UNDERGRADUATE DISSERTATION GUIDELINES

Undergraduate Special Degree Programme

Department of Mass Media

Sri Palee Campus, University of Colombo

1. Introduction

Dear Undergraduates of the Department of Mass Media,

The thesis/dissertation is an important component of the successful completion of your degree programme. It is not merely an academic requirement; it is also a reflection of your scholarship, dedication, creativity, research skills, and capacity for innovation.

The Department of Mass Media is pleased to introduce these Undergraduate Thesis/Dissertation Guidelines to provide you with clear guidance throughout the research and writing process.

All students are expected to read these guidelines carefully and adhere to the requirements and procedures set out in them when preparing and submitting their thesis/dissertation.

I encourage you to approach your research with commitment, academic integrity, creativity, and responsibility, and to maintain good communication with your supervisor throughout the research process.

Thank you

The Department of Mass Media

01 October 2026

2. General Requirements

1. The dissertation must be based on an original research study conducted by the student.
2. The research topic must be approved by the assigned supervisor and the Department of Mass Media before the student commences the research.
3. Students must conduct their research under the guidance of their assigned supervisor and must maintain regular communication with the supervisor throughout the research and dissertation-writing process.
4. The dissertation should demonstrate the student's ability to:
    - identify and formulate research problem;
    - review and critically evaluate relevant literature;
    - formulate appropriate research objectives and research questions and/or hypotheses.
    - select and justify appropriate research methodology.
    - collect relevant data.
    - analyse and interpret data appropriately.
    - discuss research findings in relation to existing knowledge and relevant theories; and
    - draw appropriate conclusions and recommendations.
5. The dissertation should normally contain 15,000–25,000 words, excluding references, appendices, and other preliminary material, unless otherwise determined by the Department.
6. Students are strongly advised to select research topics related to Mass Communication, Mass Media, Media Studies, or closely related fields.

3. Word Count

The recommended overall length of the dissertation is:

15,000–25,000 words

The following is a suggested distribution. These figures are indicative rather than rigid requirements:

Chapter	**Suggested Word Count**
Chapter One – Introduction and Background	1,000–1,500
Chapter Two – Literature Review	2,000–3,000
Chapter Three – Research Methodology	1,000–1,500
Chapter Four – Data Presentation/Analysis and Findings	3,000–5,000
Chapter Five – Discussion	1,500–2,500
Chapter Six – Conclusion and Recommendations	1,000–1,500

* Please note that the number of chapters may be adjusted in accordance with the supervisor's recommendations.

4. Research Topic and Changes to the Approved Topic

4.1 Approval of the Research Topic

The research topic must be approved before the student begins the dissertation research.

The approved title should accurately reflect the research that is actually conducted.

4.2 Change of Supervisor

A student may request a change of supervisor within one month (30 days) of the commencement of supervision. Such a change must be made with:

- the agreement of the supervisor who is releasing the student.
- the agreement of the lecturer who is willing to undertake the supervision; and
- written notification submitted to the Head of the Department and the Examination Coordinator.

A change of supervisor is subject to the approval of the Department. In very special circumstances, where a change of supervisor is considered necessary, the final decision shall be made by the Head of the Department, Rector, or Departmental Meeting, as appropriate.

Students should note that a change of supervisor is not an automatic entitlement and will be considered only on valid and justifiable grounds.

4.3 Change of Research Topic

A change to the approved research topic/title may normally be made **within one month(30days)** of approval of the original topic.

The proposed change must be approved in writing by the supervisor and submitted to the Head of the Department and the Examination Coordinator.

After this period, a change of topic will only be considered where there are sufficient academic reasons and with the approval of the relevant authorities.

5. Student Identification

To maintain the integrity and impartiality of the examination process:

1. The student's name **must not appear** anywhere in the dissertation.
2. The student's University index number must be used as the student's identification.
3. The index number must appear on the title page and wherever student identification is required.
4. Students must carefully check the complete electronic document to ensure that their name has not been included inadvertently in:
    - the main text.
    - headers or footers.
    - acknowledgements.
    - declarations.
    - file properties or metadata; or
    - any other part of the dissertation.
5. Acknowledgements must not be included.
6. Dedication must not be included.
7. No statement, symbol, photograph, signature, file information, or other material that may reveal the identity or authorship of the student should be included.

