



THE JOURNEY TO
**DISSERTATION
SUCCESS**

For construction, property,
and architecture students

Elizabeth Laycock,
Tim Howarth and
Paul Watson

ROUTLEDGE

Are you about to embark on a research project for the first time? Unsure which data collection methods are right for your study? Don't know where to start?

By presenting the reader with a series of key research management questions, this book introduces the novice researcher to a range of research designs and data collection methods. Building an understanding of these choices and how they can impact on the dissertation itself will lead to a more robust and rigorous dissertation study.

This book is designed to direct your research choices with informative text and key questions, advice from 'virtual supervisors' and reflections from students. Lists of suggested further reading also help to support you on your journey to developing an organised and successful dissertation project.

Researchers seeking support on their journey to a successful dissertation will find this book a valuable resource.

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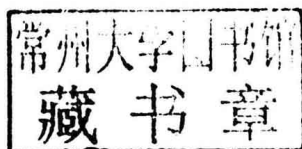
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Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>List of tables</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>x</i>
1 Preparing for your research journey	1
2 The dissertation challenge	10
3 Doing the dissertation: beginning the journey	22
4 The role of the supervisor	40
5 Evaluating the existing literature	52
6 Research concepts	78
7 The practicalities of primary data collection	106
8 Data analysis and presentation	150
9 Completing the journey: writing up and assessment	208
<i>Appendix: example calculations</i>	<i>240</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>248</i>

List of figures and tables

Figures

1.1	Key stages in the dissertation research process	4
1.2	Managing the dissertation research process: an overview of key considerations	5
1.3	Flow diagram of the research plan development process	6
2.1	The flow of the dissertation process	13
2.2	Link between aims, objectives and methods	16
4.1	Research supervision record form	47
5.1	Model of the relationship of dissertation work to literature	55
5.2	Diagram showing the progression of a literature review	62
6.1	Examples of normal distribution for continuous and discrete data	82
6.2	Example of a non-parametric data set	83
6.3	Likert scale with the assumption of equal distribution along scale	83
6.4	Likert scale with an unequal distribution along scale	83
6.5	Relationship between sample and population	94
6.6	Areas of commonality and difference between three interviewees	96
7.1	Continuum of observational roles	132
8.1	Flow chart illustrating aspects of the dissertation research process	154
8.2	Final ranking of importance of candidates' skills and attributes during employee selection	155
8.3	Venn diagram illustrating interviewees' perceptions of where skills and attributes are assessed within an assessment process	155
8.4	A word cloud illustrating the frequency of words used by students to describe quantitative data analysis	156
8.5	Using MS Excel to calculate the mean	160
8.6	Frequency distribution for a clustered data set (left) and a dispersed data set (right)	161
8.7	Standard error of mean for two data sets of differing size	162
8.8	MS Excel formulae for common descriptive statistics	163
8.9	An MS Excel sheet showing average, range, inter-quartile range and standard deviation	164
8.10	Symmetrical and skewed distributions	164

8.11	Use of shading to enhance a table (created in MS Excel)	166
8.12	Use of icons to create a traffic light diagram (created in MS Excel)	166
8.13	Pie chart (created in MS Excel)	168
8.14	Column chart, single (left) and tabulated (right) (created in MS Excel)	169
8.15	Clustered column chart, stacked column chart and percentage bar chart (created in MS Excel)	171
8.16	Column charts (created in MS Excel)	172
8.17	Bar charts ordered by size (left) and alphabetically (right) (created in MS Excel)	173
8.18	Bar chart with positive and negative values (created in MS Excel)	174
8.19	Example histograms (created in MS Excel)	174
8.20	Line charts (created in MS Excel)	175
8.21	Stacked area charts (created in MS Excel)	176
8.22	Radar chart (created in MS Excel)	176
8.23	Variability chart (created in MS Excel)	177
8.24	Scatter charts (created in MS Excel)	178
8.25	Ternary plot (created in MS Excel using Tri-plot by Graham and Midgely, 2000)	178
8.26a	Rose diagram (created with MS Excel)	179
8.26b	Strike directions (plotted using Georose by Yong Technology Inc., 2014)	179
8.27	3D charts (created in MS Excel)	180
8.28	Chloropleth map	182
8.29	Map of Shanghai from Google Earth with 3D-rendered buildings and overlay of metro lines (Google Earth)	183
8.30	3D work in progress (created in SketchUp, 2015)	184
8.31	Gantt chart (created in MS Visio)	185
8.32	Flow chart for hypothesis testing	188
8.33	Methods available to investigate relationships in data	190
8.34	Methods used to investigate differences in data	191
8.35	Trend line on a scattergraph	192
8.36	Trend line and equation on a scatter graph	193
8.37	t -test (one sample) equation	194
8.38	A model of the relationship of chapters, discussion and conclusion	200
A.1	Screenshot showing calculations for chi square	240
A.2	Using chi square table values to establish outcome	241
A.3	Screenshot showing calculations for chi square with Yates' correction for two by two grid	242
A.4	Using chi square table values to establish outcome	244
A.5	Three data sets	245
A.6	ANOVA single factor screenshots	245
A.7	Three data sets	246

