Research Paper

Research Paper

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Master II

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Objectives

This E-Learning support aims at providing a learning supportive complementary resource for M02 Research Paper Module.

Introduction

Co-requisite : The general theoretical perspectives as well the practical skills of research paper, research methods and methodologies, academic writing and study skills are prerequisites to this course. Hence, students are hereby invited to carry out some extensive reading to related sources for meeting the necessary requirements to enhance their procedural and encyclopedic knowledge more effectively.

Many college or University courses require students to submit a research paper at or near the end of the term. The purpose of a research paper is to exhibit scholarship (i.e. to demonstrate your ability to investigate some aspect of the course subject matter in death) via offering an opportunity to examine. compare, synthesise, evaluate, and even challenged these sources on the purpose of reaching an informed opinion or thesis. Respectively, the thesis pursued in research papers should provide a new and expected or a complex information that goes beyond the general information found in an encyclopaedia. In essence, the research paper does not differ greatly from essays, save for its formal treatment, and acknowledgement of these sources in the body, and at the end of the paper as well as its length.

I Research Proposal

Research proposals are an example of what Swales (1996) calls ‘occluded' genres; that is, genres which are difficult for students to have to access to, but play an important part in the students' lives. In his book Successful Dissertations and Theses, Madsen (1992: 51) writes that ‘the research proposal is often the key element to the successful thesis and, as such, the most important step in the whole process'. Meloy (1994: 31) presents a similar view, saying that ‘proposal writing does not appear to be something that comes naturally' and that we learn not only by example but also by the reactions and suggestions of our supervisors and our thesis committee members. The process of writing a research proposal will, therefore, be examined in some detail in this chapter. Topics covered will include choosing and focusing a research topic, developing a research proposal, the structure and purpose of research proposals, details to include in a research proposal, differences between a master's and a doctoral thesis, and different expectations across different areas of study.

1. Organization of Research Proposal

🔔 *Reminder*

The structure and organization of research proposal may vary according discipline, research subject, institution, targeted audience, objective...etc.

Different Sections of the Research Proposal

A research proposal's components include the following sections:

1. ***A Title*** that summarizes, in a few words, what the research will be about;
2. ***An Abstract*** which provides an overview of the study;
3. ***An Introduction / Background*** for demonstrating the relationship between the proposed study literature and what has already been done in the particular area; that is, to indicate the ‘gap' that the study will fill.
4. ***An Overall purpose*** to present a clear and concise statement of what the study attempt to achieve.
5. ***Problem*** the issue under investigation
6. ***A question (s)*** to provide an explicit statement of what the study will investigate.
7. ***Hypotheses :***
8. ***A Methodology*** to give an illustration of the steps the project will go through in order to carry out the research.
9. ***A Significance of the research*** for highlighting why the study is worth carrying out.
10. ***An Ethics*** that provides a statement as to how participants will be advised of
11. the overall nature of the study, and how informed consent will be obtained from them.

12. ***A Proposed table of contents:*** To give an overview of the scale and anticipated organization of the thesis or dissertation.
13. ***A Proposed Timetable***: To give a working plan for carrying out, and completing, the study. ***References***: To provide detailed references and bibliographic support for the proposal.
14. ***Appendix*** :To provide examples of materials that might be used, or adapted, in the study.

Fundamental:Details to include in a research proposal

Below is a list of points that are often included in research proposals.

1 A clearly focused statement of the overall purpose of the proposed

research.

2 A clearly focused research question/hypothesis that is:

● worth asking;

● capable of being answered.

3 Precise definitions of the key terms in the research question/s or hypothesis that will allow them to be clearly observed, measured and identified

throughout the study.

Writing a research proposal 59

Ways to refine a research question

● Read broadly and widely to find a subject about which you are passionate. Immerse yourself in the literature, use your library, read

abstracts of other recent theses and dissertations, check theses on

the web. For example:

– http://www.ndltd.org/

– http://wwwlib.umi.com/dissertations/

● Narrow your focus to a single question: be disciplined and not overambitious.

● Be prepared to change or modify your question if necessary.

● Be able to answer the question 'Why am I doing this project?' (and

not a different one).

● Read up-to-date materials – ensure that your idea is achievable and

no one else has done or is doing it.

