



MSc Strategic Communication & Public
Relations
(Joint Degree – Full-Time)

Dissertation Guidelines
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Written by:
Dr Derek Hodge

Adapted for MSc Strategic Communication and Public Relations (Joint Degree):
Dr Alenka Jelen-Sanchez and Dr Frederic Guerrero-Solé

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Introduction

The dissertation element of the course gives students the opportunity to design independently their own academic research project in an area of their own interest. A dissertation requires independent learning and you are responsible for the progression of your work. These guidelines are prepared to help you plan your work successfully.

Since public relations is an interdisciplinary subject, research can be approached from a variety of perspectives. For example, literature in organisational communication and organisational behaviour is relevant to issues of corporate culture; literature on ethics key to corporate social responsibility; and marketing relevant to consumer PR and sponsorship. However, all students should bear in mind that one of the key criteria is **the relevance of your study to public relations theory and practice**, which must be made explicit throughout the dissertation. You can tackle a practical, empirical study or a literature-based theoretical subject focused on analysis and argument. Your supervisor will help you to hone your project into an acceptable format, but you will need to spend considerable time on your own, thinking about how best to tackle your chosen topic.

It is really important that you are genuinely interested in your own project; a dissertation is *not* a rather long essay but a project that you will need to eat, sleep and breathe for a few months.

The dissertation requires considerable time and commitment. You are recommended **not** to embark on a work-placement or to begin employment while attempting the dissertation unless it is connected to the research project (e.g. participant observation, data gathering).

The dissertation requires you to demonstrate **academic expertise**: that is, the ability to use archives, libraries and journals, and to track down obscure sources where required. It also requires you to be research **capable to contribute to the body of knowledge, not only advancement of practice**. You are also expected to understand theories of knowledge that inform the various methodological approaches and to interpret these in terms of your research. Applied research exploring practice issues can be very rewarding but work-based projects (with the exception of [Making the Most of Masters](#) scheme) are usually not suitable for an academic dissertation as they tend to be focused on technique and strategic advice rather than contribution to the body of knowledge, and time-lines are often unsuitable.

Your dissertation periods and deadlines will slightly differ if you undertake your dissertation at Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF) or at the University of Stirling. These differences are reflected

throughout the document. However, the dissertation procedure, guidelines, ethical approval, supervision and marking criteria remain the same at both institutions.

At UPF, your dissertation period starts when the second semester finishes at UPF with the deadline on **25 July 2018**. **You will also have to present your dissertation at a public defence at the beginning of July 2018** (date to be confirmed) for a successful completion of your dissertation, which is a formal requirement for MSc dissertations in Spain.

At Stirling, your dissertation period starts when the second semester finishes at Stirling with the deadline on **31 August 2018**. There is no public defence.

Dissertation aims and objectives

Aim

To demonstrate an understanding of research procedures and to implement these in a dissertation on theory and/or practice relevant to public relations.

Objectives

Within the dissertation students should:

- Specify and justify a particular approach and reveal underlying assumptions behind that approach. These may include positivist/functionalist, phenomenological/interpretive approaches or philosophical and historical approaches;
- Specify and justify the research methods chosen and implemented. Techniques may include the range of qualitative and quantitative methods for data gathering (e.g. survey, interviews, focus groups etc.) and data analysis (e.g., statistical analysis, textual analysis, content analysis etc.)
- Present a critical, coherent and analytical piece of writing;
- Demonstrate scholarship and sensitivity in handling sources and data. Dissertations should cite original rather than secondary sources wherever possible. Data should be clearly presented and subject to critical analysis.

Supervision process

The Supervisor's role is to assist in the development of a suitable project and methodology. He or she will:

- Agree with you a timetable for delivery of draft chapters;
- Agree with you on most suitable points of contact (e.g. face-to-face meetings, Skype, email, phone);
- Point you in the direction of useful sources and references;
- Normally review and give feedback to each chapter once and once to the dissertation as a whole;
- Give advice on structure and content within ten days of receiving a draft (except when they are on holiday or absent at conferences);
- Review initial drafts (including research instruments, e.g. questionnaires, interview guides) and critique them;
- Review transcribed interviews;
- Review early workings of analysis.

A Supervisor will not:

- Give you a topic or tell you what to research;
- Edit or rewrite your work;
- Do your data analysis;
- Re-read more than one draft version of each chapter and one version of your full draft dissertation unless agreed otherwise.

