

WORKING ON A DISSERTATION (AND BEYOND)

TFG (BA DISSERTATION)
TFM (MA DISSERTATION)
THESIS (PHD DISSERTATION)
English Literature and Culture

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1. Writing a Dissertation

Whether you are writing a TFG, a TFM or a PhD dissertation, the principle is the same one: the dissertation is an *argumentative essay* which proves that you have acquired the skills required to do research at the level appropriate for each type of degree. The dissertation also proves that you can present a *thesis*, expressed through a *thesis statement*, and *argue it convincingly* on the basis of *textual evidence*. What varies from one kind of dissertation to another is the *extension* and, therefore, the *depth* of your argumentation. Also, the amount of *originality* expected:

TFG extension = 5000/9000 words (15/20 pages)

Originality of contribution to knowledge = low to moderate

Time to write it: 1 semester, in the second half of the fourth year in the **BA/Grau** (you choose your tutor and the topic the previous semester, usually in November/December)

TFM extension = 10000/15000 words (35/50 pages)

Originality of contribution to knowledge = moderate to high

Time to write it: 1.5 semesters, within the **MA**
(if you register part-time, you may write the TFM in the second year). You are assigned a tutor and choose the topic in October/November

PhD extension = 300 pages

Originality of contribution to knowledge = high

Time to write it: 3 years (full-time) to 5 years (part-time)
(in our **Doctoral programme** you do not take any courses)

You must have a tutor before enrolling and, ideally, a basic topic before registration

A dissertation makes a contribution to *general knowledge* (in our case within the Humanities), and more specifically *to the field of your choice* (a topic of English Literature and/or Culture). At TFG level you are supposed to prove that you understand the methodology of research and can find a topic original enough. For a TFM the demands are higher in terms of your ability to do autonomous research on an original topic. The PhD dissertation proves your *full autonomy* as a researcher: both your topic and your contribution must be new and relevant.

PLEASE, NOTE: BA/TFG and MA/TFM dissertations are written as part of degree programmes including subjects. UAB's doctoral programmes in the Humanities do not include teaching. You apply by contacting the programme coordinator (see <https://www.uab.cat/en/phds/english-studies>), who will guide you into the admission process. This consists of submitting a thesis proposal (in early May or early September, see below) on a topic of your choice to the programme's admissions committee. Ideally, you need to do this already under supervision of your tutor (a doctor in the programme). The committee might call you for an interview once the proposal has been assessed. During the years in which you write your dissertation, you work closely with your tutor.

2. The task of the tutor/supervisor

The tasks of your tutor (or supervisor, whatever word you prefer) are:

- Helping you to find a suitable topic, based on your own suggestions (this is *your* dissertation, not *mine*, don't expect me to choose the topic for you!)
- Guiding you to write a formal dissertation proposal that other doctors (like your tutor) can assess, if necessary (this is always done for TFMs in January/February)
- Helping you to structure your dissertation into a solid sequence of parts
- Checking that your bibliography is suitable and up-to-date (maximum 20 years old, though older relevant sources can also be used)
- Having regular tutorials with you to discuss the progression of your work
- Reading and assessing the partial drafts you may submit and the final version of your dissertation
- Finding a tribunal to judge your dissertation; setting up a date for the viva (or 'defence')
- Helping you to structure your oral presentation for the viva before the tribunal, including one rehearsal

Our tasks do not include:

- Editing (and correcting) your text for you. You must follow at all times a suitable edition system (MLA is preferred), or use the Department's guidelines for Literature, based on the same style (they will be provided by the programme's coordinator).
- It is also important that you learn how to *master the basics of Word*: inserting an automatic table of contents, editing by styles, using footnotes, numbering pages, breaking the text into different sections, adding page breaks, using headers, etc. Use YouTube tutorials.

Please, note:

- It is very important, particularly at TFM and PhD levels that you keep *regular contact* with your tutor. For TFG dissertations we have a fixed number of three tutorials, but the number of tutorials for TFMs and PhDs is variable. Email your tutor brief reports of your activities and *meet them regularly* (every two weeks for the TFM, every four weeks for the PhD). Do not make your tutor chase you... this is your dissertation, not theirs!
- PhD students must keep a written record of their thesis-related activities with monthly entries (what you have read, written or thought), including information on the meetings with tutors. This needs to be submitted for assessment by a tribunal yearly for you to be allowed to continue your studies.

3. Choosing a topic

It is important that you choose a *coherent* topic of a scope and depth suitable for your dissertation. By *coherent* I mean a topic that can be understood the moment you mention it and that is limited by clear boundaries: be specific about authors, texts, period, nationality/geographical area, theme.

Make sure that your topic is small enough for the TFG or the TFM but big enough for the PhD. My experience is that TFGs and TFMs end up being much longer than expected because the topics chosen are too ambitious (= too big in scope). Try to avoid working on two texts, if one will do; if you work on a series (of novels, or TV) focus on a

reasonable segment. In contrast, you will need a variety of main or primary texts for your PhD dissertation, at least four or five major ones which can be studied each in a chapter, accompanied by many others you should deal with as well though not so directly.

If you are an MA student thinking of writing a PhD dissertation it is a very good idea to consider the topic for both simultaneously. Your TFM may later become a chapter in your dissertation, since the extension is similar. If you want to work on something completely different for your PhD dissertation, this is not a problem at all (I did that myself!). It is just *more practical* to think of the TFM as a first step in the direction of a PhD dissertation. Do not be afraid to suggest something completely different and new: this is how research progresses.

