



**MILPARK**  
BUSINESS SCHOOL

Milpark Business School

Guidelines for the preparation of the MBA  
dissertation

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## INTRODUCTION

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A dissertation is a formal report on a research project undertaken as part of the requirement for a master's degree. The structure and presentation of the dissertation should comply with academic conventions as outlined in this document. A well-written dissertation for an MBA will engage effectively with the past research and existing theoretical knowledge, demonstrate some evidence of innovation in application, and provide useful information to either professional or employer communities. Experience has shown that flawed research cannot be disguised by an elegant report. However, it is equally true that good research may sometimes be obscured by weak structuring, poor use of language and technical editing, and a generally careless approach.

This document summarises, first, the technical and editorial requirements with which a dissertation must comply. Secondly, it provides guidelines for the layout of the dissertation document itself.

A dissertation requires from a student a sustained piece of academically correct written work. This means that in addition to the correctness of the layout and format of the document, the correct language, style and tone must also be used. Accordingly, use the third person, passive voice. Do not use the first person: 'I researched many aspects of ...' or 'I believe that this is an inadequate approach to the problem of...'. The third person passive voice sounds more formal and more academic and should thus be mastered for the purposes of writing the dissertation.

### **For example:**

In the course of the research, various aspects of the problem were surveyed.

It is possible that X's (1999) approach is limited given its inability to address the needs of ...

## SECTION 1 TECHNICAL ASPECTS

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### 1.1 Font and line spacing

Use a clean uncluttered font (e.g. Arial, font size 11pt, 1.5 line spacing and justify). Justifying the text creates a more professional appearance. Assist your readers by ensuring that all typographic and layout elements in the dissertation are 'reader friendly'.

### 1.2 Paragraph/Section structure

Use the following numbering system to differentiate between different levels of content (also see the section on Chapters below).

#### 1.2.1 First-order heading

#### 1.2.2 Second-order heading

#### 1.2.3 Third-order heading

It is preferable to use the same font and font size for both text and headings. Please do not underline headings or parts of the text for emphasis or for any other reason - the two modern (post-Remington typewriter) conventions for emphasising text are **bold** and *italic*. Be sure to use these consistently if you feel they are necessary.

### 1.3 Citations

The sources of any information used in the dissertation should be explicitly acknowledged and properly included both in the body of the dissertation as well as in the List of References. You are reminded of the need to cite all sources used accurately and completely. Should you not do this you may face charges of plagiarism.

- The surname, year of publication and page number(s) should be cited in the case of a direct quote:

- In the words of Johnson and Smith (2005: 305), "The frequency of ..."
- Cite only the surname and year of publication, if it is not a direct quote:

Johnson and Smith (2005) found that the frequency of...

OR

The frequency of ... (Johnson & Smith, 2005).

- Three or more authors: Cite all the authors the first time and thereafter only the surname of the first author followed by *et al* and the year of publication:

According to Smith, Marks, Venter and Anderson (2001) open source software opened new perspectives for small and medium enterprises.

Subsequent format:

On this issue Smith *et al* (2001)

OR

at low cost (Smith , *et al* 2001).

- Always try to access the original source of information (i.e. in which information was first published) and restrict to an absolute minimum relying on and citing secondary sources. Should only a secondary source be accessible (Peters, in the following example) the secondary source and **not** the non-accessible primary source (Botha) should be cited and included in the List of References:

In his review article, Peters (2004) referred to the following recommendations made by Botha as far back as 1986: ...

- Personal communications should be used very sparingly, but always be clearly indicated as such in the text and List of References

P. R. Samuels emphasised that... (Personal communication, 10 February 2007).

## **1.4 Page numbering**

Pages should be numbered at the bottom centre. The pages that appear prior to the beginning of the introduction (i.e. from after the title page to the end of the List of Figures) are usually numbered using small Roman numerals (i, ii, iii). Once the text of the dissertation itself begins (from the first page of Chapter 1 to the last page of the Appendices) these pages are numbered as usual (1, 2, 3...)

## **1.5 Footnotes**

Avoid using footnotes (or endnotes) as far as possible - if information is important enough to mention, it should be included in the text (albeit perhaps parenthetically).