You can help your Supervisor to help you by:

- Writing to deadlines;
- Keeping your supervisor informed about your progress and letting him/her know if you are encountering difficulties;
- Always submitting your best work to your supervisor, even if the material is 'in draft' – your supervisor may return work to you that is not properly checked for spelling and grammar, or is not properly referenced;
- Being properly prepared for each supervision session by having a clear idea of the ground you want to cover and the questions you want to ask (e.g. agenda);

- Not expecting your supervisor to correct spelling and grammatical mistakes or to do proof-reading;
- Not emailing large quantities of text two days before a deadline with a request for comments and critique the next day!

Work schedule

It is your responsibility to produce a workable schedule for your dissertation. This should be discussed and agreed with your supervisor at the first meeting.

Important points for consideration:

- Submission deadline is **Wednesday 25 July 2017 (if you are doing your dissertation at UPF)** and **Friday 31 August 2018 (if you are doing your dissertation at Stirling)**;
- The submission deadline for the first full draft of your dissertation is on **20 June 2018 (at UPF)** and **at the end of July 2017 (at Stirling)**. Please note that the definite deadline for the first full draft will be confirmed by your Programme Director and/or Supervisor.
- **Drafts will not be accepted and commented on after that deadline** – you should receive your feedback at your public defence at UPF and by mid-August at Stirling and will then need time to finalise your draft for submission;
- **Public defence (UPF only):** your dissertation project **must** be publicly defended in front of a Faculty Committee, which consists of three faculty members. The public defence dates will be at the beginning of July 2018 (dates to be confirmed). The purpose of the defence is to demonstrate your ability, intellectual maturity and capacity to present original research work conducted under the guidance of a supervisor.
- **All the dissertations, regardless if they are undertaken at Stirling or UPF, need to go through University of Stirling's ethical procedure** and be approved by General University Ethics Panel (GUEP). Please see *Ethics procedure* section below for details.
- Allow time for data collection and analysis;
- Draw up a clear work plan and schedule for all the different tasks you have to do – tackling a dissertation entails quite a lot of administrative work and project management is an important transferable employability skill that you will gain from the process in addition to the analytical and thinking skills.

The importance of working closely with your supervisor and not delaying the start of empirical data-gathering cannot be overemphasised. 12,000 words may look like a few assignments, but it

is an entirely different process and you need all the time you can get.

Timetable of Events¹

	UPF	Stirling
Idea generation and topic selection This is to be presented at the first dissertation workshop	December 2017	December 2017
Allocation of supervisors <i>If you would like to discuss your dissertation ideas prior to allocation of supervisors, you should contact your Programme Directors, who will be happy to arrange a meeting with you.</i>	March 2018	April 2018
Finalised Research Proposal <i>Students to organise initial meeting with their supervisor and agree a schedule of deadlines; ways in which contact is to be maintained and discuss any theoretical and methodological questions arising from research proposals.</i>	Beginning of April 2018	Mid-April 2018
Submit ethics forms	April 2018	May 2018
Students to make contact with potential interviewees, host organisations, establish samples, and confirm to supervisor that access is to be granted and that project is feasible.	April 2018	May 2018
Field work	May 2018	June 2018
Draft submission	20 June 2018	End of July 2018 (to be arranged with your supervisor)
Public defence	July 2018 (TBC)	N/A
Final Submission	25 July 2018	31 August 2018

Key considerations in selecting a topic

- Avoid very general and broad subjects which cannot be handled in sufficient depth in 12,000 words and a relatively short period of time;
- Be sure that you are clear about the relevance of your subject to public relations;
- Consider what source materials are available. If very little has been written on your topic you may be able to go to complementary studies for frameworks and theories relevant

¹ The timetable is indicative and might change. You will be informed of any changes, so please keep an eye on your University email.

to your topic (for example in the fields of media, advertising, management, organisational studies, cultural studies, psychology, politics, persuasion, strategic management etc.) in order to develop a framework or hypothesis for your own research. You are very likely to have to source other disciplines in order to understand properly the public relations context you are researching, for example, tourism (if tourism PR is the topic); management (if the role of PR in organisational strategic development is the topic); communication and media studies (if journalism – PR relationship is the focus); museum studies (if your question explores public relations in arts); sport studies (if sports PR is the topic) etc.

- Give some consideration to the quality and significance of existing literature, e.g., a newspaper article or a blog may contain some interesting ideas but is based on unsubstantiated opinion; a journal article will be more analytical or based on specific empirical studies, peer reviewed and therefore carry greater weight. You will need to use your judgement to assess the relative significance of these different sources and to justify their importance and the extent to which you have relied on them. You will also need to consider how research in the subject area has changed and developed and the reasons for these changes;
- Give some consideration to the approach, methods and assumptions of previous research in the area.

