



# Structuring your dissertation: video tutorial

<http://www.screencast.com/t/r0FBuz1hT0>

## Transcript

**Introduction:** Welcome to this tutorial on structuring 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 or rewind it at any time.

**Getting it under control:** So, you started off with a little seedling of an idea and wondered how you were going to make a whole dissertation out of it. Then you started your research, and in no time at all that little idea had grown a dozen branches, all covered with leaves and each one growing its own offshoots. Now's the time to get it under control again before it overwhelms you. Imposing a structure on your dissertation will help you to see the shape of your overall argument, and the gaps that you need to fill.

**What kind of structure? :** Your structure will depend on the kind of dissertation you are writing. This might be a report-style dissertation, or an essay-style dissertation.

- A report-style dissertation is typically informative and reports on research that you have carried out. This might include some primary research or it might be solely secondary research. The structure for this is determined by formal headings and you may be given a template by your department.

- An essay-style dissertation is a discussion of a topic or question, supported by evidence from your research. It usually involves mostly secondary research. The structure for this is more variable, consisting of an introduction and conclusion with the main body in-between organised by whatever headings you choose.

**Report style:** A report-style dissertation uses formal headings to organise its information. These may be given to you by your department, or you may need to make decisions about what to include. Typically these are the main headings and order used, although you may find they are called something different: for instance your findings may be called data or results. Some departments prefer you to include your literature review as part of your introduction, so do read any instructions you have carefully.

### **Things to think about**

- Firstly, think about what job each section is doing as this will help you to see how to write it. For instance, the introduction is explanatory, the methods section is descriptive and the discussion section is critical and analytical.
- You would not usually start at the beginning when writing a report. You may be asked to write your literature review first to help guide the research you do for instance. It's a good idea to write methods and findings as soon as you have them, as they are descriptive sections and can be done quite quickly.
- Your sections do not need equal amounts of word count. Typically your longest sections are your discussion, literature review and introduction. Your conclusion will be quite brief, while your methods and findings will be somewhere in-between.

**Essay style:** An essay-style structure is not as formal as a report-style structure. The dissertation is framed by an introduction and a conclusion, which have the same jobs to do as they do in a report-style structure. But what principles you use to organise your main body are up to you. Organising by themes is likely to make the most sophisticated analysis, so brainstorm the points you have to discuss and see if you can find a way to group them together – by character trait, type of event or gender, for instance. It's best to have no more than 3 or 4 chapters for your main body, or you risk not going into enough detail.

### **Things to think about:**

- Don't get hung up on finding the perfect structure first time. It isn't set in stone – if you find a better way or change your question, you can always change it later.
- Be careful to avoid including too much narrative or description – it might be tempting to organise your structure chronologically, or by primary text, for instance, but this will tend to make for descriptive writing.
- BUT remember that you are telling the story of your research journey, so it does need to flow with each chapter building on the chapters before.

**In summary:** Start to think about your structure before your research is finished to help you focus and control your work; find out whether you are writing a report or essay style dissertation; think about the job each section is doing and write accordingly; and remember that a dissertation is the story of your research journey – think about how it will tell that story.

If you do all of these things, your dissertation will be – blooming marvellous.