A **ROUTLEDGE** FREEBOOK

How to Write a Dissertation

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Introduction

This FreeBook brings together chapters from a range of Routledge books, giving you all the guidance and advice you need when approaching the daunting task of writing your dissertation.

Covering each part of the journey, from devising your topic, through methodology and research, to writing and referencing, this FreeBook will help you understand the process of dissertation writing.

All the books included in this FreeBook are available as both print and eBooks from our website: www.routledge.com.

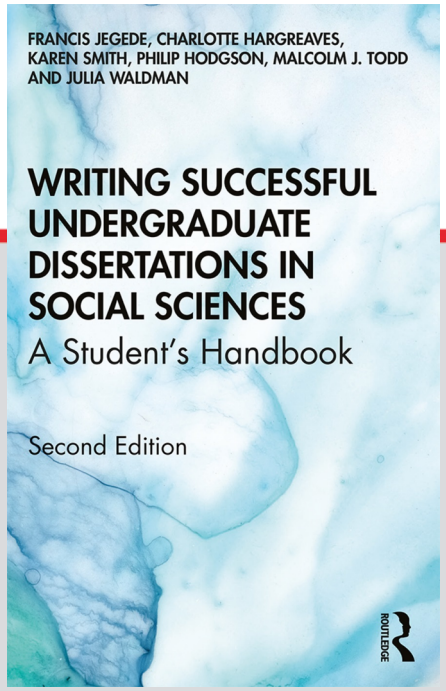
About this FreeBook

Some references from the original chapters have not been included in this text. For a fully referenced version of each chapter, including footnotes, bibliographies, and endnotes, please see the published title. As you read through this FreeBook, you will notice that some excerpts reference previous chapters – please note that these are references to the original text and not the FreeBook.

CHAPTER

1

WHAT IS A DISSERTATION?



This chapter is excerpted from *Writing Successful Undergraduate Dissertations in Social Sciences: A Student's Handbook, 2nd Edition*

by Francis Jegede, Charlotte Hargreaves, Karen Smith, Philip Hodgson, Malcolm J. Todd, Julia Waldman.

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WHAT IS A DISSERTATION?

Excerpted from *Writing Successful Undergraduate Dissertations in Social Sciences*

Introduction

This chapter explores what a dissertation or final-year project is, in order to better understand the distinctive features of this form of assessment within the undergraduate degree programme. It explains why a dissertation is required in undergraduate study and highlights the ways in which the dissertation differs to other modules you may have taken previously due to the emphasis it places upon you to take much more responsibility for your own learning. Ultimately, it provides an opportunity for you to produce your own unique piece of work. Some dissertations can even be published and start you on your own academic career. By the end of this chapter, you will have a better understanding of the following:

- What a dissertation is
- Why the dissertation is essential to your undergraduate degree programme
- What makes a dissertation special
- What a dissertation may look like
- How to prepare for and approach a dissertation.

Definitions of the dissertation

For many undergraduate social science degree students, a significant element of final-year study is an independent learning project, generally known as a dissertation. A dissertation has been defined in different ways by different people as shown in Figure 1.1. In this book we call the project a 'dissertation', but other terms, including 'extended essay', 'thesis', 'independent learning project', 'capstone project', 'senior paper' or 'final-year project' are also used.

While these projects may vary greatly in scope and nature (e.g. a large-scale written assignment such as a dissertation or extended essay or the design and production of some type of artefact, posters, exhibitions etc.), most share a number of key characteristics (Todd et al. 2004).

1. The learner determines the focus and direction of their work.
2. This work is carried out on an individual basis – although usually with some tutor support and direction provided.
3. There is typically a substantial research component to the project, requiring the collection of primary data, the analysis of existing/secondary data or both.
4. Learners will have a more prolonged engagement with the chosen subject than is the case with 'standard' coursework assignments such as essays or

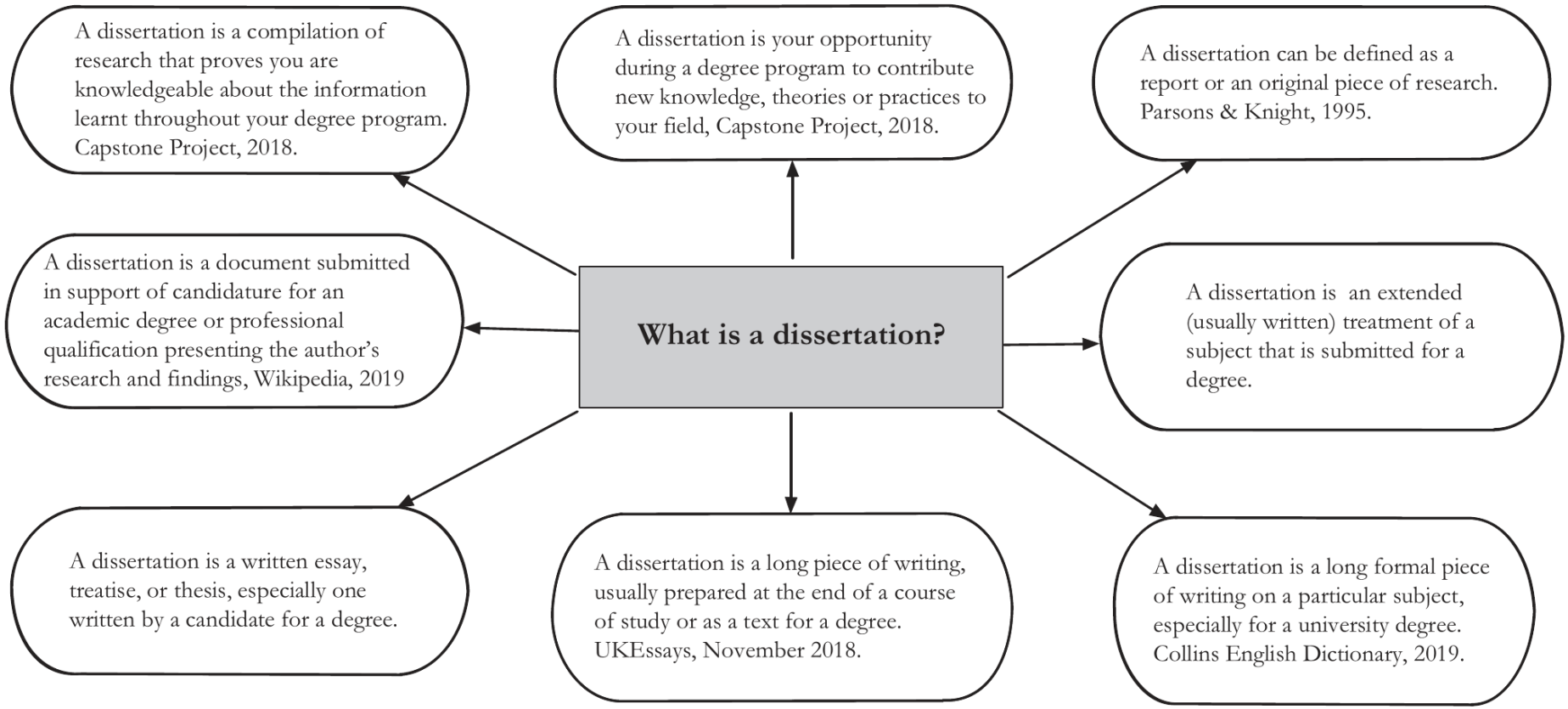

Figure 1.1 What is a dissertation?

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reports, with the work consequently expected to be more in-depth.