● Consult other students who are further down the track, especially

those who have the same supervisor as you.

● Discuss your ideas with your supervisor and lots of other people.

● Attend specialized conferences in your area – take note of the focus

of research and learn from the experts in your field.

● Work through the implications of your research question: consider existing materials and ideas on which it is based, check the logic, spell out methods to be used.

● Condense your research question into two sentences, write them down, above your work area. Change the question if needed.

● Ask yourself: What will we know at the end that we did not already know?4 An awareness of key research that has already been carried out in the particular area including:

● what conclusions were reached in this previous research, by whom and when;

● whether these conclusions are in agreement or conflict with each other;

● the main issues or controversies that surround the problem;

● significant gaps in previous research in this particular area;

● an indication of how this previous research is relevant to the proposed study.

5 An appropriate choice of research approach for the particular question or problem including a well-defined list of procedures to be followed in carrying out the research. This should include the method of data collection and analysis. The proposal should also include, if appropriate:

● a broad description of any particular theoretical framework to be used in the analysis and the reason/s for its use in the study;

● a brief statement describing how the sample population will be selected for the study and the reason for the approach to selection;

● a pilot study in which the research instruments will be trialled and evaluated and an analysis carried out of the trial data.

6 A section which highlights any anticipated problems and limitations in the proposed study including threats to reliability and validity and how these will be countered.

7 A statement which illustrates why the study is significant; that is, why the research question or hypothesis is worth asking.

8 Consideration of ethical issues involved in carrying out the research such as whether informed consent needs to be obtained, and if so, how this will be done.

9 A proposed timetable for the research. This is extremely important as it

gives an indication as to how realistic the proposal actually is.

10 A proposed budget for the research (if appropriate). This is also important as it gives an indication of how realistic the proposal may be in terms

of financial requirements and whether the research might need to be

adapted in the light of these.

11 A list of references which relate to the proposal.

12 Appendices (if appropriate) which contain any material that will be used

or adapted for the study, including any permission that might need to be

obtained to use it.

✎ *Note*

Different institutions place different levels of importance on the research proposal.

2. Tips for Developing a Research Proposal

(i) Draw up a shortlist of topics. Students can do this, for example, by speaking to other students, asking colleagues, asking potential supervisors, or looking up related research in the library.

(ii) Select a topic for investigation.

(iii) Then, formulate a general question. That is, turn the topic into a research question.

(iv) Next, focus the question. That is, be as specific as possible about what the

study will investigate. This is often difficult to do, so students should

spend as much time as necessary to get their question right.

The question needs to be:

● worth asking; that is, it needs to be significant;

● capable of being answered; that is, it needs to be feasible.

There are many questions that are worth asking but which cannot, in any practical sense, be answered. It is important to strike a balance between the value of the question and the student's ability to develop a research proposal they are capable of carrying out; that is, a project that the student has the background and training required to carry out.

(v) Decide on the aims and objectives of the study or formulate a hypothesis.

(vi) Think about the data that need to be collected to answer the question.

(vii) Draw up an initial research plan.

(viii) Now, read enough to be able to decide whether the project is on the right lines. Look especially at previous research in the area. Good places to look are journal articles, research reports and other theses and dissertations written in the area.

(ix) Next write up a detailed proposal, including definitions of key terms that are used in your proposal. That is, define the characteristics of the terms you used in the proposal in a way that would enable an outsider to identify them if they came across them. (Nunan (1992) and Bell (1999))

3. Criteria for assessing research proposals

- the logic of the student's argument;
- a well-focused research question, set of research objectives, or hypothesis;
- the width and depth of the student's reading;
- the feasibility of the student's project;
- a critical approach to the literature;
- justification of the project through the literature;
- understanding of current issues on the student's topic;
- matching of methodology and methods to the research questions.

II Quiz: Writing Assignment

Task01

Write a detailed research proposal using the following set of headings.

