

COGA1003 Dissertation (CCD)
Department of Creative, Critical and Communication
Studies
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Contents:

Schedule and deadlines:	2
Dissertation Seminar (30/9-4/11 at 4pm, QM268)	2
Deadlines	2
I. Course Outline	3
II. Writing the Abstract	4
III. Research and Recommended Reading	5
IV. Drafting and Completing the Dissertation	7
V. Referencing: A brief guide to the Harvard System	9
VI. Marking Criteria	14

Schedule and deadlines:

Dissertation Seminar (30/9-4/11 at 4pm, QM268)

30/9	Getting started: Ideas-work, finding a supervisor, first steps.
7/10	Formulating a topic for research. Please prepare to say a few words in class about your area of interest.
14/10	How to research, what are the practicalities, research ethics.
21/10	Methods and techniques: Converting research into words on the page.
28/10	Integrating sources: What do <i>you</i> have to say, and how do your sources help you say it? Bibliographies.
4/11	Who's doing what: 5-minute presentations. Abstracts due to your supervisor by Fri 7 Nov.

Deadlines

Abstract	Approx 1500 words. The abstract is a plan for your dissertation. It is an opportunity for you to tell your supervisor what your ideas are, what you plan to say about the topic, and the possible directions of research. You must discuss at least 4 key books or articles (no web pages) you plan to use, and list them in a formal bibliography at the end.	15%	Email to supervisor (cc to GS) directly: Fri 7 Nov 2008
Draft	6-8,000 words. This should look as much like the final product as you can make it. It should contain a bibliography for all sources cited.	10%	Email to supervisor and GS directly: Fri 27 Feb 2009
Final Draft	8,000-10,000 words.	75%	To Humanities Reception (w/ header sheet): Thu 7 May 2009

I. Course Outline

A dissertation is a major, individual research project, of about 8000-10,000 words, which demonstrates a student's ability to identify and use a range of primary and secondary sources to produce 'a piece of original writing' on an appropriate question or topic that has been agreed between the student and his/her supervisor.

Dissertations in the Dept. of Creative, Critical and Communication Studies should draw on each student's degree program, with the topic, research methods, sources and mode of presentation in line with the taught courses completed. As an incentive to steady work and clarity of purpose in the pursuit of this task, we emphasize process as well as product, requiring the student to complete an abstract and a draft along the way to submitting the final dissertation.

The purpose of the course is to equip students with the fundamental research and analytical skills basic to academic and/or professional practice in the area of Creative, Critical and Communication Studies, and which may be transferable to other areas of employment or higher level study, depending on each student's interests. The course will provide an opportunity to students to apply their knowledge and understanding acquired during the taught courses to investigate a problem (theoretical or empirical), an issue, or a hypothesis in their area of interest.

The Dissertation Seminar

Starting in the first week of Term 1, this seminar is *obligatory for all students who have chosen to do a dissertation*. The first sessions will focus on formulating the research projects, and on document and literature search in the field of media and communication studies. The seminar will conclude with one session devoted to short (5-min.) individual presentation of potential topics, and peer-group feedback. The advantage of this is to connect students working on similar topics with each other and to establish a "writing community" for mutual support over the year.

One-to-One-Support from Dissertation Supervisor

All students doing a dissertation must independently find a supervisor to work with. This should be your first order of business at the beginning of the term, if you didn't do this already in the spring.

The schedule of tutorials will be mutually agreed and a simple logbook will be maintained by students and supervisors. It is expected that there will be at least three one-to-one-sessions in each term. While self-directed learning is central to carrying out an independent piece of research, the supervisor will provide overall academic guidance and pastoral care.

Assessment

Please consider your dissertation a portfolio of work, not one single final product. The finished dissertation has three major components: First, an **abstract** which will lay the groundwork for your project and indicate the direction of your research; second, a **draft** (6,000-8,000 words) so that your supervisor can steer you in the right direction before it's too late in the spring term; and third, the **final draft**, due at the end of Term 3.

Only the final draft of the dissertation must be handed in with a header sheet, but the other two items will be taken into account when marking the finished dissertation.