Purpose of a dissertation

In many universities, the dissertation project can be a significant influencing factor in determining students' final degree classification as it often carries more weighting than a traditional module. Although undertaking a dissertation is an essential requirement of most undergraduate degrees, the choice of subject covered by the dissertation can be influenced by different reasons. For example, people may choose specific topics or areas because of their curiosity, personal experience or circumstances. Ultimately, however, the purpose of undertaking a dissertation can generally be summarised as the desire to:

1. Undertake a scientific enquiry or investigation into something with a view of discovering new facts or ideas
2. Evaluate the impact or effect of something or a particular phenomenon
3. Establish the truths in or validity of a claim or theories or laws
4. Find out if and how something works by collecting relevant information about a particular subject
5. Improve personal or professional skills and development in social research and investigation
6. Develop your subject expertise and intellectual and organisational skill
7. Provide a scoping exercise for post graduate study.

Depending on the purpose, key types of questions that dissertations tend to answer are:

1. What is the situation with a particular social, economic, political or cultural issue?
2. How are things related in terms of structures, connections and relationships?
3. What happens why, when, where and how?

Once the topic of investigation is decided and the purpose of doing your dissertation is established, your ideas need to be shaped into a more specific research question(s). These questions need to be clearly stated in terms of aims and objectives. The more specific your research questions, the more focused your study will be and therefore it will be easier for you to reach conclusions based on the analysis of your data.

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What distinguishes the dissertation from other work?

More than any other undergraduate assessed work, the dissertation offers you the opportunity to further develop your subject expertise and your social research, intellectual and organisational skills. The dissertation gives you a unique opportunity to work in considerable detail on a topic of special interest to you. It requires you becoming more actively involved with research, this could mean empirical research or a library-based project. It provides more scope for originality and intellectual independence than you have perhaps experienced before.

Your first essays were usually (though not always) written to titles that had been prescribed by your tutor. As you progressed through your course, you may have been given the opportunity to design your own assignment questions. In this way your independence, as a reader and critic, will have developed. Similarly, you may have noticed that you no longer read books and papers simply to understand them and re-present their arguments in an essay. Rather, you notice what particularly interested you in the books, journal articles or media sources and what particular critical questions you wanted to ask about them. The dissertation builds on this foundation; it grows out of your own particular interest, both in terms of the material you choose to write about and the topic that provides the focus of your study.

The longer word count of the dissertation requires you to sustain your analysis and interpretation over a greater range of material and almost inevitably involves you in more careful and subtle argument and critical evaluation. The preparation and writing of the dissertation make you take responsibility, with the support of a tutor or supervisor, for your own learning. You have to manage your independent study, your time and present the results of research clearly and methodically. You need to remember that the dissertation is a marathon rather than a sprint!

In many ways, the dissertation is about *doing* social science rather than writing about the social science research that others have produced. You will develop skills that will improve your expertise at subject level and be expected to collect and manipulate information, present and demonstrate critical thinking and problem-solving skills – all of which will be beneficial for your professional life or in preparing you for study at postgraduate level.

For these reasons, the dissertation can be seen as the culmination of your undergraduate studies, honing your academic skills and presenting ideas which are uniquely your own.

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Dissertation organisation and structure

The way in which this type of assessment is organised will vary from institution to institution and programme to programme. It is therefore important that you familiarise yourself with the particular arrangements for your degree. Many institutions produce module guidance setting out these requirements and also will allocate students a dissertation tutor or supervisor. Your supervisor, and any guidance which is offered, should be your primary sources of information and support for the dissertation project. While this book provides an overarching guide to the dissertation process, ultimately you will be assessed on the requirements of your own university and although most universities have a standard requirement of 'an introduction, a literature review, methodology, findings, conclusion and bibliographic references', there may be slight differences that you need to be aware of.

It is worth being very clear from the earliest planning stages of your dissertation exactly what is being asked of you. Questions that you should be asking yourself include:

- If required, have I sought and obtained ethical approval for my research?
- How many credits does the dissertation carry?
- How many words do I have to write?
- How often can I meet my supervisor?
- What can I expect from my supervisor and what should my supervisor expect from me?
- Are there any interim progress reports or oral presentations that I need to provide for my institution/supervisor as part of my assessment?
- What are the submission points and in what format?
- What system of referencing and citations am I required to use?
- What deadline am I working to and how can I manage my time to ensure completion by the deadline?

As the sayings go, 'poor planning makes poor performance' and 'failing to plan is planning to fail', so good planning and preparation in the early stages are essential for writing a successful dissertation.

All dissertations will vary in format, style and design; however, a dissertation generally contains four main sections (Swales and Feak 2004: 222):

1. Introductory section that sets out the context, aim and objective of your study;

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2. Methodology section that provides information on how and why you conducted your research;
3. Findings section that details the essential outcomes of your investigation; and
4. Discussion section that explains and evaluates your findings in the context of existing knowledge.

The introductory section begins with a general overview of your research topic. This becomes increasingly specific as you introduce the research questions you are going to pursue, the methods you will use to do that and then the results that those methods give. The dissertation will then become more general again as you relate your specific findings to the wider context. It is useful to imagine a camera. You start with a wide-angled lens which takes in the surrounding environment. Then you focus in closely using the zoom to look in detail at your subject. Then you zoom out again to see the bigger picture. A typical dissertation format is as detailed in Figure 1.2.

Preparing for the dissertation

In certain essential ways, what the dissertation reflects is a direct development from the skills that you have acquired through your programme. If you doubt that you have developed during your study, go back and look at one of your first-year assignments and think of improvements you might now be able to make to it.

As you know, when you write a module assessment, you discuss a subject area in relation to an idea or topic. The title of your essay, report or examination paper and its first paragraph focus your discussion on the chosen topic and determine the scope of the essay. You undertake a careful reading of a selection of material. Then, within the limits prescribed by the assessment title, you attempt to construct a coherent, closely reasoned and substantiated argument. Your essay does not include all your ideas about the literature area, nor does it attempt to cover every aspect of them. Rather, it is an interpretation. The dissertation may be similarly focused in approach. It identifies a single topic to explore and limits the amount of issues that can be examined in depth and detail within the specified word limit. Initially, then, you will prepare for your dissertation in the same way as you would any written assessment. The key difference is the length and the time taken to produce a sustained and justified argument around a topic that you have chosen.

