Your Excellent Dissertation: Structure and Content

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Introduction

• The importance of finding your own structural and content solutions, by reflection and consultation with advisor

• There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution

• Variables include discipline, specific topic, approach of advisor, personal preference
Basic components

1) INTRO: Aim and scope (possibly also background information and chapter description)
2) THEORY: Important and useful idea(s) or concept(s) developed by scholars
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3) METHODOLOGY: How you will collect and process your data. The potentialities and perhaps the limitations of your method(s).
4) ‘ANALYSIS’: empirical section, showing what you have found; explaining and interpreting what you have found.

5) CONCLUSION/DISCUSSION: Refer back to Introduction – what have you discovered? What is its significance?
Two approaches: 1) Social Sciences and 2) Humanities
Social Sciences

i) Introduction

ii) Theory

iii) Methodology

iv) Analysis

v) Conclusion/Discussion
Humanities

i) Introduction

[ii) Background / Scholarly context / Literature Review / Source Discussion / Theory and Methods

[iii) Analysis (more than one chapter)

iv) Conclusion
Structure at the micro level

• The dissertation is a *discussion* – not simply presentation of facts – and it must be structured in a **logical fashion**

• Solution? Define the AIM of the dissertation, and then ensure that each chapter, section and paragraph has its own ‘mini-aim’, which should be ordered in a logical sequence

• Collectively, each ‘mini-aim’ will contribute towards a more complete understanding of the research topic
A practical tip: Topic sentences

*The aim of the dissertation is to ...*

*This chapter explores the problem of ...*
And above all ...

• Be aware of your **options** ... and develop your own approach that works for your topic and which can be justified according to scholarly standards