Tables

1.1	Indicative timetable for conducting dissertation research	7
2.1	Key graduate skills demonstrated by the dissertation	11
2.2	Questions that help to frame research	12
2.3	Focusing the topic area	13
2.4	Problems with high or low volumes of literature	14
4.1	A draft agenda for a six-meeting format	45
4.2	A draft agenda for a five-meeting format	45
5.1	Advantages and disadvantages of primary and secondary data	53
5.2	Planning the literature review	63
5.3	A guide for writing references	67
5.4	Example references with suggestions to improve practice	70
6.1	Features of qualitative and quantitative approaches to research	80
6.2	Summary of key features of experimental research results	84
6.3	Considerations to be made prior to conducting experimental research	85
6.4	Common terminology associated with the experimental approach	85
6.5	Approaches to designing an experiment	87
6.6	Types of interview	90
6.7	Considerations when using interviews to collect data	91
6.8	Considerations when using questionnaires to collect data	92
6.9	Suggestions for promoting a good response rate in questionnaire data collection	93
6.10	A selection of probability sampling methods	95
6.11	A selection of non-probability sampling methods	96
6.12	Sources of possible bias within dissertation research	98
6.13	Dimensions of rigour in the presentation of dissertation research	100
7.1	Unacceptable conduct	111
7.2	Example sections in an ethical review	112
7.3	Location-based hazards	115
7.4	General hazards and lowering risk	117
7.5	Considerations in risk assessments	118
7.6	Forms of interview	121
7.7	Example interview protocol	123
7.8	Checklist method – one selection	128
7.9	Checklist method – grid	128
7.10	Likert scale – horizontal	129
7.11	Likert scale – horizontal grid	129
7.12	Likert scale – vertical	129
7.13	Numerical rating (1–5)	130
7.14	Numerical rating (score out of 10)	130
7.15	Numerical ranking method	130
7.16	Example: to establish the efficacy of a cleaning methodology on bricks	138
7.17	Grid of specimen creation for experimental testing, low validity	140

7.18	Grid of specimen creation for experimental testing, increased validity	140
7.19	Some considerations when planning to visit a building and its occupants as part of a case study	141
7.20	Example of data collection methods for a case study on the use of a selected building	142
7.21	An illustration of tasks to be undertaken post visit	142
8.1	Two techniques commonly used in undergraduate dissertations	151
8.2	Summary of basic descriptive statistics	158
8.3	Techniques for describing different types of data	159
8.4	Raw data to be presented as a column/bar chart	170
8.5	Statistical methods of describing data sets	189
8.6a	Estimating numbers of questionnaires for the chi square test, two rows and two columns	193
8.6b	Estimating numbers of questionnaires for chi square analysis, four rows and four columns	193
8.7	Review of the research work undertaken and the choices made	199
9.1	Indicative order for the contents of an undergraduate dissertation	209
9.2	Punctuation revision	212
9.3	Linking words	213
9.4	When to give a reference	215
9.5	Example marking grid for research proposal	223
9.6	Example marking grid for dissertation	227

1 Preparing for your research journey

Introduction

This chapter presents an introduction to the book, including:

- an outline of the purpose of this book – to assist students in successfully journeying through the dissertation research process by enhancing understanding of both the dissertation process and approaches to undertaking research;
- an outline of the format of this book – one that requires students to interactively navigate the text whilst considering key theory and practice, the guidance of three supervisors and the reflections of other students upon their dissertation experience;
- an overview of the dissertation process, including a flow chart and indicative timetable;
- student reflections on the dissertation.

