

DON'T BE DISS-STRESSED! HOW TO START PREPPING FOR YOUR DISSERTATION

IN COLLABORATION WITH PREVIOUS WARWICK STUDENT, REBECCA PREEDY



It feels like your whole degree has been building up to this moment. You finally have the freedom to write an extended piece of writing on literally whatever you want. The possibilities are endless... but sometimes the fear is as well! When do I start? How do I decide what to write about? Where do I start with researching? How do I approach a supervisor? These are all questions which may start to plague you during the summer before your final year of university, and it can be difficult to answer them by yourself. Check out the dissertation prep checklist below and start getting inspired!

When do I start?

The earlier the better! The sooner you start thinking about what it is that you want to write your dissertation about, the more prepared you will be. If you wait until the last minute, you may end up rushing and picking a topic that you aren't very interested in. This will make the work long and boring from start to finish, so it is much better to give yourself some time to decide what you want to focus on.



While you're close to campus, make use of the Library by going in to find some preliminary reading, or use the online catalogue to look up some e-resources and ebooks, or even try watching some documentaries or podcasts

related to your degree which might give you some inspiration.

How do I decide what to write about?

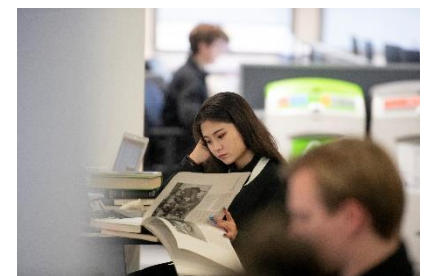
When you've been told that you can write about anything at all within the broad sphere of your degree it can be a really daunting prospect to face. Try asking your department for examples of previous titles to give you an idea about what sort of things people have written about before.

...take your time thinking about your own viewpoint...

When it comes to your own work, try narrowing it down to a number of topics that you have an interest in. Think about which modules you have particularly enjoyed during your degree, or even an individual lecture that you remember finding very

interesting. Once you have this list down on paper, it is a lot easier to get a decent idea of the sort of areas you might want to look at.

It's also sensible to think about the topics that you have a good grasp on, since you will need to have a thorough understanding of the subject material in order to get a good grade.



Where do I start with research?

Once you've narrowed it down to a basic subject area, it's time to refine your topic by researching relevant scholarship. Try a basic library search to find the most important titles and authors.

It's a good idea to get to grips with the most up-to-date research on your

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subject, since some of the older publications may be too outdated to be used as more than a basic reference in your dissertation.

Start by getting a notion of the proposed ideas in current scholarship. Do you agree with them? If not, this can be a good place to start constructing the framework of your own argument.

...think about the topics that you have a good grasp on...

Remember to take your time thinking about your own viewpoint; it might only be after reading the opinions of about ten academics that you get a real idea of what it is that you want to say.

How do I approach a supervisor?

Every department assigns supervisors in a different way. Some ask for a proposed title before matching you to an appropriate academic, while others leave it up to you to approach the lecturer you feel will suit your work best. If the latter is the case, make sure to

check on your departmental website to find out what each staff member specialises in.



It is a good idea to send a preliminary email during the summer break to introduce yourself and your proposed research topic. That way, the lecturer you are emailing can give you an idea about whether this is a suitable topic, and whether it is something that they would be interested in supervising.

Getting the step in the door before you officially start work on your dissertation can give you a real head start that will make life a lot easier for you when term actually starts.