For marking criteria, please see section VI below.

II. Writing the Abstract

Your abstract is due at the end of the dissertation seminar in autumn (Term 1). It should be 3-5 pages long (approx. 1500 words). Think of it as a road map to your dissertation, a plan for what you want to accomplish in your research, and in your writing.

One page should be devoted to a bibliography of sources you plan to use. They should be cited in the body of your abstract, and listed at the end, using the Harvard author-date system. Therefore, a substantial part of your abstract can be devoted to a discussion of your sources and how you think they will further your argument. The minimum number of sources you must discuss in the abstract is 4 books or journal articles – magazine or newspaper articles or websites are not enough.

Last, but not least, your abstract should give a rough idea of the question you aim to answer with your research, or the argument you wish to pursue in the dissertation. There are, broadly speaking, three modes of writing that you will use in a dissertation:

Description: Here you primarily aim to describe your object of study, and to convey information about it to your reader.

Interpretation: This is the next step up from a description, in which you attempt to lend meaning to whatever it is you are describing.

Argument, or position: This is what you are saying about your object of study, supported by your interpretation of it.

Remember, a successful dissertation does all three: it informs, it interprets and it presents an argument or position. Not all of this has to be present in your abstract, but it helps you and your supervisor if the abstract gives a good idea of how you plan to do all of the above in the dissertation.

III. Research and Recommended Reading

The dissertation is an independent research project. Therefore, you must start researching your topic as soon as you can. Even before you have a specific research question or thesis statement, you will have to read books, journal articles, magazine/newspaper articles around your area of study.

As you research, make sure you **take notes** on everything you come across. Carry a little notebook around, keep a folder, gather stuff on your laptop – whatever the format of your materials, make sure you assemble an archive and keep notes on it. Those notes will become the building blocks of your dissertation.

Databases and Electronic Journals

The University Library has powerful databases at your disposal, accessible through the University portal. Some useful ones for media and communications research include:

British Humanities Index: Covers journals on literature, film, arts, media, etc.

Ingenta Journals: Electronic journals, direct access to articles.

Lexis Nexis: A database of all newspapers in the UK, and other information.

Sage Journals Online

Intute: A free online service providing access to the very best Web resources for education and research.

Swetswise: The largest electronic journal gateway service in the world - allowing easy access to electronic content from hundreds of different publishers.

Start using these databases as early in your studies as you can, because they contain information that is of far higher quality than almost anything you can find on the open web.

Useful Academic Journals (available online through SwetsWise, U. of Greenwich Library)

Scan through some of these to get started on research, find ideas, and get a sense of what topics are out there in the academic debates:

Communication and Critical Cultural Studies

Continuum

Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies

Critical Discourse Studies

Critical Studies in Media Communication

Cultural Sociology

Cultural Studies

Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies

Cultural Trends

Digital Creativity

European Journal of Cultural Studies

Feminist Media Studies

International Journal of Cultural Studies

Media History

Media, Culture and Society

New Formations

New Left Review

New Media Age

New Media and Society

Television and New Media

Theory, Culture and Society

Thesis Eleven

Recommended Reading

Bertrand, Ina and Peter Hughes. 2005. *Media Research Methods: Audiences, Institutions, Texts*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ballard, Brigid and John Clanchy. 1998. *How to Write Essays: A Practical Guide for Students*. London: Longman.

Ritter, Robert, ed. 2002. *The Oxford Style Manual*. Oxford UP.

Swetnam, Derek. 2000. *Writing Your Dissertation: How to Plan, Prepare and Present Successful Work*. London: How To Books.

The Chicago Manual of Style, 15th ed. 2003. Chicago: U. Of Chicago Press. [13th and 14th editions are good too.]

Using the Web

In addition to library-based sources, you will be encouraged to search for sources on the Internet. The web is a huge, unmoderated source of information and you can find original material. The key is to treat what you read on the web with even greater caution and critical acumen than we hope you apply to conventional printed sources.

