

Dissertation and Project Planner



About the Planner:

This generic planner is designed to help you through all the stages of your dissertation or research project, from starting to think about your question to final submission. At each stage there are useful prompts to help you plan your work and manage your time.

There are also blank spaces that you can use to plan your dissertation or project. We hope that you find it useful. If you have any questions or comments please contact us on:

iad.students@ed.ac.uk



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Getting set

Tasks	Timings	Action plan	Complete? ✓
Brainstorm potential research topics and questions, paying attention to what interests you. Discuss your ideas with relevant academic staff to check feasibility and appropriateness.			
Confirm your research supervisor and check their availability during your dissertation period. You'll need to negotiate with them how often you should meet, contact them and what sort of feedback you can expect (e.g. type and frequency).			
Check for any training (e.g. statistical software or equipment) you might need. What is offered by your programme or School? Will you need to look elsewhere?			
Create a project plan using a timeline or calendar (have a look at the strategies on Study Hub). Highlight key stages, milestones and deadlines for your dissertation.			
 Set up a document with all the required formatting (e.g. font size, line spacing, margins) and write in it, rather than trying to do it all at the end.			

Starting your research

Tasks	Timings	Action plan	Complete? ✓
<p>Timetable meetings and any agreed deadlines with your supervisor. These will allow you to check that the project is going in the right direction.</p>			
<p>Start by breaking down the research - what do you have to do? Literature search, fieldwork / placement, survey(s), interviews, lab work? Put these into your calendar / timeline.</p>			
<p>Keep track of your notes, sources, data and developing ideas. Using a reading notes record sheet can help organise your notes and thinking (have a look at the strategies on Study Hub). If you are using a reference manager, keep it up to date.</p>			
<p>Consider your emergency plans - what will you do if there are unexpected delays or results? Know whom to speak to and by when.</p>			
<p> If you have analyses to perform, do a trial run as soon as possible. This will help identify any issues and allow you to start thinking about the results sooner.</p>			

The Writing Process

Tasks	Timings	Action plan	Complete? ✓
<p>Create a draft structure, outlining sections, the main points and findings. Think about the purpose of each section and use this to plan your content.</p>			
<p>Start to fill in your outline - create initial drafts. These can be reviewed and amended as your thinking and knowledge progresses.</p>			
<p>Check your writing as you go. Are you addressing the question? Are your sections / examples / sources relevant? Does your argument flow?</p>			
<p>Discuss any opportunities for feedback with your supervisor. They might be willing to give written feedback on a section of your writing or they might want to have a discussion about a complete draft.</p>			
 <p>Struggling to start or hit writers block? Free write! Set a timer for 5 mins (or longer) and just write, to get words on the page. You can edit it later.</p>			

Final stages

Tasks	Timings	Action plan	Complete? ✓
<p>Double check your formatting, font, layouts etc. Refer to your programme handbook for guidance and check if you are unsure.</p>			
<p>Check that your citations and references (including footnotes if applicable) are in the appropriate style for your programme. If you are using a reference manager, this will be much easier!</p>			
<p>Try to allow as much time as possible for multiple rounds of proofreading and editing. This really shows in the quality of the final work.</p>			
<p>Check submission dates and requirements. Do you have to submit a printed copy as well as an electronic copy? Does it need to be bound?</p>			
 For proofreading and editing, print it out and read it out loud. This helps find mistakes more efficiently than just reading it over and over on a screen.			

Useful notes

My supervisor is:

Contact details:

My supervisor is available from and to:

The School / Programme point of contact / office is:

My research question is:

My conclusion is:

My key milestones and deadlines are:

My draft structure / outline is:

My opportunities for feedback are:

Notes:

Useful links

Study Hub resources	www.ed.ac.uk/iad/studyhub
Study Hub blog	https://edin.ac/2MAQN2W
IAD UG workshops	http://edin.ac/1O5PJlh
IAD PGT workshops	https://edin.ac/2DBKrrE
The Advice Place (including the Peer Proofreading Service)	https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/adviceplace/
Careers Service	http://www.ed.ac.uk/careers
Edinburgh University Students' Association	https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk
The Library (including DiscoverEd and literature searching) - Subject specific Library guides	http://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/library-museum-gallery - https://edin.ac/2MxCzuV
Information Services (for help with University provided software and hardware)	http://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services
Student Counselling Service	http://www.ed.ac.uk/student-counselling
Student Disability Service	https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-disability-service
Other	

Useful advice from previous students:

Get help with stats software organised as soon as possible!

Write as you go along – saves time and helps you to understand your research.

Start writing sooner rather than later – gives you more time for drafts and editing.

Take time off! I always worked better on my dissertation after a break, it gives me thinking space.

Using a reference manager is a great way to save time, but it takes time to learn it.

Do not write and edit on the same day. Go back the next day at the earliest – it will be easier to review with fresh eyes.

Save your files as often as possible – always make backups!

Make sure to allow plenty of time at the end of writing your dissertation to proof-read or find a willing friend and proof-read each others.

Please note that this planner is a generic guide that you may find helpful; it does not replace subject-specific guidance on completing your dissertation or project, or the guidance from your teaching staff and supervisor.