



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM | DEPARTMENT
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA | OF THE ARTS

FASHION STUDIES

Dissertation Handbook



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM | DEPARTMENT
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA | OF THE ARTS

Two-year Master in “Fashion Studies”

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Introduction

This handbook is addressed to students in “Fashion Studies” (Laurea Magistrale, 2nd Cycle Degree). It is intended as a practical guide that will explain how to prepare your final dissertation. It supplements the basic information found on the University website, where the administrative details on how to enroll for the final examination are also available:

<https://corsi.unibo.it/2cycle/FashionStudies/final-examination>

To graduate, you have to sit a final examination designed to verify that you have reached the education objectives set by the Degree Programme.

The final examination consists of:

- the preparation of a dissertation on a subject pertinent to your studies.
- the public discussion of the dissertation during a final examination session in front of a Board.

Students select the area of their dissertation within those covered in the teaching activities of their individual study plan and choose a supervisor in that area as individual tutor to guide them throughout the dissertation project; any of the modules and any of the professors teaching a module included in their personal study plan is a possible choice of topic and supervisor.

What is the dissertation for?

In practical terms, to determine a candidate’s final grade, the Board will assess her/his overall performance, the dissertation, the curriculum followed, and the time taken to complete the programme, including transfers from other courses or Universities.

The specific purpose of the dissertation project is to introduce the student to methods of academic research and writing, and secondly to evaluate her/his capacity to undertake such work. The criteria to assess dissertations are (<https://corsi.unibo.it/2cycle/FashionStudies/final-examination>):

- originality of the subject,
- correct methodology,
- level of in-depth analysis,
- adequate writing and editing,
- ability to express and present the dissertation.

A dissertation is not a long essay, but your own structured, investigation of an interesting problem or issue. Writing an extended piece of work on a subject of your own choosing is usually a pleasurable and interesting process; it is also a challenging process that requires careful thought and planning. Many of the dissertations produced by FAST students have been of an exceptionally high standard and have



demonstrated considerable creativity, imagination and hard work. In doing the dissertation, you are taking charge in defining your own topic, creating your own space, undertaking the relevant reading, and planning and organising your research; however, you are also listening and responding to the advice and guidance of your dissertation supervisor. *Both* these processes are essential to the successful completion of a strong dissertation.

Basic questions

What?

The dissertation or thesis consists of a written text of a scientific nature. It may be accompanied by materials of a different nature such as a multimedia or design project. The thesis is original work of the student and deals with topics and issues consistent with the educational objectives and professional profiles of the degree.

There are also rules and guidelines concerning the format of the dissertation document. However, these are few in number in order to allow the creation of different types of dissertation. This Handbook sets out general guidelines common to the main types of dissertation.

Who?

You will be the author of the dissertation. Design, preparation, production, financing, presentation and submission of the individual research study are entirely the responsibility of the student.

However, you will not be expected to work quite alone. A supervisor assists each student in the preparation of the dissertation. You will propose your project to a professor of your choice among those teaching the courses in your study plan; if they agree to supervise you for your dissertation, they become your supervisor. Please read the section in the Handbook entitled Supervisor-student relationship.

When?

The work for the dissertation will be undertaken mostly in the second year, always bearing in mind the calendar for the final examination. The completed dissertation must be uploaded onto the University's server about three weeks prior to the date of the graduation session that you choose.

The amount of time that you will need to dedicate to this activity depends on the type of dissertation chosen. Time management is an important consideration and a key element of the Supervisor-Student relationship discussed below.

How?



You will need to choose a study plan for your final examination. There are several choices: the simplest one is a single module worth 18 CFU. The final examination may be linked to a thesis project carried out abroad or to an internship. See the page <https://corsi.unibo.it/2cycle/FashionStudies/preparing-the-study-plan> for details.

Selection of a research topic

You are advised to select a topic you have personal interest in, as you are required to conduct an in-depth analysis of this area. There is a wide range of topics relevant to an individual research study in fields aligned with the course programme. However, all topics and methods of research must be agreed with the project supervisor. Ethical issues – especially for empirical research project involving human participants – must also be discussed with the supervisor at the start of the project.