Some useful addresses:

University of Greenwich Library (access via the Portal, <http://portal.gre.ac.uk>)

Intute: <http://www.intute.ac.uk/>

BUBL Catalogue of Internet Resources: <http://www.bubl.ac.uk/link/hum.htm>

The Guardian newspaper archives: <http://www.guardian.co.uk>

The Times: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk>

General articles: <http://www.findarticles.com>

British Library online: <http://www.bl.uk>

Newspaper library: <http://www.bl.uk/collections/newspapers.html>

It is crucial that you evaluate any web sites that you may use for your own academic work. Ask critical questions of all websites, blogs, wikis, etc.: By whose authority is it published? What kinds of material does the site include? Is the site objective, i.e. is it campaigning? Is it up to date? Some or all of the answers to these questions will help you to gauge the accuracy of web content. This site, from New Mexico State University gives good advice on evaluating websites: <http://lib.nmsu.edu/instruction/evalcrit.html>

IV. Drafting and Completing the Dissertation

1. Planning

Take lots and lots of notes when you research your topic. These notes are the backbone of your essay. They will become paragraphs, pages and entire sections of the dissertation before you know it. You should decide the major points and what your overall argument or thesis will be, and make sure you can frame your topic in the form of a research question.

Organise the material that supports your argument or illustrates the major points. If you find that you are missing evidence for a specific point, go back to the books and articles you used or locate new ones and do some more research.

Ask yourself if your research has uncovered any conflicting points of view. Decide how you want to handle these ideas. You might present the reader with a synthesis of them, you might discuss each separately, or you might simply choose to present the argument which you found most convincing. Make sure the points are made in a logical way. In what order should your points be made? Which themes should receive the most attention?

There are two good ways to help you organize the material along the way: When you write an outline you list your main ideas, with headings and subheadings as appropriate. State your thesis at the beginning of the outline and make sure that the points you make support it. Errors in logical progression or awkward changes of topic will appear more clearly in an outline, so take time to consider what you have written.

When you write an abstract, you're summarizing the topic, your research and your argument. An abstract is not an outline – it's a discussion and an overview, not a list.

2. Writing

If you have prepared a good outline, writing the essay might not be a difficult process. But writing often takes longer than you anticipate and you should not leave it to the last minute so that you have no choice but to submit the first draft as your finished essay. Your essay should have an introduction, body, and conclusion. The introduction should set out your argument. The body of the essay sets out your specific arguments with supporting evidence and illustrations. In general each paragraph should contain one major point or illustration. In the conclusion you should summarize your argument. When the first draft is finished, read it over using the following checklist:

- Have you made your intentions and your thesis (or research question) clear to the reader?
- Have you included any irrelevant or unnecessary material?
- Have you repeated yourself, or forgotten any important points?
- Does it follow a coherent and logical order that will make sense to the reader?
- Have you checked the spelling, punctuation and grammar, particularly in areas where you are uncertain?
- Have you referenced your sources properly? Have you provided footnotes where necessary, and are your footnotes or endnotes complete and accurate? If in doubt verify the references in the original sources.
- Is the essay the right length as set by your tutor (8,000 – 10,000 words)?
- Have you prepared a complete and accurate bibliography?
- Never write only one draft. The most experienced and brilliant writers go through several revisions before their work is ready for others to read. It is often very helpful to put the first draft aside for a day or two. Looking at it with a fresh perspective will help you spot weaknesses in organisation and content.

Proofreading: After typing or printing the finished paper, proof read the paper one final time before submitting it. This is essential even if you use a spell-checker because it will not tell you when you have confused one correctly spelled word with another. It will let you write 'He went their' and 'They were not aloud to go.'

3. Style

Writing is an art and there are no rigid formulas or rules when it comes to style. Your personal writing style will develop with practice. Good spelling, grammar and punctuation are essential.

It is better not to use too many direct quotations. Use your own words wherever possible, and save quotations for special emphasis or when the author expresses an idea in a particularly effective way. Avoid using colloquial expressions, clichés or jargon in essays.

