



**MEDIA@LSE**  
Department of Media and Communications

# **MC499 DISSERTATION Guidelines 2009-10**

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**For students on the following MSc programmes:**

MSc Global Media and Communications (with Fudan)

MSc Global Media and Communications (with USC)

MSc Media and Communications  
(including Research track)

MSc Media, Communication and Development

MSc Politics and Communication

*and for students completing the following programmes:*

MSc Communication, Information and Society  
(including Research track)

MSc Communication Regulation and Policy  
(including Research track)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

These guidelines provide important information and guidance on the practical procedures for the writing, supervision and submission of dissertations within the Department of Media and Communications. Please consult the *MSc Student Handbook 2009-10* (particularly 'Part 2: Assessment Guide', sections 2.3 and 2.5) for further information regarding extensions, penalties for late submission, referencing and bibliographies, and assessment criteria.

You can find these guidelines, along with other sources of information relating to the dissertation, on the MC499 area of Moodle.

### 1.1 Who's Who

Staff in the Department of Media and Communications are responsible for aspects of the dissertation process as indicated below:

Role	Name	Responsibilities
<b>Dissertation Coordinator:</b>	<b>Dr Maggie Scammell</b> m.scammell@lse.ac.uk	Coordinates dissertation supervision and associated teaching events.
<b>Dissertation Supervisor:</b>	All teaching staff in the Department of Media and Communications will supervise dissertations.	<b>See section 2.2 below</b> for information on the role of the Dissertation Supervisor.
<b>Dissertation Officers:</b>	Names of the Dissertation Officers for 2009-10 will be posted on Moodle later in the year.	<b>See section 2.3 below</b> for information concerning the role of the Dissertation Officers.
<b>Administration:</b>	<b>Erin Keohan</b> e.keohan@lse.ac.uk	Assists Dissertation Coordinator in all areas of administration related to dissertation supervision, submission and assessment.

## 2. PROCEDURES AND ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

### 2.1 Aims and Objectives of the Dissertation

#### Aims

- To conduct an investigation of an issue relevant to the programme content under the supervision of a member of staff.

#### Objectives

- To construct a detailed plan of a research project.
- To review relevant literature on the selected issue.
- To identify relevant research questions.
- To turn general research questions into focused, researchable questions.
- (in the case of an empirical dissertation) to select and justify an appropriate research design, to select and employ suitable methods/techniques to investigate the empirical questions, and to analyse relevant data.
- (in the case of a theoretical dissertation), to set out a coherent and focused argument that advances, clarifies and (where appropriate) reframes the theoretical questions from which the dissertation starts, contributing to a critical assessment of the literature on which the dissertation draws, and its implications for future empirical research.  
**[NB: We do not encourage theoretical dissertations, but in certain circumstances they are permitted: see advice below.]**
- To write a dissertation covering a review of the relevant literature, the research questions, an explanation and justification of the research conducted, and a discussion of the findings in relation to the background literature.

### 2.2 The Dissertation Supervisor

Early in the Lent Term, following the submission of the dissertation topic/title, a supervisor will be allocated to each student.

The Dissertation Supervisor will also take over the role of Academic Adviser to the student for the remainder of the year.

Supervisors are allocated taking into account both the match of their areas of expertise to the student's topic, and parity of overall work loads of faculty.

Students can expect to see their supervisor roughly four to six times overall in both individual and group sessions. The role of the supervisor is to advise on all aspects of the research project including:

- the topic area and relevant literature;
- the feasibility of the topic;
- the time scale of the research;

- the specification of the research questions;
- (in the case of an empirical dissertation) the design and adequacy of methods, sources of data and access to fields of observation, and the analysis and interpretation of results;
- (in the case of a theoretical dissertation) the focus of the argument, its relation to and implications for the theoretical literature on which it draws, including its implications for future empirical research;
- the structure and style of the dissertation.

**Notes:**

- (i) Students are responsible for making initial contact with their supervisor by email, attaching their **first Dissertation Plan [MC499 Plan #1]**, and for attending all subsequent agreed meetings.
- (ii) Supervisors will **not** generally be available outside of term times.
- (iii) Supervisors will **not** read/comment upon final drafts of dissertations.