6. Supervisor's Certification

6.1. The supervisor's certification should be presented in the following form:

Supervisor's Certification

I am Prof./Dr./Mr./Ms. _____ and hereby certify that the student has completed this thesis/dissertation under my supervision. I recommend that this thesis/dissertation be submitted for evaluation.
Date: DD.MM.YYYY
Signature of Supervisor: _____

The supervisor's recommendation for submission confirms that the dissertation has reached a standard considered suitable for submission. It does not constitute a guarantee of a pass or any particular examination result. The final assessment remains subject to the University's prescribed examination and evaluation procedures.

6.2. The declaration on the use of AI and other software(s).

DECLARATION ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

I hereby declare that this thesis/dissertation is the result of my own independent academic work.
I confirm that I have not used Artificial Intelligence (AI), generative AI tools, AI-assisted writing tools, AI translation tools, or any other software or technological system to generate, write, rewrite, paraphrase, translate, analyse, or otherwise produce the content of this thesis/dissertation on my behalf.
The research problem, research objectives, literature review, research methodology, data collection, data analysis, interpretation, discussion, conclusions, recommendations, and written content presented in this thesis/dissertation are my own work.
I further declare that I have not submitted AI-generated or AI-assisted material as my own academic work and that I have not used any software or technological tool in a manner that misrepresents my original contribution to this research.
I understand that the use of Artificial Intelligence or other software to complete academic work on behalf of the student, or the failure to disclose such use where disclosure is required, may constitute a violation of academic integrity and may be subject to the relevant rules and regulations of the University of Colombo.
I accept full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, academic integrity, and authenticity of this thesis/dissertation.

Index Number: _____

Title of Thesis/Dissertation:

Signature of Student: _____

Date: _____

Important Notice on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Thesis and Dissertation Submissions.

Please refer to the *University of Colombo Policy on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Academic and Administrative Activities*, available at the following link:

https://science.cmb.ac.lk/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/AI-Policy-1-1-1.pdf

We trust that you have thoroughly reviewed and complied with the relevant provisions of this policy when preparing and submitting your thesis or dissertation.

Please ensure that your academic work complies with the University of Colombo's guidelines on the responsible and ethical use of Generative Artificial Intelligence.

7. Recommended Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation should generally contain the following sections in the order indicated:

1. Title Page
2. Declaration
3. Abstract
4. Table of Contents
5. List of Tables, where applicable
6. List of Figures, where applicable
7. List of Abbreviations, where applicable
8. Chapter One – Introduction
9. Chapter Two – Literature Review
10. Chapter Three – Research Methodology
11. Chapter Four – Data Presentation/Analysis and Findings
12. Chapter Five – Discussion
13. Chapter Six – Conclusion and Recommendations
14. References
15. Appendices, where applicable

The structure may be modified where appropriate according to the research design and with the approval of the supervisor and Department.

Acknowledgements and Dedication must not be included.

8. Research Title

The research title should:

- clearly indicate the subject of the study;
- be concise and specific;
- identify the major concepts or variables where appropriate;
- indicate the population, context, or geographical area where necessary; and
- accurately correspond with the research actually conducted.

Students should avoid titles that are excessively broad, vague, or unrelated to the discipline.

9. Abstract

The abstract should provide a concise summary of the dissertation and normally include:

- the background/context of the study;
- the research problem;
- research objectives;
- research methodology;
- major findings; and
- the principal conclusion.

The abstract should normally be followed by at least five keywords.

Students must not introduce information in the abstract that is not addressed in the dissertation.

10. Chapter One – Introduction

The Introduction should establish the foundation of the research and normally include:

- background of the study;
- research problem;
- research questions and/or hypotheses;
- research objectives;
- significance of the study;
- scope and delimitations;
- operational definitions, where necessary; and
- organisation of the dissertation.

The research problem should be clearly and logically connected to the objectives, research questions and/or hypotheses.

11. Chapter Two – Literature Review

The Literature Review should demonstrate the student's understanding of existing scholarship relevant to the research topic.

Students should:

- use relevant scholarly literature;
- give priority to peer-reviewed journal articles and reputable academic books;
- critically evaluate previous research rather than merely summarising it;
- identify relevant gaps, limitations, or unresolved issues in existing research;
- establish the theoretical and/or conceptual basis of the study; and
- clearly demonstrate how the present study relates to previous research.

The Literature Review **should be analytical and critical** rather than simply a collection of summaries of previous studies.

12. Chapter Three – Research Methodology

The Methodology chapter must clearly explain how the research was conducted.

