

Dissertation: Introductions, Conclusions and Literature Reviews

General Guidance on Structure

Dissertations vary widely across subject disciplines and level, and your tutor and supervisor will offer you subject specific information and guidance about the form your dissertation should take. It is important to get this right in your final piece of work.

In general, however, introductions, conclusions, and literature reviews have a similar structure and purpose in most disciplines. This guide aims to offer some general support with structuring your dissertation. You can also [book a 1-1 UniSkills appointment](#) with an academic skills advisor for further support.

Introductions

Introductions should provide a concise overview of the what, why, and how of your project. You will then cover these issues in more depth in further sections of your dissertation, such as the Literature Review and Methodology sections. The important thing here is to give the reader a clear idea of exactly what your project is and where it is going.

WHAT

- What is the specific focus, question, or topic under examination?
- What is the principal argument (thesis) or hypothesis being tested?
- What are the limits or parameters of the project?

WHY?

- Explanation of the reasons **why** your project takes the shape it does
- Including **why** it is original, fills a gap in existing research, poses a novel question, solves a problem etc.

HOW

- A brief overview of what the methodology, theoretical approach etc. will be
- The structure of the dissertation to come.

Conclusions

WHAT

- Restate your principle findings

WHY

- Explain how the findings are important and significant for the research in your field.

HOW

- Explain how you have answered your research questions with the methods and evidence you have used.
- Explain how your work could be advanced or point to new directions in future research.

Introduction: An example of a good title

Example title: 'The role of a Special Educational Needs co-ordinator in primary school management structures'.

Here is an example of how the 'What', 'Why' and 'How' outlined in the first paragraph might look in an introductory dissertation paragraph:

This dissertation examines the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator's (SENCO) role within a primary school management structure in one school in the North West of England. This dissertation will seek to interrogate to what extent the limitations of the SENCO role in the management structure of the school aid or hinder the following of Government SEN agendas and policies. It will argue that though this is a single case it is indicative of the role of the SENCO: its limitations and opportunities for supporting children with a Special Educational Need (SEN). The significance of the SENCO role is that it is often deemed as one of the key actors with responsibility for children with an SEN in a school. This dissertation will use a case-study methodology to examine the role of one SENCO in one school. It will use open ended interviews with the SENCO and the other senior managers within the school to assess the limitations and strengths of the SENCO's role (rather than the individual who fulfils that role) in delivering government policy at the local school level.

Let's have a closer look at the example introduction broken down into its three component parts:

What:

FOCUS: This dissertation examines the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator's (SENCO) role within a primary school management structure in one school in the North West of England. This dissertation will seek to interrogate to what extent the limitations of the SENCO role in the management structure of the school aid or hinder the following of Government SEN agendas and policies.

PRINCIPAL ARGUMENT: It will argue that though this is a single case it is indicative of the role of the SENCO: its limitations and opportunities for supporting children with a Special Educational Need (SEN).

Here the focus and principal argument are stated first so the reader knows what the dissertation research is on and what the argument is that will be made throughout the dissertation. As this dissertation is a case study this could have been mentioned in the first sentence as well.

The Why and the How can now be considered together.

Why:

IMPORTANCE: The significance of the SENCO role is that it is often deemed as one of the key actors with responsibility for children with a SEN in a school.

This highlights the importance of the SENCO role. To improve it further if this role is under researched it would be useful to mention this here. Alternatively, there may be disagreements about the usefulness of this role: again, it would improve the sentence further to acknowledge this. To a certain extent this will highlight and emphasis further the rationale (reason for doing) your research.

How:

METHODOLOGY: This dissertation will use a case-study methodology to examine the role of one SENCO in one school. It will use open ended interviews with the SENCO and the other senior managers within the school to assess the limitations and strengths of the SENCO's role (rather than the individual who fulfils that role) in delivering government policy at the local school level.

The 'How' should be a very simple summary of the methodology adopted and the basic method you are using to gather your primary evidence.

Conclusions:

In writing the conclusions you should restate your principal findings, the importance of your findings in the academic field and explain how your research question/s have been answered by the methods you employed and the evidence you have found. To a certain extent this will replicate the introduction; in that it is a *summary*. Neither introduction nor the conclusion can outline anything in detail: both act as guides to the content within the rest of the dissertation.

Literature Reviews:

Every dissertation will have a literature review in some shape or form. A literature review needs to show that you understand the literature currently on or around your topic. However, its purpose is not only to demonstrate that you have a good grasp of academic work in your chosen field it should also identify what is NOT known and NOT agreed on. This is after all why you are doing this research: to address what is not known or agreed on. Therefore, your literature review does NOT need to explain every piece of academic work in your chosen field.

You will need to provide a context for the topic you are examining and be aware of what is known and agreed on, but this is not the purpose of the literature review. Rather it needs to identify a specific gap in the literature. It is your rationale explained at length and should explain why this research is worth doing: what is the significance of this topic, why is a lack of research on this topic something which is worth rectifying.

A literature review should identify key themes, authors and ideas for your specific topic: it does not need to capture every detail of the debate.

You should also avoid quoting lots of authors word for word and at length.

On occasion it is **better** to paraphrase multiple authors, for example:

'Numerous authors have argued x (see for example Smith 2010, Jones 2009 and Bloggs 2001). Then acknowledge the counter arguments: for example, 'However other authors have suggested y (see for example Cooper 2011, Johnson 2005 and Butcher 2000). Then give your position or your arguments for x as against y.

Paraphrase or quote single authors sparingly; you do not have time or space in a literature review to give a detailed account of each author. Generally speaking, avoid long quotations unless you are going to discuss one or two of them at length, using other authors, work to interrogate these quotations in detail.