## 2.3 The Dissertation Officers

During the summer vacation, after formal supervision finishes at the end of the summer term, the Dissertation Officers (PhD students in the latter stages of their research) will be available to advise students on the final stages of the analysis and writing up of their dissertations. The Dissertation Officers' names and availability will be posted on Moodle.

## 2.4 Key Dates

### (i) MT10: The Dissertation Topic Selection Workshop

In week 10 of the Michaelmas term a dissertation topic selection workshop is organised as part of the MC4M1/2 lecture series, at which staff research areas (and possibly specific project ideas arising out of their current research) are presented. Following this and in the early part of the Lent term students should explore possible research topics with their personal tutor and with relevant members of staff.

### (ii) LT1: Dissertation Topic/Title [due Tuesday, 12 January 2010, by 4pm]

Students should submit their **proposed dissertation topic/title** electronically using the template and link provided in the MC499 Moodle area **by Tuesday, 12 January 2010, by 4pm**. Please read and follow the instructions carefully and ensure that you enter all the required details which are:

- **Name**
- **Candidate number** [note that this is a 5-digit number available on LSE for You and is different from your LSE ID number]
- **Email Address**
- **MSc programme**
- **Dissertation topic or working title of dissertation**
- **Preferred 1<sup>st</sup> choice dissertation supervisor** [note that there is no guarantee that students

*will be allocated to their preferred supervisors as several factors have to be taken into account in the allocation of supervisors (e.g. sabbatical and other leave to be taken by staff during the year, the balance of staff workloads]*

- **Preferred 2<sup>nd</sup> choice dissertation supervisor**

Dissertation supervisors will then be allocated (**note that allocations of supervisors will be made, even if you have not yet submitted your title/topic, so it is very much in your interest to comply with this deadline**).

**(iii) LT4: Group Supervision #1 [Monday, 1 February 2010]**

The first group supervision sessions take place in week 4 of the Lent Term. Each supervisor holds a two-hour introductory meeting for all her/his supervisees, giving students a chance to discuss, amongst other things, their first dissertation plans before formal submission. Times and venues for these group sessions will be published nearer the time.

**(iv) LT5: MC499 Formative Assessment #1: First Dissertation Plan [due Monday, 8 February 2010 by 4pm]**

The first dissertation plan, to a standard format [see Appendix 1 and Moodle for template], should be emailed to the student's supervisor as a Word document. The plan comprises a summary of the proposed work, its rationale, objectives and likely methodology, and the time scale of the different components of the project, to be set out as indicated on the template:

1. Dissertation topic/title, date.
2. Key words: 2 on concepts, 2 on methods, 1 on the field of observation.
3. Short summary/abstract (100 words).
4. (a) Empirical dissertations: the field and how to gain access, with contingency plan in case of failure.  
(b) Theoretical dissertations: the central theoretical questions to be explored and their relation to relevant existing literature.
5. Methodology.
6. Time schedule.

Students will receive **oral feedback** on this formative work in individual supervisory sessions.

**[v] LT10: Dissertation Symposium [Monday, 15 March 2010]**

The symposium, which will be attended by members of staff and (if possible) by research students who have successfully completed the programme in previous years, will start with an introductory session for all students at 9am in room NABLG08. Students will then split into smaller groups chaired by their supervisors for separate two-hour sessions at which they will be expected to present their research in progress. Times and rooms for each group meeting will be published nearer the date.

The purpose of the symposium is for students to obtain feedback and support from staff and from peers on the progress and direction of their research. The aim of the symposium will be to consolidate both the detailed subject-specific guidance already received from supervisions and, if appropriate, the work already done by students on methodology and analytical techniques on the compulsory methods and statistics courses. It does not matter how far a student has progressed with their ideas at this stage of their research. **All students should attend.**

**[vi] ST1: First Draft**

Students should aim to have completed a first draft of the literature review and project design by the beginning of the Summer Term.

**[vii] Early June 2010: Progress and Strategic Planning Meeting**

In early June 2010 students should arrange an individual meeting with their supervisor to discuss progress on data collection, analysis and the structure of the dissertation.

**[viii] ST7: MC499 Formative Assessment #2: Second Dissertation Plan [due Monday, 14 June 2010]**

The second dissertation plan is a revised and final version reflecting the changes in the scope and substance of the research, and a revised time schedule with particular emphasis on the organisation of the research through to completion in August. The plan should be cleared with, and emailed to, the supervisor as an attached Word document. This constitutes the student's commitment to the final scope and substance of the dissertation.