Research approaches

Your dissertation must clearly indicate the research approaches taken, its underlying assumptions and explain why this is appropriate. You should select appropriate methodology and supply referenced explanations and justifications as well as describing research protocols and instruments and structure of the dissertation.

The methodology chapter should not read like an essay on methodology in general, but a clear and succinct explanation of what you did and why you did it. You need to relate ideas about methodology to your particular project. Nevertheless, you should still explain and justify the research paradigm you have chosen and the reasons why you chose it. Remember, the nature of your research question determines research paradigm and the research paradigm offers a range of research methods and techniques. The dissertation should therefore flow smoothly and logically from the question(s) or hypotheses. Choosing methods and techniques (e.g. survey)

without clearly defined research questions or hypotheses will lead to problems because you have 'put the cart before the horse'.

Likewise, be sure that you understand fully the possible research paradigms, approaches and techniques, and their strengths and limitations. It is very common for public relations students to express a desire to do, for example, a 'case study' without fully understanding the parameters or demands of this approach – make sure that you do not fall into this category and make sure that you have **read at least one book on**, for example, case studies **before** you go for your first supervision.

Ethics procedure

Please keep in mind that all dissertations, regardless if they are undertaken at Stirling or UPF, need to go through University of Stirling's ethics procedure and be approved by the General University Ethics Panel (GUEP).

The **Student Dissertation Ethical Approval Form** can be accessed [here](#). Please note that you can find more information, consent forms, participant information sheets and many other templates on the [Ethics website](#).

The procedure is as follows:

1. Fill in the Student Dissertation Ethical Approval Form in collaboration with your supervisor. The form needs to be as complete as possible and you need to consult and include information from relevant codes of conduct as identified in the form. We have had quite a few rejections, because students did not consult the codes of conduct, inadequately addressed the ethical issues and procedures involved in their research or failed to submit information sheet and consent forms.
2. If your research involves live participants (e.g. surveys, interviews, focus groups, ethnography), you will need to prepare Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form and submit it together with your Ethical Approval Form. The generic template of the Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form for the students on this programme can be found in the Appendix 1 (adopted from generic University [Participant Information Sheet](#) and [Consent Form](#) templates). Please prepare both in consultation with your supervisor.

3. Send the form(s) to your supervisor, so he/she can review them, sign the Ethical Approval Form and return it to you.
4. Once signed by the supervisor, you need to send the Student Dissertation Ethical Approval Form (together with Participant Information sheet and Consent Form if applicable) to ethicsFAH@stir.ac.uk.
5. Once you receive approval, you can proceed with your empirical research.

Please keep in mind that the ethical procedure can take **from two weeks to one month**. That is why it is very important that you submit the forms at your earliest convenience (soon after the first meeting with your supervisor) to avoid any delays in your research process. **You are not allowed to do any empirical research until your ethical form is approved.**

Guidelines for the structure of your dissertation

Public relations dissertations on our programme normally undertake empirical research (unless agreed with your supervisor that you will tackle a literature-based theoretical subject focused on analysis and argument). You should consult appropriate methodology books in deciding the structure of your dissertation. In particular, see -

Creswell, J. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (3rd ed.). London, Sage.

Daymon, C. & Holloway, I. (2011). *Qualitative Research Methods in Public Relations & Marketing Communication* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

The outline structure below is intended to show the type of approach which might be adopted for an empirical dissertation. The chapters and their elements should serve as **rough guidelines**, not 'boxes to be ticked' and rigidly followed; you have to work out and justify what is appropriate in your project, paying a special attention to logical and coherent structure of your work. Very inductive or ethnographic studies, for example, may legitimately place their literature review towards the end of their dissertation. However, you are recommended to discuss the structure and content of your work with your supervisors.

Dissertation usually consists of the following chapters:

1 Introduction

The introductory chapter explains what the research topic is and why it is of interest to the field of public relations. The scope and boundaries of the research and the research setting in which the study will be conducted are outlined.

In your introduction, you should give a clear account of the research problem that you set out to investigate, making sure that you indicate key theoretical and empirical issues involved. The research question(s) should be clearly spelt out. You should also explain the research focus and how you have interpreted the research question. You should make a clear statement about the problem that you finally tackled. Outline your methodological approach to your study. Your literature is not reviewed here but you can outline theoretical framework and the scope of the literature reviewed.

The introduction should include:

- Clearly summarised research purpose placed within the domain of public relations theory and practice;
- Outline of the research setting / organisation / cultural / national background;
- Justification of the relevance of research topic to public relations theory and practice.

Some students find this a difficult chapter to write, most have to re-write it more than once before it proves satisfactory. You may find it easier to write when you are nearer the end of the project than at the beginning. Avoid rambling about the project as a whole. Keep the introduction focused and concise.