It should normally include:

- research approach;
- research design;
- study population;
- sample;
- sampling technique;
- justification for the selected sampling method and sample size;
- data collection method(s);
- justification for the selected data collection method(s);
- research instruments;
- data analysis procedures;
- ethical considerations; and
- methodological limitations.

Students must provide sufficient information for another researcher to understand how the study was conducted.

Ethical Considerations

Students must demonstrate that ethical standards were considered and followed throughout the research process.

Where applicable, ethical considerations should include:

- informed consent;
- confidentiality;
- anonymity;
- privacy;
- voluntary participation;
- responsible treatment of research participants;
- secure handling of research data; and
- any relevant institutional or professional ethical requirements.

Students must not collect or use research data in a manner that violates ethical standards or applicable University requirements.

13. Chapter Four – Data Presentation, Analysis and Findings

The Findings/Analysis chapter should present the research evidence systematically and logically.

Students should:

- present findings in a clear and systematic manner;
- use appropriate tables, charts, graphs, figures, or other forms of presentation where necessary;
- avoid unnecessary repetition between the text and tables/figures;
- distinguish findings from interpretation;
- use appropriate quantitative and/or qualitative analytical procedures; and
- ensure that the findings directly address the research questions, objectives, and/or hypotheses.

All data analysis must be conducted honestly and accurately.

Students must not fabricate, falsify, manipulate, or selectively misrepresent research data.

14. Chapter Five – Discussion

The Discussion chapter should interpret the major findings rather than merely repeat them.

Students should:

- interpret the major findings;
- compare the findings with previous research;
- relate the findings to relevant theories and concepts;
- explain significant similarities and differences between the present findings and previous studies; and
- demonstrate critical and independent thinking.

The Discussion should clearly explain what the findings mean in relation to the research problem and existing knowledge.

15. Chapter Six – Conclusion and Recommendations

15.1 Conclusion

The conclusion should:

- directly respond to the research problem and research questions;
- summarise the major findings;
- demonstrate the contribution of the study; and
- avoid introducing new evidence or findings.

All conclusions must be directly supported by the research findings.

15.2 Recommendations

Recommendations should:

- be based on the findings;
- be realistic and relevant;
- be clearly directed towards appropriate stakeholders and/or future researchers; and
- reflect the actual evidence produced by the study.

Students may also include Future Research Directions, identifying areas that could be investigated in subsequent research.

16. Referencing – APA 7th Edition

The dissertation must consistently follow the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), 7th Edition.

Students must:

- provide an appropriate in-text citation for every source used;
- include every cited source in the reference list;
- ensure that every source in the reference list is cited in the dissertation;
- use the correct APA format for books, journal articles, websites, reports, and other sources;
- provide DOI information where available;
- avoid citing sources that they have not actually consulted; and
- maintain consistency in punctuation, italics, capitalisation, and formatting.

Students must respect copyright law and academic ethics.

Plagiarism is strictly prohibited. Ideas taken from other sources, including paraphrased ideas, must be appropriately acknowledged through citation.

17. Academic Integrity

Students are required to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity.

Students must not:

- copy material without appropriate citation;
- fabricate or falsify research data;
- manipulate or deliberately misrepresent research findings;
- submit another person's work as their own;
- reuse previously submitted work without appropriate permission and citation;
- engage in plagiarism or other forms of academic misconduct; or
- use artificial intelligence or other software in a manner that violates the University's academic-integrity requirements.

Declaration Regarding AI and Other Software

The dissertation must represent the student's own academic and research work. Students must not use artificial intelligence tools or software to write the dissertation, or to generate the dissertation on their behalf.

Any use of digital or AI-based tools must comply with the academic-integrity requirements and regulations of the University.

Students remain fully responsible for the originality, accuracy, integrity, and academic authenticity of their dissertation.

18. Tables and Figures

All tables and figures must:

- be numbered consecutively;
- have clear and appropriate titles;
- be referred to in the text;
- be directly relevant to the research; and
- include an appropriate source note where the material has been obtained or adapted from another source.

Students should not include tables, figures, charts, or photographs merely for decoration.

19. Appendices

Appendices may contain relevant supporting materials, such as:

- questionnaires;
- interview guides;
- interview schedules;
- informed consent forms;
- coding schemes;
- supplementary tables;
- selected interview transcripts;
- research instruments; and
- other relevant research materials.

Appendices should contain material that supports the research and should not be used to include unnecessary information.