- Proposed title of the study
- Summary of the proposed study
- Purpose of the proposed study
- Relevant background literature
- Research question/s or hypotheses
- Definitions of terms
- Research methodology
- Significance of the research
- Ethical considerations
- Timetable for the research
- Anticipated problems and limitations
- Resources required for the research
- Bibliography
- Appendix

III Reading Assignment

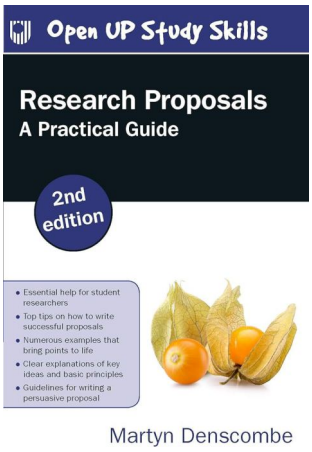
Task 01

Read ***Martyn Denscombe's Research proposals a practical guide (2nd Edition)*** and complete the following activities:

1. Identify the characteristics and features of an effective research proposal, requirements for writing a proposal, purpose and criteria of assessment and evaluation.
2. Distinguish between the outcomes and the findings of research
3. Upgrade the Blueprint of research proposal introduced to you in the TS sessions through adding more guiding details into the original draft.

Clues: These details may include:

- The paradigms
- Sub-sections...etc.



remoteDocument.net *(cf. p.)* *(cf. p.24)*

IV Organization of Dissertation

Many second-language students are unaware of the recent evolution of thesis and dissertation types and the options this provides for them. There is, for example, an increasing number of qualitative and ‘non-traditional' theses and dissertations being written. These present particular challenges in terms of how they should be written, as do theses and dissertations by publication. This chapter provides an insight to dissertation types, advice on guiding students with the overall structure of the thesis or dissertation, and the drafting of chapter outlines. It also introduces various related concepts for establishing a profound deep understanding to the master dissertation.

1. What is a dissertation?

Sometimes known as a thesis (in some countries, this term is used only for the final assignments of PhD degrees, while in other countries ‘thesis' and ‘dissertation' are interchangeable), a dissertation is a research project completed as part of an undergraduate or postgraduate degree. Typically, a dissertation allows students present their findings in response to a question or proposition that they choose themselves. The aim of the project is to test the independent research skills students have acquired during their time at university, with the assessment used to help determine their final grade. Although there is usually some guidance from your tutors, the dissertation project is largely ***independent***. For most students this will be the longest, most difficult and most important assignment completed at university, requiring months of preparation and hard work (the library might become a second home). However, it can also be very rewarding, particularly if you're passionate about your choice of topic. It's therefore definitely a good idea to make sure you choose a subject you're genuinely interested in.

Extra

Developing independence is an essential and integral part of becoming an effective researcher, and there are two key ways in which that independence will need to be demonstrated. First, you will be expected to ‘carry' your project; in other words, to exercise initiative and a considerable degree of autonomy in its design, implementation and final presentation in the form of a dissertation or thesis. In the case of research degrees in particular, what gives these degrees value in the eyes of the target audience is not merely the fact that you have demonstrated the ability to conduct a substantial study, but have also shown yourself capable of leading a project, operating independently and on your own initiative, and bringing it to a successful conclusion. In this respect, successful research says almost as much about the researcher as it does about the quality of the study itself. Yes, your supervisor will be there to support

you and help keep you on the straight and narrow, but they will expect you to run the show and keep them informed of your progress.

Reminder:The Role of the Supervisor

The role of a supervisor is essentially supportive in nature. They are there to stimulate you, to keep you on the straight and narrow, and to provide encouragement during difficult periods when you may face challenges of the kind discussed in an earlier section. Their role is not to lead you but to advance your own thinking by challenging your ideas, suggesting other avenues of enquiry or argument, and provoking you into thinking about things in alternative ways. They can also be a valuable repository of information and well positioned to direct you to relevant literature as well as potentially helpful professional connections – both individuals and institutions.

The second way in which you will need to show independence is in the way you approach ideas. What do we mean by this? Although an important objective of university education is to nurture individuals who are able to think critically about ideas rather than simply take them at face value, it is nevertheless true that much of what students actually do during the course of their university careers consists of locating, reading, selecting and making notes on information obtained from journals, books and lectures, often with a view to writing an essay or perhaps presenting a summary of that information. While there may be some critiquing of the content, this is often minimal and the process of writing becomes, in reality, little more than a process of regurgitation, of

showcasing what they have read and learnt. Although, on occasions, this may be precisely what they have been instructed to do, more often than not it is the result of a lack of self-confidence and an aversion to what is seen as risk taking, when the stakes can be unacceptably high. The thinking is that it is better to do a rather tame assignment and get a moderate mark than to stick your neck out and risk a poor one because your ideas are naïve, misguided or misinformed. Furthermore, students often feel that they do not have the authority to question or take issue with respected and prolific scholars whose names grace the covers of books and journals. As a researcher embarking on a dissertation or thesis project you simply cannot afford to approach ideas in this way.

