RESEARCH METHODS

Lecture Title:
Writing a Clear Research Report or Proposal

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21 ACADEMY

Masters in
Human Resources Management

What We Will Focus On Today

- How to communicate your research clearly and convincingly
- What academic readers expect from a strong research report
- How to write efficiently when deadlines are close
- How to produce effective:
  - **Conclusions**
  - **Recommendations**
  - **Personal reflections**
- How these final sections can strengthen your work and improve your marks

⭐ Common Academic Writing Difficulties

- Many students struggle to understand what tutors mean by **description**, **analysis**, **evaluation** and **critical thinking**
- Workplace writing habits (short, direct, bullet-point style) often clash with academic expectations
- Students may find it hard to express ideas clearly in longer paragraphs
- Time pressure can make it difficult to think deeply and write reflectively
- Feedback such as “too descriptive” or “lacks depth” can feel confusing or discouraging

Why These Difficulties Occur

- Academic writing requires a different mindset from everyday or workplace writing
- Students often summarise sources one by one instead of comparing ideas
- Bullet points limit explanation and do not show understanding
- Many students are unsure how to build a clear argument supported by evidence
- It can be challenging to consider different viewpoints or perspectives

How Students Can Improve

- Step back and look at the bigger picture, not just individual sources
- Compare themes, ideas and perspectives across the literature
- Replace bullet points with short, clear paragraphs that explain meaning
- Think about how different groups might view the issue
- Build a line of argument that is logical and supported by evidence

Verbs That Support Analytical Writing

These verbs help students move beyond description:

- argue
- compare
- contrast
- evaluate
- interpret
- challenge
- question
- justify
- refute
- assess
- synthesise
- explain why

Why Writing Matters in Research

- Academic writing can feel dry or overwhelming for many students
- Long texts and frequent references may seem distracting
- Writing proposals or dissertations can feel daunting at first
- Some students feel unsure how to express ideas clearly
- Others find writing rewarding once they gain momentum and develop their academic voice (Sword, 2012)

Writing Helps You Think

- Writing and reflection work together (Hibbert, 2021)
- Each draft helps you **clarify your thinking**
- Re-drafting makes your ideas clearer for you and your readers
- Writing throughout the project helps you learn and stay focused
- The more you write, the more helpful feedback you can receive from your supervisor

When to Write

- Write **early** and **write often**
- Use writing to explore ideas, not only to record them
- Write at every stage of your project, not just at the end
- If you are starting late, remember many students have been in the same position and still succeeded

Who Will Read Your Research?

- Your **main audience** is academics from the study centre
- Supervisors and assessors will judge whether your work meets the course criteria
- Other readers may include organisations, clients or research participants
- Each group reads your work for different reasons

What Tutors Look For

- They read your work because they must **mark it**
- They expect clear knowledge and understanding of the topic
- They look for a **consistent and suitable methodology**
- They want to see **analysis**, **critical evaluation** and **synthesis**
- They are interested in what your findings mean for HR more broadly

⭐ Follow the 21 Academy Guidelines

- These guidelines are **“authoritative and binding on all students”**
- They explain how to prepare, write and submit your dissertation
- You must follow the rules on structure, formatting, referencing and deadlines
- The dissertation is based **only on secondary data** unless special approval is given

“Students are expressly prohibited from collecting primary data… unless exceptional written approval has been granted.”

Word Count Requirements of the Dissertation

- Required length: **12,000 words**
- A tolerance of **±10%** is allowed
- Word count excludes:
  - Front matter
  - Acknowledgements
  - References
  - Appendices
- Going far over or under the limit may be penalised

“Excessive deviation from the required word count will be penalised.”

Referencing Requirements

- The Academy uses **Harvard referencing**
- In-text citations must be consistent
- Full reference list required
- Footnotes only for clarification, not for referencing
- Bibliography is optional

“The Academy’s default referencing style is Harvard.”

Academic Writing Style

- Write in **formal academic English**
- Use clear, precise language
- Arguments must be logical and supported by evidence
- Use **British English** throughout
- Define acronyms on first use

“Students shall write in formal academic English… Argumentation must be logical.”