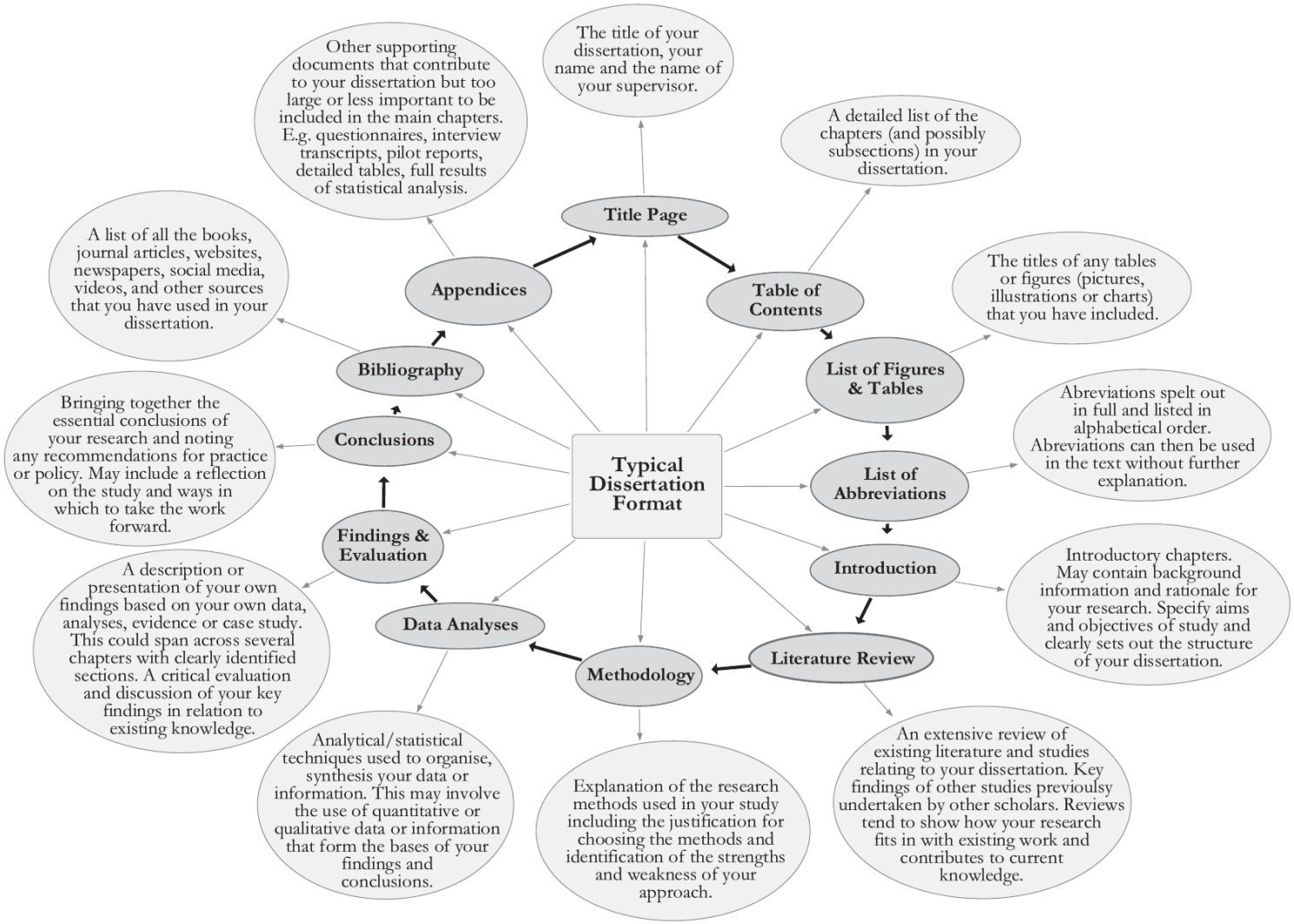

Figure 1.2 A typical dissertation format and contents structure

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You will also be able to draw upon other experiences, for example, in the analysis and presentation of findings that you may have covered on methodology modules. You are probably aware of where your academic strengths and weaknesses lie. If you have never really thought about this, it may be worth devoting time to doing so. In setting up your project, you will want to *play to your strengths*. In Chapter 3, we give you more advice on getting started with the dissertation.

Case study 1.1 Top ten dissertation writing tips

1. Select a topic that interests you

First and foremost, it is crucial that you select a dissertation or project topic that you find interesting. This will provide the initial motivation you need to get started, and it will help you stay engaged and moving forward with your work when time and other pressures begin to surface later on.

2. Know your topic

You should be absolutely clear in your own mind as to what your dissertation or project topic is. Write this down in a couple of sentences and stick it onto your computer. This will help you to know exactly what you need to do and also help prevent you from getting bogged down in material that is irrelevant.

3. Work with your supervisor

Your supervisor is there to provide guidance to enable you to conduct independent research and write your dissertation according to the conventions and expectations of your particular discipline. However, for most students this will be the first experience of working with a lecturer in such a sustained and focused way. It is important that you know what you can expect from your supervisor from the beginning. And it is equally important for you to know what your supervisor expects of you!

4. Seek peer support

Self-organised writing groups with other students can provide a valuable source of support during what is a particularly demanding and sometimes isolating experience of writing at university. Try meeting regularly with a group of peers to discuss your work and any challenges you are facing.

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5. Familiarise yourself with the assessment criteria

It is a good idea to find out early what your tutors will be looking for in your dissertation by getting a copy of the assessment criteria and any other guidance provided.

6. Consider the ethical dimension

If your dissertation involves collecting data from human participants, which is most likely to be the case in the sciences or social sciences, you will need to follow your university's ethical guidelines for such work. You are advised to begin considering the ethical dimension of your work as early as possible.

7. Make good use of subject librarians

Subject librarians are an often overlooked but very valuable resource when it comes to dissertation writing. They have specific knowledge of the journals, books and other resources – both printed and online versions – relevant to your particular discipline.

8. Keep track of your sources

From the very beginning of your literature review, it is important you come up with a simple system for keeping track of the complete bibliographic details of what you read. It is especially important to record specific page numbers for any direct quotations you write down when taking notes.

9. Start writing

What can you do when you don't know what or how to start writing? Start writing! One of the best ways to overcome that hurdle of getting started is to give yourself licence to 'free-write', to simply write down anything that comes to mind on your topic, without stopping, for ten or fifteen minutes. Don't worry about correct spelling or grammar or even writing in complete sentences as free-writing is a creative process.

10. Stay focused

A dissertation is likely to be the longest piece of writing you will complete as an undergraduate, and the risk of straying away from your topic as you progress with your work is much greater than it is with shorter pieces of writing.

(Harrington et al (2007), Write Now CETL)

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Key messages

- The dissertation is an independent piece of research where you are responsible for your own learning.
- It will demand the use of your communication, information-seeking and intellectual skills.
- The social science-based dissertation will normally include standard features, including an introduction, a literature review, methodology, findings, conclusion and bibliographic references.
- You can, and should, value your own experiences and strengths as well as secondary resources.

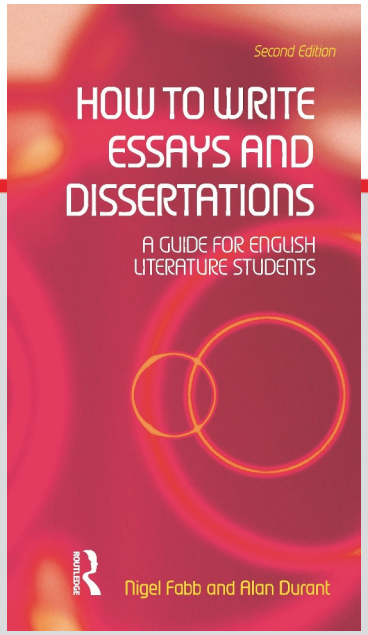
Key questions

- Do you know and understand the purpose of your dissertation and have you received all the information about the requirements of your dissertation?
- Do you have a working title for your dissertation and the specific research questions you want to answer?

CHAPTER

2

DEVISING YOUR OWN TOPIC



This chapter is excerpted from

How to Write Essays and Dissertations

by Alan Durant and Nigel Fabb.

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When you answer a set question it is essential to think about exactly what kind of question you are answering and approach the topic accordingly (Unit 2). But if you have a free choice of topic you are setting your own question and need to work out how to approach it for yourself. In this unit, we work through two related processes: (i) narrowing down the topic, and (ii) imposing a structure on your treatment of that topic. We end by showing how suitably chosen combinations of essay focus and mode of argument create coherent overall projects.