2 Literature Review

Q U A N T I T A T I V E

Function of a Literature Review

In quantitative research, the literature provides direction for the development of research questions and hypotheses to be tested empirically. It serves as a basis for comparison once the empirical work has been completed and the data analysed. The literature is used deductively as a framework for research questions or hypotheses. By reviewing fundamental theory and analysing key concepts (variables) the literature review provides both the background and the content of the remainder of the study.

QUALITATIVE

Function of a Literature Review

In qualitative research, the literature review is used inductively, that is to say, it is not used as a basis from which to direct particular research questions are generated but as a background discussion on key concepts, critical theories, and historical material. There is considerably more variance in both the scope and the position of the literature review in the dissertation as a whole.

The purpose of the literature review in qualitative research, if it is at the beginning of the dissertation, is to frame the topic. You should aim to present to the reader a road map to the various fields and themes that bear upon your research question. At the end of the research the author should compare and contrast their findings with the literature.

However, if a case study or ethnographic piece of research is being conducted, then literature may be used more fully at the end as a tool to help interpretation once the researcher has identified patterns or categories in their research. The final placement of the literature review should be discussed with your supervisor.

You should be selective, but structure this section so as to give a clear overview of the main types of literature available in this field, remembering to explain why the literature is relevant to your problem definition. The literature review is **not** a catalogue, detailed list or even a descriptive summary of sources; **neither** is it an essay about your research idea supported by references. The literature review is an overall critical review of main themes in various fields relevant to your project. It outlines theoretical framework and highlights what has and has not been written and demonstrates to the reader that your project is original. You may choose to organise your review by discipline, theme, or historical chronology.

The literature review should include²:

- An introduction which clearly indicates the aims of the review and the reasons for the structure you have chosen;
- Position your research within the main public relations paradigms and approaches (systems/excellence paradigm; critical; feminist; communication; rhetorical etc.);

² Please note these bullet points serve as guidelines of what should ideally be included in your literature review and not as compulsory list of steps to be rigidly followed in the listed order. Your literature review needs to be – above all – coherent, well-argued and logically structured.

- Clear definitions of key concepts (variables in quantitative projects) to be explored;
- A discussion of the theoretical perspectives of previous authors in your field or related fields;
- A summary of the main empirical findings of previous research and other relevant data stressing those ideas and empirical findings which are important for your dissertation, including those you challenge and reject and those which have proved to be useful to you in developing your own ideas and which have influenced you and your study;
- Your own criticisms of other writers' assumptions, perspectives and arguments which brings out the reasons for the direction of your own research;
- Concluding summary of your reasons for the structure and direction of your own research.

3 Methodology

The methodology chapter outlines your epistemological position and the precise way in which the research has been conducted. This may include the selection of method and its implications, target number of participants, the reason for their inclusion, the way the data has been generated and the method used to systematically explore or analyse the data. The key to this chapter is to illustrate the systematic way in which data was acquired and analysed so that if anyone would wish to replicate your study, they could follow your steps exactly. You should not engage in a detailed description of methods in general, but need to explain exactly how and why the methods were applied to your research and what kind of implications this has for the findings of your study.

You need to make references to research literature to demonstrate awareness and understanding of appropriate research methods for your topic. There are many specialist texts on research methodology, methods and techniques and you will need to read the ones relevant to your research approach in order to support your dissertation methodology. **The methodology chapter is written in the past tense.**

All research instruments (e.g. questionnaires, interview guides, lists of participants in the study if appropriate) should be appended. You should note, however, that full transcripts

of interviews appended on their own are of little or no value; it is your analysis of the interviews that is important. It is helpful, therefore, to append one annotated transcript to give an example of how you coded and went about analysing such data. You should also append your coding scheme, list of codes, models, tables etc. to show how you have reduced your data.

This section should include³:

- Discussion and justification of research focus/problem;
- Main research question and supplementary questions (qualitative and quantitative research) or hypotheses (quantitative research) with their explanation and justification;
- Epistemological underpinnings of your methodological position;
- Outline of the research strategy (overall approach) chosen to tackle the research problem which should be clearly linked to a research paradigm (quantitative, qualitative or mixed method; if qualitative, which approach e.g. case study, feminist approach). Please make sure that the chosen approach is logically connected to the research questions or hypotheses;
- A detailed account and justification for the methods adopted;
- Explanation and justification of data collection/generation process and instruments (e.g. sampling strategy; survey, coding sheet or interview guide design; participant observation; selection and use of documents etc.);
- Processes of recording and analysing data. This section may be usefully linked with Appendices of support material, for example, annotated transcripts to show how coding was carried out, lists of codes etc.
- A clear outline of the nature of data analysis undertaken, e.g., correlation, causal, significance, etc. for quantitative and, e.g., grounded theory and theoretical coding, thematic analysis, discourse analysis, narrative analysis etc. for qualitative research;
- A reflexive account of the process of research, including challenges and problems and the way in which you tackled these and relationship between researcher and research(ed);
- Discussion of ethical issues (with appended ethics approval form and participant information sheet and consent form if applicable);

³ Please note these bullet points serve as guidelines of what should ideally be included in your methodology chapter and not as compulsory list of steps to be rigidly followed in the listed order.