4. Submitting a proposal

Once you both agree on the suitability of the chosen topic, you need to submit to your tutor a formal dissertation proposal. You may be given specific rules, but, generally, this consists of the following:

- **Title** (provisional) in two parts: a clever, attractive main title and a subtitle. Make sure that your title announces your thesis and mentions the texts/author(s) you study (see the examples in the link above).
- An **abstract**: 350 words for the TFG, 500 for the TFM and 1000 for the PhD. An abstract is a summary of your dissertation, including your main **thesis** and **arguments**. The abstract should NOT make announcements (“In this dissertation I am going to deal with the gentleman in Dickens”) but summarise arguments (“In this dissertation I argue that Dickens sees the gentleman as an ideal masculine model”).
- **Keywords** (minimum four, maximum eight): these must include the name of the author and the title of the text, and the main issues (for the Dickens example: Victorian fiction, masculinity, gentlemanliness, Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*)
- A **bibliography**: minimum 7 titles for the TFG; 10/15 for the TFM and around 25 for the PhD. Both for TFMs and PhDs 5 of these secondary sources must be accompanied by a commentary (5 lines at least) explaining why they are important for your dissertation. For the TFG this is advisable but not compulsory.

Please, note: the PhD dissertation proposal must actually run to at least five pages and be as complete as possible, for this is also the text that the aspiring student submits to apply for admission to the doctoral programme (in early May or early September). It should, therefore, cover the following points:

1. MOTIVATION AND INTEREST IN THE DOCTORAL PROGRAMME

1.1. Studies so far

1.2. Reasons to join the Doctoral programme

2. PhD or DOCTORAL DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

2.1. Title and topic

2.1.1. Provisional title

2.1.2. Topic (500-word abstract)

2.2. Interest and originality of the topic

2.3. Precedents in the study of the topic selected

2.4. Research question(s)

2.6. Thesis statement

2.5. Methodology and research fields the dissertation belongs to

2.7. List of primary sources

2.5.1. Main works

2.5.2. Other works

2.8. Structure and organizing criteria: list of chapters (provisional)

2.9. Bibliography (of secondary sources)

Please, note: PhD students, once admitted, are asked to rewrite their proposal along more formal lines, including a calendar with their yearly activities, for their 'Pla de Recerca' ('Research Plan'). They also sign a contract ('Commitment Form') and a list of compulsory activities pledging themselves to meet their tutors regularly and to carry out the activities (attending three Doctoral programme workshops, presenting a paper at a conference, submitting an article to an indexed journal). Writing a PhD dissertation takes between 3 and 5 years, you need to consider whether you want to register full or part time (part time is advisable if you're employed working more than 20 hours a week).

5. The research question and the thesis statement

Whatever type of dissertation you write, and whether you are submitting a short abstract or a long proposal, you need to inform your reader of the following:

- why you have chosen this topic (you may mention personal motivations but try to sound as academic and formal as possible)
- why your topic is valid and relevant for a dissertation to which field your topic belongs to, as specifically as possible who has studied your topic before (name the main specialists and their works; do show that you have read their work; this is called 'literature review')
- what main problem/gap/lack you have found regarding your topic in the studies that precede yours
- your research question = this is the question you ask yourself when you notice the problem/gap/lack in all preceding studies ("why has the idea of the gentleman been overlooked in the research on the novels by Dickens?")
- your thesis = this is the answer to your research question and also the MAIN IDEA you are going to argue (= defend) throughout the dissertation ("The main idea I argue

in this dissertation is that Dickens understands ideal masculinity as the expression of gentlemanliness”)

- your main arguments (in support of your thesis)

The order of these matters may vary a little in your abstract and/or your proposal, and each point might be longer or shorter. In all cases, though, the **research question** and the **thesis statement** should be clearly visible.

6. Structuring your dissertation

Your final dissertation should consist of:

PRELIMINARY MATTER

1. **Title page/cover** containing the title of your dissertation, your name, the name of your supervisor, the title of your degree, the name of the department, the name of the university, and the year. *Please, note:* You may add an illustration if it is relevant (not just to make the cover look ‘prettier’); the same rule applies to illustrations used inside the dissertation: as many as you need, but all of them should be relevant.
2. **Table of contents.** Learn how to produce an automatic table of contents, by using Title styles for your titles. Use a maximum of two levels in TFGs (1, 1.1/1.2.), three in TFM (1, 1.1./1.1.1., 1.1.2; 1.2./1.2.1, 1.2.2.) and four in PhDs (1, 1.1/1.1.1, 1.1.2/ 1.1.1.1, 1.1.1.2.; 1.2/1.2.1, 1.2.2./1.2.1.1., 1.2.1.2).
3. **Acknowledgements:** here is where you mention and thank the persons who have supported the efforts you have made in writing the dissertation, including family, friends and partners. Also, if you wish, your tutor. One or two paragraphs.
4. **Abstract** (alter as much as you need your proposal abstract); don’t forget the **keywords!**

