**Teaching and Learning Centre podcasts: the DISSERTATION SERIES**

**A few basics – KEY POINTS**

Every department has different requirements, recommendations, and practices for dissertations. Check for the “official” requirements for word count, formatting and referencing styles, etc. in your own department. Despite the many variations among dissertations, most dissertations have many of the following sections; and each section has a particular function.

**Abstract**

The abstract gives a clear, concise, “stand-alone” summary of the research. It presents the research questions, the research design and methods, the key findings, and main conclusions of the research.

**Acknowledgements**

This part of the dissertation is where you can recognise and express thanks to individuals or organisations for support – academic, financial, moral - you have received.

**Table of contents**

The table of contents gives your reader a quick picture of the overall structure of your work, and how the sections are balanced and flow in a logical way.

**Introduction**

The introduction presents the topic and the broad research question, gives some background on the research, and most importantly gives a plan of your dissertation - a “map” of how you have organised the various sections.

**The literature review**

The literature review presents the current state of research around your topic. It should give a logical, narrative that you develop, using the existing ideas and debates around your research area, to frame and lead up to your own specific research question(s) (often raised at the end of this section). It can also include an explanation of your particular approach to thinking about these issues – how you understand the issues and ideas: your conceptual framework.

**Methods**

The methods section gives an overview of the research design – what sources or material you chose to use, what kind of participants you chose to sample, what steps you took in collecting and analysing data, and your justification for these choices.

**Results / Findings**

These sections (or one combined section) contain the results of the data analysis and the interpretation of what the results mean. Some studies (with quantitative data) have a clear separation between the results and the interpretation of what they show. Qualitative research results and findings are often presented together.

**Discussion**

The discussion is where you reflect on how your own findings relate to the wider context of the topic that you developed in the literature review. You can refer back to the rationale that you gave for your research in the literature review, and discuss what your own research has added.

It is important to show that you appreciate the limitations of your research, and how these may affect the validity or usefulness of your findings. These acknowledged limitations, along with the implications of your findings for theory, research, and practice can be raised in the discussion.

**Conclusion**

The conclusion section is often relatively short. Here you should re-iterate your research questions and your main findings, and highlight what you think are the key implications of what you have found.

**References**

Your references should follow the conventions of the referencing style you choose. All the works that are cited in the text should be listed in the references. It’s also important to check that all the works in your reference list are actually cited in the text.

**Appendices**

Appendices include items that a reader might be interested in seeing, but which would disrupt the of the main text. This might include any research instruments or protocols that you used (surveys, questionnaires) or some examples of your data (interview transcripts, for example). If you include such items as appendices, be sure that refer to them within the main text where necessary.