If your research is to be original, interesting and exciting to read, and if you are to gain the respect of your peers, it is crucial that you ‘find your own voice'. In other words, you must be prepared to adopt a critical view toward those ideas with which you come into contact, and decide where you stand on particular issues in your field

of study, especially those that relate to the subject of your research. As a researcher and a true scholar, you cannot simply accept the word of others at face value; you must evaluate it on the basis of evidence and sound argument and be prepared to disagree and criticise.

Note

Despite having different names, a thesis and a dissertation are, in fact, very similar in most respects. First, both are expected to follow the principles of sound research design and implementation. Both also follow the same principles of good academic writing style and are written up in much the same way, sharing as they do similar structure, organization and formatting conventions. Finally, both require you, as a researcher, to produce a piece of work that is original and adds to the body of knowledge in the field with which your research is associated.

Thesis/ dissertation types

Nearly all of the literature on thesis and dissertation writing consists of handbooks and guides with, apart from a few notable exceptions, very little analysis having been carried out of actual texts. Atkinson (1997) suggests a number of reasons why this might be the case. The first of these is the accessibility of the texts; that is, theses and dissertations are often difficult to obtain in university libraries, and even more difficult to obtain from outside a university. It is only recently that they have come to be available electronically via online databases . Another difficulty is the sheer size of theses and dissertations as texts for analysis. This often limits what researchers can observe as well as the number of texts they are able to analyse. Further, there is often considerable variation in expectations across disciplines and fields of study (and indeed supervisors) in terms of what a thesis or dissertation should look like (Dudley-Evans 1993, 1999; Thompson 1999). A further problem is that theses and dissertations in some areas of study are changing. For example, a thesis or dissertation written in certain areas of study may now be very different from one that might have been written ten or more years ago, particularly with the influence of what Hodge (1998: 113) terms the ‘postmodern turn' in the ‘new humanities' and social sciences. Thus, in some areas of study, theses and dissertations may be theorized, researched and written up in quite different ways from how they might have been in the past. Although theses and dissertations are similar in some ways to other pieces of research writing, such as research articles, they are also in many ways quite different. Apart from the scale of the piece of writing, they also vary in terms of their purpose, readership, the kind of skills and knowledge they are required to demonstrate and ‘display', and the kinds of requirements they need to meet.

2. Requirements of a dissertation/thesis

1 Capacity to demonstrate critical analysis and original thought in all aspects of

the study.

2 The extent to which the thesis makes a significant original contribution to knowledge and/or the application of knowledge within the field of study.

3 Ability to demonstrate a comprehensive and detailed knowledge of the literature

and theoretical understandings relevant to the field of study.

4 Capacity to apply appropriate research methodologies.

5 The quality of the presentation of the dissertation/thesis, including:

■ the clarity of expression

■ the accuracy and appropriateness of presentation of results

■ the quality and relevance of illustrative material (such as graphs, tables,

illustrations)

■ the relevance and accuracy of citations, references, etc. and the development

of a coherent argument where relevant to the field of study.

6 The quality of artefacts, if any, including:

■ the conceptual understanding of the relevant field

■ the ideas and/or imagination demonstrated

■ the technical competence

■ the resolution of the artifacts, and

■ the complexity and difficulty demonstrated.

7 The worthiness of the dissertation/thesis for publication in any appropriate form

3. Main Components of a Master Dissertation

Recent years have seen increased attention being given to thesis and dissertation writing in the literature on teaching English for specific purposes. Clearly, though, a thesis or dissertation is more than its organizational structure. Equally, there are many factors which influence decisions a student makes about the form of their text. These include the research perspective taken in the study, the purpose of the text, and the extent to which the student has been given advice on the positioning and organization of their text (Prior 1995). The form of the thesis or dissertation is also influenced by the values and expectations of the academic discipline in which it is produced and will be assessed. The structure of a text is, nevertheless, a central issue in text processing and production (Johns 1995) and one which is important for students to have an awareness of so they can make choices from the range of patterns of textual organization that are typically associated with instances of the particular genre. A number of researchers have discussed the organization of different thesis types. Dudley-Evans (1999) terms the typical 'IMRAD' (introduction–methods–results–discussion) type thesis a 'traditional' thesis. Thompson (1999) further refines this category by dividing traditional theses into those which have 'simple' and those which have 'complex' patterns of organization.