Students will receive **oral feedback** on this formative work in individual supervisory sessions.

**[ix] ST8: Group Supervision #2 [Monday, 14 June 2010]**

The second group supervision sessions take place in week 8 of the Summer Term. Times and venues for these group sessions will be published nearer the time.

**[x] Final Submission [Friday, 27 August 2010]**

Submission of two hard copies of the dissertation to the Programmes Administrator. An electronic copy to be uploaded to Moodle by the same deadline. See section 5 of these guidelines for further details concerning submission.

**Examples of Dissertations**

Students may find it helpful to browse the selection of dissertations from previous years, which can be found on Moodle. Students should note that all these dissertations were marked at 65% or higher.

Students may also wish to look at dissertations published at the Department of Media and Communications website:

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/media@lse/mediaWorkingPapers/ElectronicMScDissertationSeries.htm>

These dissertations were all marked at 70% or higher.

### 3. GUIDANCE NOTES ON THE WRITING OF THE DISSERTATION

As in other forms of assessment it is the written text that is evaluated. However much time and effort has gone into the research work, the assessment stands or falls on the quality of the dissertation. To this extent the structure and clarity of the dissertation is crucial. There is no one right way to write a dissertation because each dissertation is unique and a body of research results is polysemic, inviting a variety of different interpretations. That said, there are ways and means of writing a good dissertation and the following guidance notes set out the broad structure and other considerations to be taken into account.

Most dissertations have an empirical focus and what follows generally assumes this. However, dissertations with a theoretical focus are also possible; here general guidelines are less useful, and students are strongly advised to discuss the structure of their dissertation and their time schedule with their supervisor; see also the separate section at the end of these notes.

Note that the word-lengths below are *suggestions only*, and assume a 10,000 word dissertation. They can be adjusted *pro rata* for longer dissertations, and supervisors can advise on the overall balance of individual dissertations. The maximum length of the dissertation, including footnotes/endnotes, but excluding bibliography and appendices is 12,000 words.

#### 3.1 Empirical Dissertations

##### Introduction (700 words)

The introduction sets the scene. It raises the questions that inspired your research interest and sets them in context. Whether the research is inspired by a contemporary or historical social/political/cultural/media (etc) issue or by a problem raised in the literature, it should be set in its broader conceptual context, and the potential contribution of the proposed research explained.

##### Theoretical Chapter including Statement of Research Question (3300 words)

First, the relevant research literature should be critically reviewed (**2500 words**), leading to a specification of the research questions or hypotheses. Clearly it is not possible to cover all the literature on most topics; a particular skill is to determine what is the relevant literature, and what is not so relevant. Thus a judicious selection must be made, highlighting the key findings and controversies that provide the justification for the research that is conducted.

This should be followed by a statement of the conceptual framework in doing the research (**500 words**), that is, the main aspects of the theoretical approach that you have used to frame your research project.

Finally, this chapter should end with a clear, concise statement (**300 words**) of the objectives of the research. The rationale for the research should be explained and its potential contribution outlined. What is your research question and/or hypothesis, and how will researching it contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon and go beyond what is already known?

##### Research Design and Methodology (1500 words)

First, the research strategy should be outlined (**1000 words**) with a justification presented for the particular approach selected to investigate the stated research questions. Typically for media-related empirical projects the research design includes a mix of approaches: e.g. content or discourse analysis, questionnaires or qualitative interviewing, appraisal of documentary and other evidence.

Whichever approach you follow, it should be justified. On what criteria was the method used considered to be appropriate, why were other approaches rejected? One can think in terms of the indication of the method in the same way that medical interventions are more or less well indicated for different illnesses. (An aspirin is good for headaches but not so good for other ailments.)