MAIN BODY

5. **Introduction.** This part should occupy about 15% of the dissertation and be twice as long as the conclusion. In this section you should introduce the topic to the reader and state your research question. Here you need to justify why your research question is worth answering and then briefly present your main arguments, which you will then discuss at length in the body of the dissertation. You also need to explain how you have structured your dissertation and describe the main arguments in each part. You can subdivide this section in TFM (optional) and PhDs (necessary). By the way: page numbers begin here, in the Introduction, with 1, NOT with the Table of Contents.
6. **Body.** This part should occupy about 70% of the dissertation. You should subdivide it into suitable parts, which might be two or three for the TFG and the TFM; and up to five for the PhD, in which we call them ‘chapters’. Each part, or chapter, can be subdivided, of course, depending on its length. Make the parts of *similar length*. If one part appears to be extremely long, subdivide it. If one part appears to be extremely short, then include it into a longer section, or add more text to it.
7. **Conclusion.** This part should occupy about 7% to 5% of the dissertation and be half as long as the introduction. Be concise in presenting the conclusions of your research, laying special emphasis on what you contributed to what was previously known

about your research topic. Describe the further research you (or other persons) could do, starting with the findings in your own dissertation.

FINAL MATTERS

8. **Works Cited.** This part should occupy about 5% to 10% of the dissertation. You may include separate lists inside this segment for Primary Sources, Secondary Sources, Filmography. I do not think that internet sources should be listed separately as Webography, so do not do that. *Please note:* a *primary source* is an original text, the ones you study in the dissertation– the *secondary sources* are the texts that analyse your primary sources. If in doubt, check the MLA guidelines (or ask your tutor!). Also: this is a list of the works you quote from; any other sources you may have read but from which you do not quote, should not be included.

9. **Appendices** (if applicable). You might need to include a plot summary here if your primary sources are very long (or very many!), or a list, or graphics, an interview, etc. This is not compulsory.

Please, note: we no longer sent printed copies to examiners, but in the case of PhD dissertations, they may require them.

These are approximate indications based on the 70% / 30% ratio:

main body = 70% of the final text, divided into segments or chapters remaining
30% = introduction (15%), conclusions (7%), bibliography (7%)

- **TFG, 20 pages = 14 pages for the body [7+7], 6 for the rest (introduction 3, conclusions 2, works cited 1).**
- **TFM, 50 pages = 35 for the body [17+17], 15 for the rest (introduction 7, conclusions 4, works cited 3).**
- **PhD, 300 pages = 210 for the body [4/5 chapters of 45/55 pages each] + 90 for the rest (introduction 45, conclusions 20, works cited 25)**

Try to keep the same proportion if your dissertation ends up being longer.

7. Receiving feedback

- For TFG dissertations you receive feedback mainly from your tutor (they give you marks for the proposal and the final written TFG). Your two examiners do not offer tutorials or feedback but they give you the marks for the final version of the TFG and the oral presentation.
- For TFM dissertations, you receive feedback from all the doctors in the MA programme when you submit your proposal (in January) and again from two of them when you submit the required 5 pages of the Introduction or one part (in April). Ideally, the same two doctors will be part of your tribunal (in mid-July; you may not submit the MA dissertation in September). You need to discuss the feedback received with your tutor and incorporate the most relevant aspects to your dissertation.
- For PhD dissertations, you need to pass a yearly assessment interview in June/July before your supervisor and two or three other doctors in the programme. You need

to submit two weeks before a report (about 5 pages) explaining your progress along the year. You need to pass this assessment interview to be allowed to register for the following year (this is usually no problem at all if you have your supervisor's support).

8. The 'viva' or 'defence'

Once you complete your dissertation, you need to submit it to your tutor, and they will return it to you with comments for you to produce a final version. Please, make sure it is correctly edited, don't make your tutor waste their time in matters you need to solve yourself!

This final version, once revised, must be submitted to the members of the board or tribunal:

TFG: You submit your final version in mid-June and present your dissertation for assessment in public on a date in late June or early July before your two examiners (excluding your tutor). The examiners are chosen by the programme coordinator; they award a mark for the written work, and another for the oral presentation.

TFM: You submit your final version in late June and present your dissertation for assessment in public on a date in mid-July before a board composed of two doctors, selected by your tutor in agreement with the TFM coordinator. The tutor cannot be part of this tribunal, which may have members from outside the Department or even from other Catalan universities. In TFMs the tutor does not award any marks; these come from the examiners. You get an only final grade, without separate marks for the written work and the oral presentation.

PhD: You submit your final version whenever it is ready, within the maximum time you're given (3 years for full-time students, 5 for part-time). Once the Escola de Doctorat allows it, you present your dissertation for assessment in public on a date about two months after submission, before a board composed of three doctors, selected by your tutor. The tutor cannot be part of this tribunal and only one member can belong to UAB. The paperwork is time-consuming and complex, make sure you check what is required with plenty of time in advance. Please, note: under the new regulations, one of the doctors in your tribunal will read your dissertation in advance. They might return it to you for revision, which you need to carry out in one month before the final submission.

The **viva/defence procedure** is quite similar in the three cases: you need to prepare an oral presentation accompanied by a nice, attractive PowerPoint and then answer questions. In the case of the TFG you get a separate mark for the oral presentation or viva. For TFMs and PhDs depending on the quality of your presentation and of your answers the board may determine to give you a higher or lower final mark but you do not get a specific mark for the presentation.

How each presentation works:

TFG: you present your work in about 10/12 minutes, then each of the two examiners has 5 minutes to make comments and to ask 1 question. You listen to both of them and then reply. The viva lasts 30 minutes.

