

**Te Kura Toi Tangata  
School of Education**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

## Outline

A dissertation consists of a small piece of research completed under the guidance of an academic supervisor. The purpose is for the student to display:

- understanding of a particular research issue, problem, topic, or question;
- understanding and critique of relevant literature; and
- the competent application of an appropriate research methodology.

If a student is enrolled in a MEdLeadership, MDInS, or MEd with a subject or specialisation then it is expected that the dissertation, as the research component of the degree, focuses on the specific area related to the qualification.

A dissertation is normally 15,000-20,000 words (excluding references and appendices). It has individual start and finish dates and students may enrol at any time during the academic year. The dissertation is a 60 point paper and should normally be completed within 26 weeks full-time, or 52 weeks part-time.

## First steps

Students should begin by contacting a proposed supervisor. Academic staff with a masters degree are eligible to supervise a dissertation. A supervisor should establish whether a student is adequately prepared for independent research before agreeing to supervise.

If a student is unable to find a supervisor they should contact the Programme Administrator Postgraduate and Research [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz). As finding a supervisor can take time, students are encouraged to start this process a few months before their intended dissertation start date.

Entry into the dissertation normally requires:

- a B average or higher across a student's prior postgraduate papers;
- completion of an approved research methods paper;
- approval by the proposed supervisor; and
- approval by the Programme Leader.

## **Enrolment process**

- The student submits a two page proposal (see below) and a completed Dissertation Application Form to the potential supervisor.
- The student applies online for EDUCA592 Dissertation.
- The supervisor agrees to supervise the student and signs the Dissertation Application Form.
- The supervisor forwards the form and proposal to the Programme Administrator Postgraduate and Research to obtain final approval and to complete online processing.
- Both the supervisor and student are advised when formal approval for enrolment has been granted.

## **The proposal (two pages, references additional)**

The proposal should contain:

- a working title
- research question(s)
- brief overview of literature regarding the topic
- brief description of the methodology and methods
- consideration of ethical issues
- timeline
- reference list

## **Presentation, submission and marking**

There are no presentation guidelines specifically for the dissertation but students may follow the [Library guidelines](#) for Thesis presentation which include a title page template.

Printing and bind can be done through [Waikato Print](#)

- Students should submit two softbound copies of their dissertation to the Programme Administrator Postgraduate and Research and an electronic copy to their supervisor before 4pm on their submission due date. There are no forms required for submission of a dissertation.
- Students who are unable to submit their dissertation in person may send their softbound copies by courier. They should contact the Programme Administrator Postgraduate and Research [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz) for the correct address.

- Alternatively students may contact [Waikato Print](#) who will print and bind the dissertation and deliver it to the School of Education. Students should check delivery details in advance with the Programme Administrator Postgraduate and Research [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz)

## Extension

A student who expects their dissertation will not be ready for submission by the due date may apply for a 21 day grace period for submission or an extension by re-enrolment. It is not possible to suspend a dissertation enrolment.

A grace period for submission of 21 days does not require re-enrolment or payment of additional fees. To request a 21 day grace period a student should:

- confirm the 21 day grace period with their supervisor; and
- ask their supervisor to contact the Programme Administrator Postgraduate and Research [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz) to request the grace period. The Programme Administrator Postgraduate and Research will notify the student and the supervisor of the new submission date when the grace period has been granted.

Extensions of over 21 days require re-enrolment and incur additional fees. To apply for an extension of longer than 21 days, students should complete the Application for Change of Conditions of Enrolment form available from the Programme Administrator Postgraduate and Research [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz)

## Withdrawal

A student wishing to withdraw from their dissertation should do so prior to the end of the enrolment period by:

consulting with their supervisor; and

completing a change of enrolment through MyWaikato. Failure to do this may result in an Incomplete Grade (IC) on the student's academic record once the enrolment period is complete, which may prevent the student from re-enrolling in their degree. A refund of fees will be given only if the withdrawal is made within the free withdrawal period.

