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# **Advanced Higher Dissertations: Social Subjects**

# ADVANCED HIGHER DISSERTATIONS

## Social Subjects

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Name:

Subject:

Dissertation Title:

## OVERALL KEY POINTS

- Dissertations are not written first sentence first, last sentence last
- When **making notes** you are starting to write your dissertation
- Always be thinking about **your aims**, your themes, your key points
- When you are taking your notes, **write naturally**. Later on you can think about turning it into formal academic language
- **Regularly refer back** to your dissertation plan. Do this everyday - more than everyday...
- **Dissertation plans are dynamic**. Adapt it when you need
- Make sure you **answer the question**, you could write a brilliant dissertation but if you don't answer the question you will not do well
- The **structure** of your work is just as important as the content
- Your dissertation needs to be fully referenced so make sure you take note of all the **bibliographic information** as you go.

## WHAT IS A DISSERTATION?

A long essay.....you all know how to write essays and the principal is the same!

- ▶ 3,500 - 4,500 words (check with your subject teacher)
- ▶ Academic language
- ▶ Focused and structured layout
- ▶ Exploration and analysis NOT description
- ▶ Complimented by SECONDARY SOURCES (pg 11)
- ▶ Balanced argument
- ▶ Historiography
- ▶ Fully referenced

Elements of a dissertation:

### INTRODUCTION

- ▶ What you are going to do
- ▶ **Your interpretation** of the question, how you are going to tackle it
- ▶ **Briefly** what issues and points you are going to cover (make sure you do this in the order that you are actually going to do it in your dissertation)
- ▶ Should be **about 10%** of your final essay
- ▶ **DON'T NEED TO WRITE THIS FIRST**

### MIDDLE/MAIN PART OF DISSERTATION

- ▶ This is where you **develop your argument**
- ▶ **Broken down into sections** in any way relevant to your dissertation topic
- ▶ Use **well-organised notes** to build logical sections and break these up as you see fit ('steps to organise your notes' pg 12)
- ▶ **Each section, and paragraphs within, should have one main idea, supported by evidence, details of evidence.**

#### Basic paragraph structure

- **First sentence to introduce what you are going to talk about, making links to previous point**
- **Develop your topic, using relevant examples, evidence, and secondary materials**
- **Lead into the next point (the next paragraph)**

### CONCLUSION

- ▶ 10% of your essay
- ▶ **NO NEW INFORMATION**
- ▶ Summarise your main themes
- ▶ General conclusions
- ▶ Linked to the title and your introduction

### REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

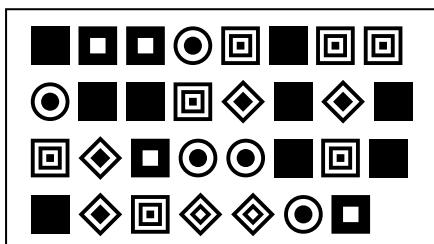
## WHY PLAN AND ORGANISE?

You will find it massively beneficial to take the time to organise your notes and continue your research referring to your plan.

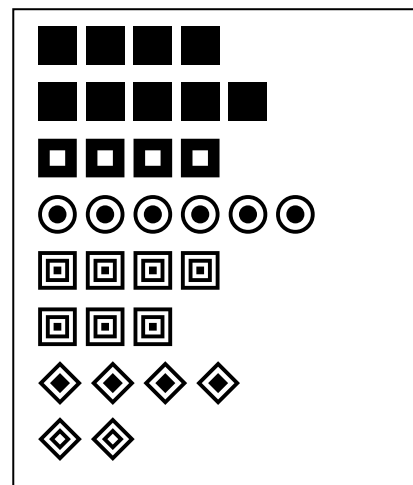
Try this....

For each box, work out:  
How many circles are there?  
How many triangles are there?  
How many types of squares are there?

BOX 1



BOX 2



Why is it easier to find the answer in box 2?

### YOU WANT YOUR NOTES TO BE LIKE BOX 2

#### Benefits of organised notes

- ▶ Will allow you to organise your thoughts
- ▶ Can easily see what topics need to be covered in your dissertation
- ▶ Can quickly find specific parts of your notes
- ▶ Can build relationships between the sections
- ▶ Can quickly see how much information you have and on what topics
- ▶ Will support the creation of a well structured and successful dissertation
- ▶ You will feel more confident and less overwhelmed

## WHERE ARE YOU?

**An important first step is thinking about where you are at with your dissertation and research right now.**

- ▶ What do you know?
- ▶ What do you still need to find out?