TFM: you present your work in about 15/20 minutes, then each member of the two members of the board has 10/15 minutes to make comments and ask possibly up to 3 questions. You answer their questions at the end of all their interventions. The viva lasts about 1 hour.

PhD: you present your work in about 20/30 minutes (a maximum of 45 is allowed), then each member of the three members of the board uses 15/30 minutes to make comments and ask as many questions as they want, possibly around 5. You answer their questions at the end of all their interventions. The viva lasts between 2 and 3 hours.

Please, note: in the TFG viva, students usually don't make notes, they just listen to the questions. In the TFM and PhD viva, you need to make notes, distinguishing between comments and questions (if in doubt, ask the examiner: 'sorry, I'm not sure whether this is a question or a comment', or 'does this answer all your questions?'). What works best is using an A4 sheet of paper horizontally with columns for each examiner; in this way you can visualize at one glance all the questions, etc, and the possible overlapping.

Make sure you won't be hungry throughout the procedure. In the case of PhD dissertations, carry some glucose with you (cough drops are discreet and effective). And you will also need a bottle of water in all cases. By the way: you may stand or sit down, as you wish. You may NOT read the presentation, but notes are always allowed. If your PowerPoint is well built, you won't even need any notes.

The PowerPoint presentation (TFG, TFM, PhD)

The Power Point presentation must be visually attractive, easy to follow and complete in the information it provides. Some advice:

- Use light colours, particularly for the background; make sure the letters on the screen are big and thick enough, preferably dark against a pale background
- Do not use much text; avoid using complete sentences or paragraphs unless you need to make sure that a quotation is fully understood by your audience
- Use images which complement the content of your words; use always highresolution images (otherwise, they look blurred)
- Work on the collocation of the items on each slide, so that a certain symmetry is achieved that looks pleasing to the eye
- Avoid using videos as they often malfunction
- Always avoid producing PowerPoint presentations that look too 'baroque', excessive, and that use different styles
- Bring your PowerPoint presentation to the viva in different formats, including .pdf. Use a USB but also email yourself the presentation in case the USB malfunctions

The content of the PowerPoint presentation should cover:

- The title of your work, your name, programme it belongs to, year
- Reasons for the choice of topic
- Research question
- Thesis statement
- Precedents of study and methodology (fields of research)

- Sub-thesis and main arguments of each part of your work
- Conclusions that you have reached
- Contribution (to research/knowledge) that you have made
- Further research (at a more advanced level) Thanks

I personally don't think that a list of works cited is necessary, but your tutor might require it.

As you can see, depending on which kind of dissertation you are defending you will need more or less time for each section, in particular for

- Precedents of study and methodology (fields of research)
- Sub-thesis and main arguments of each part of your work

These will be necessarily the central aspect in TFM and PhD viva, less extended in TFG presentations. In any case, the minimum would be about 12 slides for the TFG, possibly 20 for the TFM, 25 or more for the PhD depending on your needs.

Please, note: It is customary to start presentations by thanking the members of the board for judging your work. I find it more elegant to thank your supervisor towards the end of the presentation, but you can also do it after you thank the board at the beginning (in TFGs or TFMs).

Rehearsal (TFG, TFM, PhD)

In all cases you must rehearse with your tutor the complete presentation, ideally in the same room where the viva/defence will take place, and also ideally at least one week before the actual presentation so that you can correct the content and the PowerPoint if necessary.

Dress code (yes, there is one!) (TFG, TFM, PhD)

Your personal appearance also plays a role in your viva/defence, as this is a formal occasion and dressing nicely, *within your habitual style*, is expected. You're not asked to wear jacket and tie, or a formal dress and high-heeled shoes, but do not dress too informally. Or as if you were going to a party or a club with your friends...

The viva or defence (TFG, TFM, PhD)

- You will logically feel nervous when presenting your dissertation in public. This is understandable. My experience is that if a rehearsal goes well, the presentation goes even better.
- Presentations are *public* and you can invite your *friends or family* to give you support, though they need to be silent, and of course never make comments about the board...
- You MAY NOT record the viva, nor take photos, to respect the privacy of the board. If you wish to record only your own presentation, you may do so, first asking for the board's permission.
- By the way: in a PhD viva, any doctor in the room can ask questions but this very rarely happens.
- Your tone should be always polite and you should never sound arrogant, even when the questions you get may make you feel impatient, scared, annoyed, etc. Address the members of the board by their title, including your tutor (in a viva I am Dr. Martín!)

- To calm your nerves, keep at hand a pen you can play with, some cough drops and water in case your mouth goes dry or you feel hungry (it can happen in a long PhD viva). If you think that eating beforehand will help do it but avoid stimulants (coffee...) and tranquillisers (either medication or a simple herbal tea...) as *you need to be alert*. And as *calm* as possible.

9. My personal experience as a tutor

I have been tutoring TFG/BA, TFM/MA and PhD dissertations for many years now and in my experience the main problem is that students lack a clear idea of the purpose, extension and scope of the dissertation they need to submit... because they haven't read any!! So, the first thing you need to do even before meeting your tutor is reading outstanding dissertations of the kind you must submit. Your tutor may guide you in this (in my own case, you can see most dissertations I have supervised in my website, <https://webs.uab.cat/saramartinalegre/research/>). You can find all kinds of dissertations in UAB's digital repository (<https://ddd.uab.cat/>). TDX is a huge repository for doctoral dissertations produced in 15 Catalan and Valencian universities (<https://www.tesisenred.net/>).