How you address your reader matters: Do not use the first person if at all possible in a formal essay. Instead of saying 'I think that...', simply state your point of view. Also, do not address the reader directly as "you" (the way you are being addressed now), because this is chatty and detracts from a sober, measured academic tone.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar are essential: The dissertation should demonstrate your ability to work on your own and to ensure the quality of the result. Remember, computer spellcheckers and grammar-checkers are not your friend. The best spellcheck in the world will not catch the difference between "public relations" and "pubic relations," but your human readers will.

4. Appearance

All elements of the dissertation submitted should be typed, double-spaced, in 12p Times or similar font (not a bloated one like Courier) and printed legibly on white paper. All submitted work should be proofread and spell-checked thoroughly.

V. Referencing: A brief guide to the Harvard System

(Prepared by **Andy Gould**, U. of Greenwich Study Skills Centre)



The University of Greenwich, as with all universities, requires that students give credit to the authors of the evidence they use to support the arguments within their essays and other assignments. Most schools within the University require that students use the Harvard system of referencing (citation). This is a guide to that system giving some useful examples to which you can refer when referencing yourself.

Function

- A bibliographical reference **should** contain sufficient information for you or someone else to trace the information sources you have used.
- It indicates that you have considered appropriate authorities and evidence in your work
- It acknowledges the work of others in contributing to your work.
- The same set of rules and grammar (colons and commas) should be followed every time you cite a reference (**consistency**).
- **Note** – you ought to follow the convention of referencing dictated by your school or tutor, normally the Harvard system.

The components of the Harvard system

The Harvard system has two main components. Firstly there is the in-text reference. For each item of evidence that you use from an external source (a book, a journal article etc.) there is an entry that includes the author's family name and the year of the publication (source) that the information comes from. Note that for a quotation there will also be the page number for the page that the quotation came from.

This works in conjunction with the second element which is known as a reference list (sometimes known as a Bibliography). This is an alphabetical list (by the author's last name) which includes the full bibliographical details of the book which would enable the reader to find that source if they so wished. The in-text reference to the author's last name can be looked up in this list and the full detail found. As you can see then, the system requires both element of in-text reference and reference list to work.

Examples of how to do both elements are shown below.

Citations in the text (in-text reference)

- All material taken from another writer's work should be acknowledged, whether the work is directly quoted, paraphrased or summarised.
- Not referencing = Plagiarism
- Plagiarism = a fancy word for **stealing**

Citations in the text should give the author's name with the year of publication, then all references should be listed in alphabetical order at the end of the paper/dissertation as laid out below.

For a single author

In a study by Murthoo (1999) treatment compliance was examined.....

In a study (Seedhouse, 1997) treatment compliance was examined

When an author has published more **than one cited document in the same year** these are differentiated by adding lower cased letters after the year within the brackets.

Beattie (2000a) argued that public health issues were ignored...

Two authors:

In the book by Kearney and Rainwater (2001)

More than two authors:

Singer *et al* (1996) contend that

If more than one citation is referred to within a sentence, list them all in the following form, by date and then alphabetically:

There are indications that childhood poverty is a strong predictor of later morbidity (Wybourn and Hudson, 2002; Acheson, 1998; Lewis 1998)

Online sources:

When referencing a web page in your text it should be the Author and Year that you put in brackets and not the web page address or URL. Sometimes the author may be the organisation that publishes the web page, for example the Department of Health:

According to the Department of Health (2006) the quality of access to health care is one of their fundamental responsibilities.

Harvard method of quoting in the text:

Use quotation marks and acknowledge the author's name, year of publication and page number of the quote in brackets.

Short quotations (up to 2 lines) can be included in the body of the text:-

Wybourn (1999) states that "being an undergraduate can be a pain" (p.19).

Longer quotations should be indented in a separate paragraph:-

Smaje (1995) when commenting on transcultural care comments that:

"Whereas multiculturalism tends to emphasise the existence of different cultural traditions in contemporary Britain and promotes tolerance and understanding, anti-racism places a more political emphasis on the forces that structure and determine access to power in society"

If part of the quotation is omitted then this can be indicated using three dots:-

Smaje (1995) states "...the existence of different cultural traditions in contemporary Britain and promotes tolerance and understanding..." (p.17)

Secondary referencing

Where one author is referring to the work of another and the primary source is not available.