Second, the particular methods and procedures adopted should be summarised (**500 words**). While research questions are normally of a general nature, in order to conduct empirical research these must be made concrete and amenable to empirical investigation from data that is readily available. There are two issues here:

**(i)      *The sampling or selection of data***

Whether the design involves content analysis, an experiment, a survey or a set of qualitative interviews, the issue of sampling needs to be discussed in detail. On what basis was the sample selected and why? For surveys this involves sampling respondents from some population, while for qualitative interviewing the issue may be one of sampling significant currents of opinion or sampling an appropriate range of media users or producers. Where media or documentary material is being analysed, the procedure for selecting materials from a 'population' whose full extent may not be known should be described. In the context of an MSc dissertation it may be helpful to outline the ideal strategy that which one might employ without time constraints, and then to state how the actual method was selected and what limitations in terms of data quality this more feasible and practicable strategy entails.

**(ii)     *Design of research tools***

Research tools refer to questionnaires, topic guides for interviews, and coding frames for content analysis. Whatever tool is used, it should be fully documented and any developmental/pilot work briefly reported. For a content analysis an inter-coder reliability test should be mentioned here.

In either case, the procedures adopted in applying these methods should be summarised. The procedure is the recipe for conducting the research, after all the ingredients are assembled. For example, how were the interviews conducted, were they recorded and later transcribed? How was the coding done? How was the analysis undertaken?

**Results and Interpretation (4000 words)**

Your dissertation needs fully to express the work that you have undertaken to produce it, and therefore this is a crucially important section. You should use these 4000 words to detail, explore and analyse your results and findings.

This means that you should devote sufficient space within it to a discussion of the results and findings of your empirical work, ensuring that you make it clear what you have found, what you have understood from your findings and how those findings relate to the hypotheses or questions that you set yourself in the earlier sections of the dissertation. Allow sufficient space, therefore, to explore your results fully.

There are different ways of presenting quantitative and qualitative findings.

**Quantitative Research**

*Results*

Here the main results in terms of summary statistics, appropriate graphics and significance tests should be reported. These will follow the research questions as specified in a previous section of the dissertation and state whether the relevant hypotheses have been corroborated or not.

*Discussion*

Here what has been empirically observed is set in the context of the research objectives and design

and in relation to the broader problem area. Hence in the discussion the findings are interpreted in the light of the hypotheses or research questions, and then discussed in the context of the literature reviewed in the introduction. Explanations for disconfirmed hypotheses should be offered and reflective comments on the research design and methodology given. Finally the implications should be discussed and further research outlined.

### **Qualitative Research using Interviews**

In qualitative research the results and interpretation often go hand in hand, but in some cases it may be possible to offer results and discussion separately. Results may be based on the outcome of a manual analytic procedure or taken from the output of one of the computer packages for textual analysis e.g. Nudist or Atlas.

Most commonly with qualitative research the results and the interpretation are reported simultaneously. If so, it is advisable to move directly to the commonly occurring themes, again illustrating these with direct quotations from the transcripts. An explanation should be offered as to **how** the quotations were selected and the basis on which these are judged to be of importance.

If results and interpretation are to be presented separately, it may be useful to present the key findings from a set of interviews in an N by N tabular form. Here the topic guide issues would be the column headings, and in each row correspond to one interview, with cells of the table offering a short summary of what the interviewees said on that topic. There would then follow the identification of the commonly occurring themes relevant to the broader research questions, which would be developed further through quotations from the transcripts (with references back to the tables for clarification).

However the data and basic analysis are presented, there should follow a discussion which reviews the key findings and sets these in the context of both the research questions and the literature outlined in the introduction. Explanations for surprising findings should be offered and reflective comments on the research design and methodology given.

### **Conclusion (500 words)**

This should comprise a short statement highlighting the key insights and implications (theoretical, methodological, empirical) of the dissertation, with an outline of the possibilities for further research.

### **Abstract (300 words)**

Although the abstract is placed at the beginning of the dissertation it should be revised on various occasions and finalised as the last piece of the dissertation. The abstract will succinctly review the research questions, the design and methods and the key findings. In a final sentence the main conclusion of the research will be given.

### **References**

All references in the text should be fully and consistently cited in alphabetical order. Consider using the "Endnote" bibliographic software available on the LSE network at an early stage in the dissertation work.