A good starting point is to get all your thoughts down in one place.

Think about; what your question is, what the different sections are, what information you have right now, where you need lots more information,

**In this space write out/map out where you are right now.**

Remember to highlight:

- ▶ what you are confident about
- ▶ what you have information on
- ▶ where you need to prioritise your focus.

Don't worry about making this really organised, write down things as they come to you

## STEPS TO ORGANISE YOUR NOTES

### 1. DIVIDE

Dividing your topic into related sections will help you begin to organise your notes and will lead you nicely into your dissertation.

**The way you divide your topic is dependant on your dissertation title**

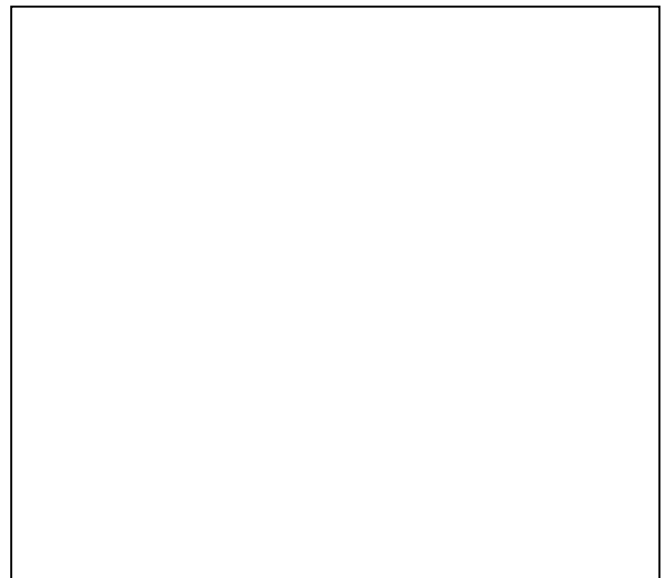
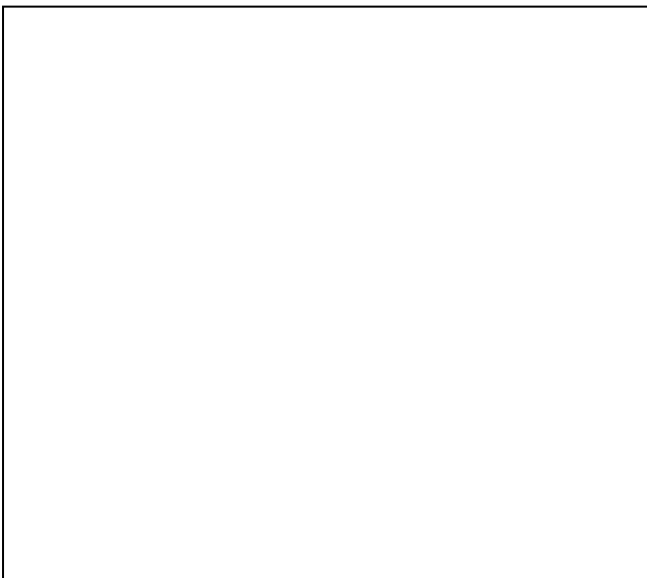
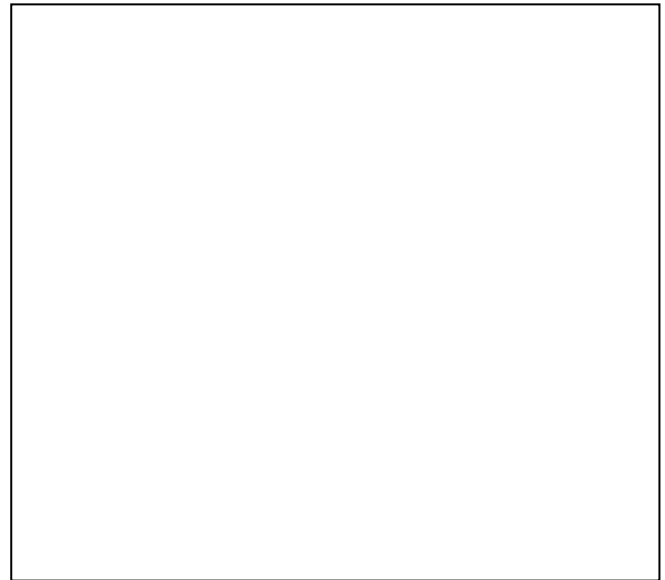
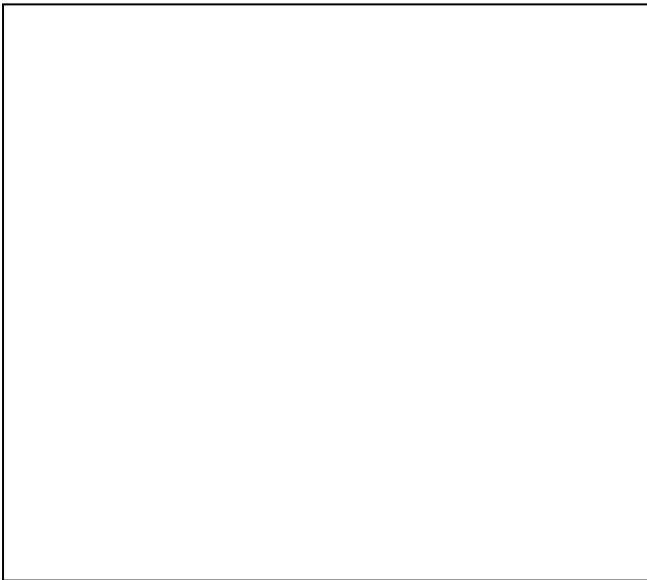
Think about your dissertation aims...

