



**DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY,  
ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

**GUIDE TO COMPLETING YOUR  
DISSERTATION  
(60 CAS CREDITS)  
OR  
LITERATURE REVIEW  
(30 CAS CREDITS)  
FOR THE  
GRADUATE DIPLOMA  
IN ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION  
(CAS-Students – 2008/9 start or later)**

**Version 18 January 2012**

These notes should be read in conjunction with the Award Handbook for the Graduate Diploma in Ecology and Conservation and with the current General Regulations pertaining to Birkbeck Awards.

Please note this is a draft version and the contents are likely to change from time to time. You should make sure that you have the most recent version available from Eva Peters at [e.peters@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:e.peters@bbk.ac.uk)

## Summary

In order to complete the requirements of the Graduate Diploma you need to complete ONE of the following options:

### EITHER

1. **A Literature Review** - (maximum 8,000 words) - *30 CATS points at level 6*

Conducting a broad and in-depth critical review of published literature and other 'secondary' sources on a relevant topic.

This will test your ability to search out, digest, interpret and assess the work of others, developing your own understanding of a subject and, hopefully, adding something new.

### OR

2. **A Dissertation** - (maximum 12,000 words) - *60 CATS points at level 6*

Comprising a literature review as above combined with a report on an independent practical investigation or case study devised, designed and conducted by you.

This requires the collection of primary data and could (for example) be an ecological investigation of a particular *site* (habitat) or *population* (species), or an investigation of a *particular problem* to do with conservation — for example, public attitudes, the policies of a conservation organization or the operation of legislation.

In each case your subject needs to be agreed well in advance with the Award Convenor. **The deadline for submission is the end of March in each academic year.**

## Timing

These alternatives are intended to provide the opportunity for you to develop and demonstrate your understanding and competence in Ecology and Conservation. In general the earlier you begin to think about and plan what you want to do, the better.

- Whether you choose a 60 credit or 30 credit option will determine how many taught courses you need to take to make up the remaining 120 credits required for the Graduate Diploma
- If you choose the Dissertation option then seasonal phenomena may determine when you need to undertake the collection of data. If you need to gather data in spring the deadlines indicated below may not work – you may need to register earlier.
- If you choose the Dissertation option then you will be allocated to an adviser and you will need to work out carefully how to best use her time (the Literature Reviews, once your topic has been agreed, are carried out independently without supervision).
- Whichever option you choose, planning is critical; it may take some time to come up with a workable proposal, and once you start work you are likely to find that everything takes a good deal longer than you thought it would!

Whichever option you choose, there are a series of key stages in your progress and it is essential you keep to the timetables for submission (see below).

## Completion of a Dissertation (60 CATS)

- Following the meeting in the spring term on **14<sup>th</sup> February 2011** you need to start thinking about your Dissertation topic.
- If you wish to complete a Dissertation (rather than a Literature Review), then you should produce a **400 word outline** to provide suitable background and context for your Project. The deadline for submission of the outline (by email to [e.peters@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:e.peters@bbk.ac.uk)) is **5 pm on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2011**. Please indicate clearly when you submit the outline that you wish to submit a Dissertation and NOT a Literature Review.
- You will be allocated a supervisor in May 2011. You should have at least one meeting with your supervisor in Term 3 to set up a suitable project. You need to prepare for this meeting by developing a clear idea of the investigation you wish to undertake and also the questions you wish your supervisor to consider.
- If you are unable to produce a suitable idea that can be taken forward as a Dissertation, you may at any stage during Term 3 switch to a Literature Review on a suitable topic.
- To be able to continue with the Project you must submit a detailed Dissertation Proposal Form on the research you propose to undertake (see below). The deadline for submission of the form (by email to [e.peters@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:e.peters@bbk.ac.uk)) is **5 pm on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2011**.
- After that you should start work on your Dissertation with a view to having made substantial progress by the start of the academic year in which you intend to finalise (2011-12). If you have not made adequate progress on the Project by the start of the academic year (**3<sup>rd</sup> October 2011**), your supervisor may suggest that you transfer onto the Literature Review.
- Submit your module choices by **Friday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2011**, ensuring you are including at least one of the pieces of work and that you have enough credit (CATS points) to finalise.
- You may have at least two more meetings with your supervisor during the academic year 2011-12. These meetings will discuss data analysis and writing up your Project. You may also provide your supervisor with a detailed contents page to look over and provide feedback.
- The deadline for submission of the Dissertation will be **30<sup>th</sup> March 2012**.