Formatting Rules

- **Font:** Times New Roman, 12-point
- **Line spacing:** 1.5
- **Margins:** 2.5 cm on all sides
- **Text:** Justified
- **Pagination:**
  - Roman numerals for front matter
  - Arabic numbers starting at 1 for main text

- *“Use Times New Roman 12-point… Line spacing should be 1.5… margins 2.5 cm.”*

Required Structure

A typical dissertation must include:

- Title Page
- Abstract
- Acknowledgements (optional)
- Declaration of Authenticity
- Table of Contents
- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Methodology (secondary data)
- Findings
- Discussion
- Conclusions and Recommendations
- References
- Bibliography (optional)
- Appendices

- *“A typical dissertation structure is as follows…”*

Ethical Requirements

- Dissertation must use **secondary data only**
- You must complete the **Research Ethics Approval Form**
- Confirm no primary data is collected
- Show respect for copyright, data protection and licensing
- Anonymise any reused datasets if needed

- *“The dissertation is based exclusively on secondary data sources.”*

Submission Requirements

- Submit drafts as agreed with your supervisor
- Final dissertation must be submitted in **PDF**
- Follow the Academy's filename conventions Lastname_Firstname_Studentnumber.

- Include the **Declaration of Authenticity**
- Late submissions normally result in a **Fail**

- *"Failure to submit the final dissertation by the official deadline shall normally result in a mark of Fail."*

Assessment and Marking

- Assessed by an **Assessment Board**
- Marking follows the Academy's **Rubric and Criteria**
- Examiners look for:
  - Strong research question/s
  - Critical literature review
  - Appropriate methodology
  - Quality of analysis
  - Clear argument
  - Academic writing and presentation
  - Accurate referencing

- *"Examiners shall evaluate the quality of the research question, literature review, methodology, analysis…"*

Academic Integrity

- All dissertations are checked for plagiarism
- AI-generated content may trigger a **viva voce**
- Similarity above **20%** or AI suspicion above **30%** may lead to questioning
- Misconduct can result in failure or disciplinary action

- *“A viva voce may be invoked when… a high suspicion of AI generated text exceeding 30%.”*

⭐ The Master's Dissertation Process

Before You Start Writing the Dissertation

- You **must** submit a full research proposal
- The proposal must be written using the Academy's template
- It must be **approved** by your supervisor and the Academy
- You cannot begin the dissertation until approval is granted
- This ensures your topic is feasible, ethical and academically sound

The guidelines state that the proposal "**must be approved prior to substantive work on the dissertation proceeding**."

What Assessors Expect at Master's Level

- A clear, well-designed research project
- Strong academic reading and critical thinking
- A logical, well-supported argument
- High-quality analysis based on secondary data
- Clear writing and correct academic conventions

Designing a Strong Dissertation Project

- Your topic must address a **real HR or people-practice issue**
- It should add **organisational or professional value**
- Your research aim and questions must be:
  - Clear
  - Focused
  - Achievable using secondary data

Your proposal must demonstrate this before approval

Research Aim, Objectives and Questions

- Your aim and questions must be:
  - Clear
  - Relevant
  - Feasible
- They must come from a **valid and practicable research problem**
- They must guide the whole dissertation

Research Design

- Your design must be appropriate for your aim and questions
- You must justify your methodological choices
- You must show awareness of:
  - Access to data
  - Ethical issues
  - Reliability and validity
- Your design must allow you to generate **good-quality data**

Literature Review

- Use a wide range of **relevant academic sources**
- Analyse and **critically review** the literature
- Define key concepts clearly
- Build a **theoretical or analytical framework**
- Show how the literature shapes your research focus

Data Collection and Analysis

- Gather secondary data that directly supports your objectives
- Present your data clearly
- Analyse it in a **thorough and critical** way
- Use your analytical framework to guide interpretation
- Show how your analysis answers your research questions

Conclusions

- Conclusions must be:
  - Clear
  - Logical
  - Supported by evidence
- They must follow naturally from your analysis
- They must link back to your research aim and questions

Recommendations (Where Appropriate)

