

HOW TO KICKSTART YOUR DISSERTATION

IN COLLABORATION WITH PREVIOUS WARWICK STUDENT, AMY PRESTON



*If you haven't yet started your dissertation, or are struggling to find your feet, don't panic. If you're an undergraduate, perhaps you're battling with how to actually start writing - if you're a postgraduate maybe you're just struggling to get the ball rolling. You're probably thinking "where do I start?" **Fortunately, Amy Preston is here with some tips to help!***

I'm an MA English Literature student in the early stages of my dissertation research and trust me, I understand that this is a time where you may be feeling lots of doubt and uncertainty - I certainly am. But along the way I've picked up a few honest tips that might just make that 'getting started' process seem a little less daunting, and who knows, maybe even enjoyable.

By reading widely and deeply you'll find gaps in the criticism...

Value your own opinions

One great piece of advice I was given once by a tutor was that before you start any essay or project, first write down your own opinions or ideas. Often when we read a lot first, the opinions of others cloud over our own ideas. For example, by writing down what you think about a primary text first, when you

start reading the opinions of others you can recognise the different arguments. Discover your own opinion, even if these are just a few odd ideas at first, and then learn to trust it.

Find the central argument

When reading secondary sources relevant to your field, write a small paragraph in your own words outlining any key terms and the scholar's central point. Try to write your own response to it if you can as doing this will help you later on, particularly if the argument is quite complex. This might become something of a literature review which will be helpful to you later on.



Quotes and citations

I'd always recommend writing down quotations as

you read in order to save you going back to them. Citing as you go can help too so that you don't forget where you found it. This is tedious now, but you will be so glad you did it when it comes to the last few weeks before submission.

Dissertation planning can feel quite lonely...

Broaden your horizons

Read. Read a lot. But don't necessarily feel you're limited to that one online database you've used since first year. If you're struggling to find a new angle for a topic within English Literature for example, why not try seeing on what is being said on the topic by scholars in the fields of Economics or Sociology? Who knows, you might just discover a new angle that you can bring to your argument.

HOW TO KICKSTART YOUR DISSERTATION

IN COLLABORATION WITH PREVIOUS WARWICK STUDENT, AMY PRESTON

By reading widely and deeply you'll find gaps in the criticism and eventually a platform for your own voice as an academic. You can always ask the Library's [Research and Academic Support Librarians](#) for help in knowing where else to look too, they're trained to help with specific subjects!

write down your own opinions or ideas...

Go for coffee

While feeling doubtful about my dissertation idea and progress, I decided what I really needed was to chat to someone else in my position. Dissertation planning can feel quite lonely, especially if you haven't yet reached that breakthrough moment that we're all waiting for, but it doesn't have to be that way.

I messaged a girl on Facebook that I knew had the same supervisor as me and asked if she'd like to meet for coffee. This meeting was extremely useful as we discussed our ideas, gave each other recommendations for secondary criticism and reassured each other about the process.

I'd recommend reaching out to others because it's great to get a second opinion from someone other than your supervisor, and potentially friendships can be formed along the way!



Check in with your supervisor

Remember that some supervisors may not contact you first and so it is best for you to reach out to them early on - this way you won't feel in the dark and left behind. I agreed to meet with my supervisor once every 2 weeks because I like to feel guided and be given a set piece of work to do for the next meeting. It helps me ensure I achieve something each week because I know I don't want to let my supervisor down. It is fine if you don't feel you need so much support, but it's best to make sure that you and your supervisor are on the same page.

Remind yourself of your successes

This is a tip from one student to another about well-being and promoting a positive mindset. Return to your past successful essays and remind yourself that you can write well: there is evidence that you have done so before. This really boosts morale and reminds you of those dark days where you thought writing 5000 words was impossible, but in the end, you pulled it out of the bag anyway. When your dissertation gets handed in, it will be a similar feeling.

Discover your own opinion...

Remember, everything is going to get done eventually, so try and enjoy the journey! It might be the last time you get to fully focus on a topic of interest. There's something quite joyous about that. So, start reading, write down your thoughts and good luck!