## Completion of a Literature Review (30 CATS)

- Following the meeting in the spring term on **14<sup>th</sup> February 2011** you need to start thinking about your Literature Review topic area.
- You are required to submit a **200 word Literature Review outline**. The deadline for submission of the outline (by email to [e.peters@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:e.peters@bbk.ac.uk)) is **5 pm on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2011**.
- Your outline will be checked and approved, after which you are free to start working on the Literature Review.
- A further meeting will take place on **15<sup>th</sup> June** to consider issues around how to produce a good piece of work.
- Submit your module choices by **Friday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2011**, ensuring you are including at least one of the pieces of work and that you have enough credit (CATS points) to finalise.
- You are required to submit an **updated 500 word Literature Review outline plus a bibliography of 10-15 references** (books, journal articles, edited book chapters) which you think are relevant to your Review. The deadline for submission of the outline and bibliography (by email to [e.peters@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:e.peters@bbk.ac.uk)) is **5 pm on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2011**.

- A workshop will be held in **late October/early November 2011** at which GEDS academic staff will meet with students to discuss their outlines and bibliographies.
- The date for submission of the Literature Review will be **30<sup>th</sup> March 2012**.

## Supervision

The academic heart of Dissertations and Literature Reviews is that they are independent pieces of work, completed by you alone, with limited help. You are expected to sign a declaration in the front cover that the work is your own, unaided effort. This Dissertation and Literature Review Handbook is available for you to consult, but you are expected to complete these modules **independently**.

In the case of Dissertations some ongoing help is provided to keep you on track, but we endeavour to offer equality of treatment to all students. Hence you cannot expect members of academic staff to engage in lengthy and continuous email exchanges or to be available for more meetings than the three you are entitled to have.

Your supervisor can comment and provide feedback on a draft contents page and ONE sample chapter to ensure the Dissertation has a sound structure. However, you should not expect your supervisor to comment on a draft of the whole Dissertation since it is not the responsibility of the supervisor to ensure that this is of sufficient quality that the Dissertation will pass. Producing a piece of work of the required pass standard is your responsibility.

## Switching from a Dissertation to a Literature Review

If you are working on a Dissertation, you are strongly advised to carry out a pilot study on data collection as early as possible to trouble-shoot potential problems. If your data collection or any other aspect of your Dissertation does not work out over the course of the summer, you may revert to submitting a Literature Review based on your original outline.

If you make this decision by the start of the academic year, you must ensure you enrol for and complete further 30 CATS of taught modules to bring you up to the required 120 CATS for the Graduate Diploma.

If, for some reason, you have to make this decision *during* the academic year, please be aware that even if you submit the 30-CATS Literature Review, you may not necessarily be able to find the additional 30 CATS needed to graduate via taught modules in that year.

**If at the end of the academic year you have not achieved the required CATS (i.e. 120 CATS for the entire course of your study), you will not be able to graduate that year. You will then need to study for the points needed in the next academic year, which will make you liable for further fees.**

## Safety

You are required to study the Geography code of practice on field work safety found at the following address: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/geds/current-students/health-and-safety>  
YOU MUST READ THIS, FILL IN THE DECLARATION FORM, AND SIGN IT. BEFORE YOU CARRY OUT ANY FIELD OR LAB WORK. YOU MUST RETURN THIS FORM TO THE GEDS OFFICE. You will also need to sign the IGS/ERP/Dissertation/Literature Review Proposal Form stating that

you agree to follow the codes of field and laboratory safety. Both forms should be returned to the Departmental Office.

Your safety, and that of any co-workers and respondents is paramount. One of the things that you must discuss with your supervisor is the safety implications of your proposed research.

## Plagiarism

You are required to observe the College guidelines on plagiarism, available on <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/facilities/support/plagiarism>. The electronic copy of your Dissertation or Literature Review may be used to check for plagiarism.

## Submission Procedure for the Dissertation and Literature Review

This course work (Dissertation or Literature Review) must be submitted to the Geography, Environment & Development Studies Office (MAL 159) by 6.00pm on **30<sup>th</sup> March 2012**.

You must submit:

- **TWO** hardcopies of your Dissertation or Literature Review; these should be bound, though spiral binding is sufficient. **You must include a signed declaration at the front that states that the work is your own and does not exceed the word limit (see below).**
- **ONE** electronic copy through Turnitin/Blackboard.

Your Dissertation or Literature Review will be first marked by an internal examiner, normally your supervisor. It will also be second marked by another member of staff in the College and, where there is discrepancy between marks or where candidates are on a class boundary, assessed by an examiner external to the College.