- Recommendations should be:
  - Practical
  - Relevant
  - Evidence-based
  - Imaginative where possible

They should show how your findings can support HR or organisational practice

What a Master's-level Dissertation Should Show

- Your dissertation must show:
  - A strong academic foundation
  - A justified and ethical methodology
  - Rigorous analysis
  - Clear conclusions
  - Practical implications
- This is what distinguishes **Master's-level work** from undergraduate writing

⭐ Avoiding Technical Crises When Writing Your Dissertation

Why Technical Problems Matter

- Writing a dissertation takes time, focus and steady progress
- Technical failures often happen **right before the deadline**
- Losing work is stressful and can seriously delay submission
- Good habits reduce risk and protect your progress
- Students often “find themselves stressed out near to the submission date when technical problems occur.”

Write Regularly and Often

- Build a routine of writing a little at a time
- Regular writing helps you stay on track
- It reduces last-minute pressure
- It makes technical problems less damaging
- Save your work every every hour
- Don’t rely on auto-save alone
- Make saving part of your writing rhythm
- Small habits prevent big losses

Back Up Your Work Properly

- Back up at the end of every writing session
- Use at least **one other device** or a secure cloud location
- Make sure your files are protected and accessible
- **Avoid Single-Location Storage**
- Do **not** store your draft only on:
  - One laptop
  - One cloud account
  - One USB stick

Saving versions

- Save each new draft with a **new version number**
  - Example: Chapter2_v1, Chapter2_v2
- This helps you track changes
- It protects you if a file becomes corrupted
- It also helps your supervisor see your progress
- Don’t store your USB stick in the same bag as your laptop
- If one is lost, stolen or damaged, the other may survive
- Treat your dissertation like valuable data
- Physical separation = extra protection

⭐ Know the Submission Requirements

- You must submit your dissertation **in the exact formats required** by the Academy
  - **Microsoft Word** and **PDF**
  - Follow the **filename conventions** provided by the Programme Office
- Check the **official submission point** on the Academy platform
- Make sure you know the **exact deadline** — late submissions normally receive a **Fail**
- If a **hardcopy** is required, it must be:
  - Printed on **A4**, double-sided
  - **Securely bound**
  - Submitted by the stated deadline
- You must include the **Declaration of Authenticity** with your final submission
- Submitting incorrectly (wrong format, wrong place, wrong file name) may delay assessment or affect your marks
- Always allow extra time for uploading — technical issues are not accepted as a reason for late submission

⭐ Planning Your Dissertation Writing

- **Why Planning Matters**
- Students usually take one of two approaches:
  - **Plan first**, then write
  - **Start writing and hope for the best**
- The second approach is stressful and often leads to major rewriting
- Planning makes writing clearer, quicker and more coherent
- Writing without a plan “usually has to be significantly revised and re-structured”.

Benefits of Planning

- Breaks the dissertation into manageable parts
- Reduces overwhelm and procrastination
- Helps you build a logical structure
- Makes your argument clearer
- Saves time later when editing

Brainstorming

- List all ideas you think belong in the section
- Remove anything irrelevant
- Edit out repetition
- Put the remaining ideas into a logical order
- Can be done alone or with a peer

Mind Mapping

- Start with your main topic in the centre
- Add branches for themes, ideas or concepts
- Helps you see connections visually
- Useful for identifying main sections and sub-sections

Concept Mapping

- A more structured version of mind mapping
- Write your main topic at the top
- Use Post-Its to list related concepts
- Move them around until the relationships make sense
- Draw lines showing how ideas link (e.g., “leads to”, “requires”)
- Produces a clear, hierarchical structure for writing

Linear Planning

- List the main themes for your section
- Add bullet points under each theme
- Organise themes into a logical order:
  - Chronological
  - By category
  - By importance

Works better for students who prefer lists over visuals

Using Post-Its to Plan

- Write each main point on a separate Post-It
- Add sub-points on additional Post-Its
- Arrange them on a wall or board
- Move them around until the structure feels right
- Remove Post-Its as you complete each part — a visual progress tracker