You are advised not to attempt a study that is too big or complicated. The more focused is the study from the outset, the more likely it is that the work will be of an appropriate standard. Past experience indicates that students attempting overly-ambitious studies often face problems of time management and data collection, problems that are all too often reflected in the quality of the submitted work and the subsequent mark.

Supervisor-student relationship

Although the preparation of the dissertation is your project, you are not expected to complete the work without guidance. You will need to identify a potential supervisor among the teaching staff, and to then consult with that tutor regarding the topic and methods of your intended individual research study.

All students must agree their topic of study with a supervisor before work is started. Supervisors will provide students with opportunities to discuss every stage of their work. This is part of the research process. Each supervisor is free to set out the ground rules for the supervision that they offer. Supervisor may also differ on the type and amount of feedback they provide on full or partial drafts, as well as in what they require in order to accept a new dissertation.

As a general rule, it is a good idea to proceed as follows:

- consult the potential supervisor UniBO web page, where they might have indicated their supervision areas and their requirements;
- check with a potential supervisor what their specific requirements are (if they are not specified in their webpage);
- have at least a preliminary idea, even if provisional, of the topic and approach you are interested in. The subject should not be too generic (e.g. 'sustainable fashion', 'Made in Italy', etc.). You can get inspiration from the course material, previous dissertations as listed in the teacher's webpage or their notes on preferred areas of supervision;
- do a preliminary bibliographic research on the chosen topic;



- write a preliminary project (check individual supervisor's requirements) of 1-2 pages with at least: provisional title, provisional objectives with description of the topic and type of research; provisional contents page with main parts/chapters; starting essential bibliography (5-10 references of books and academic articles).

NB Many supervisors require that the document 'Dissertation Supervision Request Form', containing specific information is provided to them ahead of a supervision agreement. A template for this document can be found as Appendix of this handbook. It can also be downloaded as a Word document that can be filled in from the 'Final exam' section of the FAST website (link above).

A dissertation requires substantial work and time; as well as good planning and coordination with your supervisor. Individual supervisors set their own requirements as to how many months in advance you need to contact them. It is in any case advisable to make a first contact as soon as possible, from 8-10 months to a minimum of 6 months prior to the desired graduation date, and with few exams left to pass.

Supervision meetings

You should contact your supervisor to arrange these tutorials. It is in your interest to book these well in advance to ensure their availability at critical periods during the research process (such 'critical' periods include prior to submission of the research proposal; prior to data collection; prior to, during, and post data analysis; and one month prior to submission).

Proof reading of the dissertation manuscript is the responsibility of the student. However, your supervisor will probably provide constructive observations relating to, for example, content, structure, academic style and presentation. Your supervisor may provide written feedback on a portion of the completed manuscript providing that it is submitted allowing sufficient time for review (not one week before submission deadline).

What will not happen

Your supervisor will not:

- provide your dissertation topic;
- manage your time;
- schedule supervision meetings;
- collect articles, books or data for you;
- do your analysis;
- proofread your dissertation;
- supervise your work if you change topic without permission or fail to meet deadlines.

Responsibilities of the student



You need to:

- identify a potential supervisor, and then consult them regarding the topic and methods of your intended research study - most supervisors will require a preliminary project in order to accept a new dissertation: make sure to ask what your potential supervisor requires and when;
- agree a workplan with the supervisor and then respect the scheduled deadlines;
- arrange times of subsequent meetings with your tutor, preferably well in advance;
- prepare for supervisory meetings by sending the agreed material at the agreed date.

Ethical aspects of the research project

Ethics is a matter of how you conduct yourself in different situations, and in particular your obligations towards the people you work with or come into contact with. If you opt for a review-based dissertation, then for the purposes of completing the work your principal relationship will be your tutor, as discussed above. If your study has an element of empirical enquiry collecting original data from people, then your obligations to others, principally study participants, become more important and must be taken into consideration in conversation with your supervisor in advance of starting data collection. Whatever form of dissertation you choose, plagiarism is always an important issue to be aware of and consider carefully (see below).

Plagiarism

It is important to develop a method, right from the start of your research, to keep track of other works you have read, and that may be cited in your dissertation document. Remember that comprehensive referencing minimises the risk of your work appearing to plagiarise the work of others. Any evidence of plagiarism, that is the passing off the work of others as one's own, in a dissertation manuscript, will have serious consequences.

