Assignment Overview

The assignment is a piece of work in which you demonstrate your ability to investigate a topical issue or problem which is directly associated with your programme of study. Within the assignment you collect, analyse and evaluate relevant information, draw supportable conclusions based on your findings and make appropriate recommendations.

A workplace or organisation-based

If you have sufficient relevant access to an organisation, this is possibly an ideal basis for your dissertation as it can be a readily available and valuable source of primary, live evidence. If you are not confident that you can negotiate such relevant access to an organisation, then you may not wish to seek this option.

Rather than focussing on an organisation/workplace, you may still wish to undertake a review which generates significant and valuable primary research. If you can identify access to the relevant area of your research and data sources, this could be a good option for you.

In some subjects you will find a great deal of information on your topic area is already collected and published. This becomes secondary research for you – i.e. it can be relevant for your own needs but was initially published by others for other purposes. The research dissertation types already identified above need to have secondary research in addition to primary research (i.e. research evidence that you yourself will generate).

However, it is also possible to have a dissertation that wholly comprises secondary research and you will have access to a range of databases and literature via the University library that you might be able to use for this research.

Choosing a topic

5.1 Topic area expectations

The Dissertation is a 40 credit module and therefore heavily influences your final degree classification.

Those tasked with marking your dissertation will take note of the extent to which your topic area is aligned to your degree programme. In other words, the focus of the dissertation must reflect the subject field of your programme of study, or of an area of study within that subject field

5.2 How do I develop the topic I have chosen?

To help define the boundaries of the dissertation you should ask yourself the following questions:

Why choose a particular topic?

In other words, ensure the topic is of relevance to you, your programme of study and/or anticipated future career as this will enthuse you to undertake and complete the work.

What is your dissertation aim and how will you achieve it?

Identifying the dissertation aim is vital as this will lead to determining your dissertation objectives which shape the content of the overall dissertation. The aim must be coherent and reasonable if you are to complete a good dissertation.

What are the dissertation objectives?

These are the practical steps you will undertake in the dissertation in order to achieve the dissertation aim. The objectives need to be achievable and collectively fulfil the dissertation aim.

Who will you need to involve?

The dissertation is undertaken and completed by you alone, but there may be other people who can assist you, for example by providing access to an organisation and thereby the means of gaining primary research. Don’t forget your supervisor is a source of support and advice.

What are your timescales?

The academic timeframe is the limiting factor - you must submit your completed dissertation by TBC and this deadline helps you to determine the nature and scope of your dissertation as the work must be achievable within the timeframe.

Will there be any cost involved?

It is unlikely that there will be any material personal financial cost to you in preparing the dissertation, but you should also consider if your work has a time or cost implication for others that you seek support from as this could impact on their willingness to assist you

What boundaries or limitations are there?

In deciding upon a topic area, aims and objectives, you need to consider factors such as availability and potential problems of access to data, the limited time frame in which you are operating, ethical implications and any other relevant factors.

When you have considered the questions above, you will gain a clearer picture of what you are seeking to achieve and that should help you to focus upon your topic, aims and objectives more clearly.

It is important to set a very clear aim and objectives at the outset. It cannot be emphasised too strongly that care taken in the early stages of the assignment, particularly when choosing a topic and setting an aim with supporting objectives, will play a large part in the ultimate direction and success of the dissertation as a whole.

The assignments aim should express what you seek to achieve and will be closely related to the dissertation title. The objectives should describe how you will fulfil the dissertation aim – they will be very precise and be expressed in ‘one line’ statements beginning with the word “to”. An example aim with supporting objectives could be:

‘An examination of the use of monitoring data in implementing a Total Quality Management policy within a Teesside manufacturing business’.

The objectives that fit and support this aim are:

To identify the nature of data which needs to be collected

To describe which data is currently collected

To identify current systems of analysis

To identify barriers to interpretation and use of the data

To make recommendations on changes to current practice

Note, the aim is stated succinctly and four to six supporting objectives is reasonably achievable within the available word count in most cases.

Assignments can change in focus for a number of reasons - you must discuss this with your supervisor and not seek to make major changes to your topic without consultation.