Keep All Notes and Drafts

- Don’t delete early drafts or ideas
- Keep a “might be needed” file for:
  - Deleted paragraphs
  - Quotes
  - Notes
  - Alternative structures

These can be useful later when revising or writing conclusions

⭐ Writing Compelling Conclusions and Recommendations

- Earlier lectures explained how to write the main parts of your dissertation
- Now we focus on the **final chapter**, where you:
  - Bring your argument together
  - Present clear conclusions
  - Offer practical recommendations
- This chapter shows your ability to **think critically**, **synthesise evidence** and **apply your findings**
- This part of the dissertation may also include a **personal reflection**, depending on your programme requirements
- Strong conclusions and recommendations demonstrate the value of your research and its relevance to HR or organisational practice

Writing a Strong Conclusions Chapter

Why the Conclusions Chapter Matters

- You will usually write this chapter when you are tired and close to the deadline
- Many students feel they have “nothing new to say”
- But the conclusions section carries **significant marks**
- A strong conclusion shows:
  - Clear thinking
  - Understanding of your findings
  - Connection to the literature
  - Relevance to HR practice

What a Good Conclusion Should Do

- Bring together the key findings of your study
- Explain what the findings **mean**
- Link your findings back to the **existing literature**
- Show the implications for **HR theory** and **HR practice**
- Demonstrate that your research questions guided your whole project

Check for Consistency

- Your conclusions must answer the **same questions** you set at the start
- If your conclusions drift into new areas:
  - Revisit your introduction
  - Adjust your research questions if needed

Consistency across chapters is essential for a strong dissertation

Structure for a Compelling Conclusions Chapter

- Start with a short introduction
- Restate your research aim and questions
- Explain what the chapter will cover
- This is one place where **copy-and-paste** from the introduction is acceptable

Discuss the Significance of Your Findings

- Explain why your findings matter
- Link them to what was already known in the literature
- Show how your study adds something new
- Discuss implications for HR theory and HR professional practice

Reflect on Your Research Design

- Summarise your research approach
- Explain why you chose it
- Reflect on strengths and limitations
- Discuss whether your findings can be:
  - Generalised
  - Transferred to other organisations or contexts
- Identify areas where further research is needed

Address Each Research Question or Objective

For each question or objective:

- What were your main findings?
- How do they relate to the literature or theories?
- What was surprising?
- What does the literature help you understand?
- What issues did your study reveal that the literature does not fully explain?
- What are the implications for HR theory?
- What are the implications for HR practice?

Identify the “Big Take-Away”

- What is the **one key message** your research offers?
- What is the added value of your project?
- End confidently — you have worked hard and earned the right to state your contribution clearly

Writing the Recommendations Section

Why Recommendations Matter

- Requirements vary by study centre and qualification level
- At Master's level, recommendations often focus on **implications for HR practice**
- Some programmes also expect:
  - An implementation plan
  - Practical, action-focused steps

Strong recommendations show you can **apply your findings** to real HR issues

Why Students Find This Difficult

- It can feel daunting, especially if the research was not done in a specific organisation
- You may feel unsure about what you are “allowed” to recommend
- But with some careful thinking, you can produce strong, credible recommendations
- Assessors reward clear, practical ideas that follow logically from your findings

Shift Your Thinking: Past → Future

- The rest of your dissertation looks **backwards** at:
  - What you found
  - What the evidence shows
  - What the literature says
- Recommendations look **forwards** at:
  - What should be done next
  - What actions HR or organisations could take

This is the one section where your **professional opinion** is encouraged

You Can Still Recommend Without a Specific Organisation

- Even if your study was not based in one workplace, you can still:
  - Recommend actions for HR policy
  - Suggest improvements for HR practice in general
  - Identify sector-wide implications

The key is to keep your recommendations **action-orientated**, not vague

What Assessors Want to See

Strong recommendations usually include:

- **Clear actions** (not general statements)
- **Timescales** — when should the action happen?
- **Accountabilities** — who should do it?
- **Resources** — what will it cost or require?
- **Contingencies** — what if something goes wrong?

These elements show you can think like an HR professional.

