Dissertation Template 1:

Qualitative research project

**Example project**:Why do university lads like to joke about gender? A qualitative study of how undergraduate men construct gendered identities.

**Title page:** Tile of project, your name, registration number, course/degree title.

Example:

* Why do university lads like to joke about gender? A qualitative study of how undergraduate men construct gendered identities
* Kitty Nichols
* Registration no 1234567
* Sociological Studies
* University of Shefftown.

Finding your Way: Have you included all the key information on your title page? Check your course documentation for clarity on what is required.

**Contents:** List of chapters and page numbers.

This is a straightforward section and there are often tools and technology on the computer programs you are using to write up the dissertation which do this for you (for example within *Microsoft Word* the creation of a contents page can be found under the ‘Reference’ tab). A top tip here is to **ensure that you are consistent**; this includes making the font the same throughout and using line spacing effectively.

Finding your Way: Ensure that the page numbers in the document match those listed in the contents page.

**Introduction:** This provides an overview of your project. It explains your interest in the topic and sets out the structure of the dissertation. If you can, try to include a ‘hook’, imagine that you want to draw the reader in, getting them excited and interested in your project. Also, consider that this chapter allows the reader to understand what the remainder of the dissertation will look like before they continue to read on.

In the context of our example project, in the Introduction, you would need to introduce the study of men and humour very broadly, noting why this is an important issue. It would also be a good idea to use a contemporary example from society to highlight this as a topical and significant issue. This helps to persuade the reader that this area warrants further study.

Additionally, it would be wise to provide some brief background of the group of men
in the study (not too much, as this is extended in the Methods chapter). Also, include
 a brief explanation of ‘lads’ and the association between lads, humour, and gender,
using references to begin to indicate the most important texts/thinkers in this area.

Finally, you should outline the structure of the dissertation noting what each chapter will do and contain. This helps the reader to see how everything will flow and how the argument is connected.

Example:

*The next chapter will present a critical discussion of the literature, including a discussion of masculinity, lads, humour, and student life. This will be followed by chapter three, which will outline the design and methods chosen to conduct the research…*

Finding your Way: This is the ‘so what’ moment. You need to tell the reader why this research is needed and important. Sell yourself and support this with literature/resources where possible!

**Literature review chapter(s)**: This sets out the existing work in this area and what has previously been identified, as well as highlighting any gaps in the literature.

It is usual to organize this chapter using sub-sections. Breaking up the chapter into themes or sections helps you to organize your own thinking and convey the main arguments clearly. It is likely that these sections will be guided by your literature search. These sections can be broad and broken down into smaller sections, or they can be very focussed. In order to make this decision, it is best to discuss the options with your supervisor.

We have provided ‘research plan templates’ as one possible way of beginning to identifying these themes (explore other resources provided within these online pages).

It is also useful to consider how the sections fit together and try to position these in a logical order.

Finding your Way: By the time you finish this section the knowledge gap should be really clear to the reader.

Example:

* Gender: Masculinity and femininity in contemporary society
* Lad cultures and The Lad
* Gender and lad cultures in higher education
* Humour and joking
* Gender and joking.

**Methodology**: This includes a discussion of the methods chosen and the theory behind these, as well as justification for your decisions. Drawing on methods literature throughout, this section also discusses the sample and ethics. There is more to a dissertation than the communication of results. It is just as important to show the examiners that the methods underpinning your research are appropriate.

Finding your Way: This chapter requires as much time and effort as the res, avoid rushing it and always include literature to support your points.

A strong structure would be as follows:

* **Introduction:** What the chapter will cover, so that the reader knows what to expect (a few sentences).
* **Theoretical approach:** (This refers to what we talked about in chapter 2. Ontology, epistemology, and methodology are talked about together and are important to include, markers want to see that you have noted how the way you perceive the world influences the types of knowledge created in your project). Here you want to be clear about which theoretical stance your thinking is informed by. This might seem scary, but often you can get clues from similar research projects, so reading methods sections of previous research you have used and enjoyed is a good starting point.

Example:

*Feminist and interactionist approaches influenced my methodological stance to research, viewing gender as a social construction, therefore enabling a critique of masculinity (Pini and Pease, 2013; Butler, 2008). Furthermore, feminist thinking was adopted to provide a critique of the construction of knowledge, placing emphasis upon situated experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Flax, 1987).*

* **The research setting:** Telling the reader about the place you are conducting the research. Example, *discussing University of Shefftown in terms of the type of university it is, the student population and any features which are significant to the research (only if appropriate ethically)*.
* **Participants:** Information about your sample, who they are (age, ethnicity, class could be useful here), why they were chosen.
* **Access:** How you recruited your participants e.g. snowballing, purposive, random. Also, the method of contacting them e.g. via a social media, email list, posters.
* **Data collection:** Tell the reader how you did the research. What exactly did you do and why did you make the decision to do it this way? This is called the ‘method’. You could include:
	+ **Observation and research diaries** (including what the method is, how I implemented it, limitations/challenges).
	+ **Interviews** (including what the method is, how I implemented it, limitations/challenges).
* **Analysis:** How you organized, coded, and analysed your data. More specifically, the approach and tools to analysis such as thematic/discourse/narrative analysis and whether this was manual or through use of tools such as NVivo.
* **Ethics:** The ethical considerations you needed to make during your project. Remember this needs to cover the whole process, so not just practical elements in the data collection stages, include dissemination and production stages too.
* **Conclusion:** Remind the reader what the chapter has achieved (briefly) and what is coming up in the following chapters. You want to make it clear how this chapter fits into the whole project.

**Findings chapters**: This provides both a description of the data and the presentation
of it. Often this chapter is combined with the following one, as it can be difficult to separate
your findings from the analysis.

You might have multiple findings chapters depending on the discipline, methodology, and your data. Alternatively, similarly to the literature review chapter, you might divide this chapter into sections. The decision on how this will look, or how many you have, will be dependent on your data and how you want to present it.

The research plan template within the online resources will act as a good place to begin identifying these sections.

Finding your Way: Try to avoid covering too many points at once in your analysis chapter. Instead stay focussed and concentrate on quality rather than quantity in your discussion.

If you utilize sub sections such as these, think carefully about how they are connected. They should each make interesting arguments, however be fitted together to fully address your research aims and objectives.

Example:

Analysis is divided into three sections:

1. *The continuation of lads and gender jokes.*
2. *What happens when the joke is challenged?*
3. *Beyond the lad: New understandings of lads in higher education.*

**Conclusions**: This draws the conclusions together stating clearly what the work has identified and how the research questions were addressed. It is also likely to reflect on possible areas for future research.

Finding your Way: Remember that contributions can vary, these can be substantive or theoretical. Discuss what you think your contribution is with your supervisor before you start writing.

Included in your conclusions should be:

* **Final conclusions:** Make it clear how you have addressed your research questions, and what the contribution of your research might be to academia and society.
* **Limitations:** Note the most significant challenges or critiques of the research, also noting why these are not a problem overall!
* **Future directions:** What research might come next, and what else might be done in this area, perhaps on a bigger scale or in a different context.