A thesis with a 'simple' traditional pattern is one which reports on a single study and has a typical organizational structure of 'introduction', 'review of the literature', 'materials and methods', 'results', 'discussion' and 'conclusion'. This thesis is an examination of rater consistency in the assessment of second-language writing. A thesis with a 'complex' internal structure is one that reports on more than one study. It typically commences with 'introduction' and 'review of the literature' sections, as with the simple traditional thesis. It might then have a 'general methods' section which is followed by a series of sections that report on each of the individual studies. The thesis ends with a general overall conclusions section (Thompson 1999). Dudley-Evans (1999) refers to a further kind of thesis, which he terms a 'topic-based' thesis. This kind of thesis typically commences with an introductory chapter which is then followed by a series of chapters that have titles based on sub-topics of the topic under investigation. The thesis then ends with a 'conclusions' chapter. The PhD thesis he reports on, written in the field of electronic engineering, is made up of nine chapters, seven of which are topic based.

4. Task01

Exercice

- Identify the type of dissertation to the following sample, justify your choice.

Degree: MA Study area: Cultural studies

Title: Unworldly places: Myth, memory and the Pink and White Terraces

Chapter 1: Introduction

Disappearing wonders

Chapter 2: Plotting

Travels of colonial science

Plotting destinations

Chapter 3: Sightseeing

Topophilic tourism

Site specifics

Painting the place and myth

Souvenering the site

Chapter 4: Astral travel

Mnemonic tours in the ‘new wonderland'

Memory tours

The buried village: Embalmed history

Living out the past

Museumising the past: Sanctioned memory

Chapter 5: Postscript

Source: Paltridge 2002: 140

5. Eloued University Model

Organizing One's Dissertation/ Thesis

- Front Page
- Dedication
- Acknowledgments
- Abstract
- List of Figures
- List of Tables
- Table of Contents
- General Introduction
- Chapter One: Reviewing the Relevant Literature
- Chapter Two: Reviewing the Relevant Literature
- Chapter Three: Fieldwork
- Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion
- General Conclusion
- References/ Works-cited
- Appendices (If any)

6. The Acknowledgments

Introduction

The Acknowledgements are an important part of the student's text as they can reveal a lot about disciplinary membership and networks at the same time as showing gratitude to the people that have helped the student in the pursuit of their studies. Hyland (2004b) has studied thesis and dissertation Acknowledgments in detail. His work has shown not only that there are typical ways in which these texts are organized but also how students use these texts to display their disciplinary membership and networks at the same time as they thank the people that helped them in their academic undertaking. As Hyland (2004b: 323) points out, these short and seemingly simple texts ‘bridge the personal and the public, the social and the professional, and the academic and the moral'. Through these texts, students balance debts and responsibilities at the same time as giving their readers ‘a glimpse of a writer enmeshed in a network of personal and academic relationships'. The following is an example of how one of the students in Hyland's study expressed gratitude in their Acknowledgements section.

In this section, disciplinary membership and allegiances as well as gratitude and credit are displayed to the individuals and concerned groups. Fundamentally, this section plays important social and interpersonal roles in the dissertation writing process, for it observes:

1) appropriate academic values of modesty,

🔎 *Example*

The writing of an MA thesis is not an easy task

2) gratitude,

🔎 *Example*

I am profoundly indebted to or I am grateful to', ‘Many thanks to', etc.

3) self-effacement.

🔎 *Example*

I am the only person responsible for errors in the thesis.