## **1.6 Composition of the dissertation**

A dissertation normally consists of the following sequence of distinct elements (examples of each is presented in Section 2 below):

- Cover - soft cover ring-bound for examination copies and hard cover glued spine for the final post-examination copies
- Title page
- Declaration (required)
- Acknowledgements (optional)
- Abstract
- Table of contents
- List of tables
- List of figures
- Chapters
- References
- Appendices

## SECTION 2: EXAMPLES

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The following pages represent examples of the front matter, the typography, layout and formatting of the contents and examples of the rear matter (note the page numbering).

Please note that text boxes on the following pages contain explanatory information and would not appear in the dissertation.

# TITLE OF DISSERTATION

Initials and surname of student

Dissertation title  
Master in Business  
Administration  
Degree

Milpark Business School  
2008

## **Cover**

Soft cover spiral-bound for examination purposes; hard cover glue-bound after examination; the student may choose the type of material to be used (leather or book board).

- Title 18 to 20pt font size
- Rest of page: 14 to 16pt font size
- Same font type as the rest of the dissertation
- No degrees behind the name of the student.

This cover page should not be confused with the title page which contains more information.



Student's initials + surname TITLE OF DISSERTATION: SUBTITLE 2008

**Spine** (only hard-bound cover!)

- Same font size as title page, but the font size should be adjusted according to the width of the spine.
- A relatively long title may require smaller font size and/or a two line title and/or not including a subtitle (if any).
- No degrees should follow after the name of the student.

# TITLE OF DISSERTATION

by

FIRSTNAME MIDDLENAME SURNAME

Dissertation submitted in partial compliance  
with the requirements for the  
degree of Master  
in Business Administration  
at the Milpark Business School

Supervisor: A Red, MBA  
JOHANNESBURG  
October 2008

## Title page

- The page should not contain any pictorial material.
- List the highest qualification of the supervisors, behind their names; do not use titles such as Dr or Ms.
- Title: Font of choice, **BOLD SMALL CAPS**, not exceeding 20pt letter type
- Rest of text: Normal, 14pt letter type.
- No degrees behind the name of by the student.

I declare that this dissertation, *Title of the dissertation*, is my own unaided work and that each source of information used has been acknowledged by means of a complete reference. This dissertation has not been submitted before for any other research project, degree or examination at any university.

.....  
(Signature of student)

.....  
(Date)

....., (City/town of students residence)  
South Africa

## Acknowledgements

It is appropriate to acknowledge the contributions and support of the following role players and support mechanisms, if they impacted on the course of the study:

- Supervisors
- Other substantive research support (funding, companies providing access or information, etc).
- Employer/s and professional colleagues (where relevant)
- Friends and family members

Keep the acknowledgements sober and balanced. Do not exceed one page.

## Abstract

The abstract must sum up the topic of the dissertation in a succinct manner. It is similar to an abbreviated Executive Summary. It should preferably not exceed 350 words (one page). An obvious approach would be to briefly state the research issue. Then outline in a sentence or two the process the research followed. Summarise each Chapter in a few sentences. Summarise the research design and methodology, the findings, discussion and recommendations. This section should account for approximately 80% of the summary. Make sure that the summary communicates in its own right, as a standalone section; however, do not engage in discussion. In terms of content, the summary should stick very closely to the dissertation itself and under no circumstances include any new information. Do not include any sub-headings. Use the passive voice and an appropriate academic style and register: 'This dissertation examines the question of whether X informs Y in Z situation. Overall, the research indicates that C is more significant than A...'

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A dissertation is a research report and it stands to reason that readers would often consult the document to obtain information on a specific issue and that requires relative completeness and absolute accuracy of the table of the contents.

- It is not necessary to reflect more than three levels of subheadings, e.g. 1, 1.1., and 1.1.1.
- To enhance readability, headings in the table of contents should not exceed one line. If there is an unavoidably long heading in the body of the dissertation, it should be abridged: 'Experiment 2: The effects of utilisation of the two-step innovation model in technology transfer in Mpumalanga', could be shortened to, 'Experiment 2: Results of the two-step model in Mpumalanga'.
- Restrict the size of left indentations or tabs to a minimum.
- Rather obvious, but often overlooked: use the same letter type as in the body of the dissertation; also use the same font size: avoid different font sizes in the table of contents to emulate the headings in the text.