20. Formatting and Presentation

Students must follow the official formatting requirements prescribed by the Department.

These requirements may include:

- page size;
- margins;
- font and font size;
- line spacing;
- paragraph alignment;
- page numbering;
- chapter headings;
- table and figure formatting;
- title-page format;
- binding requirements; and
- submission format.

The final formatting and layout instructions issued by the Department must be followed strictly.

Dissertation Cover

The final dissertation cover shall be black in colour.

Students must follow the official instructions provided by the Department concerning the cover page, binding, layout, and presentation.

21. Responsibilities of the Student and Supervisor

The supervisor provides academic guidance and feedback; however, the student is responsible for conducting and completing the research.

Students should understand that the supervisor is not a personal copy editor, translator, proofreader, or dissertation writer.

Students are responsible for:

- arranging consultations with the supervisor;
- preparing and submitting chapters according to the agreed schedule;
- incorporating appropriate academic feedback;
- maintaining research records;
- proofreading their own work;
- ensuring grammatical and language accuracy;
- checking references and citations;
- ensuring compliance with formatting requirements; and
- completing the dissertation within the prescribed period.

Supervisors may be responsible for several students while also undertaking teaching, research, administrative, and other academic duties. Therefore, students must respect agreed consultation schedules and allow sufficient time for supervisors to read and provide feedback on submitted chapters.

The Department of Mass Media remains committed to providing appropriate academic guidance and support to students.

22. Supervision and Dissertation Submission Requirements

22.1 Regular Consultation

Students are strongly advised to meet or communicate with their assigned supervisor at least once a week throughout the research and dissertation-writing period.

Students are expected to:

- obtain academic guidance and feedback;
- report research progress;
- discuss difficulties encountered during the research;

- submit chapters according to the agreed schedule; and
- maintain regular communication with the supervisor.

22.2 Supervisor Consultation/Progress Record

Students shall maintain a Supervisor Consultation/Progress Record Sheet.

The student and supervisor should record and sign each consultation, indicating:

- date of consultation;
- matters discussed;
- progress made; and
- agreed next steps, where appropriate.

Students are responsible for keeping the record up to date and submitting it to the Department when required.

22.3 Supervisor's Recommendation for Submission

The supervisor has academic responsibility for determining whether the dissertation has reached a satisfactory standard for submission.

A supervisor may decline to recommend submission where the student has:

- failed to maintain adequate consultation with the supervisor;
- failed to follow reasonable academic guidance and instructions;
- failed to demonstrate satisfactory progress;
- failed to meet prescribed dissertation requirements;
- violated ethical or academic-integrity requirements; or
- violated relevant University, Faculty, Campus, Departmental, or examination rules and regulations.

The supervisor's recommendation for submission does not guarantee a pass or any particular examination result. The final assessment remains subject to the University's prescribed examination and evaluation procedures.

23. Retention of Research Data and Evidence

Students must retain the original research data, documents, records, and supporting evidence relating to their dissertation throughout the research and examination process.

Depending on the nature of the research, these may include:

- completed questionnaires;

- interview records and transcripts;
- audio/video recordings, where ethically permitted;
- consent forms;
- field notes;
- observation records;
- coding sheets;
- datasets and statistical outputs;
- photographs or other documentary evidence;
- relevant correspondence; and
- other evidence supporting the research findings.

All research records must be stored securely and responsibly.

24. University's Right to Request Research Evidence

The University/Sri Palee Campus reserves the right to request students to produce original research data and supporting evidence relating to the findings presented in their dissertations when required for:

- academic verification;
- examination;
- investigation;
- inquiry; or
- other legitimate University purposes.

Students are therefore responsible for preserving relevant research records and evidence in a secure and accessible form for the period specified by the University or Department.

Failure to produce requested evidence may result in further academic or administrative action in accordance with applicable University rules and regulations.

25. Dissertation Submission Checklist

This checklist is not merely a formality or a list to be ticked without verification. Students must carefully examine every item before submitting the dissertation.