## Medical or compassionate extensions and withdrawals

### Application for an extension with a fee waiver on medical/compassionate grounds

If a student is unable to complete their dissertation on time due to circumstances outside their control, they should contact the Programme Administrator Postgraduate and Research [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz) who will advise how to apply for an extension with a fee waiver. Requests for extensions made on medical or compassionate grounds are considered by the Associate Director Student Administration, not by the Faculty.

## **Application to withdraw on medical/compassionate grounds**

If a student is unable to complete their dissertation due to circumstances outside their control, they should apply for medical/compassionate consideration through MyWaikato. Requests for full or partial fee refunds for withdrawals made on medical or compassionate grounds are considered by the Associate Director Student Administration, not by the Faculty.

## **Advice for supervisors and students**

### **Starting out**

When designing the research project, it is important to keep in mind the time and length limitations. For example, it might not be appropriate for a student to design her/his own questionnaire or other instrument, or interview more than two or three people.

This is a small-scale research project and the student should be required to display competence in conceiving and conducting a clearly defined study. It is important that both the supervisor and student do not become overly ambitious and exceed the boundaries of the dissertation. For example, this study may replicate an existing study in a new context rather than designing a new or innovative research project.

### **Research ethics approval**

Research projects that involve human participants must have ethical approval. This means that if the student intends to send out questionnaires, interview, observe, or otherwise obtain personal information about other people, they need to obtain ethical approval.

With the support of their supervisor, a student must complete the online [FEDU Ethics Application](#) and submit it to the Division of Education's Ethics Committee. The student needs to be fully enrolled in their research paper before they can submit their application for ethical approval.

If the application is approved on first submission, ethical approval should take approximately three weeks. Students should be aware, however, that they may be required to modify their application for ethical approval which will extend this period.

The Programme Administrator Postgraduate and Research [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz) can advise about the research ethics approval process.

### **Meetings between the supervisor and the student**

It is important that the supervisor and student keep in contact regularly to ensure the progression of the dissertation. Students should keep a written summary of these meetings and email the summary to the supervisor 1-3 days after the meeting. This ensures that:

the student has understood the supervisor's guidance and expectations; and

the student and supervisor are both monitoring progress.

## Weekly workload

The anticipated workload for a full-time postgraduate student is 40 hours a week and a part-time postgraduate student 20 hours a week. This means that students are expected to devote an appropriate amount of time to their dissertation.

## Reading drafts

An important part of any research process is writing. Often undergraduate students write their assignments only once before handing them in. At the postgraduate level, however, it is important to emphasise that part of any research process is to write several drafts before the research is ready to be presented for examination.

While a supervisor should guide students and assist them to structure their research report in a coherent manner, it is not the supervisor's responsibility to write it for them. Supervising postgraduate students is only one part of a supervisor's workload and therefore, students should provide, as far as possible, well organised and grammatically correct written drafts, with correct referencing. This way, supervisors can comment on content which should be their major area of focus and support.

It is important for students to be aware of how much time is required to comment on a draft, and for students to take this into account when submitting drafts and waiting for feedback. Students may point out specific aspects that they would like supervisors to comment on with their drafts. Drafts should normally be presented at least seven days before a meeting.

## Writing drafts

Students may find it demanding writing a longer and more sustained argument than in their previous papers. They may also find that the dissertation requires a greater level of information literacy skills. Supervisors should direct students to the support of [Academic Liaison Librarians](#) and [Student Support Services](#) for additional help.

For many students, the dissertation provides initial experience in the research environment. Students are encouraged to take every opportunity to participate in the wider intellectual life of the University. Supervisors will encourage students to attend seminars and conferences, present aspects of their work if there is an opportunity, attend workshops that help them to develop necessary research skills, and where applicable, encourage them to publish in appropriate journals.

## Marking the dissertation

Dissertations are marked by both the supervisor and an examiner. The examiner is an internal staff member who is nominated by the supervisor. The Programme Administrator Postgraduate and Research [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz) will send out copies of the dissertation to both the supervisor and the examiner and ensure these are returned in a timely manner.

Both the supervisor and examiner submit a report and a recommended mark and grade. These recommendations are then moderated. If there are discrepancies, and agreement cannot be reached, the Associate Dean Academic (in collaboration with the supervisor, examiner, and moderator) will make a final decision.