How to Write Effective Recommendations

- Base each recommendation on your findings
- Make sure each one links clearly to your conclusions
- Use confident, professional language
- Avoid vague phrases like “HR should consider…”
- Instead use action verbs:
  - “HR should implement…”
  - “The organisation should introduce…”
  - “Managers should develop…”

Using a Table to Develop Strong Recommendations

Why Use a Table for Recommendations?

- A table helps you **think clearly and practically** about what should happen next
- It forces you to link each recommendation directly to your **findings and analysis**
- It helps you avoid vague or generic suggestions
- It is especially useful when:
  - You are short on time
  - You are close to the word limit
  - You need a clear, structured format

The Purpose of a Recommendations Table

- Helps you identify **4–5 clear actions**
- Encourages you to specify **who should take responsibility**
- Allows you to set **priorities** (high/low)
- Ensures your recommendations are **action-orientated**, not theoretical
- Shows assessors that your ideas are grounded in your research

What Assessors Expect

Strong recommendations must:

- Follow directly from your **data and analysis**
- Not be based on assumptions or personal preference
- Be realistic and relevant to HR practice
- Show that your research project was necessary
- Demonstrate your ability to think like an HR professional
- If assessors feel you “could have made your recommendations without the research”, marks will be lost.

Template for Recommendations

- Your table should include:
- **1. Action**
- State the specific action you propose
- Make sure it clearly follows from your findings
- **2. Who should take this action?**
- HR managers?
- Line managers?
- Professional bodies?
- Sector bodies or unions?
- Another stakeholder?
- **3. Priority**
- High
- Low

This structure keeps your recommendations focused and practical.

When a Table Is Enough

A table is a good option when:

- You are close to the word limit
- You are short on time
- You need a clear, concise format
- Your recommendations are straightforward and easy to express

A well-designed table can still earn strong marks.

When to Add Extra Text

You may gain **additional credit** if you include a short discussion after the table:

- Identify **potential resistance** to your recommendations
- Explain how this resistance could be managed
- Suggest **fallback plans** or alternative actions
- Show awareness of organisational realities
- Demonstrate critical thinking and professional judgement

This extra commentary strengthens your recommendations and shows depth.

Final Advice for Recommendations

- Keep them **action-focused**, not vague
- Make sure each recommendation links directly to your findings
- Use the table to stay organised and clear
- Add a short narrative if you want to show deeper insight
- Think like an HR professional:
  - Who does what?
  - When?
  - With what resources?
  - What could get in the way?

⭐ Writing the Personal Reflection Section

Why Personal Reflection Matters

- Some programmes (especially CIPD-accredited ones) require a short **personal or professional development reflection**
- Even if it is not compulsory, reflection helps you understand:
  - What you learned
  - How you developed
  - How the research shaped your professional identity
- Reflection shows maturity, self-awareness and commitment to continuous development

What This Section Is Really About

- Think about what you learned about:
  - Yourself
  - Evidence-based HR practice
  - The research process
- Consider how the project changed your understanding of:
  - Your skills
  - Your confidence
  - Your professional identity

This is not a diary — it is a **focused, analytical reflection**

Keep It Short but Meaningful

- This section is usually **brief**
- You need to get maximum value from limited space
- Focus on insights that show:
  - Growth
  - Learning
  - Professional development

Avoid long stories — choose the most important points

Reflect on Your Starting Point

Consider:

- What was your skill level at the beginning?
- What did you know (or not know) about research?
- What was your attitude towards research?
- How did you feel at the start of the project?
- What has changed since then?

These reflections show your development journey.

How You Used Your Learning

- How did earlier modules prepare you for this project?
- Which theories, models or skills did you draw on?
- How did your academic learning support your research decisions?
- This shows integration of knowledge across the programme

Challenges and How You Overcame Them

- What problems did you encounter?
  - Time pressure
  - Data limitations
  - Motivation
  - Understanding theory
- How did you deal with these challenges?
- What strategies helped you move forward?

This demonstrates resilience and problem-solving

Strengths and Development Areas

- What strengths did you discover or build on?
- What weaknesses or development needs became clearer?
- How did the project help you understand your capabilities?

