MSC DISSERTATION GUIDELINES

MSc Full-Time Programmes

2022-2023

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1. MAIN INFORMATION & DEADLINES

The MSc Dissertation is an individual, mandatory, end-of-studies report written in two phases:

PART 1. The Dissertation Proposal **(4 ECTS)** is written in the spring semester, as a deliverable for a 12H seminar, taught by the Dissertation Supervisor. Each supervisor teaches 12-15 students each year and supervises their individual reports. Submission deadline 2023: **April 30.**

PART 2. The Final Dissertation **(10 ECTS)** is written in the two months following the end of the spring semester. This paper is based on the project laid out in the Proposal. Submission Deadline 2023: **June 30.**

Students are authorized to upload their papers on COURSES before these deadlines.

Any delay beyond these dates leads directly to the second chance session and counts as a resit, marked by (R) on the students' transcript.

Similarly, failure to satisfy the requirements leads to a re-write of the paper. Resubmission Deadline 2023: **September 30.**

The Dissertation includes only written reports (no oral presentations).

2. OBJECTIVES & CHARACTERISTICS

The objective of the MSc Dissertation is to assess students' capacity to produce answers to **real-life, professional challenges,** relying on academic readings and empirical data analysis.

In particular, the assignment is designed to address the following competences:

- Identifying suitable and sustainable approaches to real-life problems.
- Proposing inclusive and/or sustainable recommendations.
- Designing initiatives that achieve sustainability objectives.
- Recommending solutions based on data analysis (primary or secondary data[1]).

Contrary to purely academic research or standard MSc theses, this work has a strongly **professional** orientation, addressing a **real-world challenge** in the domain covered by the programme. Readings and data analyses should result in **operational recommendations** that can be directly applied in real life. This **applied aspect** of the Dissertation is more important than theoretical discussion and elaboration.

In this framework, students are expected to build a **research question** and provide **evidence-based** responses. The work consists of the following steps:

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL
1. Identify a **question** within the specialization area of the MSc Programme.
2. Link this question to academic readings; use the NEOMA Library resources.

FINAL DISSERTATION
3. Collect and analyse data (primary or secondary).
4. Provide **answers** to this question as well **alternative answers** and evaluating their pertinence.
5. Reach operational conclusions and **recommendations** for a company, or the related professional field.

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[1] **Primary data:** original data collected by the student using a scientific method of data collection: survey, *in situ* observation, focus groups, semi-directive interview(s), model testing, etc.

Secondary data: evidence and data already published by scientific or professional sources, see page 7 for more details.

3. ASSESMENT CRITERIA

Student performance for the MSc Dissertation Proposal and Final paper is assessed on nine dimensions:

1. **Originality of the topic:** relevance and originality in relation to the specific area

2. **Appropriation of the literature**: mastery of the relevant literature and quality of its critical presentation

3. **Quality of methodology/information collected**: quality and appropriateness of method for data collection (quantitate or qualitative)

4. **Quality of analysis and reasoning:** the ability to address the issue at hand

5. **Ability to synthesize:** the degree to which the analysis allows for an in-depth understanding of the recommendations

6. **Pertinence of recommendations**: recommendations clearly result from the analysis presented

7. **Quality of layout:** professional level of report writing

8. **Ethics:** application of citation and referencing standards

9. **Quality of thought and knowledge of specialization area:** addressing the objectives set out by the dissertation, demonstrating knowledge of the specific area

4. THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR

The dissertation supervisor may be a permanent or associated professor or instructor. They are assigned in the autumn semester by the Head of the Programme in collaboration with the related Academic Department.

Students are enrolled in a 12-hour course, composed of lectures and workshops with their supervisor. Students are assigned to a group of 12 to 15, working in the same broad area, and develop their own individual project.

The course sessions aim to direct students to examine their topic of interest in depth, collecting and synthesizing relevant information. Discussions encourage cross-fertilization and foster critical analysis and thinking.

The mission of the supervisor it to **validate the scope and outline of the work**. Supervisors guide students in shaping their research question and defining a method of data collection to source the evidence to answer it.

The supervisor **marks the Dissertation Proposal** at the end of the spring semester. For the next two months, the supervisor remains available for problems relating to data collection, analysis and writing of the final report.

The supervisor **marks the Final Dissertation** using the grid specified in the Dissertation Assessment, as defined by the Director of MSc Programmes at NEOMA Business School.

5. FORMULATING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The Dissertation work aims to provide (several) alternative, substantiated answers, solutions and recommendations to the research question.

Students must initially argue the **importance and relevance** of their research question by considering the following issues:

- Why should this question be asked?
- What are the real-word challenges relating to this issue?
- Is it possible to answer this question? (data availability and accessibility; confidentiality issues)
- Can the possible alternative answers be substantiated?

