



# Finishing your dissertation: video tutorial

<http://www.screencast.com/t/OUG2WySh>

## Transcript

**Introduction:** Welcome to this tutorial on finishing off your dissertation, from the University of Reading's Study Advice team. This tutorial is designed for you to go through at your own pace, and you can pause it at any time.

**Nearly there:** You've done all the reading, all the research and all the writing for your dissertation. You can see the finish line. But it's worth making sure you have enough time to polish up your dissertation so that you get the mark you deserve for all that hard work. A little time spent on proofreading, editing and checking that your referencing and layout is right can be the difference between classifications at this important stage of your academic career.

**Get editing:** The first thing to do, once you have a full draft, is to edit your work. Put yourself in your marker's shoes and read through your work from the beginning in one go, like they will. Look out for anything that will annoy them when they read it - repetition and contradictions, waffling and irrelevant discussion. You will need to put your ruthless hat on for this job. You may have sweated blood and tears over a paragraph but if you find it isn't necessary or doesn't fit the rest of your discussion, now's the time to let it retire gracefully.

**Proof-read carefully:** Proof-reading is something often left to the last minute, or not done at all if you're short of time. But it can make a real difference to your marks. It shows that you care about your work and can be careful and meticulous. Try reading aloud - you are more likely to pay attention to each word and notice mistakes. Remember to put in the punctuation - if you have to draw a breath in the middle of a sentence, it's probably too long.

**Cite it right:** Of course you know that you need to check that your references are present and correct. But do you know how much time this is likely to take?

Probably more than you think. You will have been collecting references for quite some time, and it's easy to think you'll add in the details later when you're writing and you're on a roll. As well as checking that everything that needs a citation has one, you need to also make sure you're using the right referencing style for your department and that the way you use italics, commas, full stops and brackets to separate information is consistent. This might seem petty, but it does show that you can work with academic rigour.

**Lines, margins, figures and fonts:** The next thing to do is to check your layout. Look at your department's guidelines for this – they may be in your dissertation handbook or in your course handbook. Do you need to double space your work? Is there a specified width for the margins? Are there any directions about where figures and illustrations should go - within your text, or at the end? Is your text in a professional-looking font at a reasonable size for your reader?

**Front and end matters:** Once you are happy with your text, it's time to turn your attention to the front and end matters. Front matters will include a cover page, table of contents and maybe an abstract, list of figures or list of abbreviations. End matters include your bibliography and any appendices. You may have some instructions about how to do these. Alternatively, see if you can look at some past dissertations to see how they set their work out. You must leave these tasks until your text is finished or you'll find that the page numbers keep changing.

**Binding:** For an undergraduate or taught postgraduate dissertation, you will not be expected to hard bind your work. Comb, soft, spiral or wire binding with a card or clear acetate cover is usually sufficient. This can be done quickly and cheaply at any print shop including Mailboxes in the Student Union. Remember to leave extra time to get this done at busy times.

**Check list:** So, here are the tasks you need to check off your list before you hand in your precious dissertation:

- Have you edited to remove waffle, repetition and contradictions and make sure the narrative flows?
- Have you proof-read carefully – aloud is best?
- Have you checked your citations to make sure they are all present, correct, consistent and in the correct style?
- Have you got all your front and end matters in place and listed?
- Have you checked your department's requirements for layout and binding?

Do all these things, and your diamond in the rough could turn out to be a real gem.