- Issues relating to scientific criteria of reliability, validity and generalisation (please keep in mind that these criteria have different meanings in quantitative vs. qualitative tradition) and discussion of strengths, weaknesses and limitations of your research approach.

4 **Findings**

Showing your data is in many ways the most important part of your dissertation. This is also where your own creativity and intelligence come into play. Reviewing literature and choosing your methodology are really preparatory steps; displaying your data and making use of it is the core of your dissertation. By the time you come to do this, you may be quite tired having worked solidly at your research for a considerable time. Don't let this make you forget what is really important in your dissertation. Make sure that you devote enough time and energy to data gathering, analysis and writing up your findings.

You need to present your findings in a clear and accessible way. Spend some time thinking about the ordering of this section. You need a clear, logical structure which makes your empirical findings accessible to the reader and which enhances your argument. You need to explain to the reader why you are selecting and emphasising some findings. Don't forget to **comment** on data, **discuss** findings and **relate them to the reviewed literature and theory**. It is important to go beyond description of results. Explain what you think is important and why you think it is important.

Integrate various sources of data (e.g. interviews, organisational promotional literature, newspaper articles) together with concepts drawn from academic literature in order to develop your ideas and to present a coherent and convincing argument that addresses your research questions or hypotheses.

Take care to present the data so that the reader gets an accurate picture of what you found out. The presentation should be exhaustive (no gaps), easy to follow, and purposeful (framed by your aims, hypotheses, and research questions). It may be helpful to include diagrams, and in some cases illustrations or photographs, depending on the nature of the study.

Take into consideration:

- the general theoretical perspective that you are adopting;

- the specific assumptions, arguments and empirical materials you need to present
and /or refer back to:
- the particular model/conceptual scheme/frame of analysis that you are using/developing;
- the range and volume of data which you have to present, e.g. ways of summarising routine data and findings (tables, charts, diagrams, infographics etc.) and of highlighting significant data;
- the use of secondary sources to put your primary sources in context;
- any obvious weaknesses/lacunae in your own material.

5 **Discussion of practical implications/applications of research**

Decide whether you wish to make specific recommendations, or just draw out the general implications of your work. Make clear the premises on which you base your discussion/recommendations. Be explicit about the types of context/situation for which your conclusions are relevant, and the limits beyond which they do not or may not apply.

This section is often integrated in your findings chapter (particularly in qualitative research), but you might also want to keep it separate.

6 **Conclusions and implications**

State what you have been able to establish during the course of your work. What answers do you have for your research questions? What does the work mean? Relate your work and its conclusions to previous literature and research - does your research back up these or refute them? Indicate fruitful areas of future research but make clear where your recommendations are based on imaginative or contemplative speculation. Be careful to avoid raising new issues in relation to your own work that might leave the Examiners wondering why you did not tackle them. Your final chapter should:

- Sum up the main findings of your project;
- Draw out the broader implications - what does all the data mean?
- Explain how your research relates to existing public relations theories and concepts;

- Explain how your research relates to public relations practice.

Overall:

Make sure that you leave enough time at the end of the dissertation process to check over your work and present it in the best possible way. 'Presentation' in this context is not about 'glossy' layout or typefaces, but about clearly structured and well-planned chapters which have proper introductions and conclusions and lead the reader seamlessly through the document. Once you have had your final feedback from your supervisor (and Public Defence Committee at UPF), you will have around two to three weeks to finalise your draft (and arrange for printing and binding at UPF).

Submission and presentation of dissertation

- 1 **At UPF**, dissertations should be submitted by **25 July 2018**. An electronic copy in PDF format must be emailed to master.dcom@upf.edu and four hard copies must be submitted to the Department Secretary's Office. Dissertations should be presented on A4 paper, typed and double-spaced on one side of the paper only. The minimum margin requirements are 4cm left hand margin and 2cm right hand margin. The recommended type-size is 12pt. A type face suitable for a book or a long document should be selected; *sans serif* faces should be avoided.

More details on submission and presentation of your dissertation at UPF are available [here](#).