The submission procedure follows the College guidelines contained within the Common Awards Structure. This states that:-

- i) No individual academic member of staff can allow extensions.
- ii) Coursework submitted late is given two marks: a penalty mark of the Pass Mark, assuming it is of a pass standard, and the 'real' mark that would have been awarded if the work had not been late. Both marks are given to the student on a cover sheet. If the coursework is not of a pass standard a single mark is given.
- iii) Students submitting coursework late have the opportunity to provide written evidence, medical or otherwise, as to why their work was submitted late. This should be submitted to the Tutor or Programme Director, as appropriate and thence to the Mitigation Sub-Committee (see point v below). If no such documentation is received prior to the meeting of the Mitigation Sub-Committee the 'real' mark will not be considered and the penalty mark will stand.
- iv) An absolute cut off deadline for late submission and accompanying documentation shall be specified.
- v) All requests are held over and considered by a sub-group of the relevant Exam Board prior to a meeting of the full Exam Board. This sub-group should be called the Mitigation Sub-Committee and should meet termly and/or prior to the full Exam Board, as appropriate. All cases on file should be dealt with at that meeting/those meetings, and the results presented to the full Exam Board.

vi) Appropriate procedures should be put in place for students on interdisciplinary programmes. This should normally involve submission of evidence to the relevant module tutor, who should pass it on to the Mitigation Sub-Committee of the School in which the programme is based.

The absolute cut-off deadline for late submission and accompanying documentation is **30<sup>th</sup> May 2012** (6.00pm).

Your mitigating circumstances claim must be made on the College's form (available on <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/administration/certificate-exams/mitigating-circumstances>) to Eva Peters, Department of Geography, Environment & Development Studies ([e.peters@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:e.peters@bbk.ac.uk)).

## Guidance for dissertations

While there are a number of shared principles in science and social science (such as the importance of careful planning, reviewing of the appropriate literature, deploying appropriate research skills and techniques in a rigorous way, etc.), there are also some differences of approach. Social science Dissertations and Literature Reviews are unlikely to start off with a hypothesis, whereas this is the basis of scientific investigation. In social science, it is more usual for projects to examine an issue, and draw arguments and conclusions out of the analysis. There are also differences in styles of writing and report production.

The choice between a science/social science/interdisciplinary focus should be made on the basis of what interests you, and what you want to do, and also on whether you have the necessary experience, particularly in terms of research and analysis skills. Science and social science projects are equally challenging, and are marked according to the quality of the individual project alone.

## Doing a science-based dissertation

### a. General issues

A field-based and/or laboratory-based Dissertation will involve a survey or sampling programme to collect data from one or several field sites, which are then analysed statistically to explore an aspect of the biotic and/or physical environment. Field data may be supported by other data recorded from controlled experiments in the laboratory. The data are normally collected in the summer vacation and analysis and the writing of your report undertaken in the final year. You will need to arrange permission to collect data and/or samples from your chosen study site(s).

You should start your Dissertation as soon as possible, and the times that you work should be discussed with your supervisor before you start. Supervisors will provide advice about relevant literature, experimental design and, in conjunction with technical staff, guidance about appropriate laboratory and other practical work. Equally, as it is your Dissertation you should be able to contribute your own ideas and be prepared to design your own experiments. As time and money are limited you are well advised to think carefully about and discuss the details of a piece of work before you start.

We suggest that you do the background reading for your Dissertation as soon as you have chosen your topic and prepare a detailed experimental design of the work that you are planning to do for discussion with your supervisor. You should also consider at the very beginning whether you will need help from other people in the department, whether the facilities are available and the likely costs.

## **b. Writing the report**

Much emphasis is given to the production of a report in a proper scientific format because this is the main tangible evidence available for assessment. The format should follow that of a serious scientific paper published in a journal like *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms*, *Journal of Ecology*, *Journal of Experimental Biology* or *The Journal of Experimental Botany*, and should contain the following sections.

### *i. Abstract or summary*

The abstract or summary should contain an outline summary of the work carried out and any significant results achieved.

### *ii. Introduction*

The introduction should contain a brief review of the literature showing a thorough understanding of the background to the problem and why you consider it important. It should contain a statement of the objective and aims of the work. It should conclude with clearly stated hypotheses that are testable and which will be tested using the data collected.

### *iii. Methodology*

The materials and methods section should describe in detail the experimental or survey procedures used to collect novel data, or methods used to collect and evaluate published data, indicating an awareness of any likely limitations, pitfalls or problems of the data. Established methods should be referenced. Great importance is attached to the establishment of proper experimental controls and/or the validation of published data. In general sufficient detail should be given so that the reader understands what was done, and could repeat the same experiments/survey if required.

