is around 200 hours (7 hours, or 1 day a week). The 40 credit dissertation is around 400 hours (14 hours, or 2 days a week). The final word counts are:

20 credits = 6,000-7,000 words

40 credits = 12,000-13,000 words

40 credit dissertation students are required to do a presentation worth 10% of their mark (which takes place in February). The 20 credit dissertation does not have a presentation.

The 20 credit option means that you will take an additional course compared to those choosing 40 credits and can therefore spread the risk of your final year marks across more course units. The 40 credit option carries a great deal of weight over your final degree mark (a double-course effectively), but you take a course less across the year so you should have more time to devote to your dissertation. It requires good time-management skills and a lot of self-motivation to undertake such a big piece of independent work. It is often however the most rewarding part of the degree programme for many students.

Please note that if you have averaged less than 60% in the second year, then you will have to get permission from the dissertation coordinator to take the 40 credit option.

If you have any concerns about credit options or the prerequisites, please see Owen Abbott.



## Choosing a Topic

### How do I choose my topic?

A dissertation involves independent study of a topic chosen by you, and finalised after consultation with your supervisor in September. You have free reign when choosing your topic, but must consider the following points:

- Choose something that really interests you rather than something that has been done several times before. There are some topics that are so well-worn that it is extremely difficult to develop a fresh approach to them.
- Remember that this is a dissertation in *sociology*. By now you will have discovered that sociology is a very broad discipline, one that overlaps with several others. However, your primary emphasis should lie within the discipline of sociology and your dissertation must refer to and be informed by debates, concepts and theories within the sociological literature.
- A dissertation should be analytic rather than just descriptive. It should address a clearly defined sociological problem, some clearly articulated puzzle or question or hypothesis.
- All dissertations involve independent research. However, the term 'research' includes a very wide range of activities. For example, it could involve – individually or in combination – library study, archival study, interviews, focus groups, participant observation, analysis of secondary survey data, official documents, other texts, visual materials or digital resources.

### Topic restrictions:

- **Workload:** Remember that the dissertation project should not be so grand as to take up all of your time. You should take account of the relative importance and credit value of the dissertation in your final assessment when planning your work across your final year – keep it in proportion.
- **Personal safety:** you are responsible for your own personal safety when conducting your research for the dissertation. You will not be allowed to undertake risky research and will have to complete a risk assessment form to consider personal safety issues.
- **Research ethics:** you are required to conduct your research to acceptable ethical standards. Undergraduate dissertation students are expected to comply with the SoSS ethical guidelines, which rule out certain kinds of research. You will not be allowed to conduct covert research or research dealing directly with vulnerable groups, including **under 18s** or adults who are not able to give informed consent. You will have to complete a SoSS ethics form and submit with your research proposal in order to gain ethical approval for your research.

**Note:** NO fieldwork can be undertaken before you have gained ethical approval for your research (granted in late October when you have submitted your research proposal)



## Supervision, Guidance & Support

### Dissertation Supervisors

You will be assigned a member of staff in Sociology to act as your dissertation supervisor, and you will meet them in September. The dissertation coordinator is responsible for assigning supervisors in early September; you do not need to contact staff yourself.

In sociology we give you free reign over your topic choice. This means that we cannot promise to match you with a supervisor who is an 'expert' in the area that you have chosen to research. All supervisors however are experts in the process of doing social research. We encourage you to consult other members of staff in Sociology who have particular expertise on your topic in addition to your supervisor.

We also ask that **you email us your topic choice at the beginning of September (you will receive an email from Grace Aspinall requesting this information)**. If you do this, then any obvious matches between available supervisors and student topics can be made when supervisors are allocated in September.

Dissertation supervisors will meet 20-credit dissertation students *at least* twice (once per semester), and 40-credit dissertation students *at least* four times over the year to give specialist advice on developing the research topic. Meetings will normally be held during supervisors' office hours and should be arranged by email. It is your responsibility to arrange meetings with your supervisor. **The dissertation is YOUR responsibility. Your supervisor will offer you advice but her/his main responsibility is to respond to your ideas and plans, not to tell you what to do.**

### Dissertation Lectures

Alongside individual supervision, guidance and support is also provided by the dissertation course and coordinator, who is another source of advice throughout the year.

The dissertation course includes a series of sessions across the year, which help you with dissertation work and allow you to meet with other students who are experiencing the same issues. The dissertation coordinator runs the sessions, although they often include external speakers and other staff. The Sociology Futures sessions also run within the Dissertation course, and help to prepare you for life post-graduation.