The basic rule of academic writing is that when we write something, we note carefully where the ideas in our writing come from. In other words, we always cite our source (see section References below, for how to cite both in the text and in the list at the end of the document). We do this because every claim should be supported by literature (or empirical evidence) We also do it so that readers can understand what part of the writing is background, and what part is the new contribution.

You always have to draw on relevant literature in order to support your own ideas, but to avoid plagiarism, when you are using ideas or information/data from the literature you must refer to the relevant authors. You need to do this each time you are using an idea from the literature you are reading.

When you are referring to an author without direct quotation be careful that your paraphrasing of their ideas is entirely in your own words. Direct quotations must be in quotation marks and referred to by page number. But be careful in using many long quotations. The idea of using an author's words is that they sum up what you are trying to say in a particularly interesting, concise, clear, unusual way, which would be lost if you paraphrased.



NB Students are advised that in order to verify the originality of the document produced for the final examination supervisors and graduation committees can use the software Compilatio:

<https://www.unibo.it/en/study/guide-to-choosing-your-programme/essential-guide-to-the-study-path/final-examination-and-guarantee-of-originality/guarantee-of-originality>

Preparing the dissertation document

The following guidelines are for the written report and are based on those universally accepted for academic presentations/publications published in several style manuals (e.g., APA, Harvard). They are recommendations, not rules. You may be asked by your supervisor to modify particular aspects.

Length

Unless your supervisor provides you with specific recommendations, the average length of a FAST dissertation is between 80-100 pages (equivalent to about 150-200000 characters including spaces, or about 20-25000 words). The bibliographic references list at the end and the appendices are NOT included in the pages/characters/word count.

Dissertation submission

The dissertation is submitted by uploading it in Pdf format on Studenti Online following the deadlines and instructions found here <https://corsi.unibo.it/2cycle/FashionStudies/final-examination>.

Printed copies are not mandatory. You can consult your supervisor about whether they recommend you to print a copy for them and/or the Committee.

Graduation session

You will present your dissertation to a Graduation Committee during a final defense, which will take place on the final examination dates of the session you have applied for. During this formal discussion, you will be given an allotted time (usually around 10 minutes) to orally present the main aims, methodology and results of your project. The members of the Graduation Committee will then have the opportunity to ask questions. This presentation is part of the overall final examination and should be carefully prepared: discuss with your supervisor how best to present your project. Many students choose to use a slide presentation - please refer to the instructions on the Final Exam section of the FAST website. Please also note that as this is part of an examination, you may have notes with you but you are not supposed to read a text.

Common structure of a dissertation



You should see the dissertation as your project, and its final chapter structure can be decided by you, with guidance from your supervisor. You may also find it useful to consult some of the guides to writing a dissertation at the end of this handbook.

There are some elements that are common to all dissertations. These should be placed in the following order (but not all are necessarily present – a dissertation may have no tables and therefore no ‘List of Tables’):

Preliminaries

- Title page (use the template, ‘frontespizio’, provided)

- Abstract

- Acknowledgements

- Table of Contents

- List of Figures

- List of Tables

- Glossary

Introduction

Main body – divided into Chapters (described below)

Conclusions

References

Appendices (if necessary)

What follows are brief guidelines regarding each section.

Title page

You can find the template to use (fill it in with your details, deleting the instructions) here:

<https://corsi.unibo.it/2cycle/FashionStudies/final-examination>

Abstract

You should include a brief summary of your study at the start of the submitted report. It should contain a description of the rationale, methodology, and findings of the study.

Acknowledgements

You should acknowledge special assistance received during the preparation of the dissertation. Effusive recognition for routine participation by members of staff/family etc. is unnecessary.

Tables of Contents, List of Tables, List of Figures



Prepare a Table of Contents to show the page number of chapters and sub-sections. Prepare two lists to index all tables and figures respectively. These are normally placed in sequence after the Acknowledgements.

Figures

Figures are extremely helpful to assist the reader in understanding the methods used, and results obtained from the study. Photographs or diagrams illustrate the use of apparatus, positions of subjects, and other technical matters. Graphs are a complement to written and tabular presentation of data; care should be taken to ensure good standards of presentation.

