

Managing and Focusing your Dissertation

Dr Kevin Morrell
www.kevinmorrell.org.uk

www.kevinmorrell.org.uk

Managing a Masters dissertation

- Problems and Myths
- Timetable and Milestones
- Process and Content
- The supervisory relationship
- Tools for Planning
- Illustration and examples

www.kevinmorrell.org.uk

Problems and Myths

- Common problems
 - Inappropriate topic choice
 - Misunderstanding requirements
 - Inappropriate choice of methods
 - Poor use of time ('traps')
- Common myths
 - You have to do something amazing, or new
 - I'm not clever enough to do this, or, I can't do this
 - Writing happens at the end, that's why it is called 'writing up'

BUT... allow yourselves to learn

www.kevinmorrell.org.uk

Timetable and Milestones

End May	Outline Proposal
June 20-21	Workshop 1
July 5	Redraft proposal
July-Sep	Supervisor alloc'n
July-Nov	Feasibility, access, lit review
Nov 24-25	Workshop 2
Nov-April	Collect data plan analysis
April 27-28	Workshop 3
Aug 1	1 st draft
Sep 26	2 hard copy 1 CD submit
April	Exam Board
July	Graduation

Research Topic
 Secure Access
 Decide Methods
 1st chapters (draft)
 1st interview / survey
 Begin (finish) analysis

Process and Content

- Content of the work (review, design, analysis, writing)
- The process (how you do things)
 - How do you work best typically
 - How can you work best on this project
 - Time-traps: Displacement, bad habits, unhelpful thinking
 - Single – double loop learning

www.kevinmorrell.org.uk

The Supervisory Relationship - 1

Example contract from a typical handbook / module guide

- ...minimum input expected from the supervisor:
- Hold an initial face-to-face meeting with the MPA participant.
 - Hold two further meetings to review progress during the project.
 - Review and comment on a first draft of the dissertation (if submitted in good time).
 - Respond to all email and telephone contact from the MPA participant.
 - Mark the dissertation and arrange for it to be second marked. Agree the mark with the second marker.
- ...minimum input expected from the supervisee:
- Make the first contact to arrange an initial meeting (once supervisor allocated).
 - Set up and agree dates for progress review meetings with the supervisor.
 - Set up and agree a date for the delivery of the first draft of the dissertation.
 - Set up and agree a date or a phone appointment for receiving feedback on the dissertation.⁵ *from the Warwick guide (p11)*

The Supervisory Relationship - 2

More Importantly:

Keep promises, clarify expectations, share information, make specific commitments and honour them. Be keen and open to suggestions.

Disappear, visit for no reason, fail to hand in/do work, don't read what they suggest, ignore comments, phone for a 'chat', treat meetings as a contest.

Your supervisor can reasonably expect you:

Show independence; are honest about how things are; produce quality written work that is not a first draft; meet commitments (or explain why)

You are entitled to expect:

Constructive criticism; guidance, suggestions, advice and ideas; help with literature; support; some direction. Try to listen... avoid being defensive.

PLAN meetings... demonstrate you are seeing them for a reason, show you recognize their time is important.

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

Suggested Tools

- 3 kinds of tools:
 1. Planning
 2. Timing
 3. Focus
- Limitations of tools:
 1. Suitability (people and project)
 2. 'Rational' (emergent, reverse-engineering)
 3. Constrain (thought and action / activity)

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

Planning, Timing and Focus

- Planning – a view of the research process
- Timing – a Gantt chart approach
- Focus – a Data Needs matrix

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk

Illustration and Examples

(these are subject to copyright restrictions)

www.kevinmerrill.org.uk