### *iv. Results*

The text in this section should outline all of the results, drawing attention to numbered tables and graphs. In this way the reader can interpret and understand the results of the study. Although you should highlight important or interesting results any discussion or detailed conclusions should be left until the next section. The results themselves should be presented in tables or graphs wherever possible, and with the appropriate statistics. Photographs and drawings may be used where appropriate. Data must be presented in ways that make clear the significance of any results.

### *v. Discussion*

The discussion should examine in detail the significance of the results, placing them in the context of other work. An evaluation of the likelihood that the hypotheses are true, supported by the data and analysis, should be included. A realistic evaluation of the failings and shortcomings of the Project will be expected and credited. In this section consideration of the greater academic significance of the results should be demonstrated. An outline of appropriate follow-up experiments and future research should be included.

## **c. Checklist to use when carrying out your Dissertation**

### *i. The scientific hypothesis and project design*

- Is the project a novel and/or interesting one?
- Does the project include testable hypotheses?

- Are the aims of the project stated clearly?
- Has the project/data collection been designed to collect enough data, in a way which will produce useful/significant results?

ii. Data collection and scientific skills

- What was the level of skill required to collect data?
- What difficulties have been encountered / overcome in data collection?
- Was the design of the experiment/data collection modified in the light of preliminary results?
- Was enough data collected?

iii. The Report

*Abstract*

- Is the abstract between 200-300 words?
- Does the abstract describe the nature of the work and the results obtained?

*Introduction*

- Does the introduction contain a clear statement of the aims of the project?
- Does the introduction place the project work in its scientific context with a thorough, but concise, review of the relevant literature?

*Methodology*

- Does this section describe in detail the procedures followed? Could you carry out this project following the methods reported here?
- Does this section explain clearly the nature and magnitude of errors associated with the experimental measurements or data survey?
- Does the experimental or survey design contain appropriate controls and/or validation of data?

*Results*

- Does this section contain results in a tabular or graphical form?
- Does the results text draw attention to the salient features of the figures or tables, rather than simply repeat what is already in these?
- Are the tables enumerated, each with a correct description of the contents and a reference to the primary source where relevant? Are the columns and rows correctly labelled together with units of measurement? Is it indicated that the table contains means, standard errors, percentages, frequencies etc.?
- Are the figures enumerated and appropriate for the type of data; e.g. bar histograms for frequencies, line graphs for dependent/independent variables etc.? Does each have a legend containing an accurate description of the contents of the figure and its source where relevant?
- Do line graphs have all axes labelled correctly (including units)? Is the scale of the axes appropriate for the data? Do the points have error bars when required? Is it explained how lines are fitted to the data; e.g. by eye, regression etc.?
- Are statistical tests used when necessary? Are the correct tests used? Are the summary statistics appropriate for the type of data?
- Are photographs and diagrams clearly labelled with a key to abbreviations in the legend and an accurate description of what they are? Is there a scale indicated?
- Is the results section structured to make clear the significance of the results and to provide a basis for subsequent discussion?

*Discussion*

- Is it clear that the significance of the results is appreciated?
- Are the project results discussed in relation to other published work in the field?
- Are the hypotheses discussed in detail?
- Are the results obtained discussed in the wider environmental context?

- Are the limitations of the approach used in this project adequately discussed?
- Are any working hypotheses for further testing proposed?

#### References

- Are the references in the text referred to in the correct manner; i.e. (Marks, 1990, 1992a, 1992b; Marks and Spencer 1992; Marks *et al.* 1991)?
- Are the references listed in alphabetical and chronological order?

## Doing a social science based dissertation

### a. General issues

A social science-based Dissertation will explore some aspect of human-environment relations. It can either be based on primary research (for example, interviews, questionnaires, observations); or it can be based on your own statistical analysis and discussion of large data sets which you can access from elsewhere (such as government departments or NGOs). In this case, the data sets must be sufficiently large for you to carry out rigorous and meaningful, as well as original, analysis.

The sorts of considerations to bear in mind when thinking about what to do are:

- Does the subject interest you?
- Is the proposed study feasible, in terms of scale and resources? The temptation is often to be too ambitious, but it is better to do a smaller project well than a larger project sloppily.
- Which theoretical debates does your proposed study intersect with and draw upon?
- What methodological and statistical/analytical techniques are best for the proposed study, and are you familiar with them?

Once you have identified an issue that you wish to explore, and you have discussed it with your supervisor, you will need to think about the following:

- Reading as extensively as possible on relevant theoretical debates in the academic literature.
- Collecting as much background material as possible on the subject (for example, unpublished booklets, newspaper reports etc).
- Sampling and research design. Depending on the nature of your project, you will need to think about how you are going to go about collecting your data.