At Stirling, dissertations should be submitted by **31 August 2018**. An electronic copy saved as a Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or Rich Text Format (.rtf) document must be submitted via the digital assessment submission facility in Canvas (Dissertation module) or in case of technical difficulties emailed to Jane Campbell (jane.campbell@stir.ac.uk). **Neither the Programme Director nor your Supervisor has the authority to alter the final submission date.**

- 2 **Dissertations should not exceed 12,000 words and will be returned if they exceed this limit.** This number **excludes** all references, tables, appendices and acknowledgements. Please keep in mind that tables and appendices should not serve as a 'dumping area' for

the text that does not fit in the word count, but merely as a supplementary text illustrating and supporting your main arguments made in the dissertation.

- 4 Provide an exact **word count** for the whole dissertation in the Table of Contents.
- 5 A sample of good dissertations is deposited in the library at the University of Stirling and/or available online. Please note that methodology teaching has varied during the time the course has been running (1988 – present) and that this is necessarily reflected in dissertations.

Students should be aware that an electronic copy of their dissertation may be selected by Communications, Media & Culture for retention in the University Library at the University of Stirling where it will be accessible both to members of the University and external examiners through Library access provisions and might be used for teaching purposes. If you do not wish your dissertation to be retained for these purposes, please inform the Graduate Studies office upon submission (this includes students doing their dissertations at UPF).

Students doing their dissertations at UPF should be aware that dissertations awarded ‘distinction’ (mark of ‘excellent’) must be published in RECERCAT, a digital repository for Catalan research universities and research centres, with a view to increasing their visibility. Student authorisation for the publication must be submitted together with their dissertations.

6 Content and Layout

1. Title Page
2. Declaration
3. Agreement
4. Acknowledgements (optional)
5. Abstract and keywords
6. Table of contents
7. Main text (see *Structure of your dissertation* section)
8. References
9. Appendices

6.1 Title page

At UPF, the title page should include:

- Title
- Author
- Supervisor
- Date published: **Academic year 20--/--**
- Name of the collection: **Department of Communication: Research-oriented postgraduate programmes**
- Subcommunity name: **Department of Communication**
- University's name: **Universitat Pompeu Fabra**

You can download a sample [here](#).

At Stirling, the title page should include:

- Title
- Author and academic credential
- Degree fulfilment
- University name: University of Stirling
- Date: month and year

Please see Appendix 2 for the sample of a title page.

6.2 DECLARATION (SAMPLE)

Declaration

- 1 This work is composed by me.
- 2 This work has not been accepted in any of my previous applications for a degree.
- 3 The work of which this is a record is done by me.
- 4 All verbatim extracts have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of my information have been specifically acknowledged.

Signature:

Date:

6.3 AGREEMENT (SAMPLE)

Agreement

I agree to Communications, Media & Culture using my dissertation for teaching purposes. I understand my dissertation may also be made available to future students in the library.

Signature:

Date:

6.4 ABSTRACT AND KEYWORDS

Dissertations must be accompanied by an abstract (maximum 150 words at UPF and around 250-300 words at Stirling) which summarises the purpose of the dissertation and its content. Keywords, stated below the abstract, should be no more than 200 characters.

6.5 TABLE OF CONTENTS

At a minimum this should include a list of chapter numbers, chapter titles and page numbers relating to the start of each chapter. If diagrams, figures and tables are used these should be labelled and listed in a separate 'figures and tables' contents. Word count should be included at the bottom of the table of contents.

6.6 REFERENCES

This should include only works specifically referenced within the dissertation text. References should be arranged alphabetically in the APA 6th ed. or Harvard referencing style.

6.7 APPENDICES

Appendices should be numbered and placed at the end of the dissertation (after the References).

Assessment and marking

At least two internal members of academic staff mark the dissertations and external examiners review dissertations and assessment practices. Both universities use common Dissertation Grading Sheet while assessing your work (please see Appendix 3).

At UPF, students have to attend public defence of their dissertations in front of the Faculty Committee, which provides recommendations for improvement and makes an initial assessment. The dissertation is then marked by the supervisor after the submission, taking into account Committee's recommendations and how students addressed these.

At Stirling, two markers mark the dissertation independently and agree on the mark.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of someone else's ideas without due acknowledgement and is a serious offence. Direct quotes from a source must be presented as such. Paraphrased material must also be fully acknowledged. It is **not** acceptable practice to write a paragraph-long paraphrase of several sentences and acknowledge the author with single citation.

Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to):

- using extracts from another person's work without acknowledgement or quotation marks
- summarising another person's work without acknowledgement
- substantial use of another person's ideas without acknowledgement
- copying another student's work or ideas
- using your own previous work (so called self-plagiarism)

Please note that self-plagiarism, i.e. including your previously submitted work for assessment on this programme or for any other academic award verbatim in your dissertation constitutes plagiarism and should be avoided. Your dissertation should be an original piece of work and while you can use knowledge and ideas developed in previous assignments, you should not be merely copy-pasting from them.

Conclusion

The dissertation offers you the opportunity to pursue your own interests and to define an area of research. While it is hard work and needs careful planning, it is also a very rewarding experience. There is one final piece of advice to bear in mind and that is to **remember that you should retain a strong focus on public relations.**

Finally, we hope that you have found these guidelines helpful and that you enjoy working on your dissertation!

Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Version date: September 2017



Participant Information Sheet

Delete all advisory text and optional questions that do not apply – these are designed to make you consider lots of different scenarios and not all will be relevant to your research. Your Participant Information Sheet should be concise and encourage potential participants to read it in full.

1. Research Project Title

2. Background, aims of project

Briefly describe who you are and what you are doing.

SUGGESTED TEXT: We would like to invite you to take part...

3. Why have I been invited to take part?

SUGGESTED TEXT: You have been invited because...

4. Do I have to take part?

SUGGESTED TEXT: No. You do not have to take part and this will not affect your [DELETE AS

APPLICABLE: grade, treatment etc.]

SUGGESTED TEXT: If you do decide to take part, you can withdraw your participation at any time without needing to explain and without penalty by advising the researchers of this decision. You can also withdraw your data within [ADD AS APPROPRIATE: timeframe]

SUGGESTED TEXT: You will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to [DELETE

AS APPLICABLE: sign a consent form/confirm your consent orally/complete an electronic consent form].

5. What will happen if I take part?

Make sure the participant knows what is expected of them.

SUGGESTED TEXT: You will need to complete [x] questionnaires/interviews

SUGGESTED TEXT: The [DELETE AS APPROPRIATE: questionnaire/interview/sampling] should take approximately [minutes/hours].

Where will the study take place?

Will/Will not be follow up visits?

6. Are there any potential risks in taking part?

SUGGESTED TEXT: The following risks are involved in taking part....

SUGGESTED TEXT: To help prevent these risks the researchers will.....

7. Are there any benefits in taking part?

SUGGESTED TEXT: The benefits of taking part are:

OR – SUGGESTED TEXT: There will be no direct benefit to you from taking part in this research.

SUGGESTED TEXT: You will receive [x amount/voucher/token/gift] for [taking part/reasonable travel costs/meals/childcare]

OR – SUGGESTED TEXT: There will be no payment for taking part in this project.

8. What happens to the data I provide? [examples of text – pick the most applicable]

SUGGESTED TEXT: The research data will be kept anonymous using...

SUGGESTED TEXT: Personal/confidential information will be stored anonymously using...

SUGGESTED TEXT: The [researcher/research team/ supervisor/ collaborators/ translators/ transcribers] will have access to personal/sensitive data/research data (*but will have signed a confidentiality agreement*).

[OPTIONAL/IF APPLICABLE] We will ask all participants for their permission to use direct quotes.

Where, due to the nature of the research, it may not be possible to safeguard the confidentiality of the data – reasons should be stated and the consequences for the participant should be explained.

Be clear with participants the circumstances under it would be necessary to break confidentiality. Within UK law, obligations to disclose exist in relation to child protection offences, the physical abuse of vulnerable adults, money laundering and crimes covered by the prevention of terrorism legislation.

9. [OPTIONAL/IF APPLICABLE] Recorded media

Participant's permission must be obtained to record their activities on audio or video media.

You must provide a clear explanation of how these will be used.

If the recordings will form part of a publication/broadcast or be deposited in an archive a separate release form should be prepared for each item used.

10. [OPTIONAL/IF APPLICABLE] Future uses of the data

SUGGESTED TEXT: Due to the nature of this research, it is very likely that other researchers may find the data to be useful in answering other research questions. We will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way and, if you agree, we will ensure that the data collected is untraceable back to you before letting others use it.

11. Will the research be published?

SUGGESTED TEXT: The research may/will be published in.... You will/will not be identifiable in any report/publication

SUGGESTED TEXT STUDENTS: This research will be used for my postgraduate project.

Where will the participants be able to access a copy of the published results?

Where will the results be presented? At conferences/in journal articles/workshops/mass media?

12. Who has reviewed this research project?

SUGGESTED TEXT: This project has been ethically approved via The University of Stirling General University Ethics Panel.

13. Who do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?

SUGGESTED TEXT: If you would like to discuss the research with someone.....