The purpose of this book

Researching and presenting a dissertation is a requirement of many university degree courses. It can be both very challenging and very rewarding; and for many students, it is by far the largest piece of independent research that they have encountered. The dissertation is an undertaking that demands significant commitment from the student researcher. This book has been written to support students of the built environment disciplines through their dissertation journey and to assist them in making research decisions along the way. The book outlines dissertation research processes and supports students in thinking about their approach to designing, managing and delivering their research dissertation.

A broad range of professional disciplines contribute to designing, developing, delivering and managing the built environment. These professions include: architecture, architectural technology, building surveying, civil engineering, construction management, estate management, quantity surveying and town planning. A good number of dissertation research opportunities are presented by the built environment, its history, its evolution and its many professions, practices and activities. The array of potential topics for investigation is vast and includes, but is

2 *Preparing for your research journey*

not limited to: master planning; conceptual design; detailed design; comparative studies; materials and product innovation; legal and contractual management; planning; surveying; valuation; and the management of people, resources, costs, sustainability, design, quality, building information, environmental impact, and health and safety.

As well as a broad array of built environment research topics, there is also a variety of possible approaches to carrying out dissertation research. These include, among others: laboratory-based experiments; practice-based reviews; comparative studies; case study investigations; attitudinal and behavioural investigations; and desktop-based literature reviews, which are conducted without new primary data being collected by the researcher.

Being given the opportunity to investigate a topic that you have selected can be exciting and maybe a little daunting, with many challenges presented along the way. Without a doubt, though, doing a built environment dissertation can be a satisfying and enjoyable experience. Having the opportunity to set the focus of your research, investigate what research already exists related to your topic, determine the appropriate methods, collect and analyse data, and present it in a dissertation format can be very enriching and even the start of your own specialism within a professional field.

The format of this book

This book has been written for novice researchers, and the authors have assumed that the reader does not have extensive research experience. It considers approaches to undertaking research and outlines key concepts, definitions and requirements thereof. Furthermore, it offers an interactive means to engage with developing an understanding of some potentially daunting aspects of the dissertation challenge. Whilst the dissertation process is outlined and important aspects of research theory and practice are addressed, the book also delivers:

- a succinct introductory overview for each section;
- information in the form of text, diagrams and tables to support study of the dissertation project;
- reflections by real students upon aspects of the dissertation process;
- supervisor guidance and opinion to help the reader critically reflect upon their own dissertation;
- a series of key questions for the student researcher to consider and address;
- suggestions for further reading.

The book is structured so as to encourage the reader to move between sections and browse rather than demanding strict linear reading from front cover to back cover. It incorporates a number of features to enhance and deepen understanding of the dissertation process and the challenges associated with conducting dissertation research. The key features are designed to support you in your dissertation journey.

It is intended that this book complement the advice and guidance of a dissertation supervisor, and wider reading should always be undertaken to stimulate critical thought about performing and managing research as well as critical understanding of the dissertation process itself.

Overview of the dissertation process

Developing and delivering a built environment dissertation can be viewed as a 'project' – a project with clearly defined goals and outcomes to be delivered with only limited resources and set within a specified time frame. Recognition of previous relevant research is required, and the collecting and analysing of data needs to be carried out in valid and meaningful ways. Not only must the researcher understand the dissertation research process, they also need to be able to identify and manage research issues that arise at each stage of the process. Indeed, like any project, all aspects of the process require a great deal of thought, planning and management. Thankfully, a supervisor is allocated to help and support you through the development, planning and management of your dissertation.

Figure 1.1 outlines the main stages in the dissertation research process. Thinking about and determining a suitable topic is the very first stage in the journey; proof-reading and refining the quality of the presented thesis is the final stage before submission and, hopefully, celebration.

Figure 1.2 provides an outline overview of the main considerations in managing the dissertation research process. This diagram concisely maps the key components and considerations of the dissertation journey. Importantly, it also emphasises interaction with an allocated supervisor as a valuable constituent part of the process. It should be remembered that whilst you are responsible for managing and delivering your dissertation research, your supervisor can be very helpful in guiding you and questioning your approach as you go along.

You should plan to have meetings with your supervisor throughout your dissertation research journey. Such meetings will vary in frequency and duration, but you should always try to attend with a clear purpose in mind. It is recommended that at such meetings, you be prepared to update your supervisor with regard to your progress. It can be useful to draft in advance a list of questions or issues for discussion.