A clearly written title should be placed below the body of the Figure. Figures should be numbered consecutively from (Arabic number) 1 within each chapter. For example, Figure 3.2 relates to the second figure in Chapter III.

Tables

A table should be simple, logically arranged, and easy to read. Columns of figures should be right aligned in the case of whole numbers, or else aligned at the decimal point when used. Do not use more significant figures than are necessary.

The title is situated above the table. Tables should be numbered consecutively from 1 within each chapter. For example, table 4.5 related to table 5 in Chapter IV.

Introduction

The introduction should contain a clear statement / discussion of your research questions(s).

An introduction typically establishes clearly and succinctly the research problem or questions, their relation to relevant debates and literature, how you intend to investigate your research problems, and very briefly, the methods used and how you analysed your data. You may also want to include a very brief description of what is covered in each chapter. This provides a signpost for the examiners about the structure of your dissertation.

A good way to proceed is to write a version of the introduction early in the preparation process, after completing the literature review, and then revise it after completing the data acquisition and analysis phase, to ensure that all the concepts used have been adequately described or discussed in the Introduction.

Main body

A possible articulation of the different chapters of the main body is as follows: Literature review; Methodology; Findings; Discussion of findings. However, a theoretical dissertation will differ also in



structure from a dissertation based on collection of original data. This is an area that needs to be discussed early on with the supervisor, probably in the first meeting. A few more general tips regarding specific chapters are below.

Review of the literature

Effective research questions are grounded in a rigorous examination of previous research into the issue or theme chosen. That's why the first step, after your topic is agreed, is to start collecting and reviewing book and articles. Think of your literature review as having some of the following tasks:

- Locating and situating clearly your research problem in the context of the relevant literature and existing debates
- Demonstrating that you have thoroughly read and understood the literature that is directly relevant to your research problem
- Highlighting areas where there is insufficient literature or debate regarding the problem you want to investigate
- Differentiating your own approach from that of the existing literature
- Providing a theoretical 'grounding' for your dissertation
- Including already available data on the topic of your dissertation

The literature review need not contain just theoretical literature, but should also be a discussion of the secondary sources relevant to the area you are investigating. If you are confused about what you should cover in a literature review, brainstorm your research problem and look at its key concepts.

Students sometimes ask 'how much' they should read for the literature review and 'how many' references it should contain. It is impossible to simply quantify the number of books that you should read. Examiners are looking for a demonstration of your thorough knowledge and understanding of the literature that is directly relevant to your research problem and its key themes / concepts. Your supervisor will be able to tell you whether you are on the right track. They will advise you if they think you are exploring irrelevant or unnecessary areas of literature, or, conversely, if you need to read more some areas widely or in greater depth.

The chapter might have another title, or be split into two chapters, or be merged with the methodology, but this task needs to be completed and properly reported in the final text.

For more guidance on writing a literature review, read this useful article:

Knopf, J. W. (2006). Doing a Literature Review. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 39(1), 127–132.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20451692>

Methodology

Don't forget that an appropriate methodology is what distinguishes scientific or academic research from informal investigation. You should describe the methods you use with sufficient detail and



precision to allow others to reproduce your results following the description you provide in this Chapter. Methods have their own scientific sources: depending on what method you choose, use and refer to relevant sources (research handbooks or methodological articles).

Conclusions

The Conclusions chapter is often relatively brief. Look back to the stated aim of the research. Were you able to support or refute your original hypothesis? Or answer your question? What were your principle findings in the case of a qualitative or exploratory study?

Look forward: how your study contributes to an understanding of your chosen topic, or suggests ways of changing current practice? Does it have wider managerial or social implications?

Footnotes and Endnotes

These should only be used for amplification, when discussion is required but would interrupt the development of the argument in the main text.

References

You should use a standard recognized format of bibliographic referencing and citation for acknowledging all the sources you have used, both in the body of your dissertation and in a separate list of references at the end of your text. The Bibliographic References at the end of the dissertation are not included in the wordcount of the dissertation. You must also read the statement on plagiarism in this handbook.

