

## **Your dissertation: A gateway to your future**

Dr Peter Levin

Are you required, as part of your degree course, to submit a dissertation or a long essay of 10-30 thousand words or so? How's it going? Does it feel like a burden, a pain? Or do you see it as an opportunity, a chance to do something interesting and imaginative, not constrained by the 'tramlines' of a weekly series of lectures and seminars or classes? If the latter, one question that you could usefully ask - when you have a moment or two - is this: 'Who will be interested in knowing about my work?'

If you think your work will deserve a wider audience than your examiners and supervisor, think about how to reach them. It's never too soon to do that, especially as there may be ways of tweaking your work to make it more interesting to them.

And bear in mind that in a job interview, if you can talk intelligently and with enthusiasm about your dissertation work and what you learned from it, you will be well on the way to getting that job.

So think about how to publicize your work. Here are some possible avenues to explore:

### **An academic paper**

Can you use your dissertation as the basis for a paper in a learned or professional journal? You will need to familiarize yourself with the style and other attributes that the editor is looking for, such as length, format and referencing system, and then shorten and rewrite your dissertation to conform to these requirements. (Usually, a dissertation as submitted for examination purposes will be far too long to be republished in full.) Your supervisor, if he or she is available, should be capable of giving you some advice on this.

### **A conference paper or poster**

Could your dissertation serve as the basis for a conference paper, whether at an academic, professional or student level? Could you use it to create a lively poster to display at a conference? Attending and taking part in conferences is a very good way of meeting people who share your interest and of starting to build a network of contacts. You will need such contacts if you want to continue to work in your field after graduating: having them will make it more likely that people will think of you when job opportunities arise.

Conference announcements usually give details of the format in which proposals are to be submitted. You will almost certainly have to provide an abstract of 250-300 words: this needs to be as enticing as you can make it. Find out if there are key terms that you can include, such as current issues to which your work is relevant. Again, ask your supervisor for advice. (And be sure to credit him or her for it in your acknowledgements.)

### **Presenting a conference paper**

A whole book can be written on giving presentations – and has been: see the Student-Friendly Guide *Perfect Presentations!*, by Levin and Topping (ISBN 9780335238613) – but here are some suggestions:

- Know your audience and what is likely to intrigue them, to capture their attention. Think of what you will be doing as telling them a story.
- Prepare and bring with you some handouts with a brief outline (e.g. headings) of your presentation, together with any other material that it will be helpful for your audience to have in front of them as you speak
- If you are using PowerPoint, make sure that your slides will be legible from the back of the room in which you are presenting. Unreadably small writing and undecipherable visuals are guaranteed to annoy an audience.
- Begin by introducing yourself and your subject, and saying what the puzzle or problem was that you set out to solve.
- Give an outline of your method – what you did, what tools you used – but no more than an outline.
- Tell your audience what you found, and what you know now that you didn't before. Did you solve your puzzle?
- Invite questions. Discussion with your audience can be the most rewarding and exciting part of your session, so be sure to leave enough time for it.

### **Using the world wide web**

Have you thought about using the world wide web to publicize your work? Could you set up and develop your own website? You could use it to publish reports and articles arising out of your dissertation work, as well as any updates to it. Keep an eye on on-line journals and submit contributions to them and to online forums. These contributions can include links to your own website, of course, as well as to those of other people.

### **A gateway to your future**

In publicizing your work you can open up a gateway to your future. Take the trouble to do it well, and to keep on learning as you do so. The world can be your oyster!

[For more on this subject see *Excellent Dissertations!* ISBN 9780335238613 and *Perfect Presentations!* ISBN 9780335219056]