This shows honest, constructive self-evaluation

Feedback and Your Response

- What feedback did you receive during the project?
- How did you feel about it?
- How did you use it to improve your work?

This shows openness to learning and professional growth

Applying Your Learning to Your Career

- How will you use the skills and knowledge gained?
- How will this project influence your HR practice?
- What will you do differently in future roles?

This connects your academic learning to real-world practice

⭐ Writing the Abstract or Executive Summary

Why This Section Matters

- Different study centres have different expectations
- You may need to write either:
  - A **short abstract**, or
  - A **slightly longer executive summary**
- This is the **first part** assessors read
- It must make sense **on its own**, without reading the rest of the document
- In some centres, the abstract is used to allocate **first and second markers**

Write It Last

- Do **not** start with the abstract
- Write it **after** you have drafted the whole dissertation
- Most people find it easier once the conclusions are clear
- This ensures accuracy and avoids rewriting

Abstract Requirements (21 Academy Guidelines)

- The dissertation must include a **separate Abstract page**
- The Abstract appears **after the Title Page** and **before the Acknowledgements**
- It must provide a **brief summary** of the entire dissertation
- It should cover:
  - The research aim
  - The methods used
  - The main findings
  - The key conclusions
- The guidelines specify an exact word count:
  - **Concise (250-300 words)**
  - **Self-contained**
  - **Clear enough to stand alone**

Template for Writing an Abstract

- Use this structure (adapted from Biggam, 2021):
- *This research examines…*
- *The study is important because…*
- *Data for this study were gathered in the following way(s)…*
- *The findings suggest that…*
- *The main conclusions from the study are…*
- *(If appropriate) The main recommendations arising from this report are…*

This helps you stay concise and focused.

⭐ Structuring and Organising the Final Dissertation

Why Structure Matters

- Your study centre provides the official structure — always follow it
- A clear structure helps the reader understand:
  - **Why** you carried out the research
  - **How** you did it
  - **What** you found
  - **What it means** for HR theory and practice

The 21 Academy Guidelines follow this same logic

Title Page

- Must include:
  - Dissertation title
  - Your name
  - Date of submission
  - Programme details (as required by the Academy)

- This page must follow the Academy’s exact formatting rules

Abstract or Executive Summary

- *(Academy requires an Abstract; with fixed word count)*
- A brief, self-contained summary of the whole dissertation
- Includes: aim, methods, key findings, conclusions (and recommendations as required)

Write it **last**

- Must make sense on its own
- Academy: placed after Title Page, before Acknowledgements

Contents Page

- The Contents Page must be **automatically generated** in Microsoft Word
- Word creates it using the **Heading Styles** you apply throughout your dissertation
  - **Heading 1** → Chapter titles
  - **Heading 2** → Section headings
  - **Heading 3** → Sub-sections (optional)
- To insert the Contents Page:
  - Place your cursor where the Contents Page should appear *(Academy order: after Abstract and Acknowledgements)*
  - Go to **References → Table of Contents**
  - Choose **Automatic Table 1** or **Automatic Table 2**
- Word will instantly generate a professional Contents Page with:
  - Correct headings
  - Page numbers
  - Indentation
- As you edit your dissertation, update it by:
  - Right-clicking the table → **Update Field** → *Update entire table*

Introduction

- Introduce the topic and explain why it matters for HR practice
- Present your:
  - Research aim
  - Objectives or research questions
  - Terms of reference (if used)
- Provide a short overview of the structure of the dissertation
- Sets the tone and direction for the whole document

Literature Review

- Shows how your study fits into the wider academic field
- Defines key concepts
- Reviews strengths and weaknesses of previous studies
- Demonstrates how the literature shaped your research questions

- For proposals: shorter
- For dissertations: detailed and critical

Research Methodology

- Explain **how** you carried out the research
- Include:
  - Data sources (secondary only for Academy dissertations)
  - Procedures for gathering, recording and analysing data
  - Ethical considerations
  - Logistical issues
  - Strengths and limitations of your approach

Reader must understand exactly what you did and why

Findings / Results

- Present the **facts** from your data
- No interpretation yet
- Use tables or summaries were helpful
- If fewer than 50 responses: use whole numbers, not percentages
- For proposals: describe expected findings only