You should cite the primary source and the source you have read eg Vygotsky and Piaget, 2002, cited in Wybourn, 2003.

- Secondary referencing should be avoided where possible. Find the original if you can.

The Reference List – the Harvard method of listing references at the end of the text

- List in **alphabetical order** by author's name and **then by date** (earliest first),
- If more than one item has been published during a specific year by letter (1995a, 1995b etc.)
- Take information from the title page of a publication and not from the front cover, which may be different.
- Include the elements and punctuation given in the examples below.
- Author's forenames can be included if given on the title page but this is not necessary.
- The title of the publication should either be in italics or underlined.

A book by a single author:

Baggini, J (2002) *Making Sense: Philosophy behind the headlines*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press.

A book by two authors:

Searle, John and Chomsky, N (1997) *The meaning of sense: critique & arguments*. 105th edn. London: Wybourn.

A book by more than two authors

Singer, Mandela *et al.* (1995) *Health care in a multiracial society*.
London: Open University Press

A book by a corporate author (eg a government department or other organisation):

Nursing and Midwifery Council (2003) *Patient-centred care: a NMC position statement on patient involvement*. London: Nursing and Midwifery Council.

An edited book:

Baumeister, R. (ed.) (1999) *The self in Social Psychology: Key readings in social psychology*. Hove: Taylor and Francis.

A chapter in a book

Burnard, P. (1997) 'The self and self awareness.' In: K. Burns *et al.* (eds.) *The Self in Society*. London: Stanley Thornes. pp.17-28.

An article in a journal:

Valkimaki, A. (1993) 'Patient information systems.' *British Journal of Nursing*, 13(1), pp.43-5.

An article in a newspaper:

Sabo, M. (2003) 'Fear of gun crime rising.' *Guardian*, 26 October 2003, p.10.

If no author name is given then the publisher should be used instead.

Guardian (2003) Public health in decline. *Guardian*, 24 October 2003, p11.

An online source:

Department of Health (2006) *Equality and human rights*. Available at:
<http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/EqualityAndHumanRights/fs/en> (Accessed: 15 May 2006).

A television programme

Julie through the looking glass. (1992). BBC 2, 4 July

A video

12 Angry Men. (1957) Directed by Sidney Lumet [Videocassette].
Hollywood: MGM Entertainment

CD ROMS

Institute of Cancer Research (2000) *A breath of fresh air: an interactive guide to managing breathlessness in patients with lung cancer*. [CD Rom]. Sutton:
Institute of Cancer Research

Government publications

- White Papers contain statements of Government policy
- Green Papers put forward proposals for consideration and public discussion.
- They are cited in the same way.

A White paper

Department for Education and Skills (2002) *14-19 next steps: the future*. Cm.3390. London: Stationery Office

A Green paper

Department for Education and Skills (2003) *Extending Opportunities: raising standards*. Cm 3854. London: Stationery Office.

VI. Marking Criteria

There is no simple checklist, but here are the key questions that supervisors will ask regarding the three key elements of the dissertation:

1. Thesis:

Is the thesis or research question clearly stated?

How well is the research topic defined in the introduction, and is it the rest of the dissertation relevant to it?

2. Evidence:

Is the research method or approach clearly stated and explained?

Is the supporting material of appropriate quality for a dissertation?

Is the evidence presented clearly, in a manner that relates it to the research question?

3. Presentation:

Is the language of the appropriate quality for a third year undergraduate dissertation?

Is the dissertation formatted correctly and proofread (with grammar, punctuation and spelling in order)?

Is it the right length (8,000-10,000 words)?

Are sources correctly cited, and is the bibliography complete and correctly presented?

Your supervisor may add to this any criteria that are relevant to the specific research project (e.g., concerning methods, types of sources, mode of presentation, etc.). Please discuss this with your supervisor throughout the research and writing process, not just at the end.