**See also** section 2.3.4 'Guidelines for references and bibliographies' in the *MSc Student Handbook 2009-10*, and the School's online resources at:  
[http://www2.lse.ac.uk/library/training/citing\\_referencing.aspx](http://www2.lse.ac.uk/library/training/citing_referencing.aspx)

### **Appendices**

The appendices should include only supporting material, data, statistical tables or transcripts that are judged to be essential in the evaluation of the main text. It is generally not necessary to provide raw

data if summary analysis has been provided in the body of the dissertation, but details of complex statistical procedures and relevant outputs, coding frames, code book, questionnaires and interview transcripts should be included. One full interview transcript, translated into English if necessary, as an example is sufficient.

## 3.2 Theoretical Dissertations

The approach, content and organisation of theoretical dissertations vary greatly. **It is particularly important to agree the detailed structure of these dissertations with your supervisor.** The advice given above in section 3.1 on 'introduction', 'statement of research question', 'conclusion', 'abstract', 'references', and 'appendices' applies equally to theoretical dissertations. While theoretical dissertations might take various forms (such as general literature review), we require that any theoretical dissertation is directed towards clarifying what are the most important directions for future empirical research.

**Note:** The assessment criteria for both empirical and theoretical dissertations are the same, as outlined in section 4 below.

## 4. DISSERTATION ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

In general, assessment criteria for the dissertation are the same as for coursework [please refer to section 2.5.6 'Assessment Criteria' of the *MSc Student Handbook 2009-10*]. Students should also note that examiners are looking for a number of qualities in a successful dissertation:

**Presentation** would include the following:

- **clarity of expression;**
- **a coherent and consistent structure** (with appropriate chapters, titles and subtitles);
- **satisfactory abstract;**
- **complete correct and consistent referencing** (see section 2.5.4 'Guidelines for references and bibliographies' in the *MSc Student Handbook 2009-10*, and the School's online resources at: [http://www2.lse.ac.uk/library/training/citing\\_referencing.aspx](http://www2.lse.ac.uk/library/training/citing_referencing.aspx))
- **satisfactory appendices** (including, as appropriate, details of complex statistical procedures and relevant outputs, coding frames, code books, individual interviews and focus groups topic guide, questionnaires, statistical tables and transcripts judged to be essential in the evaluation of the main text, including a full transcript of one sample interview (translated into English if necessary), with other transcripts to be available on request).

**Content** would include the following:

- quality and breadth of literature survey;
- the fit between your assessment of the literature and your choice of empirical research focus;
- the appropriateness of research design and strategy;
- selection and implementation of methods and techniques;
- data integration and data analysis;
- interpretation of results;
- identification of research gaps and shortcomings;
- discussion of further research.

**Critical Judgement** would include the following:

- depth of interpretation;
- theoretical sophistication;
- critical appraisal;
- thoroughness of analysis;
- imaginativeness /flair/boldness.

### Plagiarism

Students should refer to section 2.5.5 'Avoiding Plagiarism/Academic Dishonesty' of the *MSc Student Handbook 2009-10*, and be aware that **plagiarism is a serious offence with serious consequences for those found guilty of academic misconduct**. Students should also note that unpublished MSc dissertations of former students and/or PhD theses referred to in the text of their dissertation must be included in the bibliography, in the same way as published materials.

### Turnitin

LSE takes the issue of plagiarism very seriously and so the Department of Media and Communications makes use of a text-matching system called *Turnitin UK*.

Remember that using *Turnitin UK* to self-check is **entirely optional**. In addition, the process is wholly confidential, staff at LSE do not have access to student *Turnitin UK* accounts.

See your MC499 Moodle page for full instructions on how to use Turnitin.

## 5. DISSERTATION SUBMISSION

### 5.1 Submission Deadline

The deadline for submission is **1600 on Friday, 27 August 2010**.

### 5.2 Extensions/Penalties for Late Submission

As for all assessed coursework, requests for extensions should be emailed to the Chair of the Examination Sub-Board, Professor Terhi Rantanen, giving full details of the circumstances leading to the request. Note that medical or other evidence will be required if an extension is granted. Please see section 2.3.1 (v) of the *MSc Student Handbook 2009-10* for full information concerning extensions and penalties for late submission.

### 5.3 Length

Dissertations submitted for MC499 should be not less than 10,000 words and not more than 12,000 words in length. *In calculating the length of the dissertation, endnotes or footnotes are included, but bibliographies and appendices which provide supporting information only are excluded. Acknowledgments are not included in the final word count.*

**Dissertations that are over length may be penalised.**

The word count should be recorded on the coversheet.