Organizing the Acknowledgments Section

Hyland points out that there are typically three stages in Acknowledgements sections: a reflecting move which makes some introspective comment on the writer's research experience, a thanking move which gives credit to individuals and institutions, and an announcing move which accepts responsibility for any flaws or errors and dedicates the thesis to an individual or individual/s. Examples of each of these moves are shown in table below:

Table 11.2 Moves in Acknowledgements sections

Move	*Examples*
Reflecting move	The most rewarding achievement in my life, as I approach middle age, is the completion of my doctoral dissertation.
Thanking move	
Presenting participants	I would like to take this opportunity to express my immense gratitude to all those persons who have given their invaluable support and assistance.
Thanking for academic assistance, intellectual support, ideas, analyses, feedback, etc.	In particular, I am profoundly indebted to my supervisor, Dr James Fung, who was very generous with his time and knowledge and assisted me in each step to complete the thesis.
Thanking for resources, data access and clerical, technical and financial support, etc.	The research for this thesis was financially supported by a postgraduate studentship from the University of Hong Kong, The Hong Kong and China Gas Company Postgraduate Scholarship, Epson Foundation Scholarship, two University of Hong Kong CRCG grants and an RCG grant.
Thanking for moral support, friendship, encouragement, sympathy, patience, etc.	I'd include those who helped including my supervisor, friends, and colleagues. It is also appropriate to thank for spiritual support, so I'd also include my friends in church and family members.
Announcing move	
Accepting responsibility for flaws or errors	Notwithstanding all of the above support for this project, any errors and/or omissions are solely my own.
Dedicating the thesis to an individual/s	I love my family. This thesis is dedicated to them.

Source: based on Hyland 2004b

Conclusion

Many people think that the Acknowledgments section of a manuscript is a trivial and unimportant component. However, it constitutes a vital means to ensure that all affiliated support for the paper can be duly and transparently mentioned. By acknowledging people for their efforts and contributions, you demonstrate your integrity as an academic researcher. In addition, crediting other people for their help can also increase their presence in the academic world and possibly help to boost their career as well as your own.

7. The Abstract

What is an Abstract ?

An abstract is a brief, comprehensive summary of the contents of an article. It allows readers to survey the contents of an article quickly. Readers often decide on the basis of the abstract whether to read the entire article. A good abstract should be:

ACCURATE--i.e. reflecting the purpose and content of the manuscript.

COHERENT--i.e. writing in clear and concise language. Use the active rather than the passive voice (e.g., investigated instead of investigation of).

CONCISE--i.e. being brief but make each sentence maximally informative, especially the lead sentence. Begin the abstract with the most important points. The abstract should be dense with information.

Typical structure of the Abstract

The Abstract typically aims to provide an overview of the study which answers the following questions:

- What was the general purpose of the study?
- What was the particular aim of the study?
- Why was the study carried out?
- How was the study carried out?
- What did the study reveal?

The typical structure of an Abstract, then, is:

- overview of the study;
- aim of the study;
- reason for the study
- methodology used in the study;
- findings of the study

Example

This study traced the development of the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) in Britain over its first eleven years of operation (1984–1994). With the exception of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS), women's sports advocacy organisations are under-researched as a relatively new organisational form. They represent a significant development in the history of women's attempts at gaining greater access to the sportsworld and are an important subject of study as vehicles of change. My interest in researching the British WSF emerged from my experiences as a volunteer with the organisation; this also provided me with insights into organisational issues that warranted exploration. Feminist thinking was central to this project, informing the rationale, methodology and analysis. After presenting a chronology of the major events in the history of the WSF, issues relating to the following themes were discussed: (1) the connections between the WSF and feminism; (2) the politics of sexuality; and (3) dealing with differences among women. Over the duration of its history the WSF has moved away from philosophical origins influenced by radical feminism towards a closer alliance with the values and priorities of the sports establishment. Although this has enabled the WSF to develop closer relations with the structures of sport, it has also meant that the organisation's agenda has become greatly depoliticised. In effect, the WSF has moved from being a women's sports advocacy organisation to a women's sports development agency. The impact of these changes are discussed in terms of the three themes. This study argues that making a political analysis of sport is fundamental to challenging gender inequality. Understanding the ideological processes at work in

sport enables connections to be made between women's disadvantage in sport and their subordinate position in wider social structures. It is suggested that the WSF's ability to perform its function as the national organisation representing women's interests in sport is closely tied to its ability to link women, sport and politics.