TFG/BA: my experience of tutoring this type of dissertation has always been very positive. The main difficulties I have come across are:

- some initial difficulties to select a text to work on, which is totally normal the proposal tends to be the weaker part of the items that must be marked, and the grade tends to be lower than the rest (this is because the student is still working at a preliminary stage)
- the text is incorrectly edited, with no styles used, typos, incorrect use of parenthetical references... which makes me waste my time, because I tend to correct down to the last comma
- the bibliography I have suggested has not been included (why not?!) the PowerPoint does not follow the instructions and needs to be redone the content of the presentation is too descriptive and does not emphasise the main
- thesis and arguments (but this is usually corrected after the rehearsal)

If you're interested in further study, check this:

MA in English Studies: Linguistic, Literary and Sociocultural Perspectives

<https://www.uab.cat/web/estudiar/official-master-s-degrees/general-information1096480962610.html?param1=1345898380617>

TFM/MA: my experience of tutoring this type of dissertation has always been very positive. The main difficulties I have come across are: some initial difficulties to select a text to work on (the student needs to work more

- actively on this aspect than a BA student)
- the proposal has required several drafts
- in general, feedback from the other doctors in the programme has been very useful, but the bibliography they have suggested (or I) has not been included (why not?!) the text is incorrectly edited, with no styles used, typos, incorrect use of parenthetical references... which makes me waste my time, because I tend to correct down to the last comma

- the PowerPoint does not follow the instructions and needs to be redone the content of the presentation is too descriptive and does not emphasise the main thesis and arguments (but this is usually corrected after the rehearsal)
- the student had serious difficulties to complete their TFM and had to register again for a second year (two cases out of 22...); in both cases they did finish their dissertation

If you're interested in further study, check this:

Doctoral Programme in English Studies/Filologia Anglesa

<https://www.uab.cat/en/phds/english-studies>

PhD: my experience of tutoring this type of dissertation has been far more complicated. Out of twenty-nine students I have tutored so far, ten have successfully submitted their dissertations, but nine have abandoned, usually in the third year. The main cause was the impossibility of combining a full-time job with the writing of their dissertation, though in other cases they and I found out only in the third year that they actually lacked the skills needed to complete a PhD dissertation, and they quit.

Typically, PhD students spend the first two years doing research and only sit down to start writing in the third year. They may have submitted before an article to a journal or presented papers in conferences, but these briefer texts might not give a clear indication of their skills. When faced with chapters 50 to 70 pages long, and a 300-page dissertation, many find themselves unable to sustain their argumentation for that long.

A problem I acknowledge is that we (the tutors) tend to admit doctoral students without sufficiently checking their writing, trusting that if they have completed a solid TFM/MA dissertation they can also write a good PhD dissertation. This is in many cases a bit too rash on their side, and on ours. So, please, if you are an MA student reading this and are thinking of writing a doctoral dissertation, start reading as many as you can and then decide whether you can write one yourself.

The dissertation will be part of your life for between 3 and 5 years and this is a major decision to make. In the case of the TFG/BA and the TFM/MA dissertations you spend a few months doing research in the context of a degree, but in the case of the PhD dissertation you will be working for years on your own (with the help of your tutor, of course, and in contact with other students like you). You need to consider, besides, financial matters. Unless you have the good luck to get a scholarship (<https://www.uab.cat/en/doctoral-school/grants-scholarships-calls>), you will have to work elsewhere during those years. Please, note, too that although in our programme you're free to choose the topic of your dissertation, if you apply for a scholarship, this is usually conditioned to your working within a funded research project, which might limit your choices.

In short: before you commit yourself, talk to other doctoral students and to recent doctors, so that you're fully aware of what to expect. And, of course, to the doctors in our programme.

10 ... And beyond!

This section comes from two blog posts published in my blog *The Joys of Teaching Literature* (<https://webs.uab.cat/saramartinalegre/2021/04/19/gettingpublished-some-advice-for-beginners-on-books/>) in April 2021 and is aimed at PhD students.

10.1 Getting published: some advice for beginners (on articles and book chapters)

‘Why publish and should I...?’, you may be wondering. Publication is an essential aspect of academic life: it is indeed the main method to present research results and new ideas (apart from teaching, attending conferences, giving talks...). Unlike what I was told when I was a PhD student myself (but never heeded), the sooner you start publishing, the better; remember that publications are, besides, a key component in accreditation processes in Spain. You may have heard, by the way, of ‘impostor syndrome’: you might feel that you lack the authority to publish, but this authority is only acquired by publishing, so this is what you need to do. Academic writing, of course, is learned by reading, reading, and reading academic work, and understanding its conventions. Pay attention! To publish you need good academic skills, acquired during your BA and MA studies, but also a thick skin to stand criticism (which can be very harsh) and rejection.

Publication takes a minimum of six months from handing in your text to seeing it published, one year on average, and in some cases two years (or more). Thus, if you want to have one or two publications by the time you hand in your PhD dissertation, the second year might be a good time to begin. You may transform part of your future dissertation into an article; if this is published before you finish your thesis you can still use the text in it (with permission); indeed, some dissertations consist of a collection of previously published articles, though this is not a model we recommend in our programme (precisely because publication in the Humanities is a rather slow process). Writing an article for publication in the second year is also a way of testing your academic skills. If it is rejected, that is an experience you can also learn from... Please, note that our programme requires that you submit (not necessarily publish) an article to an indexed journal (= one that is acknowledged as significant in its field).