Some Questions to Ask Yourself

What is the question I want to answer?

Having an idea of a general area of interest is often the starting point for an essay: a wish to write on 'something around X' (where X is most commonly an author, a work, a literary theme or a period). Right from the start, however, it is important to sharpen this sense of an area of interest by formulating it in terms of questions rather than broad, and inevitably vague, descriptive phrases.

> If you start from an area of interest which is 'Irony in Jane Austen's novel *Emma*', try to work out some questions to ask, such as, 'Do any of the characters in *Emma* deliberately use irony?'; 'Which characters use irony? Which don't?'; 'Is there a distinction between the way men use irony and women use irony in *Emma*?', etc.

Collecting all the questions you can think of won't give you a coherent focus for your essay, however. Once you have a cluster of questions, you need to encapsulate as many as you can in a single basic question, like this:

> Which types of characters in *Emma* use irony and why?

This reformulated question can now be researched and written about in a way that the original broadly defined area couldn't be.

What can I expect by way of an answer?

Having identified a main question, you will find it helpful to make as full a list as possible of the kinds of answer that are possible in principle; you can then at least consider candidates that your essay may in due course reject.

> The question 'Which types of character in *Emma* use irony and why?' is

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actually two questions. Answering the first part involves classifying characters into types; so it is useful to think of all types which might be relevant in answering the question – male versus female, old versus young, poor versus rich, as many types as you can think of. Some contrasts may immediately appear irrelevant, but it is necessary to consider them briefly, if only to see why you are ruling them out. Answering the second part, 'why?' depends on your answer to the first part. But it is useful anyway to speculate about possible findings: what kinds of things could count as explanations. The characters who use irony might be similar in type to Austen herself (in class, gender, age); or they might be characters who function as heroes and heroines in the novels. Each of these answers raises further questions. This is exactly how you build your essay, as a sequence of questions which give rise to answers that prompt new questions.

What methods will help me find an answer?

Your essay needs to provide evidence or reasons for your point of view. Constantly ask, 'what have I noticed in the text or in background materials about the context that makes me think this?' Even if your reasoning seems self-evident to you, it won't to other people; they will come at the issue from a slightly (or perhaps a very) different point of view.

How can you show your reader that you have made an exhaustive survey of the characters in *Emma* and whether or not they use irony? Drawing up a list of all speaking characters is an obvious start (perhaps with a note of which pages they speak on and who they speak to). Putting all this information into a table might then be a good way to gather data together so that you can see clearly if there are any relevant generalisations to be made. You can put the table into your essay if the information turns out to be significant; or the table might just function as a way of leading you on to a different, better way of investigating the same question.

Will my chosen field expand indefinitely?

Bear in mind that background material can expand infinitely; it needs to be closed off somewhere, or given a boundary, to prevent you becoming submerged in a project that can't be completed. Take care not to include everything you are interested in, for the sole reason of bringing it in somewhere.

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Excerpted from *How to Write Essays and Dissertations*

> Avoid the 'Jane Austen, gender, class, early nineteenth-century society and the development of the novel' type of project; such a project includes everything but inevitably lacks a clear focus.

How does my topic relate to current work in the field?

It may be that the question you wish to ask is different from the sorts of discussion you have encountered in what you have read on the subject. If so, indicate that you know this, if possible with an explanation of how your approach differs. Or it may be that the question you are interested in has been discussed before, but that you want to develop it in a different way, or to extend it, or to disagree with one of its premises. Again, indicate this, as precisely as possible. Establishing how your work fits into debate in the area is an important aspect of essay-writing in literary studies. Generally speaking, you need to know and to be able to show how and why your work *matters*.

> For the *Emma* essay, you could look in a bibliography for links between 'irony', 'Austen' and 'characterisation'; and you could scan some collections of essays on Austen or *Emma* for possibly relevant material. Similarly you could look in books on irony, in order to see how closely your ideas resemble existing material, and what aspects are original.

Am I interested enough?

With exam questions, you have little choice about whether you are interested enough to keep yourself motivated until you've finished. But then you also have only a short period of time. Some pieces of work, on the other hand, require a lot of reading and study time. For these you are likely to produce better work if you choose questions that genuinely interest you, or connect with problems you are interested in outside your studies, rather than if you feel your work is being done to no purpose, or simply out of obligation.

Be wary, though, of topics in which you feel very deeply immersed personally. You should depend primarily on knowledge you learn as part of your academic work, and not from your personal life experiences. You should also avoid writing as 'a fan', and in general keep clear of a topic if you feel it will be difficult to stand back sufficiently from it to carry out the sorts of procedures we have discussed in this unit.

> If you have a general political interest in social class, this could support an investigation of class as it relates to characters' use of irony in *Emma*.

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Excerpted from *How to Write Essays and Dissertations*

Having looked at different sorts of decision that need to be made in formulating a project, we can now generalise. A literature essay always has a **focus** for its subject matter (a question shaped out of an area of interest); it should also always have a particular **mode of argument**. Each of these aspects of an essay has predictable characteristics. Consider focus first.

Essay focus

Here are some typical kinds of **focus**.

(i) AUTHORS

'The life and works of John Steinbeck'; 'women Romantic poets'.

(ii) TEXTS

Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'; Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*; selected poems by Christina Rossetti.

(iii) GENERIC GROUPINGS OF TEXTS

The sonnet; eighteenth-century pastoral poetry; kitchen-sink drama.

(iv) HISTORICAL ISSUES RELATING TO A TEXT OR GROUP OF TEXTS

The specifically nineteenth-century idea of beauty in the nineteenth-century novel; developments in the theatre immediately before the English Civil War; representations of industrial life in early twentieth-century novels.

(v) THEORETICAL ISSUES RELATING TO LITERARY STUDY

Comparison of post-structuralist approaches to the lyric poem; the mental processes involved in understanding a metaphor; manipulations of point-of-view in narrative.

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Excerpted from *How to Write Essays and Dissertations*

Mode of argument

Here are some typical modes of argument. These allow you, in approaching the point of focus of your material, to create something new and interesting.

(a) REVALUE A REPUTATION (OR ASSESS RELATIVE ACHIEVEMENT)

An extended essay that argues that Carol Ann Duffy is a major English poet who has not been taken sufficiently seriously because she writes humorously.

(b) ANALYSE STYLE: COMMENT ON ASPECTS OF THE LANGUAGE OF A TEXT

An essay pointing out that Shakespeare's first sonnet ends with a comma in the first printed edition and arguing that this is because it is the first part of a larger poem including also the second sonnet.

(c) RELATE A TEXT TO THE HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH PRODUCED IT, OR IN WHICH IT IS READ

An essay which looks at the relation between the spread of tourism in the countryside in eighteenth-century Britain and the development of a new style of 'countryside' poetry exemplified in Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, published near the end of that century.

(d) PLACE A TEXT IN A LITERARY OR AESTHETIC CONTEXT (E.G. IN A TRADITION, IN THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW FORM OR STYLE)

A dissertation arguing that Robert Louis Stevenson should be understood as an early example of twentieth-century Modernism rather than as a late example of nineteenth-century Realism.

(e) DESCRIBE OR INTERPRET (OR REINTERPRET) A TEXT

An essay which describes the narrative of Alasdair Gray's novel *Lanark* and

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interprets it as a symbolic representation of the state of late twentieth-century Scotland.