Most social science studies identify 2/3 research questions, rather than hypotheses as such. If the title of was: "The perceptions of UK school children on the causes and consequences of global warming", the research questions might be:

- What do UK school children (aged 11-16) know about the scientific and political debates over global warming?
- What do they identify as the main causes?
- What do they identify as the main consequences?
- To what extent do they believe that global warming will affect their own future?

This sets out a series of clearly identified issues that they will explore and analyse. Obviously, after a review of the wider literature on perceptions of global warming, the next step would be to think about sampling (which school children and where?) and methods (interviews, focus groups, questionnaires?). So, you don't have to 'prove' or 'disprove' anything, but you

do have to think and research and write carefully to produce a rigorous and credible piece of research, which locates your analysis and arguments within wider theoretical debates.

#### **b. Fieldwork issues - safety**

Your foremost consideration must be **safety** (see above). Think about bringing someone with you if, for example, you are doing house to house interviewing. If you go overseas, you must take out insurance, and plan ahead in terms of inoculations against specific health risks and so on. You should also take Foreign Office advice on travelling to different parts of the world. One of the aspects of your project that you discuss with your supervisor must be the safety issues that you will confront.

#### **c. Fieldwork issues - ethics**

Another priority must be the **ethics** of your dissertation. Hence, for example your research should not upset, harm or offend your respondents, and you should also maintain the confidentiality of anyone who speaks to you. You can find further guidance on research ethics on the:

- School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy webpage – <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/sshp/our-research/sshp-ethics-committee-and-procedures-1/ethical-conduct>
- MyBirkbeck webpage – <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/facilities/support/research-ethics>
- Many of the books suggested in the bibliography (below) offer discussions and suggested codes of ethical research practice.

All research that is carried out by Birkbeck students and staff that involves intervention or interaction with human participants requires ethical approval. It is part of the GEDS requirement that ALL students who are conducting research which involves human participants MUST complete the two-page ethics form (below) and submit this to their supervisor for approval BEFORE any data collection takes place. If you have any queries in relation to ethics, please discuss these with your supervisor.

#### **d. Writing the report**

There is rather more flexibility in the format and order of a social science report compared to a science report. For example you may write in the first person ('I' 'me'), especially in the methodology section, which describes how you went about your research.

A 'standard' order would typically be the following:

- Title page
- Plagiarism declaration
- Abstract (200-300 words) succinctly describing what you studied)
- Acknowledgements ('thanks to my friends, my partner, my cat ...' etc)
- Contents page (with page numbers), list of figures, maps, diagrams, photos etc
- Introduction and research questions
- An overview and discussion of the relevant theoretical debates
- Background to the study (not always necessary, but it may be that you need to describe the NGO you are studying, or the place you were working in)
- Methodology - what methods you used and why; some of the strengths and weaknesses, etc.
- Analysis of the data collected
- Conclusions
- Bibliography

Some tips:

- Keep a record of all your bibliographic sources, and start putting your bibliography together from day one. It is very frustrating when, 8 months after you started, you have to scrap a quote because you can't find the source or page number.
- Make sure you have a good bibliographic range of material, with sufficient academic sources.
- Leave yourself more time than you would expect to finish off the report well - designing it, checking for spelling mistakes, and getting the pagination right on the contents page. It is surprising how long this can all take, but you do earn marks for presentation.
- Take photos of your work (e.g. you in a classroom of school kids asking about global warming). A few photos liven up a report, and in some cases can be a very important resource (for example, if you were looking at garden design and ideas of nature).
- Do stay in regular contact with your supervisor.

## Doing a literature review

### a. General issues

You can do a science, social science or interdisciplinary Literature Review. A Literature Review is an 8000 word extended essay, which examines a particular area of interest *critically, originally* and *in depth*. Given that you are drawing on secondary sources, it must be a subject that has attracted academic debate (e.g. you could not do an extensive Literature Review on the environmental consequences of the decline of the spotty aardvark if only one paper had been written on it). On the other hand, some subjects may be too big for an 8000 word essay to make much headway (e.g. the science of global warming). In this case, you would be advised to choose an aspect of the larger issue, and pursue that in more depth.

### b. Reading

You will need to read as widely as possible around your chosen subject. As well as academic material (books, journal articles and edited book chapters), you may also be able to get some useful material, for example government reports, for discussion from the web and other sources. However, the *balance* should favour academic sources, and also bear in mind that journal articles are generally more up to date than books. You should aim to review the relevant arguments, drawing out particular positions and themes, and discussing their strengths and weaknesses.