Analysis

- Interpret what the findings mean
- Compare your results with the literature
- Use theories and concepts to explain patterns
- Discuss whether your findings:
  - Match expectations
  - Partly match with anomalies
  - Contradict expectations
- Show critical thinking and depth

Conclusions

- Summarise the key insights from your analysis
- Link back to your research questions
- Explain implications for:
  - HR theory
  - HR professional practice
- Identify areas for further research
- Must be evidence-based, not opinion-based

Recommendations

- Future-focused: what should happen next?
- Must follow logically from your findings
- Include:
  - Actions
  - Timescales
  - Accountabilities
  - Resources
  - Contingencies
- Use a table if short on time or word count

Personal Reflection

- *(Required in some CIPD-aligned programmes; optional in Academy dissertations)*
- Reflect on what you learned about:
  - Yourself
  - Research
  - Evidence-based HR practice
- Include challenges, strengths, feedback and future development
- Keep it short but meaningful

References

- *(Academy requires full Harvard referencing)*
- List all sources cited in the dissertation
- Must follow the required referencing style
- Poor referencing = loss of marks
- Keep accurate notes of all sources used

Appendices

- *(Academy requires research instruments in appendices)*
- Include supporting material such as:
  - Research instruments (questionnaires, interview guides)
  - Additional tables or documents
- The dissertation must make sense **without** reading the appendices
- For proposals: include intended instruments

⭐ Style and Expression in Academic Writing

- **Write Clearly and Simply**
- Academic writing does **not** need to be complicated
- Clear communication comes from **simple, direct sentences**
- If a sentence is long, check whether it can be split into two
- Aim for clarity, not “sounding academic”

Use Direct Quotations Sparingly

- You get credit for **your own thinking**
- Too many quotations make your work look “second-hand”
- Use quotations to **support** a point, not to **make** the point
- Paraphrase where possible and cite correctly

Avoid Jargon, Slang and Abbreviations

- Academic writing is more formal than speech
- Avoid contractions (write *do not*, not *don't*)
- Avoid informal phrases (e.g., "the flip side…")
- Use precise, objective language
- If technical terms are essential, include a **glossary before Contents Table**

Use Paragraphs Effectively

- Start a new paragraph for each **new idea**
- Most ideas need more than one sentence
- If paragraphs are too short, check whether ideas are fully explained
- If paragraphs are too frequent, check whether they can be combined

Avoid Repetition

- Do not repeat the same ideas in different chapters
- Check especially:
  - Introduction vs Literature Review
  - Literature Review vs Conclusions
- If you find repetition, redraft one of the sections

Be Careful with AI Tools

- Grammar and spelling tools can help improve clarity
- But avoid “borrowing” text from AI apps
- AI-generated citations may be **inaccurate or non-existent**
- You must verify all sources yourself
- Using unverified AI text risks **poor scholarship** or **plagiarism penalties**

Be Consistent with Person (First/Third) and Tense

- Most academic writing uses **third person**
  - “The research was conducted…”
- Some qualitative or action-research projects may allow **first person**
  - “I conducted interviews with…”
- Follow your study centre’s expectations
- Be consistent **within each chapter**
- Use **present tense** for published literature
  - “Jones (2018) highlights…”

When to Use First Person

- First person is appropriate in:
  - Reflective sections
  - Personal learning accounts
  - Some qualitative methodologies

- If used, keep it professional and focused
- Maintain consistency throughout the section

⭐ Reviewing, Revising and Submitting Your Work

- No one produces a perfect dissertation in one draft
- You need time to create **multiple drafts** of each chapter
- Redrafting helps you:
  - Clarify your thinking
  - Improve structure
  - Strengthen your argument
  - Remove weak or unclear writing

Revising is part of the research process, not an optional extra

What Redrafting Helps You Do

- “Tighten up” your writing
- Add missing sections
- Remove unnecessary material
- Move content to improve flow
- Improve clarity and coherence
- Strengthen your academic voice

Key Questions for Evaluating Early Drafts (1)

- *(Based on Saunders et al., 2023)*
- How clear is the **overall structure** of the report?
- Is each chapter or section structured logically?
- Are your **research objectives/questions** expressed clearly and consistently?
- Do your conclusions **answer** your research questions?
- Is the meaning clear? Which passages feel clumsy or unclear?