**What is the most relevant way to divide your dissertation topic?**

Use your mind map to combine ideas that relate to one another

You can have as many sections as is relevant to your dissertation

- ▶ Start to think about how the different topics relate to one another
- ▶ How much information do you have for each topic?
- ▶ How much evidence do you have? What are the debateable issues?



## 2. ARRANGE

When it comes to writing your dissertation you will need to organise your sections in a logical way. Thinking about how topics relate to one another and what needs to follow what will help you to build your dissertation.

### **Be Logical:**

Think about how sections relate to one another

**You will arrange and rearrange your topics several times throughout your research process.**

How you would like to organise your notes on different sections?  
(in different parts of your jotter, word documents, use of colour)

This is covered in more detail in the section on note taking (pg 12)

## 3. DISSERTATION PLAN

What often distinguishes a flourishing dissertation from a poor dissertation is planning and structure.

If your dissertation has no structure it will be hard for you to stay focused and your reader will have a difficult time trying to figure out what you are doing.

ORGANISED 'PLAN' = ORGANISED DISSERTATION

**A useful dissertation plan will help you to be clear, to cover all points and hopefully aid you in feeling less overwhelmed by the whole dissertation process.**

Your plan should be dynamic and can be changed and adapted as your knowledge develops

- ▶ Essay plans should be precise and to the point.
- ▶ Use short phrases and keyword reminders.
- ▶ The middle section can have any number of sections relevant to your topic

Look again at 'elements of a dissertation' - form your plan around this structure.

Use your plan.....think about:

- ▶ Prioritising your research
- ▶ How you are going to organise your notes



DISSERTATION PLAN

## ACADEMIC WRITING

High-quality academic writing:

- ▶ Formal language
- ▶ Refers to secondary sources
- ▶ Organised and logical
- ▶ 'Emotionally neutral'
- ▶ Fully referenced
- ▶ **Compare and Contrast**
- ▶ **Analysis and Interpretation**
- ▶ **Limited Description**

You should only be describing where it is relevant.

**Follow on.....**

Follow a logical line of argument; this is based a lot on the success of your plan.

- ▶ Make links
- ▶ Natural progression
- ▶ Don't abruptly change subject - this only highlights that you don't know what the connections between themes/ styles etc

Remember what you know about essays and paragraphs....