### 5.4 Format/Style

- **Dissertations should be type-written** using a font size 12 or larger, 1.5 or 2-line spacing, must include a full bibliography and an abstract, and should be printed double- or single-sided on A4, or American letter-size, paper. Apart from this, style and format are up to individual students.
- 
- **Front page:** the following information should appear on the front page of your dissertation:
  - Title
  - Candidate number
  - Supervisor's name
  - Sentence along the lines of: "Dissertation (MC499) submitted to the Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics, August 2010, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc in ....."
- **Turnitin originality report:** If you have chosen to use Turnitin you may wish to include your originality report with your dissertation. Only the front page of the originality report should appear after the cover sheet and before your own front/title page. See your MC499 Moodle page for full instructions on how to use Turnitin.
- **Binding:** How you bind your dissertation is up to you – there are no formal requirements; most students prefer to use spiral binding with plastic covers. This can be done at the Library Copy Shop relatively cheaply.

## 5.5 Submission Instructions

Submission of the dissertation for MC499 consists of 2 hard copies and an electronic copy uploaded within the MC499 Moodle area.

The **deadline** for the hard copy is **4pm Friday 27 August 2010**.

The **deadline** for the electronic copy is **5pm** on the same day.

**Dissertations are only considered to be on time when both the electronic and paper versions are submitted by the deadline.**

### Submission of hard copy

- 2 hard copies of the dissertation should be submitted to Erin Keohan, room S117c.
- **Accompanying forms:** as for all assessed coursework each copy of the dissertation should contain (i) a completed coversheet/plagiarism declaration form and (ii) the front page of the Turnitin originality report (**not compulsory**). These forms may be either slipped inside the front cover of the dissertation or bound into your document.
- **Candidate numbers/names:** please remember that your name should not appear either on the coversheet, or anywhere in the dissertation itself. Please use your **5-digit examination candidate number** rather than your LSE ID number to identify your work.
- **Note** that submission by email is **not** permitted.

### Submission of electronic copy

- Instructions for uploading and submitting coursework on Moodle are provided by the LSE Centre for Learning Technology: Quick Guide <http://clt.lse.ac.uk/Help/student-moodle-assign.php>
- To ensure anonymous marking, students *must* use *only* their candidate number, the course code and the year in the name of the file, in the following format: (e.g. for a student whose candidate number is **12345**) file name: **12345\_MC499\_2010**
- You must adhere strictly to this naming convention and must not use your name, the name of your course, or the title of your dissertation.

### Postal submission

If you are not going to be in London over the summer you should post hard copies of your dissertation to us **but note that they must arrive at LSE on or before the deadline**; being postmarked on the deadline is not sufficient.

You should address the package to:

**Vanessa Cragoe**  
**Department of Media and Communications**  
**Room S117b, LSE**  
**Houghton Street**  
**London WC2A 2AE**  
**UK**

**IMPORTANT: Your package should always be labelled as being of no commercial value in order to avoid you paying import taxes/duties.**

We regret that we cannot confirm receipt of dissertations submitted by post but we will contact by email any student whose dissertation has not arrived by the due date.

**Note:** All raw data and source materials relating to assessed assignments should be kept until students graduate from LSE (i.e. until the date of the first presentation ceremony after the relevant exam board).

## APPENDIX 1. TEMPLATE FOR FIRST DISSERTATION PLAN

[available on the MC499 Moodle web area for download and completion]

(1)	<b>Dissertation topic/title:</b>		
(2)	<b>Key words:</b>		
	Two key words on concepts:		
	Two key words on methods:		
	One key word on the field of observation:		
(3)	<b>Short summary/abstract [max 100 words]:</b>		
(4a)	<b><u>Empirical dissertations:</u> the field and how to gain access with contingency plan in case of failure:</b>		
(4b)	<b><u>Theoretical dissertations:</u> the central theoretical questions to be explored and their relation to relevant existing literature:</b>		
(5)	<b>Methodology:</b>		
	<i>Please tick as appropriate</i>		
	Interviews		Discourse analysis
	Case study		Focus groups
	Content analysis		Ethnography/Participant observation
	Visual analysis		Survey
	Documentary analysis		Other [describe below]
(6)	<b>Time schedule:</b>		