(f) TAKE SIDES IN AN ONGOING CRITICAL ARGUMENT BETWEEN DIFFERING VIEWPOINTS

A thesis which investigates the made-up words in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* which resemble slips of the tongue, compares literary-theoretical approaches with experimental psychological approaches, and concludes that the psychological approaches undermine the validity of the literary-theoretical approaches.

(g) EXEMPLIFY THEORIES, TERMS OR APPROACHES, OR USE A CLASSIFICATORY SYSTEM TO DESCRIBE A TEXT, USUALLY IN ORDER TO ASSESS HOW SUITABLE OR EFFECTIVE THE DESCRIPTIVE SYSTEM IS

An essay showing that the linguistic theory of Conversational Analysis can help us understand how characters in *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams control each other through the ways they interact in speech.

Combining focus and mode of argument

Essay projects can be devised by combining a given essay focus with a particular mode of argument, though not all combinations are automatically as interesting as each other. Consider, as an example of a combination of a selected focus with one of the modes of argument outlined above, an essay with a focus on R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* [focus (ii)], which argues that it is underrated and indicates why it should be viewed as a more significant achievement [mode of argument (a)]. Note that more than one focus can be adopted in any given essay, and different modes of argument can be combined. In our example, the evaluation of *The Guide* could involve a stylistic argument, so combining mode of argument (a) with mode of argument (b).

While a single essay may draw on more than one perspective, however, it is important to establish which is the primary or organising mode of argument and what is the primary focus around which the essay is based. Otherwise you risk obscuring the development of your essay by failing to signal clearly its overall

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direction. Many essays suffer from exactly this problem: they lack a sufficiently clear sense of what the main issues are. Other essays are damaged by what appears to be the opposite problem, but is actually a result of the same lack of structure: they read as if they are trying to solve two or more problems at once.

Giving your essay a title

There is no rush to find a title for your essay; you can decide it at any stage. Your title can lead the process of writing, as a source of questions and ideas. Or it can be chosen at the very end, encapsulating the main points of an argument you have already written.

As regards your title's form of words, there are typical formulae you can build on, especially the common form 'title colon sub-title':

> The Text and the Reader: Construction of meaning in fiction by Umberto Eco (*title of a Master's thesis*)
>
> Marx and Spenser: Elizabeth and the problem of Imperial Power (*draft title of a PhD thesis*)

The formula here is not just two points about the essay linked by a colon, but also requires a combination of two different styles: the main title is in a verbally adroit, catchy form or alternatively is in some way vague or enigmatic; the sub-title offers a gloss or explanatory paraphrase in more conventionally academic language.

Consider in this light one possible title for the Naryan topic used as an example above:

> Undervalued achievement: the contribution of R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* to the development of post-colonial fiction

This title illustrates both types of contrast. The phrase before the colon is enigmatic: it states a provocative combination of value and perceived injustice, but without referring to anything in particular. This contrasts with the phrase after the colon, which consists of more conventional literary critical terminology: author name; book title; literary genre ('fiction'). As regards topic, the phrase after the colon indicates what the essay is about, in that the author's name and the title of the work signal the essay's main focus, with the phrase 'the development of post-colonial fiction' providing necessary context. But even when you have read the sub-title, you have to go back to the main title, 'Undervalued achievement', to find

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what we have called the mode of argument: the point of view and sense of purpose that will drive the essay.

EXERCISE

Select a novel you have just read. Following procedures outlined in this unit, construct a brief summary of the main points you might include in each of the following types of argument about the book:

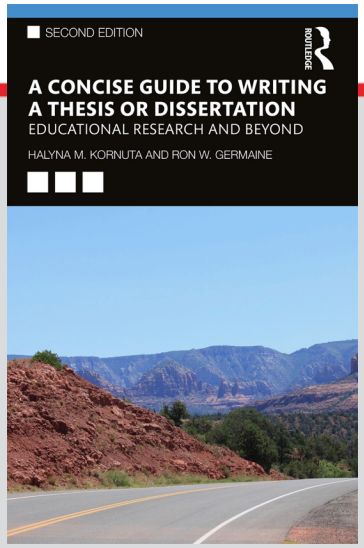
- stylistic
- contextual
- evaluation of conflicting critical arguments

Compare your three summaries.

CHAPTER

3

THE BIG PICTURE



This chapter is excerpted from

A Concise Guide to Writing a Thesis or Dissertation

by Halyna M. Kornuta, Ron W. Germaine.

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Excerpted from *A Concise Guide to Writing a Thesis or Dissertation*

As you begin the journey of conducting research and reporting the results, it is helpful to know about the formal expectations for writing as well as general organizational guidelines. One set of formal expectations comes from the decision of many of the social and behavioral sciences to follow the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines for formatting journal articles and research documents. A second set of formal expectations is likely to come from specific requirements set out by your university. Check whether your university has a style guide. Both sets of formal expectations must be adhered to as part of producing quality, professional writing. A third set of expectations may come from your faculty advisor or committee chair about how to structure and develop your study.

Theses and dissertations defined

The term 'thesis' usually refers to a study completed as part of a Master's program, while 'dissertation' refers to the culminating study in a doctoral program. Length and depth of content may also be distinguishing features; however, the purpose of both is to demonstrate that writers have a sufficient knowledge of their field of study. For the purpose of this Guide, reference to a research study (or simply 'a study') includes both a thesis and dissertation, and the general structure for writing a thesis or a dissertation is considered to be the same. Before beginning a study, writers should review institutional requirements for approval of their study. Most studies require approval through an Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Topic development

Begin by identifying a topic about which you feel passionate, and clarify how it fits within your field of study (see Chapter Part I: The big picture 3 Two, Figures 2.1 & 2.2). A research study is too much work for its own sake unless you feel some passion for the topic you are investigating. Look within your own professional practice for ideas, discuss ideas with others, including professors, colleagues, and other practitioners. Explaining your interest and answering their questions will help you to focus your ideas, sharpen your purpose, and even lead to a source of support. Choosing a faculty advisor or committee chair that you know you can work with, and one who shares your interests, is critical to the success of your completed study (Lunnenburg & Irby, 2014).

Repeat the discussion process several times as you are articulating the purpose statement, contributing to the Literature Review, and developing the research methodology.

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Excerpted from *A Concise Guide to Writing a Thesis or Dissertation*

Read the literature within your area of interest, and where possible focus writing assignments from coursework on your topic. You are likely to find several problems or topics that would benefit from an investigation and intervention.

Define the problem clearly.

Articulate the problem or need that must be addressed within the topic you choose. A clearly defined problem will make it much easier to write a laser sharp purpose statement, which will guide the whole of your study. Most problems in social sciences are open-ended questions, and thus do not have "one best solution". For example, there are many kinds of interventions in teaching that may influence students' learning or even their attitudes. The things we want to influence – like measures of achievement or attitude – are dependent variables in a quantitative study. The tools or interventions we use in the process of influencing are independent variables. Clarifying the problem and writing a purpose will be easier when you define a problem in terms of: What effect does [some intervention or strategy] have on [measures of what you want to influence]?

For example, a problem might be: How do cooperative learning/teaching strategies affect the academic achievement of learners in an elementary school setting? Or: What effect does teaching a multicultural-based curriculum have on adolescent learners' attitudes towards tolerance? Or: What effect does parent involvement in the life of a school have on the graduation rate of children? A significant body of educational research has been performed around such questions and is readily available in the literature. Reading the current literature begins to define a topic for further investigation.

Choose the methodology.