Index Number: _____

No.	Requirement	Student Check

1	Approved research title is used	☐
2	Student's name does not appear anywhere in the dissertation	☐
3	Student index number is correctly stated	☐
4	No material identifying the student/authorship has been included	☐
5	Required ethical statement is included	☐
6	Required AI/non-use statement is included	☐
7	Acknowledgement is not included	☐
8	Dedication is not included	☐
9	Abstract is included	☐
10	At least five keywords are included	☐
11	Table of Contents is included	☐
12	List of Tables is included, where applicable	☐
13	List of Figures is included, where applicable	☐
14	Introduction is completed	☐
15	Research problem is clearly stated	☐
16	Research objectives are clearly stated	☐
17	Research questions/hypotheses are appropriately stated	☐
18	Relevant literature has been critically reviewed	☐
19	Theoretical/conceptual framework is appropriately presented	☐
20	Research methodology is clearly explained	☐
21	Sampling method and sample size are justified	☐
22	Data collection method(s) are justified	☐
23	Ethical considerations are addressed	☐

24	Data have been analysed appropriately	☐
25	Findings are clearly presented	☐
26	Findings are discussed in relation to previous research	☐
27	Conclusions are based on the research findings	☐
28	Recommendations are supported by the findings	☐
29	APA 7th Edition referencing has been followed	☐
30	All in-text citations appear in the reference list	☐
31	All references in the reference list are cited in the text	☐
32	Tables and figures are correctly numbered and titled	☐
33	Appendices are properly organised, where applicable	☐
34	Academic integrity/plagiarism requirements have been checked	☐
35	Dissertation has been proofread for grammar, spelling and formatting	☐
36	Student's name does not appear in the electronic file or file properties	☐
37	Dissertation meets the required word limit	☐
38	Required formatting guidelines have been followed	☐
39	Supervisor consultation/progress record is complete	☐
40	Final dissertation has been carefully checked before submission	☐

Student Declaration

I confirm that I have completed the above checklist and carefully checked my dissertation in accordance with the Dissertation Submission Guidelines of the Department of Mass Media, Sri Palee Campus, University of Colombo.
Index Number: _____
Signature of Student: _____
Date: _____
Supervisor's Signature: _____
Date: _____

26. Final Advice to Students

Students are strongly encouraged to begin their research and dissertation work early and to work according to a realistic timetable agreed upon with their supervisor.

Students should:

- maintain good communication with their supervisor.
- prepare a research and writing timetable;
- meet the supervisor according to the agreed schedule.
- submit chapters on or before the agreed dates.
- allow sufficient time for receiving and incorporating academic feedback.
- retain all original research data and supporting evidence.
- proofread the complete dissertation carefully; and
- complete the dissertation at least one month before the final submission deadline, where possible.

The final period before submission may require considerable time for proofreading, corrections, formatting, page layout, printing, binding, and other submission requirements.

Time is an important part of research. Do not wait until the deadline. Work according to a plan, communicate regularly with your supervisor, and take responsibility for completing your dissertation on time.

Department of Mass Media

The Department is committed to supporting students in completing their research successfully. Students are encouraged to seek appropriate academic guidance whenever they encounter genuine difficulties in the research process.

However, the responsibility for planning, conducting, writing, checking, and submitting the dissertation rests primarily with the student.

Plan your research. Follow your schedule. Maintain academic integrity. Communicate with your supervisor. Complete your dissertation responsibly and on time.

Definitions and Interpretations

For the purposes of these Guidelines, unless the context otherwise requires, the following terms shall have the meanings assigned to them:

1. **University** means **Sri Palee Campus, University of Colombo**.
2. **Campus** means **Sri Palee Campus, University of Colombo**.

3. **Department** means the **Department of Mass Media, Sri Palee Campus, University of Colombo**.
4. **Student** means:
    - an undergraduate student following an undergraduate degree programme offered by the Department of Mass Media, Sri Palee Campus; or
    - an undergraduate student who is not following a degree programme offered by the Department of Mass Media but is attached to Sri Palee Campus and is undertaking a thesis/dissertation or other supervised research work under the supervision of the Department of Mass Media.
5. **Month** means a period of **30 days**, unless otherwise specified.
6. **Deadline** means the final date prescribed for the submission of a thesis/dissertation to the University or Sri Palee Campus for examination, or the final date prescribed for the submission of a chapter or other required research work to the supervisor for review and final approval, as applicable.
7. **Thesis/Dissertation** means the research work undertaken by a student as a requirement of the relevant undergraduate degree programme, subject to the academic and administrative requirements of the University, Sri Palee Campus, and the Department.
8. **Supervisor** means a lecturer or other person formally appointed or approved by the Department to supervise the student's thesis, dissertation, or other prescribed research work.

This document contains 20 pages.

Dr. Sugath Senarath

Head of the Department

Department of Mass Media.