Key Questions for Evaluating Early Drafts (2)

- Have you used any **biased, emotional or imprecise** language?
- Does your literature review clearly inform your:
  - Methodology?
  - Data analysis?
- Does your literature review:
  - Describe what others have written?
  - Analyse issues?
  - Develop a line of argument?

Key Questions for Evaluating Early Drafts (3)

- Are the points in each chapter **logical and well explained**?
- Do ideas follow on sensibly from each other?
- Have you presented and analysed your data in a way that readers can follow?
- Are any references missing?
  - If you cannot find them, replace or rewrite
- How trustworthy is your evidence?
  - Have you shown robust criteria for selecting sources?

Word Count and Accuracy

- Check how close you are to the **word limit**
- Exceeding the limit can affect your mark
- Ensure all references are accurate and complete
- Make sure tables, figures and appendices are correctly labelled

Getting Feedback

- Your tutor can help identify strengths and weaknesses
  - But only if you give them enough time to read your draft
- Family and friends can help spot unclear explanations
- Use feedback to prioritise revisions
- Be open to improving your work — this is part of academic development

Losing or Finding More Words, Strengthening Analysis and Final Checks

When You Have Too Many or Too Few Words

- Early in the project you may worry about reaching the word count
- Later, you may struggle to **stay within** the limit
- A minority of students have the opposite problem — their work feels "thin"
- Both issues can be solved with targeted revision strategies

If You Need to *Lose* Words (Making More into Less)

- Remove subsections that are **not central** to your argument
- Shorten long descriptive passages using **tables or diagrams**
- Reduce or paraphrase long quotations
- Summarise ideas expressed in multiple sentences into **one concise sentence**
- “Word-weed”: remove unnecessary, repetitive or qualifying words
- Keep only the “need-to-have” content, not the “nice-to-have”

If You Need to *Add* Words (Making Less into More)

- Add new sections where explanations are too brief
- Strengthen links between paragraphs to build flow
- Move useful material from appendices into the main text (avoid padding)
- Add more references, including **contrasting viewpoints**
- Expand your evaluation of your methodology
- Ensure recommendations are detailed and actionable

⭐ Description vs Analysis

- **Description** = summarising what others have written
- **Analysis** = explaining, interpreting and understanding
- Strong dissertations minimise description and maximise analysis
- Assessors want to see your **thinking**, not just your summarising

Becoming More Critical (Steps 1–3)

- For each theory, concept or method you describe, write **“prove it”** beside it
- On a Post-It, note possible objections or alternative viewpoints
- Redraft to highlight both **strengths and limitations**
  - This shifts your writing from descriptive to evaluative

Becoming More Analytical (Steps 4–7)

- After each evaluated idea, write **“so what?”**
- Redraft to answer the “so what?” in relation to your research questions
- Look for repeated answers — these become **analytical themes**
- Reorganise your writing around these themes
  - This is a sign you are thinking like a researcher

Why These Steps Work

- They help you move from:
  - “What the literature says” → to → “What this means for my study”
- They strengthen your argument
- They help you build a coherent, thematic structure
- They improve the quality of your analysis and your final mark

⭐ Final Checks Before Submission

- Check spelling, punctuation and grammar carefully
- Ensure formatting is consistent:
  - Section numbers
  - Table numbers
  - Appendix labels
  - Font sizes
- Check for layout glitches
- Ensure all references are present, accurate and consistently formatted
- Confirm page numbers match the Contents Page
- Check the Title Page includes all required information
- Review the Abstract — does it still reflect the final version?
- Ensure research objectives/questions are clearly stated in the introduction
- Include ethical review documentation if required

Final Advice

- Leave time for slow, careful checking
- Do not rush the final stage — it affects the professionalism of your work
- Aim for a document that is as close to perfect as possible
- Strong presentation supports strong content

Thank you for your attention!