#### Guide to sessions (tbc):

September (kick-start & first group meeting with supervisor)

October sessions (writing the research proposal, reading critically and keeping notes)

November sessions (Literature Review, Sociology Futures session: Life After University)

December (Data Analysis Workshops)

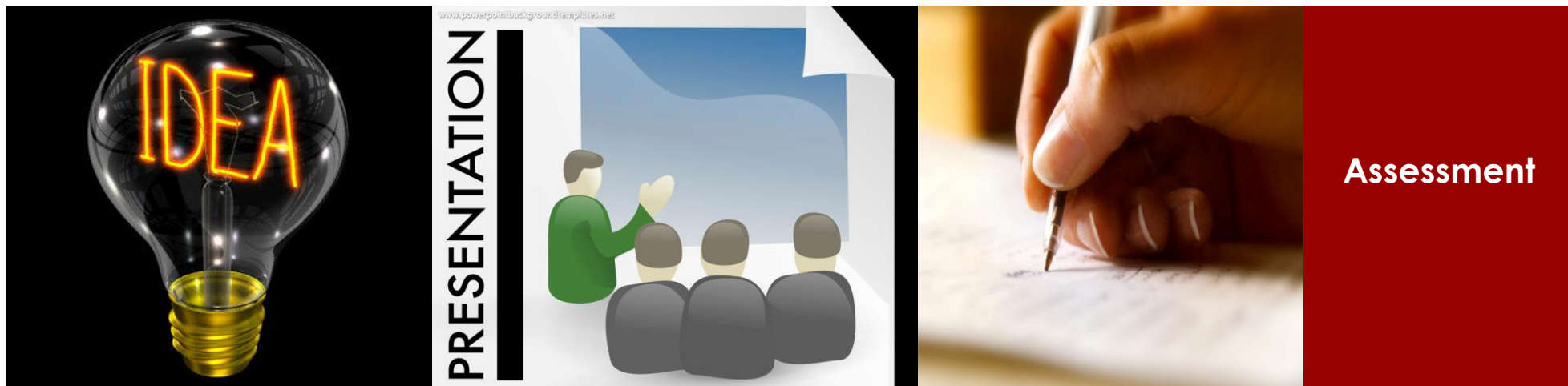
January (presentation planning & Sociology Futures session: Presenting your academic research)

February sessions (Sociology Futures: landing your dream job, writing with your data)

March sessions (methods chapter, introduction and conclusion, finalising your dissertation)

March (Sociology Futures session: Careers





## Assessment

### Research Proposal (15%)

**Word count:** 2,500

**Submitted:** late Oct

1. A brief **statement of the research problem**
2. A statement of the **rationale** for the topic, in terms of its place in sociological theories and debates and your personal interest in it.
3. **Elaboration of the research question.** This entails breaking it down into a series of more specific and focused questions
4. List of 15 **references** to literature that you have read or will read to provide you with the sociological context of the topic
5. A statement of your **research design**.
6. A realistic **timetable** for the various stages of your research,

### 40 credits dissertation only: Oral Presentation (10%)

**Duration:** 15 minutes (no questions)

**Take place:** February

Each student is required to make an oral presentation in groups of 10-12 students taking the dissertation module, using visual aids such as powerpoint slides.

The presentation should:

- describe the background to the project and the research questions,
- describe and justify the methodology
- report on the progress of the research, indicating what results are emerging or anticipated.
- Reflect on the limitations of the research

### Written Dissertation (75% for 40 credits, 85% for 20 credits)

**Word count:** 6-7,000 words for 20 credits / 12-13,000 words for 40 credits

**Submitted:** End of April/beginning of May (you can submit early!)

Sections of the dissertation include:

- Title page
- Abstract
- table of contents
- list of tables and figures
- acknowledgements
- Introduction
- Literature review
- Methodology
- Findings & analysis (one or two chapters, adapted to your project)
- Conclusion
- bibliography
- appendices.

## 6 Steps to Completing Your Dissertation



DRUDGERY



PROCRASTINATION



PANIC



DESPAIR



DRUDGERY



PRINTING

## Suggested reading

- Bryman, Alan (2008) *Social Research Methods*, 3rd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blaxter, Loraine, Hughes, Christina and Tight, Malcolm (2006) *How to Research*, 3rd edition, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- David, Matthew and Sutton, Carol D. (2004) *Social Research: The Basics*, London: Sage
- Denscombe, Martyn (2003) *The Good Research Guide for Small-scale Social Research Projects*, 2nd edition, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Fink, Arlene (2009), *Conducting Research Literature Reviews*, 3rd edition, London: Sage.
- Gilbert, Nigel, ed (2008) *Researching Social Life*, 3rd edition, London: Sage.
- Kumar, Ranjit (2005) *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners*, 2nd edition, London: Sage.
- Mason, Jennifer (2002) *Qualitative Research*, 2nd edition, London: Sage.
- Methodspace: <http://www.methodspace.com/>
- Punch, Keith (2005) *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, 2nd edition, London: Sage.
- Reardon, Dennis (2006) *Doing Your Undergraduate Project*, London: Sage.
- Sarantakos, Sotirios (2004) *Social Research*, 3rd edition, London: Palgrave.
- Trochim, William M. *The Research Methods Knowledge Base*: <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/index.php>
- Yates, Simeon J. (2003) *Doing Social Science Research*, London: Sage/Open University Press