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All the guidelines for the **Table of Contents** also apply to the **List of Tables** and the **List of Figures**. Note that:

- Every table or figure must have a heading / title.
- A heading must contain the essential information an informed person would require to understand what the table is intended to communicate.
- The X and Y axes and/or columns/rows should be clearly labeled, as relevant. These labels should describe accurately and clearly what they refer to.
- If the information was taken from a publication or some other source, the source should be clearly acknowledged directly below the table/graph/figure.
- A table should not spill over from one page onto the next. If the table is unusually comprehensive a fold-out page should be considered.

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Summary of previous solutions

Figure 2: Johnson's recommendations

Figure 3: Summary: Authors and their organisational diagnoses

Figure 4: Structure of the customer questionnaire

Figure 5: The sample: Demographic characteristics

A figure is normally included in a publication if the complexity of a process may be better represented using a diagram or a picture (to name two types of figures).

All the guidelines for the **Table of Contents** and the **List of Tables** also apply to the **List of Figures**. Note that:

- All figures should have a heading/title.
- A heading must contain the essential information an informed person would require to understand what the table is intended to communicate.
- Information (e.g. in text boxes) should be accurate, short, clear and explicit.
- A diagram may easily become more confusing if the verbal information is not also well-designed.
- If the information was taken from a publication or some other source, the source should be clearly acknowledged directly below the table/graph/figure.



## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ASSAF	Academy of Science of South Africa
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
DBSA	Development Bank of Southern Africa
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
MBS	Milpark Business School

In principle, the use of acronyms or abbreviations should be restricted to the absolute minimum, especially in the case of uncommon ones (e.g. those that are unique to a specific organisation). Good practice is to spell out the full proper noun (followed by its acronym between brackets) the first time it appears in that chapter, after which the acronym can be used in the rest of the particular chapter. Repeat this process in each new chapter: 'The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) announced...'

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

- Background
- Statement of the problem
- Purpose and importance of the problem
- Research objectives
- Hypothesis
- Research methodology
- Definition and scope of the research study
- Limitations of the research study
- Structure of the dissertation
- Chapter summary

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

- A critical review of the literature, including the theory that underpins the research study.
- Literature review must include current information i.e. Journals (Do not include your views/opinions).
- All references used must be accurately cited
- Chapter summary

## **CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

- An explanation of the research design and how the research study will be conducted.
- An explanation of methods chosen and why (whether Quantitative and/or qualitative)
- A link between the questionnaire/ interviews/ focus groups etc and the literature to the hypothesis
- Detail of the population to be researched
- Detail of the sample size
- Detail of the pilot study
- Detail of how the reliability and validity will be managed
- A brief outline of the methodological weaknesses and how they will be managed
- Chapter summary

## **CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS**

- Presentation of research data/facts
- Must include scientific analysis of results using statistical methods where possible
- Collation of results
- Chapter summary

## **CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

- A comparison of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 with the findings from the research to support or reject your (or other) findings.
- Proof/rebuttal of any hypotheses or support/challenges to the research objectives
- Discussion of the findings
- Discussion of whether and how the hypothesis and research objectives have been met or not
- Chapter summary

## **CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS**

- Look at the hypothesis and research objectives and outline clearly how they have / have not been addressed
- Brief summary of the research study finding
- What are the key recommendations that will add value to the organisation?
- Implications and risks to management
- Discussion of the weakness of the research
- Include further research opportunities
- Chapter summary.

## LIST OF REFERENCES

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The List of References should include all sources of information directly and indirectly used in the dissertation. Do not include other sources that may be relevant, but that were not actually referred to in this list.

An adapted version of the Harvard referencing style should be used; the most common cases are illustrated above.

- References should be listed in alphabetical order across categories of sources; in the case of more than one publication by the same author.
- The references should be listed in chronological order. Do not differentiate between different sub-categories of sources (e.g. journals and books).
- Entries must be accurate and complete.

## APPENDIX A: CUSTOMER QUESTIONNAIRE

Include as appendices information such as the following:

- Copies of data-gathering instruments, e.g. questionnaires, interview schedules
- Geographical maps used in the study e.g. for sampling
- Site maps, e.g. factory lay-out, if necessary to understanding part of the study
- Transcriptions of essential parts of interviews (qualitative research)
- Anonymised raw quantitative data
- Large correlation or other numerical matrices
- Other essential illustrative material

All appendices should be properly listed in the Appendices as well as discussed and cross-referred in the text.