Free Dissertation Data Collection Checklist

Your step-by-step guide to collecting high-quality, ethics-approved, analysis-ready data for your undergraduate, master's or PhD dissertation.

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Phase 1: Planning & Methodology (Before You Write a Single Question)

#	Task	Done
1	[ ] Clearly define your research question(s) and objectives.	☐
2	[ ] Decide whether your study is quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods.	☐
3	[ ] Choose your data collection method(s) – survey, interviews, focus groups, observation, secondary data, experiment.	☐
4	[ ] Determine your target population and sampling strategy (random, stratified, convenience, purposive, quota).	☐

5	[ ] Perform a power analysis (for quantitative) or determine saturation point (for qualitative) to justify your sample size.	☐
6	[ ] Check that your university's ethics committee requires approval – and allow 2–6 weeks for the process.	☐
7	[ ] Identify any data protection requirements (GDPR, anonymisation, data storage).	☐

Phase 2: Instrument Design & Validation

#	Task	Done
8	[ ] Design your survey questionnaire or interview guide using clear, neutral, unbiased language.	☐
9	[ ] For surveys, use validated scales where possible (e.g., Likert, PHQ-9, PSS-10).	☐
10	[ ] Avoid leading questions, double-barrelled questions, and jargon.	☐

11	[ ] Keep the length reasonable – aim for 10–20 questions to maximise response rates.	☐
12	[ ] Add an introductory statement explaining the purpose, confidentiality, and consent.	☐
13	[ ] Pilot test your instrument with 5–10 people who resemble your target population.	☐
14	[ ] Revise based on pilot feedback (confusing wording, technical issues, timing).	☐
15	[ ] Prepare participant information sheets and consent forms (online or paper).	☐

Phase 3: Ethics & Approval

#	Task	Done
16	[ ] Complete your university's ethics application form – include all study materials.	☐

17	[ ] Ensure you have informed consent – participants must know what they are agreeing to.	☐
18	[ ] Plan how you will anonymise data (remove names, use participant IDs).	☐
19	[ ] Decide on a data retention period (typically 5–10 years for PhD, shorter for taught degrees).	☐
20	[ ] If collecting sensitive data, follow your university's data protection impact assessment (DPIA) process.	☐
21	[ ] Do not start data collection until you have written ethics approval.	☐

Phase 4: Data Collection Execution

#	Task	Done
22	[ ] Test your distribution channels – email lists, social media, university portals, or paid ads (Meta, LinkedIn).	☐

23	[ ] For surveys, use a reliable platform: Google Forms, Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey or Jisc Online Surveys.	☐
24	[ ] For interviews/focus groups, test your recording equipment and transcription software (e.g., Otter.ai).	☐
25	[ ] Send reminders – response rates increase by 20–30% after the first reminder.	☐
26	[ ] Monitor response rates daily. If low, adjust your recruitment strategy or offer incentives (e.g., gift voucher draw).	☐
27	[ ] For secondary data, document your sources (dataset name, version, date accessed).	☐
28	[ ] Keep a data collection log – dates, number of contacts, any issues encountered.	☐
29	[ ] For qualitative interviews, transcribe as soon as possible after each session.	☐

Phase 5: Data Management & Storage

#	Task	Done
30	[ ] Store raw data in encrypted cloud storage (Google Drive, OneDrive, university network).	☐
31	[ ] Create a clear folder structure: `/Raw Data`, `/Cleaned Data`, `/Analysis Outputs`, `/Documentation`.	☐
32	[ ] Back up your data to at least two locations.	☐
33	[ ] Anonymise the dataset as soon as possible (replace names with codes).	☐
34	[ ] Keep a separate codebook or data dictionary explaining variable names and values.	☐
35	[ ] For qualitative data, organise transcripts into a project file in NVivo or ATLAS.ti.	☐
36	[ ] Check your university's data retention policy – do not delete anything before the required period.	☐

Phase 6: Data Cleaning & Preparation for Analysis

#	Task	Done
37	[ ] Remove duplicate entries (e.g., same IP address multiple times).	☐
38	[ ] Identify and decide how to handle missing data (delete, impute, or flag).	☐
39	[ ] Check for outliers that may skew your analysis.	☐
40	[ ] Code open-ended responses into themes (if qualitative) or categories (if quantitative).	☐
41	[ ] For surveys, check that reverse-coded items are correctly transformed.	☐
42	[ ] Create composite scores if you are using multi-item scales (e.g., average of Likert items).	☐
43	[ ] Export your cleaned dataset into SPSS, R, Stata, Excel, or NVivo.	☐
44	[ ] Run descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, standard deviations) to understand your data.	☐

Phase 7: Final Checks Before Analysis

#	Task	Done
45	[ ] Ensure your sample size meets the requirements of your planned statistical tests.	☐
46	[ ] Verify that your data matches your research questions – if not, revisit your analysis plan.	☐
47	[ ] Check for any ethical issues that emerged during collection (e.g., participant distress).	☐
48	[ ] Prepare your methodology chapter with a clear description of all collection steps.	☐
49	[ ] Save a final, unaltered backup of your raw data in case your supervisor asks to see it.	☐
50	[ ] Celebrate – you have successfully collected your dissertation data! 🎓	☐

Quick Reference: Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Pitfall	How to Avoid It
Low response rate (<30% for surveys)	Send reminders, personalise invitations, offer incentives, use multiple channels.
Unvalidated instrument	Always pilot test and, where possible, use existing validated scales.
Ethics approval delays	Submit your application early – at least 6 weeks before you plan to collect data.
Messy, unusable data	Keep a data log, clean as you go, and document every decision.
GDPR non-compliance	Anonymise data, store securely, and include a privacy notice in your consent form.
No backup	Use at least two storage locations (cloud + external drive).

Need Help? We Are Here for You

If any of these steps feel overwhelming – or if you simply want an expert to handle the data collection while you focus on analysis and writing – Premier Dissertations can help.

- Collect 200 real survey responses in 7 days – using targeted Meta Ads and email campaigns.
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