There are several accepted systems of citation and it is important that you discuss and agree on one with your supervisor early on. A general guide of the main options can be found here:

https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Or, from the University of Bologna (in Italian):

<https://sba.unibo.it/it/servizi/formazione/guida-alla-citazione-delle-fonti-bibliografiche>

Referencing also refers to citations within the text. Citation is an essential component of academic writing. The purposes of citation are:

- To appropriately credit the work of previous authors. Failure to cite previous work on which the dissertation is based, or worse still, text directly copied from previous books or articles, is considered plagiarism. Plagiarism is unethical behaviour (see above).
- To contextualise the dissertation. It should be possible to demonstrate that the proposed research question warrants further investigation based on gaps in the literature, or that hypotheses and arguments fundamental to the research question are implied/proposed in the work of key authors in peer-reviewed academic publications.



- To demonstrate the dedication and skill of the student, first in reading widely around the subject, and then in synthesising previous work for the purposes of the student's own research.

N.B. The University Library system offers various guides and tutorials on Information Literacy, both online and as ad-hoc class-room training. Students are strongly encouraged to make the most of this service. Start by checking what is currently available at <https://sba.unibo.it/en/services/training>.

Appendices

The Appendices should include background material. They are not included in the wordcount of the dissertation. Appropriate appendices could include:

- an example letter to participants or organizations
- the interview schedule or topic guide
- example of transcript of interviews conducted
- additional information on your topic (such as demographic information)
brief extracts demonstrating how you coded or analysed any data so that you can demonstrate how you have used your method
- extracts from your fieldnotes

Editorial guidelines

For the final version, suggested typeface is a simple one such as Times New Roman, with a font size of 12 (10 for footnotes). The page should be laid out with all margins set to 2.5 cm, with lines properly spaced.

For further guidance see:

<https://corsi.unibo.it/2cycle/FashionStudies/final-examination/editorial-guidelines-final-dissertation.pdf/@@download/file/Editorial%20guidelines%20final%20dissertation.pdf>

Further reading

There exist many publications on how to complete a dissertation successfully, run a small research project, write academically, and so on. There is also a varied methodological literature – your supervisor will be able to point to the most relevant for your chosen topic and approach.

It is strongly advised to start your bibliographic research from the Rimini Campus University library, as well as the wider library system of the University of Bologna, including the database of online academic journals available to you as UniBO students.

Below is a short list of some general texts that you might find useful as you start thinking about your dissertation; you will need to adapt the advice to the specific requirements – length, structure, etc – of



your degree, but they will be useful for issues like finding a topic, researching literature, writing up notes and then chapters, working method, time management, and so on.

- A. Abbott (2014) *Digital Paper: A Manual for Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials*, University of Chicago Press.
- H.S Becker (2007) 2nd ed. *Writing for social scientists: how to start and finish your thesis, book, or article*, University of Chicago Press.
- J. Biggam (2021) 5th ed. *Succeeding with your Master's dissertation. A Step-by-step Handbook*, Open University Press.
- K.E Rudestam, R.R. Newton (2014) 4th ed. *Surviving your dissertation: A comprehensive guide to content and process*. Sage.
- A. Sönke (2017) *How to Take Smart Notes: One Simple Technique to Boost Writing, Learning and Thinking. For Students, Academics and Nonfiction Book Writers*, North Charleston, SC, CreateSpace Independent Publishing.



APPENDIX

DISSERTATION SUPERVISION REQUEST FORM

Students are advised to consult the FAST "Final Exam" section (link below) before contacting a potential supervisor. There you can also download the Dissertation Handbook - please consult it before submitting this form to a potential supervisor.

<https://corsi.unibo.it/2cycle/FashionStudies/final-examination>

Please, submit the following information to a potential supervisor:

1 – NAME, SURNAME, MATRICULATION NUMBER, NAME OF DEGREE PROGRAM

2 – GRADUATION SESSION

(any possible delay of the session must be justified and agreed with the supervisor)

3 – TEACHING ACTIVITY (this is the module connected to your dissertation topic, taught by the supervisor)

4 - PROVISIONAL TITLE AND TABLE OF CONTENTS

(they can be modified later)

5 – TOPIC DESCRIPTION

6 – RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

7 - METHODOLOGY



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8- BIBLIOGRAPHY & WEBLIOGRAPHY

9 - DISSERTATION DELIVERY PLAN

(dissertation must be delivered one month before discussion)