(Grace 1995)

Types of Abstracts

- An abstract of a report of an empirical study should describe: (1) the problem under investigation (2) the participants with specific characteristics such as age, sex, ethnic group (3) essential features of the study method (4) basic findings (5) conclusions and implications or applications.
- An abstract for a literature review or meta-analysis should describe: (1) the problem or relations under investigation (2) study eligibility criteria (3) types of participants (4) main results, including the most important effect sizes, and any important moderators of these effect sizes (5) conclusions, including limitations (6) implications for theory, policy, and practice.
- An abstract for a theory-oriented paper should describe (1) how the theory or model works and the principles on which it is based and (2) what phenomena the theory or model accounts for and linkages to empirical results.
- An abstract for a methodological paper should describe (1) the general class of methods being discussed (2) the essential features of the proposed method (3) the range of application of the proposed method (4) in the case of statistical procedures, some of its essential features such as robustness or power efficiency.
- An abstract for a case study should describe (1) the subject and relevant characteristics of the individual, group, community, or organization presented (2) the nature of or solution to a problem illustrated by the case example (3) questions raised for additional research or theory.

8. The Introduction

The introductory chapter

Bunton (2002) and Paltridge (2002) found that despite variation in the overall structuring of the thesis with the emergence of new ‘hybrid' types, all the theses they examined had an introductory chapter. Our understandings of the structure and organization of the introductions to theses draw on the research into journal article Introductions, primarily carried out by Swales (1990). Readers may be familiar with his Create a Research Space (CARS) framework. Introductory chapters have in fact probably been subjected to greater examination than other typical sections of the thesis genre (Bunton2002; Dudley-Evans 1986). This may be because they are themselves shorter and therefore more amenable to analysis than the other typically much longer sections, but whatever the cause, there is more research upon which to draw when we look at thesis Introductions. This allows us to propose a framework for the typical structure of thesis Introductions.

As Swales and Feak (1994) have argued in terms of the research article, the thesis Introduction is of strategic importance: its key role is to create a research space for the writer. It is in the Introduction that the writer makes claims for the centrality or significance of the research in question and begins to outline the overall argument of the thesis. In the fierce academic competition to get papers published in reputable academic journals, the Introduction is extremely important in positioning the writer as having something to say that is worth publishing. This is not as true for the thesis writer who is seeking to enter a community of scholars but as Bunton (2002: 58) notes, ‘since one of the

criteria for the award of a doctorate in many universities is that the thesis makes an original contribution of knowledge', the doctoral student needs to establish in the Introduction how the thesis relates to and builds upon previous research in the field. In a study carried out in Hong Kong, Allison et al. (1998: 212) found that 'failure to create a "research space"' was a key shortcoming in the thesis writing of the non-native speakers of English at their university.

Table 6.1 Typical moves in thesis Introductions

Move 1	*Establishing a research territory*
	a by showing that the general research area is important, central, interesting, problematic, or relevant in some way (optional)
	b by providing background information about the topic (optional)
	c by introducing and reviewing items of previous research in the area (obligatory)
	d by defining terms (optional)
Move 2	*Establishing a niche*
	a by indicating a gap in the previous research, raising a question about it, or extending previous knowledge in some way (obligatory)
	b by identifying a problem/need (optional)
Move 3	*Occupying the niche*
	a by outlining purposes/aims, or stating the nature of the present research or research questions/hypotheses (obligatory)
	b by announcing principal findings/stating value of research (optional)
	c by indicating the structure of the thesis and providing mini-synopses (previews) of each subsequent chapter (obligatory)
	d by outlining the theoretical position (optional)
	e by describing the methods used in the study (optional)

Source: based on Swales and Feak 1994: 175 and Bunton 2002: 67

The role of the introductory chapter

It has been found that despite the growing variation in dissertation/ thesis structure and organization at the macro-level, it is useful to begin by considering the role of the Introduction in relation to the thesis in its entirety. The thesis is said to be shaped like an hourglass that is open at the top and bottom. The Introduction sits in the upper open end of the hourglass bowl to indicate that it is in the Introduction that the researcher clearly signals the relationship between the specific topic of the thesis and the field of work into which the thesis is being inserted.