Supervisors and examiners will provide the recommended mark and grade on a separate page to the report.

Once a final mark has been confirmed, the Programme Administrator Postgraduate and Research will inform the student of their final mark and grade, and provide the student with copies of the supervisor's and examiner's reports.

The supervisor's and examiner's reports will generally comment on the following areas (where appropriate):

- abstract
- introduction and literature review
- exposition of the research goals or questions, and significance of the research
- methodology and appropriate use of methods
- presentation of findings
- discussion, interpretation of findings, and implications
- academic conventions of the dissertation (e.g., structure, referencing, grammar, clarity of writing)

## Marking criteria

These marking criteria can be used for a dissertation that takes the usual form of a research report for a project.

Grade Range	Description
A	<p>A dissertation in the A range is an <b>excellent and coherent</b> piece of work that includes all of the following:</p> <p>a coherent and succinct abstract that clearly summarizes the major aspects of the study including the overall purpose of the study, problem or question; the methodology and methods; setting and participant; major findings; and a brief summary of interpretations and conclusions</p> <p>a well-articulated explanation of the issue, problem, or topic</p> <p>an excellent critique of the issue, problem, or topic that includes any current debates</p> <p>a sound academic justification for the study</p> <p>a critical and comprehensive literature review and synthesis of relevant national and international research, including any seminal studies as well as current work in relation to the issue, problem, or topic</p>

	<p>a well justified and appropriate methodology that demonstrates coherence between a theoretical position and research question</p> <p>a thorough investigative approach that includes a well-described research design and critical approach to methods and/or data generating sources</p> <p>appropriate and accurate data analyses</p> <p>findings clearly presented and interpreted</p> <p>findings considered through critical discussion and critique in relation to the existing body of research</p> <p>well-formulated conclusion and if appropriate identifies implications for practice and/or poses research question(s) to address any identified gap(s) in the field</p> <p>a consistently high level of academic writing including a sound and logical structure, few errors in spelling and grammar, correct use of citations and referencing, and adherence to the latest APA writing conventions</p> <p>Additionally, the student:</p> <p>demonstrates capacity for doctoral research and would be a likely scholarship candidate; and</p> <p>might also demonstrate a scholarly stance that includes independent thought or creative ideas.</p>
B	<p>A dissertation in the B range is a <b>sound</b> piece of work that includes all of the following:</p> <p>a clear and succinct abstract that summarizes the major aspects of the study</p> <p>a clear explanation of the issue, problem, or topic</p> <p>a justification for the study</p> <p>a reasonably comprehensive literature review and synthesis of relevant national and international research, including any seminal studies as well as current work in relation to the issue, problem, or topic</p> <p>an appropriate methodology that demonstrates a link between a theoretical position and research question.</p> <p>a suitable investigative approach that includes a description of the research methods</p> <p>careful and coherent data analysis</p> <p>findings presented clearly with some interpretation.</p> <p>discussion of findings mostly descriptive and tentatively linked to the existing body of literature</p>

	<p>a conclusion that shows some appreciation of the importance of the findings</p> <p>a very good level of academic writing with a clear structure, a low proportion of errors in spelling and grammar, correct use of citations and referencing, and adherence to the latest APA writing conventions</p>
C	<p>A dissertation in the C range is an <b>adequate</b> piece of work that includes most of the following:</p> <p>a clear abstract that summarizes the study</p> <p>an adequate explanation of the issue, problem, or topic</p> <p>a justification for the study</p> <p>a good literature review and synthesis of relevant national and international research in relation to the issue, problem, or topic</p> <p>a suitable methodology that demonstrates a link between a theoretical position and research question.</p> <p>a clear description of the research methods</p> <p>evidence of data analysis</p> <p>an adequate presentation of findings with little interpretation</p> <p>discussion is mostly descriptive with some links made to the existing body of literature</p> <p>a conclusion that shows some appreciation of the importance of the findings</p> <p>a good level of academic writing but may contain weaknesses in structure, and noticeable errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, or referencing</p>
D	<p>A dissertation in the D range demonstrates major <b>deficiencies</b> in some, or deficiencies in many of the expectations outlined above.</p>