Consider what you might measure, who you would interview or survey, or what documents you might examine to gather data about the problem you have identified. For example, measures of whether a teaching intervention is successful could come from sources such as test scores, office referrals, attendance, et cetera. Such numerical measures are called *quantitative* data. You may also discover what you need to learn by interviewing people who have experienced what you are investigating. Such verbal or written data are called *qualitative* data.

Craft a purpose statement.

Once the problem is defined and the methodology identified, a purpose statement is needed. The purpose statement is a clear, precise statement that encapsulates

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what you intend to do in your study. The purpose statement is like a 'rudder' that guides everything you write in your study. Each time the purpose statement is repeated in your study, it should be copied and pasted so that it is exactly the same. Part II, Chapter One provides more detailed information about writing the purpose statement.

Organization

Writing a research study should demonstrate understanding of how to prepare for, set up, and conduct quality research. In general, this requires identifying a topic, finding out and reporting from the literature what is already known about the topic, what other researchers have discovered, establishing a need and purpose for the study, detailing a plan for gathering and analyzing data, results, and making recommendations.

Chapters One, Two and Three.

On the surface, the logical order for writing a research study may appear to begin with Chapter One and proceed sequentially through to Chapter Five.

The order for writing a research study begins with Chapter Two, followed by Chapters One, Three, Four, and Five.

However, because research must be grounded in literature, the place to begin is with the Chapter Two review of literature, followed by Chapter One, which introduces the study; then Chapter Three, which presents the plan for gathering and analyzing data, followed by Chapter Four with its presentation and analysis of data, and finally the executive summary of Chapter Five, which discusses the findings, draws conclusions, and looks ahead to make recommendations for change in policy or practice and need for further study.

Suggestions for choosing a topic and beginning the Literature Review are found in Part II, Chapter Two of this Guide. The Literature Review for your area of focus should reflect current knowledge about the topic to be investigated, and should review what other researchers have discovered about the issue, or closely related topics. It is important to write about the topic with sufficient breadth to present differing perspectives or contrasting views of the topic, and with sufficient depth to report the complexities of the issue.

Upon completion of Chapter Two, Chapter One is written. It outlines the

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need, purpose, and nature of the study. Chapter Three is written after Chapter One is completed and describes the methodology for carrying out the study. Completion of the first three chapters ends the proposal-writing stage. If you have not already done so, check with your advisor about requirements for approval from your institution's IRB before beginning data collection.

Chapters Four and Five.

Once the proposal is approved by an IRB, data are gathered and analyzed. Two additional chapters are then added to the three-chapter proposal section. Chapter Four presents the findings and analysis of data. Chapter Five forms an executive summary of the study and includes recommendations for change in policy or practice, and recommendations for further study. Each of the five chapters should be 'stand alone'; written so that the reader could read one chapter and know the essence of the study.

References and Abstract.

The reference section begins on a new page at the end of your writing, and before any appendices. We highly recommend keeping an ongoing, annotated bibliography throughout the writing process as a way of tracking key ideas and sources. Notes and ideas from each source are briefly summarized within an annotated bibliography, and the source identified in APA format so that it is available for the reference section. The annotated bibliography will provide a quick link for you to go back to sources, which is often needed during writing. An example of an entry in an annotated bibliography is:

> Marshall, J., Smart, J., & Alston, D. (2016). Development and validation of Teacher Intentionality of Practice Scale (TIPS): A measure to evaluate and scaffold professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 59, 159– 168. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2016.05.007
>
> The Marshall et al. article identifies seven teacher-controllable actions that are said to lead to greater student success. Note to self: Compare/align the seven actions with other measures of teacher effectiveness to see how they match.

In the reference section of your report, list only the references you actually cite in your writing, and omit all notes from the annotated bibliography.

The Abstract should be the very last part of your writing. Information about writing an abstract is at the beginning of Part II of this Guide, and in the APA

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Publication Manual (APA, 2010b, pp. 25–27).

Writing quality

Writing should reflect grammatical correctness, clear and precise communication, accuracy of information, and a logical flow of thought. Chapters Three and Four of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA, 2010b) provide excellent advice about writing style. The APA Publication Manual also identifies a format for levels of headings. Headings are 'directional signs' within your writing. They help to create meaning for readers by showing a pattern of organization and flow of thought; therefore, accurate formatting of headings is essential. Critical thinking contributes to clarity in writing.

Levels of headings.

Headings show readers the outline and flow of thought for your writing. In that sense, headings are like navigation lights mariners rely on as they traverse a dark channel at night. Without the navigation lights, sailors would quickly become lost or run aground. Similarly, without correct levels of headings that reflect accurate formatting, readers will have difficulty following what you are trying to communicate. Therefore, it is essential to use the format for headings shown in Table I.1 below (APA, 2010b, pp. 62–63). You may not need all of the levels, but it is essential that you follow the pattern to the extent necessary for your specific study.

Additional strategies to enhance quality writing include repeating the purpose statement word for word in each place it is stated so that its precise focus is not lost or changed. Key words should be used consistently. For example, a term such as 'educational workshops' should not reappear as 'educational in-service sessions.' A research study should not be written from the bias of one particular perspective. Fair-mindedness and intellectual integrity require that contrasting views or differing perspectives be presented.

Table of Contents.

It is possible to create a Table of Contents by using a formatting function in Microsoft Word (web search 'Creating a Table of Contents in MS Word'). Formatting the headings in this way will allow you to create a Table of Contents that digitally links each heading in your study to a page location.

Format.

The APA Publication Manual (APA, 2010b) was written primarily as a guide for

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Table I.1

Format for APA levels of headings

Format for five levels of headings	
Level of heading	*Format*
1	**Centered, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading**
2	**Flush Left, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading**
3	**Indented, boldface, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period.**
4	***Indented, boldface, italicized, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period.***
5	*Indented, italicized, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period.*

writing manuscripts for journals. While most of the APA formatting requirements apply to research papers, theses, or dissertations, some differences in style are both permissible and encouraged. "The Publication Manual presents explicit style requirements but acknowledges that alternatives are sometimes necessary; authors should balance the rules of the Publication Manual with good judgment" (APA, 2010b, p. 5). It is also important to check formatting requirements unique to your own institution. In general, the preference is for 12-point font with a typeface such as Times New Roman. Double-space all text lines, and single-space the text in tables and figures.

Requirements for margin size may vary. If the final product is to be bound, be sure to check with your university about the appropriate margin size. If the final product is not bound, all margins should be one inch (APA, 2010b). An exception is

the first page of each chapter, which should begin with a two-inch margin (rather than one inch) at the top of the page. Additional specific requirements can be found in the APA Publication Manual, section 8.03.

All pages must be numbered consecutively beginning with the Title Page as page one. Page numbers are located in the top right of the header. Also in the header, flush left, should be the running head, an abbreviated form of the title that is no longer than 50 characters.

Writing resources

The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA, 2010b) is an excellent resource for guiding scholarly writing in terms of style, mechanics, and formatting. A helpful online resource is available at http://www.apastyle.org/learn/faqs/index.aspx

Other helpful resources include a page on the University of Toronto website, http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/literature-review, for advice about writing a literature review. Additionally, the webpage, http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/style-and-editing/hit-parade-oferrors, provides examples of what to do and what not to do in relation to writing style, grammar, and punctuation.

Tables and figures.

Tables and figures have unique formatting elements as defined by the APA Publication Manual (APA, 2010b). Tables are usually used for information to be displayed in rows and columns. The title for a table is placed above the table in two lines: The first line states the table number, in plain text, and not followed by a period. The second line states the table name, in italics and capital letters for each word in the title. A formatting example for tables follows.