‘Where should I start publishing?’, you may be thinking. Please, note that I am speaking here of a journal publication, but (at least in Literary Studies) you might also start publishing by contributing a chapter to a collective volume (though this is usually less valued than an article). If you’re working with a research group, you need to follow the research lines marked by the principal investigator (perhaps s/he is also your supervisor). In Spain, many of us in English Studies have started publishing in the online journal of the Asociación Española de Estudios Anglo-Norteamericanos (AEDEAN), *Atlantis*, which has quite a good reputation (it is what we call a B-list journal). Ask your supervisor for advice and use databases such as, for instance, MIAR (<https://miar.ub.edu/>) to learn which journals might be a good choice for you, and how they are ranked. Yes, journals are ranked by performance (they are indexed).

MIAR, for instance, uses the ICDS index (Secondary Composite Index Broadcasting) which refers to the “visibility of the journal in different scientific databases of international scope or in repertoires evaluation of periodicals”. MIAR awards points to each journal according to how visible it is in the Web of Science Core Collections and Web of Science classic (AHCI, SCIE, SSCI o ESCI), Scopus, and other abstract and indexing databases (specialized or multidisciplinary); international catalogues like Latindex or assessment lists (such as Catalan CARHUS Plus, European ERIHPlus or Spanish Sello de Calidad FECYT). Spanish database DIALNET is also taken into account and so is the “rate of survival of the journal, considering a maximum of 30 years in the calculation”. Until recently, it might happen that the journal where you published an article was rated A+ but by the time you passed assessment, or applied for a scholarship, etc, the journal was down to C or D, and so was your article. Fortunately, this has been corrected now. By the way, each subject category of journals is sub-divided into four quartiles: Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4. Q1 corresponds to the top 25% journals; Q2 to the 25 to 50% group; Q3, 50 to 75% group; and Q4 to the bottom 75%100% group. Logically, everybody wants to publish in the A+/Q1, journals but, unless you really are exceptionally talented,

this is not really where you should begin; aspiring to publication in a B/Q2 journal is more advisable. Apart from MIAR, see our library's databases website [here](#) (and do ask your supervisor).

How a journal rates is called its 'impact factor' (IF) or 'journal impact factor' (JIF). Just for you to really understand the academic world we live in, Wikipedia explains that IF and JIF refer to "a scientometric index calculated by Clarivate that reflects the yearly average number of citations of articles published in the last two years in a given journal". Wikipedia further informs that Eugene Garfield, founder of the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI), invented the impact factor. This has been calculated yearly since 1975 "for journals listed in the Journal Citation Reports (JCR)". So what is Clarivate? Well, because of a series of financial operations, JCR is now the property of private corporation Clarivate, established by the Onex Corporation and the Baring Private Equity Asia. Check <https://clarivate.com/webofsciencegroup> and infer whatever you need to infer from this. It is assumed, in any case, that the higher the ranking, the better positioned the journal is and the more authors it attracts, being able to select the very best. However, many scholars dispute that the highest ranking journals are really the best in their field (and what happens when their field is very small, like Medieval Catalan Literature?). Perhaps all this is talk for another seminar.

'But... how do I really start publishing?', you may be wondering. There are, I think, three main ways. A) You write an article on your own initiative and send it to a journal. B) You attend a conference and the paper you present is further developed into an article which either you send to a journal or is included in a publication derived from the conference (monographic journal issue, proceedings, collective book). C) You respond to a call for papers (cfp) sent by an editor seeking contributors (to a monographic journal issue, or a collective volume). How do you get cfp's? You join an association (such as AEDEAN), or a mailing list, or browse specialised websites (such as <https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/>). This is important: you need to be very active in your search for journals and cfp's, they will not simply come to you.

A few other notes, a bit randomly. Are you supposed to pay for publication? No, even though this is not uncommon in other fields, and not unheard of for books in ours. Will you be paid for publication? No, the only type of publication for which you might get royalties are books. What is Open Access? A European Union mandate indicates that academic publication should be ideally freely available online, this is what Open Access means. Online journals follow this mandate and I personally prefer open access because it gives more visibility to my work, though it must be noted that the highest ranking journals are usually only accessible through the very expensive databases to which universities subscribe. Some publishers sell Open Access, that is to say, they allow you to publish online work you have already published for them—for a fee. How about the digital repository at UAB? (Dipòsit Digital de Documentació, ddd.uab.cat). I do publish a lot at DDD, but this is considered self-publication and, therefore, useless for official validation or accreditation. You can use, however, DDD to publish work in progress, or other work usually not accepted directly for publication (such as conference presentations).

Once you have chosen the journal to which you want to submit your article, you need to edit it according to their guide for authors. Make sure you absolutely respect their preferred word count (articles and book chapters range from 4500 to 10000 words, though 7000-8000 is the more habitual length). Follow the journal's (or book editor's) instructions to submit: in some cases this just involves sending an email, in others you need to use a specific online application. You need to send your article anonymised (with no indication of who you are); the abstract and keywords are habitually sent in a separate document, usually with your name in it and contact information. Make sure you receive an acknowledgement of receipt; if you don't, contact the journal/book editor within the

week following your submission. A very important rule is that you cannot send your article simultaneously to several journals; you need to wait for a journal's negative decision to try another journal. I am not 100% sure why this is the case, since it slows down very much the process of publication, but apparently this is to avoid having many peer reviewers assessing the same text (or the same reviewer assessing it for two journals).

Once you submit your article (or book chapter) the editor will send it to the reviewers, who will review it anonymously. This is the process known as blind peer reviewing. The number of reviewers used to be three, but is now down to two, and in some cases one. The journal (or book editor) should contact you in a reasonable period of time (ideally, a few weeks, usually a few months) and email you the reviews. Of course, the higher ranking journals take longer to review articles as they get many submissions. Some reviewers write some notes, others long reports (I usually also send the text submitted with corrections and notes). Three things may happen: a) your article is accepted with no further revision (very rare...); b) your article is accepted but you're asked to revise it before re-submitting; c) your article is rejected (in that case, you are free to send it elsewhere). Rejection is common, and reviewers' reports can be very harsh. Be ready for that! Do not reply to rejection emails with negative, rude comments. Just say thanks, move on and send the article elsewhere. If you have been asked to revise your article, this usually means that the journal is interested, though it might well be that your second (or third, or fourth) revision is finally rejected. It happens to all of us! Be patient and stay calm!!! The reviewers may ask you to simply rewrite some passages, or add certain quotations and sources, but in some cases revision might be extensive and require substantial rewriting. This is part of the process. Always keep the different versions of the texts revised, just in case you need to go back to any of them (number or date them). If you do not agree with certain aspects of the peer reviewing, you may discuss them with the editor but be ready to accept his/her opinion, and do as you're told.

Once your article (or book chapter) is accepted, the editor will contact you next to proof-read it (= to check that the text sent for publication has no errors). At this stage, you may not change your article/book chapter substantially; you can only correct spelling or punctuation mistakes, some occasional vocabulary and grammar errors. Once your text is published, you should get the .pdf (article) and ideally a hard copy of the book (for a chapter), and of course add it to your CV. Published authors track their citation impact index through Web of Science, Scopus, or Google Scholar. The more you publish, and the more you're quoted, the higher your citation index will be. Of course, I always wonder whether the trick is to publish something controversial but rather foolish so that everyone cites you to explain how wrong you are. That also increases your citation index!

There are no hard and fast rules about how much a doctoral student should publish. I would recommend two publications (at least accepted) before submitting your PhD (two publications in three to five years is feasible). Publishing in books of proceedings derived from a conference is not well valued today, not even when the editors stress there has been a peer-reviewed assessment of the texts. And, yes, journal articles are valued above book chapters because supposedly, peer reviewing is more 'serious' in articles (I don't agree with this). Co-authorship, by the way, is common in the sciences (including Linguistics) but not in Literary Studies (in which usually collaboration is limited to two authors, very rarely more). If you're planning to get an accreditation as a [Lector](#) in the Catalan system or [Profesor Contratado Doctor](#) in the Spanish system, check the publication requirements now, so that you can plan your career in advance. And don't forget to open an account at Research Gate or Academia.edu, to follow what other researchers in your field are doing. Good luck, may your citation index grows to be very high!

10.2 Getting published: some advice for beginners (on books)

Writing a PhD dissertation takes from 3 to 5 years on average (this can be extended if you're a part-time student, though it is not really advisable). During these years you should start publishing articles in indexed journals and chapters in collective academic books, as I explained in the previous post, beginning in the second year. I am well aware that combining the effort required to write a 300-page-long dissertation with the effort required to write at least a couple of 25-page-long articles is daunting, but this is why we advise you to use part of the dissertation for those publications (you can always include a version of your publications in your thesis, with due acknowledgements; this is not self-plagiarising).

Once your dissertation has been submitted and has passed the assessment of your tribunal, that's it, you're a doctor! Spanish universities have an official mandate to upload online all the dissertations they produce (see www.tdx.cat, the repository of the Catalan universities as an example of how this is done) and, therefore, you will be asked to submit your dissertation (minus the typos!) for that. I know that in other countries this is not done, precisely to prevent academic publishing houses from rejecting dissertations as possible books. However, here in Spain we take into account that a) not all doctors transform their dissertations into books, b) a book based on a dissertation needs to be substantially different from the dissertation itself. The English Literature section of the programme I work for recommends that PhD candidates produce dissertations as close as possible to publishable monographs (a monograph is a book-length essay by one author), but even so there is very little chance that a publisher will accept a PhD dissertation as it is, with all the extensive theoretical framework, the many notes and so on.

At the end of 3 or 5 years working on your dissertation you will probably feel exhausted and little inclined to work 2 or 3 more years on your monograph. Let me tell you, however, that you might never get the chance to publish a book again, not even if you become a successful scholar. The duties connected with teaching and the preference in official assessment for peer-reviewed journal articles make it very difficult to find time for book-length work. If you pay attention, you will see that most books these days are either collective volumes or publications derived from PhD dissertations. My impression is that only a handful of extremely committed, prolific authors manage to have a career which includes three books or more. I myself felt very unhappy with myself for not having a monograph in English, though I have edited collective volumes and have some books in Spanish. When I managed to publish *Masculinity and Patriarchal Villainy in the British Novel: From Hitler to Voldemort* as recently as 2019, I felt much better. This volume closed the gap left by the non-publication of my dissertation. In fact, it comes from one of its chapters, so you see how long we can go on working on our doctoral research. Mine, I know, is not over yet.

So, having established that publishing your dissertation as a book is a very good idea, let me tell you how to proceed. Here's the first tricky matter. As I explained in my previous post, the impact factor helps you to understand how each journal is rated, but for books this is not so clear. The database SPI (Scholarly Publishing Indicators) can help you to navigate the field and have a more or less clear idea of who the major publishers are. But be careful! Their section 'Lingüística, Literatura y Filología' mixes fields which are in fact too diverse. I would not send a proposal for a book on Literary Studies to De Gruyter or John Benjamins Publishing Company, which I connect with Linguistics, and I wonder that Palgrave Macmillan is number 12 in the list, as I think it is much higher by prestige. Anyway, your reading for the dissertation should give you a clear idea of which university presses publish the most relevant authors and titles. However, don't make the mistake of thinking, for instance, that publishing in Duke University Press (39 in the SPI

list) is not worth it, and you should only aim at publication at number one, Oxford University Press. As happens Duke UP is a great publishing house, like others lower in that list.

A key matter in that sense are collections. Academic publishing houses do publish stand-alone books, but they tend to organize their publications into series about a particular topic, which is what collections are (yes, they are also called series). Let me give you an example. If you are, as I am, into science fiction and want to publish a monograph, then the best series is the Liverpool Science Fiction Texts and Studies by the University of Liverpool Press (which is actually run by Oxford University Press). This series is edited by two very well-known scholars in the field, David Seed and Sheryl Vint, and has an editorial board of six other very well-known scholars. If you check the webpage, you will see that you are invited to contact them through a Commissioning Editor, that is to say, the person in charge of the series on behalf of the publishers, Liverpool UP. She will consider your proposal and pass it onto the editors, who have the last word about their admission for publication. If your proposal is accepted, then either Prof. Seed or Prof. Vint will supervise your text. But before we go to that, let me tell you about the proposal.

Once you have chosen the series (or collection) your future book might fit, you need to produce a proposal. All publishers offer guidance through a proposal submission form, which tells you which steps you should follow (see for instance for the series I have mentioned <https://bit.ly/2YkhV8O>). Filling in a proposal is a first exercise in the marketing of your book, for here is where you have to 'sell' it, explaining what it is about, and describing its main saleable features. The publisher you target will want to know who might be interested in your book, what competitors it has, and so on. Writing an attractive description is, therefore, very important; this goes beyond simply writing an abstract, which tends to be a text addressed to other scholars, not to a publisher. When you write a proposal you need to ask yourself 'why would this publisher want to issue my book at all?' and you need to persuade them (but always use formal language!). Correct me if I am wrong, but I think that in the case of books, you can indeed send your proposal to several publishers, though perhaps it is more elegant to wait for a (possible) rejection before you try another one. And, of course, you need to accompany your proposal with a sample text, ideally one chapter.

Your proposal will be assessed by the series' editor(s), and perhaps by other anonymous reviewers. Make sure you understand their instructions and modify your text accordingly, because you don't want to rewrite substantially and then be told that you need to rewrite again. Your text will pass another review before publication and, of course, you will have to proofread it once it goes through the copy editor that checks errors (though not all publishers offer this service and some might demand that you pay for professional help). This varies with each publisher but make sure you negotiate a sufficiently generous deadline, so that you don't find yourself awfully stressed. Please, note that depending on how much rewriting you need to do, and your work-related situation, this might take one or two years, during which you're still expected to publish articles if you're really committed to having an academic career. And, by the way, a tricky part of any book is the index –make sure you understand how to produce one, or be ready to employ paid help.

When your manuscript is ready, or almost ready, your publisher will ask you to supply back cover blurbs (usually one by you, a couple by prestige scholars in your field), and a list of journals where your book could be reviewed. Getting reviews is important, much more so if these reviews appear in A-listed journals but, don't be, on the whole too optimistic about impact. Academic books are usually published as hardbacks costing between 100 and 200 euros, accompanied by a much cheaper ebook edition that, anyway, is expensive at around 35 euros. This means that an average academic book

might sell 100 to 200 copies, bought mostly by university libraries, with royalties for the author of about 200 euros, if you're lucky! Titles that sell reasonably well as hardbacks might be re-printed in one or two years as paperbacks, at a price between 25 and 35 euros, but, again, don't think you're going to make a lot of money out of that. My impression, however, is that in the Humanities no matter how many articles and book chapters you have published, what really makes you respected as a scholar are the books. I don't think you get invitations, for instance, to be a plenary speaker at a conference without them.

I'll finish by explaining that in the Anglophone world, where researchers are expected to write books, they teach relatively short semesters. Here, our much longer semesters make writing books almost impossible. At the same time, this is now expected of us. CNEAI, the agency that assess our publications every six years (for the 'sexenios') regards books as just one of the five publications you need to present, even though a 100,000 word book is clearly much more work than a 5,000 word article. However, the current accreditations for tenure (=indefinite contracts) expect candidates to have already published a monograph. This can only be, given the time constraints, a book based on your dissertation.

I hope all this has been useful. Please, leave comments if there is any doubt. May you publish many books!