### c. Writing the Literature Review

The final Literature Review should be divided into sections and will typically include the following:

- Title page
- Plagiarism declaration
- Introduction
- A number of substantive sections where you discuss the topic in detail (typically this would be 3-4 sections, but the exact number would depend on the subject that you were examining)
- Conclusion
- Bibliography

The introduction should clearly outline the issue(s) that you are proposing to examine (and perhaps those you are not, so that the reader is clear on the focus of the report). Just as with the Research Project, the temptation is very often to pick up a subject that is too large and unwieldy, and which would not allow you to develop a deeper analysis. It is better to narrow down a subject and do it well.

The final Literature Review must not exceed 8000 words in length (not including the bibliography).

## General information

### Title and second page

#### Example of a front page statement:

**Biotic and physical factors determining plant distribution on an abandoned industrial site in Tower Hamlets.**

**John Smith**

**BSc Environmental Science**

**Birkbeck College**

*Example of a plagiarism and word limit declarations (to go on the second page):*

I declare that the work presented in this report is my own and that the work of others - published or unpublished - has been acknowledged.

Signature:

Date:

I declare that the whole report (including the appendices, excluding the bibliography) does not exceed xxxx words.

Signature:

Date:

## Some useful reference books

- Best, S. and Krueger B. (2004) *Internet Data Collection*. London: SAGE.
- Bonnett, A. (2001) *How to Argue: a students' guide*. Harlow: Pearson.
- Bryman, A. (2001) *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crene, P. and Lea, M. (2008) *Writing at University: a guide for students*. Maidenhead: McGraw Hill/Open University Press.
- Fairbairn, G.J. and Winch, C. (1996) *Reading, Writing and Reasoning: a guide for students*. 2nd edition. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Flowerdew, R. and Martin, D. (eds.) (2005) *Methods in Human Geography: a guide for students doing research projects*. Harlow: Pearson/Prentice Hall.
- Gray D. (2009) *Doing Research in the Real World*. London: SAGE.
- Hay, I. (1996) *Communicating in Geography and the Environmental Sciences*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Hoggart, K., Lees, L. and Davies, A. (2002) *Researching Human Geography*. London: Arnold.
- Kitchin, R. and Tate, N. (1999) *Conducting Research in Human Geography: theory, methodology and practice*. Harlow: Prentice Hall.
- Lindsay, D. (1995) *A Guide to Scientific Writing: manual for students and research workers*. Melbourne: Longman.
- O'Leary Z. (2004) *The Essential Guide to Doing Research*. London: SAGE.
- Porush, D. (1995) *A Short Guide to Writing About Science*. London: Longman.
- Silverman, D. (2001) *Interpreting Qualitative Data: methods for analyzing talk, text and interaction*. London: SAGE.
- Silyn-Roberts, H. (1996) *Writing for Science: a practical handbook for science, engineering and technology students*. Auckland: Longman.



**Department of Geography, Environment and Development Studies**

**Dissertation Proposal Form**

**You must answer all questions. Expand sections for answers as necessary.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Course: \_\_\_\_\_

Working title: \_\_\_\_\_

Module(s) to which the Dissertation most closely relates:

\_\_\_\_\_

Amended abstract (500 words):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Research question/hypotheses:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Proposed methodologies (approx. 300 words):

- IF SCIENCE BASED – this should include whether field or lab-based, location, source and nature of data, equipment, variables to measure.
- IF SOCIAL SCIENCE BASED – this should include type of method/s (e.g. face-to-face survey, postal questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, etc.) and potential number of respondents.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Graduate Diploma in Ecology and Conservation - Dissertation

Academic sources: (name 10-12 books, journal articles, edited book chapters) that you will be drawing on):

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Name of allocated supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

I have read, understood and agree to observe the codes of fieldwork and laboratory safety.

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

**The deadline for submission of this form (by email to [e.peters@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:e.peters@bbk.ac.uk)) is 5 pm on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2011.**



**Department of Geography, Environment and Development Studies**

**Ethical Approval Form for Dissertation**

**You must answer all questions. Expand sections for answers as necessary.**

1. Name of student: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Degree programme: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Student email: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Student telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Name of supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Title of Dissertation: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Proposed research method/s (e.g. face-to-face survey, postal questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Where will the research be conducted?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Age of participants to be included in the research? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Do the participants form part of a 'vulnerable population', e.g. schoolchildren, people with learning or communication difficulties, patients in hospital or people under the care of social services, people in custody or on probation, and people engaged in illegal activities such as drug abuse. **YES/ NO**

IF YES give details:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. How will participants be selected?