Table 1

Alignment of Outcomes, Assessments, and Assignments

Figures are usually diagrams and illustrations. Only one line is used to state the figure number, in italics, and the figure name. This line is placed under the figure. The figure name is not in italics and only the first word is capitalized. A formatting example for figures follows.

Figure 1. Relationships to program learning outcomes

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All tables and figures must be referred to in the main body of the text and in the order in which they appear.

Process and product

A significant time commitment is required to complete a research proposal, and to carry out the study. Students have estimated that the process of developing and prioritizing ideas requires a minimum of 30 hours, the Literature Review 80 hours, and the methodological framework 30 hours. The initial stages of writing often include a feeling of uncertainty. This 'muddling through' stage is typical as your ideas develop and evolve. Chapter Two of this Guide provides advice on identifying and developing a topic for a study.

In the research phase, time for data gathering can range from days to several months or years, depending on the nature and purpose of the study. To help view your writing from the perspective of someone who will evaluate it, an example of a grading rubric is included in the appendices. The rubric provides descriptions of categories and levels of quality for research writing.

The total number of pages for a research study may range from fewer than 100 to more than 300, including Title Page, Abstract, Table of Contents, and References. Far more important than the number of pages, however, is that the content reflects scholarship and clear logic, and provides accurate, fair-minded communication that has a logical flow of thought. When this type of writing is combined with a passion for the topic, an excellent product is likely to result.

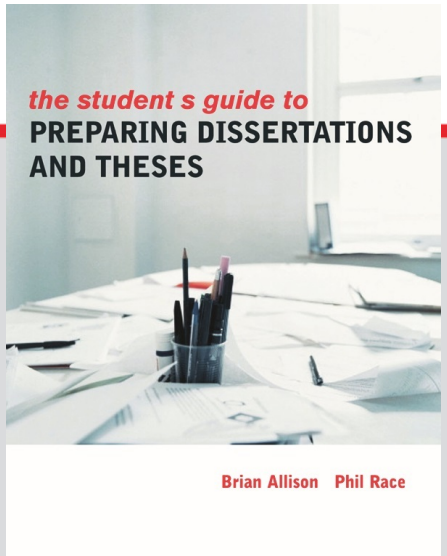
Summary

Part I of the Guide has presented a big picture view of the contents of a research study, along with the general formatting requirements. Part II will describe the focus and contents of each chapter.

CHAPTER

4

CAPTURING YOUR RESEARCH



This chapter is excerpted from *The Student's Guide to Preparing Dissertations and Theses*

by Brian Allison, Phil Race.

Learn more

CAPTURING YOUR RESEARCH

Excerpted from *The Student's Guide to Preparing Dissertations and Theses*

This book is not essentially about *planning* your research. There are several much more comprehensive sources available to you, going into detail about research methods, drawing up a research proposal, choosing a supervisor, and so on, including several listed in the 'Further reading' at the end of this book. The main aims of *this* book remain helping you to turn your research into a dissertation, and to do it so well that you earn the research-based qualification you are aiming towards.

This Part is essentially about the key processes involved in turning your research into a dissertation, whereas the first and last parts of the book are about the bits and pieces which will make up your dissertation itself.

For a start, this chapter on 'Capturing your research' is about making sure that the findings of your research start off on their way to becoming embodied in your dissertation.

Keep files, not piles!

If your research findings are spread around on loose sheets of paper, arranged in piles rather than filed systematically, all it takes is for the piles to get overturned or shuffled and your evidence could be irretrievably disarrayed. It's worth the extra few seconds it takes every now and then to staple related jottings and papers together, and put a title on them, so that they don't become separated. Better still, use a good supply of cardboard wallets or plastic pockets, and write on them enough detail of what's in them to be able to find what you may be looking for, quickly and easily, weeks or months ahead.

Put dates on everything. Make sure that you record the date (and even time) that key results were gathered, the dates where you first analysed the results, the dates where you abandoned particular results, and the dates of absolutely everything you did - whether in the finl analysis it could prove to be important or not. It only takes a few seconds to add the date to a piece of paper, but it could be quite impossible to remember when you did something even a few weeks later without that date.

Try to get one little bit 'ready'

Some things you can write long before you start bringing the final form of your dissertation together. In particular, it's useful to write out details of your experimental methodology almost as soon as you've done each part of it, while it's still fresh in your conscious mind. Months later, it would take much longer to write

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the same account, and it would not be nearly so good.

Don't just *do* your research, *log* it

One of the biggest dangers with research is that you can become so busy *doing* it, that you don't take the time to stop and make notes of what you've done. Writing it all up later may seem an attractive proposition when you're busy pressing on with the research, but in practice it can take much longer to write it up when the important details have faded from your conscious memory. Furthermore, if you train yourself to write things up as you go along, you don't have to carry nearly so much in your memory - you've 'captured' the ideas, processes, details, thoughts, questions, and so on all the way along.

Don't feel, however, that as you log your research that you should be choosing words so carefully that they will survive until the final edition of your dissertation. Trying to write down 'final' commentary or analysis is a daunting task. Remember that the notes you make along the way are just that - notes - and that you can continue to edit and improve them beyond recognition on the way to your final dissertation. But if you hadn't made the notes, it would be a much harder job - all sorts of details, thoughts, ideas, questions could have evaporated away long before you started to put them all into words.

Always have your pen or pencil at the ready - or if you're more comfortable with fingers on keyboard, make sure that you capture your thoughts and ideas on disk really often. Even two hours later, a bright idea which occurred to you could have evaporated away again if you hadn't taken the trouble to put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard.

Start thinking about the wording, as you make notes

At the end of the day, your research is only reckoned to be as good as the words you use to express it. You need in due course to communicate your thoughts, findings, ideas, hypotheses and so on to other people, not least your examiners. So as you practise capturing your research, keep experimenting with the wording. Do your best to say exactly what you mead in language which is quite self-explanatory. At the very least, this will help *you* to make sense of your thoughts and ideas when you revisit them later. At best, you're paving the way to writing your dissertation fluently and convincingly.

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Excerpted from *The Student's Guide to Preparing Dissertations and Theses*

Copy everything important

What if there was a fire, and all your data and results went up in smoke? What if someone stole your computer and your floppy disks? Why put yourself under such pressure? For the cost of some photocopying, you can have everything important in more than place. All the better if it is properly labelled with dates, titles, and so on, so that you can still make sense of it even if the originals have gone for ever in that fire, accident, theft or whatever.

What if my research gets 'stuck'?

Welcome to the world of *real* research. Research is like that. There are good days, good weeks, but also bad ones. Sometimes you will feel that you're heading up a blind alley, bashing your head against a brick wall, or trying to whisk treacle into your research. Why do you think there are so many metaphors about it? Because it happens to everyone.

There is however one well-tried remedy. Just try something else. Explore a different aspect of your research. Go off on a tangent - even for a short while. it's surprising how often these little diversions turn out to be important - perhaps even more important than the original target where the blockage occurred.

Overall, you need to stick within reason to your carefully planned research programme, but leave yourself freedom to follow-up interesting-looking diversions. Some of these are quite likely to turn out to be more interesting than some of your original research targets - and more worthy of including in your dissertation in due course.

Remember that it's all finite!