Good research questions are specific, accessible, and answerable, **for example**:

- ✓ *Should brand X be extended to other circuits of distribution?*
- ✓ *Is company X on the road to brand extension?*
- ✓ *Should a product be re-branded in order to re-launch sales?*
- ✓ *How to improve the performance of brands of a large distributor?*
- ✓ *What is the impact of marketing levers on recruitment in sector X?*
- ✓ *Is viral marketing adapted to attracting and winning brand loyalty from adolescents?*
- ✓ *Which development strategies to adopt in the management of an ageing brand?*

Bad examples of research questions are broad and vague topics (**see below**). It is essential to define a research question rather than a descriptive title. Also, the student might be asking the right question but not have access to any reliable data in order to analyse it.

- × *The private investor faced with the risk of being sued.*
- × *The risks of civil responsibility of the firm and their insurance.*
- × *We are all managers.*
- × *Internationalisation strategies and partnerships.*
- × *Information systems and strategy.*
- × *Developing luxury products in Asia.*
- × *Corporate social responsibility.*

6. LITERATURE: LIBRARY SOURCES

Students must follow two Self-Training Library Modules and participate in the Q&A Zoom organised by the Library **before the beginning of the Dissertation seminar**. Self-evaluation quizzes are included in the training.

Students are expected to use two types of literature sources:

- **Concepts and theories** provided in textbooks, course material and research articles from academic sources (reviews, colloquia, theses, etc.)

- **Previous studies or benchmark cases**, analyses of the companies and/or sectors that have faced similar problems in the past. Such examples can be found in specialised literature sources: textbooks, published case studies, articles from professional reviews, press articles, analyses and studies by specialised agencies or experts in the field, etc

A Dissertation based on sources dating from years ago is at risk of losing a great deal of relevance. It is highly recommended that the student uses and cites **the most up-to-date edition** of any work used.

7. DATA COLLECTION

Data collection aims to find the evidence that will support answers to the research question driving the Dissertation.

- The Dissertation may collect and analyse original, **primary data**, that is, data collected by the student using a **scientific method** of data collection: survey, *in situ* observation, model testing, semi-directive interviews, focus group, etc.

- Alternatively, the Dissertation may analyse **secondary data**, that is, already published evidence. Secondary data sources are diverse: company data, sectoral and/or professional data, panels, sectoral analyses, annual reports and financial statements, OECD and other international agency and NGO publications, articles from professional reviews, studies by specialised firms and experts in the field, government studies, official reports, etc.

Data analysis and **synthesis** aim at three objectives: (i) propose alternative answer(s) to the research question, (ii) substantiate the objectivity of the data, and (iii) argue for the validity of the real-word recommendations.

Depending on the method of data collection, original data can be **quantitative** (e.g. percentages, frequencies, etc.) or **qualitative** (e.g. text from semi-directive interviews or focus groups, etc.). Data analysis therefore may include statistical testing when the data are quantitative.

8.   DATA CONFIDENTIALITY

In the case when a Dissertation collects data from a specific company, it is essential to **ask for and obtain the company's authorisation to use these data** and/or any internal documents of the company.

The company may request that the Dissertation in question be treated as **confidential** and not be read or distributed outside the Direction of the NEOMA Business School MSc programmes. In this case, the Director of the MSc Full-Time Programmes, the Head of the MSc Programme and the student sign a confidentiality clause. **The confidentiality clause form is added in the Dissertation.**

9.   REPORT OUTLINE

Both the Dissertation Proposal and the Final Paper should follow the below outline. The Final Dissertation may include the Proposal chapters; however, it will **only be evaluated** on the chapters that compose the Final Dissertation as defined in this document.

1.   Cover page
2.   Declaration of Academic Integrity
3.   Confidentiality Clause (when applicable)
4.   Acknowledgments
5.   Table of Contents
6.   **Abstract (800 words including 5 keywords)**
7.   Main body of the text
8.   References
9.   Appendix (when applicable)

10. REPORT CONTENT & STRUCTURE

The structure of the manuscript may vary according to the topic (e.g. chapter titles, order of the chapters etc.). The outline of the Dissertation Proposal **must be validated** by the supervisor before submission. The documents must cover the following content:

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL
1.   **INTRODUCTION:** presenting the **inspiration** and **importance** of a real-world, professional challenge
2.   **LITERATURE REVIEW:** linking this problem to **academic and other readings** from the Library resources.
3.   **CONCLUSION:** reformulating a **research question** and outlining the **method** and the **procedure** to be followed in order to answer it.

FINAL DISSERTATION
4.   **METHOD**: description of the **method** and **procedure** used to **collect data and evidence**. Details of sample, measuring instruments (e.g., questionnaire, interview guide or documents analysed) etc.
5.   **RESULTS:** presenting the **analysis of data** or other evidence (qualitative or quantitative data)
6.   **DISCUSSION:** providing **answers** to the initial research question as well **alternative answers** and evaluating their pertinence. Presenting operational conclusions and **recommendations** for a company, or the related professional field.