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12. Proposed starting date for collecting research data: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE of student:

Date:

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**The supervisor must read the above and in addition discuss any ethical issues with the student. When the supervisor has done this, s/he must answer the following questions and sign below.**

I have read the application and discussed its ethical implications with the student and confirm that in my view all ethical issues have been addressed: **YES/ NO**

I consider the application routine: **YES/ NO**

I consider the application non-routine and believe it needs to be assessed by the SSHP Ethics Committee: **YES/ NO**

SIGNATURE of supervisor:

Date:

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**N.B.**

1. Student and supervisor should both keep a copy of this form.
2. Student should allow sufficient time for this process.
3. Student should not begin collecting data from participants until ethics approval has been received from either your supervisor (if deemed routine) or the SSHP Ethics Committee (if deemed non-routine).

## Criteria for Assessing Dissertations

DEGREE CLASS EQUIVALENT	COURSEWORK GRADE	PERCENTAGE RANGE	INDICATIVE MARKING CRITERIA
<b>High First/ Distinction</b>	A**	90-100	As good a dissertation as can reasonably be achieved. An outstanding original piece of work, comprehensive, logical with first rate presentation and written in unambiguous, readable English. Communication of ideas showing a sophistication not normally found at undergraduate level. There should be synthesis, with a critical weighing of evidence, and quotation of authorities in recent literature which is comprehensively engaged with. The research may show methodological innovation and/or develop new ideas which are thought-provoking or which challenge received views. The candidate's own conclusions and exceptional level of reflection are evident.
<b>Clear First/ Distinction</b>	A*	80-89	Full achievement of an original, worthwhile aim and completion of stated objectives. Good, philosophical review of shortcomings. Clear, critical and intelligent appreciation of the subject, context, study methods and findings. Both introductory material and the critical discussion showing a logical sequence of ideas. Written in unambiguous, readable English. Analysis of numerical material will be complete, accurate and appropriate. Totally focused on the subject matter and showing evidence of understanding and reading beyond that provided by the lecturer. Skill in synthesis should be obvious.
<b>First/ Distinction</b>	A	70-79	Addresses a clearly defined and demonstrably significant research problem. Design shows awareness and understanding of the research literature and succeeds in addressing a particular gap in that literature, and a professional research approach. Combines competence with originality in data collection (where appropriate), analysis and interpretation. Achievement of worthwhile objectives and good, philosophical review of shortcomings. Very well written and structured, with a critical approach, attention to detail and a very good appreciation of the literature, method and findings.
<b>Upper Second/ Merit</b>	B	60-69	Clear programme of study and worthwhile objectives but not sufficiently innovative or painstaking to result in original findings. Design is inspired by the relevant research questions and addresses a clearly defined research question. Design and execution shows clear thinking, together with an ability to write well and sustain

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			<p>an argument. Draws effectively on the literature. Conclusions merited by the findings and good awareness of the context of the study. A highly satisfactory piece of work, but weaknesses may include: minor flaws in research design; methodology is relevant, but may be chosen somewhat uncritically; material collected, analysed and interpreted well, but with more limited sophistication.</p>
<b>Lower Second/ Pass</b>	C	50-59	<p>Good effort and sound outcome, but pedestrian or lacking in imagination and critical insight. Failure to achieve objectives fully. Programme of work not particularly ambitious or innovative. May be lacking in content, focus, organisation, breadth of reference or depth of discussion. Reasonable interpretation of the findings and the literature but may not be grounded in a wide-ranging literature review. Satisfactory, but not stylish or perceptive. Weaknesses may include: incomplete or inappropriate research design; methodology shows signs of weakness; methodology is not evaluated critically; material is analysed and interpreted in an inappropriate manner.</p>
<b>Third/ Pass</b>	D	40-49	<p>Shows some knowledge of key literature and/or techniques and contains some original material. However, this knowledge may be used ineffectively, inaccurately or in an unreflective way. Original material is only partially described rather than fully explained and discussion does not elaborate sufficiently on key themes and/or central research questions. Somewhat deficient in effort, or arguments / discussion poorly resourced. Undue faith in the literature. Few signs of analytical technique or depth, little attention to detail and some errors of interpretation. No clear programme of work and insufficiently clear objectives. Will have only a limited attempt to identify research questions and/or an appropriate context, and these may have been incomplete, under-developed, with an excessively narrow focus, inappropriate or confused. Shows only limited evidence of any attempt to use an appropriate methodology, and without sufficient thought having been given to methodological issues, and the research will have employed an inappropriate or inadequate approach. There is an attempt at a literature review but it contains too many omissions or inaccuracies. Conclusions / findings are presented but include unsubstantiated assertions. Will have one or two of the following shortcomings: (i) structure such that the argument is not clear; (ii) poor interpretation of evidence; (iii) lack of or largely unsupported conclusions; or (iv) largely unsupported arguments.</p>

