

Te Wānanga Toi Tangata  
School of Education



## Outline

A dissertation consists of a small piece of research completed under the guidance of an academic supervision panel of one lead supervisor and a second 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 the MEd, MEdLeadership or MDInS, 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. The supervision panel 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 supervisors 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 supervisors; and
- approval by the Programme Lead.

## 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 supervisors agrees to supervise the student and signs the Dissertation Application Form.
- The supervisors forwards the form and proposal to the Programme Administrator Postgraduate and Research to obtain final approval and to complete online processing.
- Both the supervisors 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.

The dissertation should be submitted as a digital copy in PDF format to [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz) and to the supervisor by 4pm on the due date.

## 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 supervisors; and
- ask their supervisors 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 supervisors 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 EDUCA592 should do so prior to the end of the enrolment period by:

- consulting with their supervisors; and
- completing a withdrawal 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. Applications for an extension with a fee waiver on medical or compassionate grounds are decided by the Associate Director Student Administration, not by the Division.

### Application to withdraw on medical/compassionate grounds

If a student is unable to complete their dissertation due to circumstances outside their control, they should make a medical/compassionate application to withdraw from EDUCA592 through MyWaikato. Applications to withdraw on medical/compassionate grounds are decided by the Associate Director Student Administration, not by the Division.

## 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 their 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 supervisors, a student must complete the online [FEDU Ethics Application](#) and submit it to the Division of Education Ethics Committee. The student needs to be fully enrolled in EDUCA592 before they can submit their application for ethical approval. The Division of Education Ethics Committee Administrator [fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz) can advise about the research ethics approval process.

The initial review of an application for ethical approval takes approximately three weeks. The student should be aware that the reviewers frequently require modifications to be made to the application. The time taken to make the modifications and obtain final approval will extend this three week period.

If the student's project focuses on recruiting participants in their capacity of any one or more of physical health, mental health, disability or wellbeing, or involves employees of the District Health Board, they need to apply for ethical approval to the **Human Research Ethics Committee** and not to the Division of Education Ethics Committee. For further information, contact [humanethics@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@waikato.ac.nz)

### Meetings between the supervisors and the student

It is important that the supervisors and student maintain regular meetings to monitor progress and ensure timely completion of the dissertation. Students should keep a written summary of these meetings and email it to the supervisors 1-3 days after the meeting. This ensures that:

- the student has understood the supervisors' guidance and expectations; and
- the student and supervisors 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 one supervisor (lead or second) and an examiner. The examiner is an internal staff member who is nominated by the supervision panel. The Programme Administrator Postgraduate and Research [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz) will send a digital copy of the dissertation to the examiner, and ensure the supervisor and the examiner submit their reports in a timely manner. The suggested timeframe is three weeks.

Both the supervisor and examiner submit a report and a recommended mark and grade. The recommended mark and grade will be submitted on a separate page to the report. If there are discrepant grades, the supervisor and examiner should try to reach an agreed mark and grade. If agreement cannot be reached, the Associate Dean Academic or delegate (in collaboration with the supervisor and examiner) will make a final decision.

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>

	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
C	<p>A dissertation in the C range is an <b>adequate</b> piece of work that includes most of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a clear abstract that summarizes the study</li> <li>an adequate explanation of the issue, problem, or topic</li> <li>a justification for the study</li> <li>a good literature review and synthesis of relevant national and international research in relation to the issue, problem, or topic</li> <li>a suitable methodology that demonstrates a link between a theoretical position and research question</li> <li>a clear description of the research methods</li> <li>evidence of data analysis</li> <li>an adequate presentation of findings with little interpretation</li> <li>discussion is mostly descriptive with some links made to the existing body of literature</li> <li>a conclusion that shows some appreciation of the importance of the findings</li> <li>a good level of academic writing but may contain weaknesses in structure, and noticeable errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, or referencing</li> </ul>
D	A dissertation in the D range demonstrates major <b>deficiencies</b> in some, or deficiencies in many of the expectations outlined above.