11. REPORT CITATION & REFERENCING

Students must apply the rules set out in the NEOMA Library's online guide: Avoiding plagiarism, citing its sources and writing a bibliography.

The source (e.g., academic or press article, company report, book, webpage etc.) of all information (e.g., ideas, analyses, events, data etc.) presented in the Dissertation must be **cited in the main body of the text** using APA style[2] 7th Edition (i.e., last name of the author(s) and year of publication). All sources cited in the document must be presented in full in the **References** section at the end of the manuscript.

The source of any figure (e.g., table, diagram, statistical chart, image) taken from another publication must be **cited in the main body of the text** (i.e., author(s) last name(s), year of publication and page n°, placed under the figure). The full reference is to be listed in the **References** section.

Direct (*verbatim*) quotes must not exceed 40 words. They must be signalled by **quotation marks** and followed by the appropriate citation in parenthesis (i.e., author(s) last name(s), year of publication, page n°).

The **References** list must contain all the sources (e.g., academic reports, press articles, figures, images, etc.) **cited in the manuscript.** Sources must be presented in **alphabetical order** by the last name of the first author. An additional bibliography presented separately in an APPENDIX may list sources that have not been used in the manuscript but are relevant to the topic.

It is highly recommended that students use and cite the most up-to-date edition of any work used.

12. REPORT FORMAT

All documents must be submitted in a **.doc** format, using MS Word as provided to students in their Office365 account.

The recommended number of pages is **min. 10 – max. 15** for the Dissertation Proposal and **min. 10 – max. 15** for the Final Dissertation (not including Cover page, References and Appendix).

The **file name** must contain the students' SURNAME and FIRST name and the title e.g. SURNAME_First name_Final Dissertation.

The format should respect basic **APA 7th Edition report-writing** requirements. Students are expected to study the writing guides available in the NEOMA Business School Library[3]

- Font size: min 11 - max 12, depending on font Preferred type font Calibri 11
- Justified paragraphs with **1.5 paragraph spacing** and **normal margins** (2.5cm on all sides)
- Page number on **Footers**, student name on **Headers**
- No more than **3 levels of titles** for sections and subsections

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[2] Students may apply another Citation and Referencing style that they are familiar with (e.g. Harvard or MLA) as long as one and the same style is used it throughout the manuscript.

[3] Doing your Master's Dissertation
The Quick Fix Guide to Academic Writing : How to Avoid Big Mistakes and Small Errors Ed. 1
Essay Writing: a Student's Guide
Doing Your Dissertation in Business and Management : The Reality of Researching and Writing Ed. 1

13. REPORT SUBMISSION & PLAGIARISM

Students must upload an MS Word file of their work on COURSES before each deadline. **All submissions are automatically analysed by the anti-plagiarism URKUND software.** The software is capable of recognizing text that has been published elsewhere that is used *verbatim* or with small changes with great accuracy.

URKUND cannot be used to test manuscripts before submission.

Plagiarism is a matter of great concern at NEOMA Business School and may lead to exclusion from the school. Plagiarism consists in intentionally or unintentionally failing to identify the source of ideas and information.

A Declaration of Academic Integrity is available in Appendix and must be included in the Dissertation.

Plagiarism detected in the MSc Dissertation is sanctioned by failing to validate the related ECTS. Papers with a high percentage of plagiarized content must be resubmitted in the resit session.

Students must consult the **Internal Regulations** and **Study Regulations** concerning sanctions related to plagiarism which are available on MyNEOMAgora. Similarly, students should read their **MSc Programme Regulations** available on COURSES.

14. APPENDIX

- A. COVER PAGE TEMPLATE
- B. CONFIDENTIALITY CLAUSE
- C. DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

NEOMA
BUSINESS SCHOOL
REIMS · ROUEN · PARIS

MSC DISSERTATION PROPOSAL or **MSC FINAL DISSERTATION**

TITLE OF YOUR PROPOSAL or FINAL DISSERTATION

POSSIBLE SUBTITLE

Your FAMILY NAME / First name

Head of MSc Programme: FAMILY NAME / First name

Dissertation Supervisor: FAMILY NAME / First name

Date:

CONFIDENTIALITY CLAUSE

All information related to the company Click or tap here to enter text. contained in the Dissertation

presented by the student Click or tap here to enter text. currently enrolled in the MSc Click or tap

here to enter text. programme, is strictly confidential and will under no circumstances be diffused

outside NEOMA Business School.

City   Click or tap here to enter text.

Date   Click or tap to enter a date.

Anne-Sophie COURTIER   Click HERE   Click HERE

Associate Director Programme Grande Ecole   Student   Head of Programme
Director MSc Full-Time Programmes

DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I, undersigned, M./Ms Click or tap here to enter text. student enrolled in the MSc Click or tap here to

enter text. certify that the data and information contained in the Dissertation entitled Click or tap here

to enter text. have not been plagiarised.

City   Click or tap here to enter text.

Date   Click or tap to enter a date.

Signature