

1. INTRODUCTION: WRITING A DISSERTATION¹

Whether you are writing a Bachelor's/Undergraduate Dissertation (TFG), a Master's Dissertation/MA Thesis (TFM), or a Doctoral/PhD Thesis, the core requirement remains the same: the dissertation is an argumentative essay designed to demonstrate that you have mastered the research methodologies and critical thinking skills appropriate to your level of study. What varies across dissertation types is the length of the work, the depth of the argumentation, the expected level of autonomy, and the degree of originality required.

- At the TFG level, you must demonstrate a firm grasp of literary research methods and the ability to identify a topic of genuine critical merit.
- For a TFM, the standards increase, requiring a higher capacity for independent inquiry into a subject. It calls for a more sophisticated engagement with theory and a more nuanced analysis than a TFG.
- A PhD dissertation serves as the ultimate validation of your independence as a researcher. Here, you are expected to make a significant and original contribution to the field.

TFG extension = 6,000-7,500 words

Originality of contribution to knowledge = low to moderate

Time to write it: one semester, in the second half of the fourth year (you choose your tutor and the topic the previous semester)

Your **Undergraduate Dissertation** is the culminating product of undergraduate work and it is likely to be the longest and most complex piece of writing you have ever done. One of the most significant obstacles to a student's morale is the false assumption that a TFG must be a groundbreaking contribution to research. You'd better see it as the natural next step in your academic journey. Success in the TFG depends on a firm understanding of the tasks ahead. The purpose of this guide is to clarify those requirements and offer a structured path forward. We will begin by outlining the **specific skills you are expected to demonstrate**:

1. Independent research

You are responsible for selecting a specific topic and working on it on your own. This means finding relevant primary and secondary materials and thinking independently about what they do and why it matters.

¹ We are grateful to Sara Martín Alegre—Senior Lecturer at the UAB (Autonomous University of Barcelona) and author of the blog [The Joys of Teaching Literature](#)—for sharing her guide *Working on a Dissertation (and Beyond)* with the members of the Spanish Association for Anglo-American Studies (AEDEAN). That document provided the foundation for the present guide.

2. In-depth analysis: From explanation to interpretation

In literary studies, analysis means moving beyond *what* a text says to uncovering *how* and *why* it says it, within a specific critical framework. This is the discipline of “close reading”: attending to language, form, structure, imagery, tone and intertextual echoes, and connecting those observations to broader theoretical stakes.

3. Using sources correctly

You will draw on two types of material:

Primary sources: The literary work(s) that constitute the focus of your dissertation. Depending on your topic, this may include other literary works, artwork, music, films, etc.

Secondary sources: The critical conversation surrounding your primary texts: analyses and interpretations by critics and scholars. You need to engage with this scholarship critically, not merely cite it.

You are expected to compile a list of works cited and demonstrate a good command of standard citation and referencing systems (MLA is standard in literary studies).

4. Creating an argument

You must construct a coherent and convincing argument by combining your own ideas with previous research. This means that you weave your own interpretive perspective with external evidence to build a logical progression—a “path” for your reader to follow—proving the thesis statements put forward, constructing extensive argumentation, using appropriate language and terminology, and applying relevant methodology to achieve interesting and convincing results. Your argument should be specific (avoid broad generalisations), grounded in close reading, and in dialogue with existing criticism.

5. Project management skills

In addition to the academic skills listed above, remember that completing your dissertation successfully also requires:

- A detailed dissertation plan: Use a calendar or timeline to highlight key stages and deadlines.
- Respecting the supervisory cycle: This means submitting drafts well in advance to allow your supervisor sufficient time for a thorough review, ensuring their insights can be meaningfully integrated into the final version.
- Working at a steady pace: Distribute your tasks evenly throughout the project to prevent a heavy workload in the closing stages. Enough time should be allowed for revision, proofreading, and final corrections.