In the early stages of formulating and developing a dissertation research project, you will need to meet with your supervisor on a number of occasions. It is good practice to develop a research plan and consult with your supervisor for thoughts, views and feedback regarding this proposed plan. Some universities formalise the requirement for a research plan by requiring that dissertation students be assessed on the basis of what is commonly termed a 'research proposal' or 'interim report'. Figure 1.3 provides a concise map of the process of developing a research plan and serves to emphasise that supervisor feedback is an essential and integral part of planning and developing a dissertation research proposal.

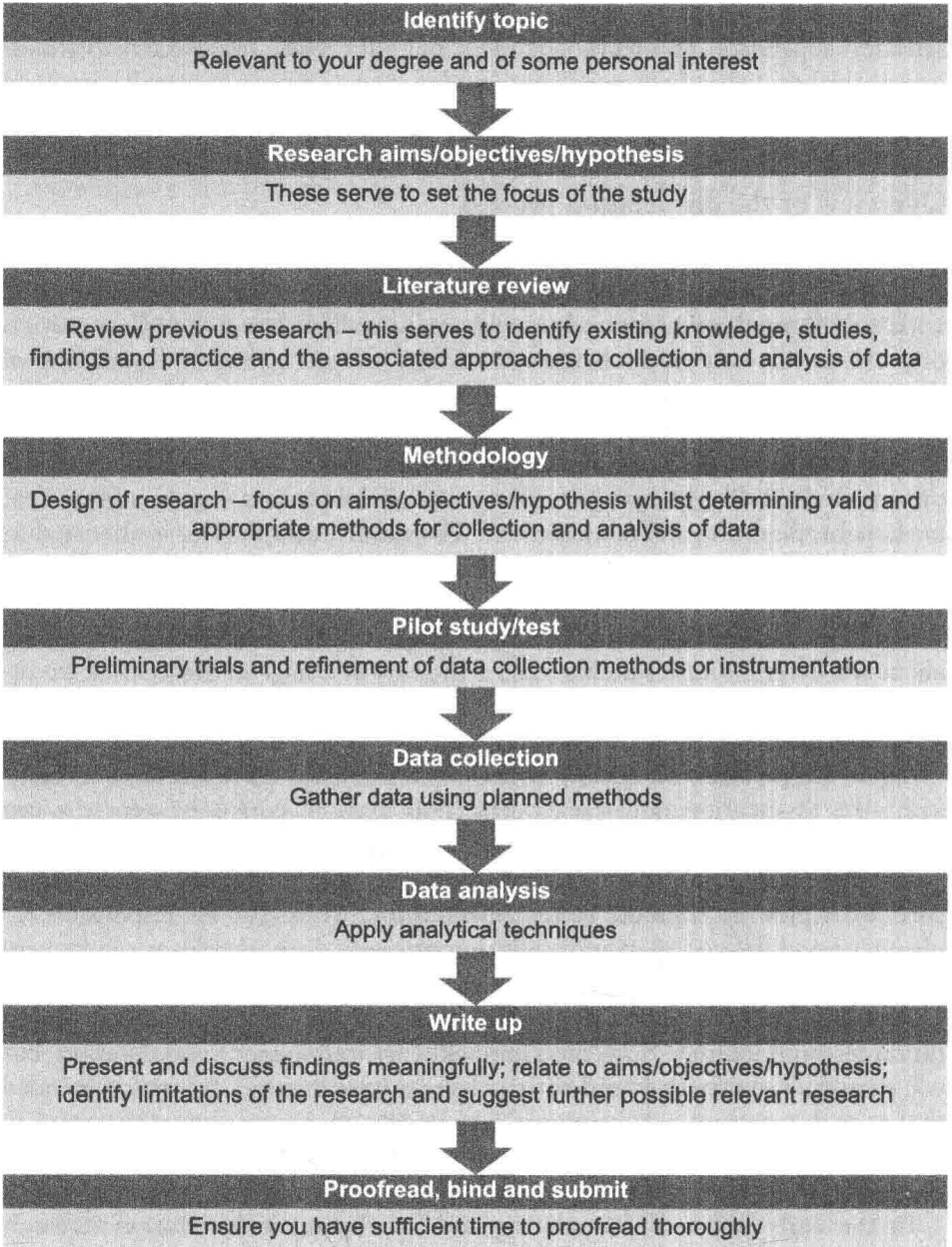


Figure 1.1 Key stages in the dissertation research process