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<b>Fail</b>	F	30-39	Low input of effort and superficial write-up, conveying little of the context or value of the research. Includes some review of literature, and may make reference to research findings, but is deficient in knowledge / understanding of literature and fails to incorporate relevant findings. Serious errors of interpretation and lack of critical thought. Will have made virtually no attempt to identify research questions and/or an appropriate context. Shows virtually no evidence of any attempt to use an appropriate methodology and the research results will be seriously flawed, inadequate or only partially relevant to the question raised. Will have three or more of the following shortcomings: (i) structure such that the argument is not clear; (ii) poor interpretation of scant evidence; (iii) lack of or wholly unsupported conclusions; or (iv) completely unsupported arguments.
	F	20-29	Insufficient effort to complete a reasonable piece of work. Attempts to identify a clear research problem or answer a research question, but is too brief, superficial or poorly executed. No evidence of sustained thought or application. Shows little understanding of what is required, being marred by inaccuracies and omissions.
	F	10-19	Little or nothing of any relevance and little or no original research. Completely inadequate knowledge and understanding; may contain a few partially relevant facts.
	F	0-9	As above, but highly foreshortened and with clear absence of effort. Often trivial and anecdotal. No recognition of the demands of the task.
	F	0	Copied or plagiarised answer with no intellectual input from the student OR work penalised for late submission, having been submitted without mitigating circumstances.

## Criteria for Assessing Literature Reviews

DEGREE CLASS EQUIVALENT	COURSEWORK GRADE	PERCENTAGE RANGE	INDICATIVE MARKNG CRITERIA
<b>High First/ Distinction</b>	A**	90-100	As good a literature review as can reasonably be achieved. An outstanding piece of work, comprehensive, logical with first rate presentation and written in unambiguous, readable English. Reviews a very wide range of literature and is fully and comprehensively referenced throughout. Communication of ideas showing a sophistication not normally found at undergraduate level. There should be synthesis, with a critical weighing of evidence, and the candidate's own conclusions should be evident.
<b>Clear First/ Distinction</b>	A*	80-89	Evidence of extensive research imaginatively and convincingly deployed. The argument may be complex, a range of relevant information is provided, and shows good understanding of the issues involved. The approach may suggest new and interesting ways of dealing with the material. Reviews a wide range of references and is fully and correctly referenced throughout.
<b>First/ Distinction</b>	A	70-79	Good coverage of relevant material. Evidence of critical evaluation demonstrated by selection and presentation of material. Abundant evidence of background research and citations of references from relevant research, with complete and accurate referencing.
<b>Upper Second/ Merit</b>	B	60-69	Evidence of a good and broad-based engagement with, and understanding of, the relevant material. Organised in a clearly-argued, well-illustrated and relevant fashion. Solid but on occasion unimaginative. Ambition of work is clearly visible but not always carried through. Analysis and argument are generally good. There are no major deficiencies in the overall structure but some weaknesses of analysis and argument are present. Complete and accurate referencing.
<b>Lower Second/ Pass</b>	C	50-59	There may be deficiencies in the overall structure, relevant weaknesses of analysis and argument, and obvious gaps in the bibliography. Lacks organisation or breadth of reference, often displays lack of clarity in writing and/or poor argumentative skills.
<b>Third/ Pass</b>	D	40-49	Work that, while showing some knowledge of the material, is yet seriously deficient in understanding and breadth of reference, with little or no critical comment. May be unduly brief, or fail to formulate and/or answer the research question(s). Sloppy and badly organized argument and presentation, clear evidence of haste and carelessness.

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<b>Fail</b>	F	30-39	May show some knowledge of the material, and serious effort, but reveals deficiencies in understanding, organisation or breadth of reference. May be derivative, irrelevant, or extremely superficial. Shows minimal understanding of material or serious deficiencies in argument.
	F	20-29	Irrelevant, ignorant or extremely superficial work. Minimal understanding of material. Key issues not identified, use of inappropriate material and/or disorganised. No convincing evidence of an understanding of the literature, with a very limited selection of relevant sources and no critical comment.
	F	10-19	Little or nothing of any relevance. Unsystematic, incomplete or inaccurate. No attempt at critical comment, serious gaps and omissions in literature.
	F	0-9	As above, but highly foreshortened and with clear absence of effort.
	F	0	Copied or plagiarised answer with no intellectual input from the student OR work penalised for late submission, having been submitted without mitigating circumstances.