Earlier in the course, research proposal's lesson illustrated the importance of situating the proposed research in relation to a field of inquiry. This is, in large part, the role of the introductory chapter. As all work in some way talks to previous work and develops upon it, the top of the hourglass is open and the 'bulb' of the glass is broad. As the dissertation/thesis develops to focus on the specific topic of the research and the particular methodology employed, the hourglass narrows, only to broaden out when the findings/results are examined and then discussed in terms of how they add to the body of existing knowledge in the field. Whereas in many journal articles the introductory section will contain a review of the relevant literature, in the thesis, the literature is almost always reviewed in a separate chapter or sometimes in more than one chapter. This is in fact one of the distinguishing characteristics of the thesis as its length allows for the development of an extensive literature review and explicit theoretical framework. It is particularly important for the researcher, who is both a student and a novice member of the research community, to locate his/her work adequately in relation to the field and acknowledge their intellectual 'debts' explicitly. The Introduction, nonetheless, typically reviews some of the key literature in the field in order to situate the research.

The typical structure of the Introduction

As it has been said earlier, recent research has provided a more detailed understanding of the generic structure of thesis Introductions (Bunton 2002; Dudley-Evans 1986). The organizational structure of the Introduction can be said to move from a fairly general overview of the research terrain to the particular issues under investigation through three key moves which capture the communicative purposes of the Introduction (Swales and Feak 1994):

- ● to establish a research territory;
- ● to identify a niche or gap in the territory;
- ● to then signal how the topic in question occupies that niche.

In Move 1 – establishing a research territory – the writer typically begins to carve out his/her own research space by indicating that the general area is in some way significant. This is often done through reviewing previous research in the field. In addition, the writer may choose to provide background information on the particular topic being investigated and may define key terms which are essential for the study. The different moves in the Introduction tend to employ different tenses (Atkinson and Curtis 1998). Move 1a, which signals the importance of the general area of research, often uses verbs in either the present tense or the present perfect tense in the sentence which makes these claims to centrality

(Swales and Feak 1994).

Move 2 – establishing a niche – points to a ‘gap' or niche in the previous research which the research will ‘fill'. For Swales and Feak (1994), the metaphor of the niche or research space is based on the idea of competition in ecology – academic writers seeking to publish must compete for ‘light and space' as do plants and animals. Elsewhere, when describing writing a conference abstract, Swales and Feak (2000) use a marketing metaphor to talk about ‘selling' one's research, and the niche metaphor can be extended to the notion of niche marketing – identifying a specific gap in the market which the new product can fill. While comparing one's thesis to a marketable product may initially appear distasteful, we have found it useful to talk in these terms to our students; the dissertation must after all make an original contribution to the field. The market niche metaphor is also helpful in understanding the idea of the Introduction as enabling the writer to position themselves in the marketplace of ideas relative to what has been written by others in the field. In the thesis, the gap is also sometimes presented as a problem or need that has been identified as requiring further research.

In Move 3 – occupying the niche – the writer, by outlining the purposes of their own research, indicates to the reader how the proposed research will ‘fill' the identified niche or gap. In a thesis/dissertation, the principal findings will frequently be previewed and theoretical positions as well as methods used may be outlined. It is here that the writer can signal the value or significance of the research, the overall structure of the thesis (i.e. including a mini-synopsis of each chapter)

The CARS framework has been found to be a useful way of assisting thesis writers with developing a structure for their Introduction that enables them to clearly indicate to the reader what the significance of their thesis is. It should not however be seen as rigid and inflexible: it is a tool for understanding how writers within different disciplines attempt to persuade their readers of the validity of their arguments for the research space they have created. Writers of completed theses will often report that the Introduction was the last chapter that they wrote and many experienced writers of journal articles report a similar phenomenon. For some, the introductory section is one of the hardest to write. While it can be argued that one only knows where one is

going once one has arrived and that is why the Introduction can only be written at the end of the journey, it is important to at least draft the Introduction – and the research proposal will, to a degree, be that draft – so that it can be redrafted as the thesis evolves until finally the overall meaning of the thesis emerges. As Levine (2002) puts it, Chapter 1 – the Introduction – needs to be ‘rewritten' with the insights gained from having drafted the complete thesis. The Introduction may also ‘tidy up' the somewhat messy, circular process of the research and make it appear more linear and logical. A final point concerns the article-compilation thesis – a collection of published papers, prefaced by an Introduction and a concluding chapter – which

Complementary resources

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[cf.]