You should give the participants your contact details and the contact details for one other individual within your Faculty (usually your supervisor), in case they wish to obtain further information about the project.

SUGGESTED TEXT: You will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep.

SUGGESTED TEXT: **Thank you for your participation.**



Participant Consent Form

Researcher name [Insert]

Participant name/number [Insert]

Delete all advisory text and optional questions that do not apply – these are designed to make you consider lots of different scenarios and not all will be relevant to your research. Your Participant Consent Form should be 1 side of A4.

Research Project Title:

Please initial box	
SUGGESTED TEXT: I confirm that I have read and understood the [DELETE AS APPROPRIATE: information sheet/letter] dated [insert date] explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project	
SUGGESTED TEXT: I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during the study and withdraw my data within [provide timeframe] without giving a reason, and without any penalty.	
SUGGESTED TEXT: I understand that my responses will be kept anonymous [if true] and I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses [if true].	
OPTIONAL DELETE AS APPROPRIATE: I consent to being [audio recorded/video recorded/having my photo taken]	
OPTIONAL DELETE AS APPROPRIATE: I understand how [audio/video/photographs] will be used in research outputs. I am aware that I will not be named in any research outputs but I could be identified by people I know through the stories I tell.	
OPTIONAL DELETE AS APPROPRIATE: I give permission to be quoted directly in the research publication against my name	
OPTIONAL DELETE AS APPROPRIATE: I give my permission for my data to be used in future research	
SUGGESTED TEXT: I agree to take part in this study	

Name of Participant

Signature:

Date: [Click here to enter a date](#)

Name of Researcher

Signature:

Date: [Click here to enter a date](#)

Appendix 2: Title page sample (University of Stirling)

Community Relations and Landfill: The Case of Tossa de Mar

Julie Palmer BA (Hons) University of Leicester

Dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Joint Degree MSc in Strategic Communication & Public Relations
University of Stirling and Universitat Pompeu Fabra

University of Stirling

31 August, 2018

Appendix 3: Dissertation Grading Sheet

Dissertation Grading Sheet

MSc in Strategic Communication and Public Relations (Joint Degree)

Student Name	
Title of Work	
1st Marker	
2nd Marker (Stirling only)	

1. Introduction

Criteria	
1.1	Summary of the research purpose placed within the domain of public relations theory and practice.
1.2	Outline of the research setting / organisation / cultural / national background.
1.3	Justification of the relevance of research topic to public relations theory and practice.
Comments	
Assessment	

2. Literature Review/Theoretical Framework

Criteria	
2.1	Aims of the review and reasons for the structure chosen.
2.2	Research is positioned within the main public relations paradigms and approaches.
2.3	Discussion of the theoretical perspectives of previous authors in the field or related fields.
2.4	Summary of the main empirical findings of previous research and other relevant data stressing those ideas and empirical findings which are important for the dissertation.
2.5	Criticisms of other writers' assumptions, perspectives and arguments which brings out the reasons for the direction of the research.
2.6	Clear definitions of key concepts (variables in quantitative projects) to be explored.
2.7	Concluding summary of the reasons for the structure and direction of the research.
Comments	
Assessment	

3. Methodology

Criteria	
3.1	Discussion and justification of research focus/problem.
3.2	Main research questions and supplementary questions (qualitative and quantitative research) or hypotheses (quantitative research). Explanation and justification.
3.3	Outline of the research strategy (overall approach) chosen to tackle the research problem which should be clearly linked to a research paradigm.
3.4	Detailed account and justification for the methods adopted.
3.5	Clear justification of data collection/generation process and instruments
3.6	Reflexive account of the process of research, including challenges and problems.
3.7	Discussion of ethical issues (if applicable).
3.8	Reliability, validity and generalisation (if applicable) and discussion of strengths, weaknesses and limitations of the research approach.
Comments	
Assessment	

4. Findings

Criteria	
4.1	Presentation of the findings in a clear and accessible way.
4.2	Integration of various sources of data.
4.3	Use of secondary sources to put primary sources in context.
4.4	Discussion of practical implications/applications of research.
Comments	
Assessment	

5. Conclusions and implications

Criteria	
5.1	Summary of the main findings of your project.
5.2	Implications.
5.3	Relation to existing public relations theories and concepts.
5.4	Relation to public relations practice.
Comments	
Assessment	

6. Structure, Style and Presentation

Criteria	
6.1	Structure and presentation.
6.2	Writing, spelling and syntactical correction.
6.3	Adequate and updated bibliography.
Comments	
Assessment	

Additional comments:

First Grade:

Second Grade (Stirling only):

Agreed Grade:

Signature:

Date: