Dissertation Timeline Template

Plan your proposal, data collection, writing and submission milestones.

Plan backwards from your deadline

Write your submission date at the top of a blank page. Work back through each phase, add a buffer of at least two weeks before the deadline, and put every date in your calendar today. Percentages below are a guide; adapt them to your programme.

Phase	Typical share of the time	Output
Topic and question	5-8%	Draft research question and a one-page outline
Proposal	8-10%	Approved proposal with aims, method and ethics plan
Literature review	15-20%	Annotated sources and a structured review chapter
Method and approvals	8-10%	Final design, instruments, ethics approval
Data collection	15-20%	Raw data collected and stored safely
Analysis	10-15%	Results tables, figures and notes on findings
Writing and redrafting	20-25%	Full draft, then revised draft after supervisor feedback
Final checks and submission	3-5%	Formatting, references, proofread copy submitted

Milestone checklist

- Research question agreed with supervisor
- Proposal approved
- Ethics approval received (if needed)
- Literature review first draft
- Data collection finished
- Analysis complete and checked
- Full first draft sent to supervisor
- Revised draft after feedback
- Reference list and formatting checked
- Final proofread and submission

Chapter word-count guide

Chapter	Share of words (typical master's)
Introduction	8-10%
Literature review	20-25%
Methodology	12-15%
Results	15-20%
Discussion	15-20%
Conclusion	5-8%

Supervisor meeting agenda

- What I did since last time (two minutes)
- Where I am stuck (bring specific examples)
- Feedback I need on this draft section
- Decisions we need to make today
- Next steps and the date of the next meeting

Habits that keep a dissertation moving

- Write something every working day, even 200 words. Fix it later.
- Keep a running reference list from day one.
- Back up your work in two places.
- Send drafts early. Feedback on a rough draft is more useful than praise for a polished one.
- Protect a regular writing slot and treat it like a class.

Stuck? A short session with a tutor who knows your field can save weeks. Ask us about dissertation coaching at tutorsgallery.org.