- ▶ **Each section, and paragraphs within, should have one main idea, supported by evidence, details of evidence.**

**Paragraph structure (briefly)**

- **First sentence to introduce what you are going to talk about, making links to previous point**
- **Develop your topic, using relevant examples, evidence, and secondary materials**
- **Lead into the next point (the next paragraph)**

Examples of 'academic keywords'

accordingly	accounts for	additionally	alternatively	although	analysis	as a result
by contrast	chiefly	comments on	compares	consequently	contrasts	conversely
correspondingly		defines	describes	despite	discusses	distinguishes
evaluates	especially	examines	explains	for example	for instance	further
furthermore	however	illustrates	implies	in addition	including	in that case
in the same way		interpretation		justification	moreover	namely
notably	nonetheless	on the contrary		outlining	particularly	rather
regarding	relates	similarly	states	summarises	therefore	trace
with respect to		with this in mind				

## DRAFTS AND FINE TUNING

Getting started is hard so

- ▶ start with what you find easiest
- ▶ start with simple and clear language that you understand - you can formalise this in a later draft

Keep writing, you have the knowledge in your head, it is important to get it down on paper, so don't **stop to worry about style** - this is what drafts are for.

**You will change and adapt your first draft several times.**

Handing in your first draft is a key failing and easily recognised by a marker

**a little pruning goes a long way and time spent pruning goes even further**

The drafting process.....

### DRAFT 1

- ▶ Get your ideas down, allow yourself to flow naturally with your thoughts.
- ▶ Focus on your question and your core idea
- ▶ Get examples from secondary sources down when you have them
- ▶ Add in references from your notes
- ▶ Use your sections to guide you
- ▶ Keep referring to your essay plan

### DRAFT 2, 3, 4, 5.....

- ▶ Look at the structure
- ▶ Rearrange paragraphs and sections
- ▶ Add in more examples and evidence
- ▶ Start to formalise language

Ask Yourself....

- ? Have you written clearly? (Read out loud to check)
- ? Is there any section where you have too much or too little information?  
(if so decide how to balance this out)
- ? Is your structure clear?
- ? Have you included enough evidence/secondary sources?
- ? How in-depth is your analysis? Have you wasted too many words on description?
- ? References and bibliography all present and correct?
- ? Do you have a clear and concise introduction and bibliography?
- ? Its hugely worthwhile spending time perfecting the introduction and conclusion.  
10% each side of the overall word count
- ? Are you within your word count?

## SECONDARY SOURCES

Although your marker is interested in what you think and what you have to say you also need to consult other sources for facts, figures, reasoning, evidence, examples and interpretations. This will come from secondary sources.

What is a secondary source?

Secondary sources will help you with the vital parts of your dissertation:

- ▶ Criticism
- ▶ Interpretation
- ▶ Analysis

**Interacting with your sources:**

**Be critical...**

- ▶ Think about what **you need**, what **you want**
- ▶ Always refer back to your dissertation question and your dissertation plan

**Ask yourself....**

- ? Do you agree with the interpretation given?
- ? What evidence has the person used?

**Getting the most out of your secondary source:**

- ▶ Contents page
- ▶ Index
- ▶ References
- ▶ Bibliography

**You dissertation needs to be fully referenced so make sure you take note of all the bibliographic information as you go.**

What is bibliographic information?

- ▶ Title
- ▶ Author
- ▶ Date of Publication
- ▶ Place of Publication
- ▶ Publisher

## NOTE MAKING

### Planning your notes:

Think about **Box 1** and **Box 2** (page 4)

Steps to excellent (and extremely functional) notes

1. Type up your essay plan (this will form the bones of your essay and save you from the fear of a blank screen)
2. Separate the notes you have already made into your 'sections'\*
3. Start to build up a bank of evidence from your sources
4. Highlight your research priorities
5. Insert future notes straight into the relevant section

\*Practical ways to keep notes:

Separate sections of your jotter  
Notes on paper in your folder with dividers  
Individual word documents  
Headings within a word document  
USE COLOUR.....

### Practical note making:

When you are taking your notes, **write naturally**. Later on you can think about turning it into formal academic language

Read through sections/paragraphs/chapters **BEFORE** starting to take notes on it

Put everything in your **own words**. Make it very clear when you have taken a **direct quote**

Note down all the **bibliographic information** at the top and **page numbers** as you go along

#### Good Notes

- Divided into sections
- Clear and precise
- In your own words
- Natural language
- Relevant to your question
- Quotes in quotation marks
- Prompting questioning and further analysis
- Can be easily transferred into a draft
- Useful even after a few weeks
- 
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#### Bad Notes

- Look like Box 1
- You don't understand what you've written
- Copied directly from text
- Hung up on formality and style
- Irrelevant to your topic
- Not marked what's a quote
- Isolated learning
- Will have to be fully reworked to be included in dissertation
- Doesn't make sense the next time you look at it
- 
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