You haven't got one million words for your dissertation - nor 100 years to write it all up in. One of the vital research skills you will need to develop is about deciding what *not* to do, what *not* to include, what *not* to read, and so on. In practice, digging *too* deep in research often leads towards blind alleys. It's best to capture your thoughts on what is reasonably close to your research agenda, and resist the temptation to try and make notes of absolutely every little detail which may eventually turn out to have some importance. Many of the details can be ignored, at least until you establish why they may indeed be important. And if they *are* important, you should be able to find them a second time round. So, first time round, concentrate on what seems to be important, and don't go overboard with detail yet.

CAPTURING YOUR RESEARCH

Excerpted from *The Student's Guide to Preparing Dissertations and Theses*

Don't be a hermit!

Talk to people about your research as you do it. Talk to your supervisor of course. But also talk to any fellow researchers around you. Talk to other human beings too. Explaining what you're trying to do to a complete 'lay person' who has no knowledge at all about your particular subject, can be mind opening for you. The very act of explaining what you're trying to do helps you yourself to put it into perspective, and to work out what's most important. Talking to fellow research students is really beneficial - or you as well as for them. You're all fighting the same battle - to find something work writing down and analysing, to write it to the standards required, and to be able to defend your ideas in the presence of experts. The more you've argued your case with fellow students, the better you'll become able to argue the same case to your external examiner in due course.

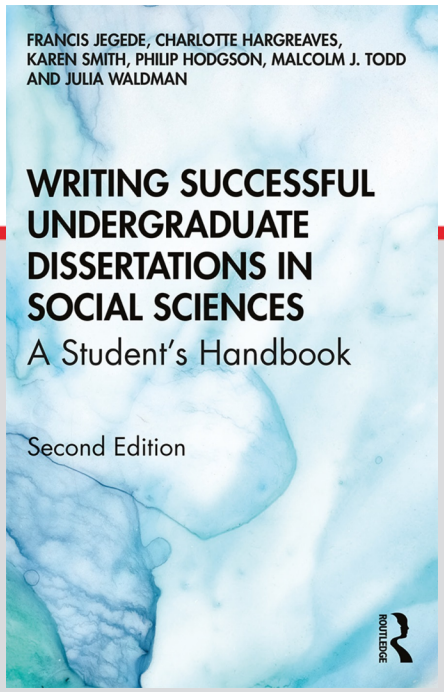
Don't stop reading

Keep reading the literature around your field of study. It changes fast. It can change daily in some areas. At the end of the day (in other words your viva) it is really important that there's nothing relevant and new that you haven't seen - and not only seen, but mentioned in your own work. While it's tempting to spend quite a lot of time on a literature review, then to press on with your own work, it's never safe to leave the literature to itself hoping nothing important will be added to it. Keep doing your web-searches, your scans of the most relevant journals each time an issue comes out, and so on. In any case, your literature 'top-up' activities can feel like a welcome break, now and then, to your own researches.

CHAPTER

5

SEARCHING AND REVIEWING LITERATURE



This chapter is excerpted from *Writing Successful Undergraduate Dissertations in Social Sciences, 2nd Edition* by Francis Jegede, Charlotte Hargreaves, Karen Smith, Philip Hodgson, Malcolm J. Todd, Julia Waldman.

Learn more

SEARCHING AND REVIEWING LITERATURE

Excerpted from *Writing Successful Undergraduate Dissertations in Social Sciences*

This chapter examines the essential skills in literature reviewing and offers advice on where to search for literature for your dissertation. It offers practical guide and tips on how to undertake an effective search to generate resources for your dissertation. The chapter also covers issues relating to referencing, citations, quoting, paraphrasing and acknowledging other people's work in a dissertation.

By the end of the chapter, you will have a better understanding of:

- Designing literature search strategy
- Where to search for literature
- How to access the resources you find
- What to do when you find the resources
- Who to ask for help.

What is a literature review?

A literature review is a systematic study and critical examination of completed or ongoing scholarly papers, documents and other published/unpublished materials on a particular topic to understand current knowledge. It is a useful synthesis of information and evaluation of works of other researchers to establish what is known or unknown about the subject of your dissertation. Reviewing literature offers you the opportunity to gain insights into what other people have done or said in the past that relates to your dissertation. Through this review, you will be able to understand current debates and discourses as well as theoretical and methodological issues relating to your dissertation. If you want to look at a literature review first hand, a simple way would be to look at any research journal article you have used during the course of your studies; a common feature will be a review of the literature prior to discussion of the research findings. This enables the research to be contextualised.

Why search the literature?

Conducting a systematic and thorough literature search will ensure that you find the majority of the resources that will help you to throw light on the questions you are researching. A literature search will show you whether someone has already answered the questions you are asking, or it will show you how other researchers have approached similar problems. You can develop new theories or concepts based on the evidence gathered from other scholars.

It is worth remembering that literature is more than just books; literature includes all of the following:

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- Books (reference, textbooks, monographs)
- Conference proceedings
- Encyclopaedias
- Journal articles
- Magazine articles
- Newspapers
- Official publications
- Online material
- Patents
- Published video/DVD material
- Reports
- Standards
- Theses
- TV/radio broadcasts.

There is a wealth of information out there. It is really important, therefore, to have a good search strategy and evaluation method in place to make sure you find the most relevant literature for your study. Based on its format, a literature review can be a systematic review, a secondary data analysis project or an introduction to a primary research topic. Just remember that looking at Wikipedia is not sufficient to produce an essay, never mind a dissertation! You will be assessed on the quality and the range of sources used.

What makes a good literature review?

The techniques you use for conducting your literature search and the way you write your review will depend on the aim and objectives of your dissertation. While some studies may require an extensive, in-depth review of literature, others may just need a short review of existing literature. Generally, a literature review tends to:

- Show your familiarity with past research and studies on your chosen topic and related subject;
- Provide a contextual framework for explaining key theories and concepts relating to your study;
- Position your research within the general discourse and debate in the field;
- Explain new concepts or define terminologies used in your dissertation to which the readers may not be familiar;
- Describe how your dissertation contributes to knowledge, by identifying

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gaps that your research is designed to fill or specific areas of knowledge to which your dissertation is complementary;

- Highlight the significance of your dissertation in relation to existing studies.

A good literature review will provide a comprehensive evaluation and examination of information on the topic of investigation and present this information in a logical and orderly fashion to help readers follow the discourse, debates, arguments and research findings of other researchers. Fully referenced, it should provide a good summary of relevant scientific literature relating to other people's work by synthesising what has been done, when and by whom so that readers can have a good understanding of how research and knowledge on the topic has developed over the years. Although selective, it should also provide readers with a good understanding of the background or context to the study and how the research fits or sits within existing knowledge or contributes to the development of new ideas. It should highlight key features of theories and concepts that have been used to underpin similar studies and the key assumptions of these theories (Figure 4.1). It is also important for a literature review to be balanced in terms of its coverage of different opinions and debates. To serve its purpose, a literature review should be critical and analytical in its approach so that new ideas and understanding can be developed from the evidence (Bolderston 2008).

How do I structure or organise my literature review?

Typically, a literature review should be organised in a chronological or thematical order. For a single topic study, a literature review usually requires a chronological approach where knowledge on the topic has developed over the years from past to present period (Lawrence 2011). Research that relates to different themes or multiple topics will typically require a thematic approach to literature review, although a chronological review of literature may still be carried out within each theme. Whichever approach you choose for your literature review, it is important you ensure a logical structure and flow as you weave together other scholars' work to present a coherent picture of knowledge on the topic of investigation.

Where do I find information for my literature review?

Information for your literature can be sourced in three main ways through hard copies and online material. These are: primary, secondary and tertiary sources (Panda and Alekya 2018).

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Primary sources: Some literature reviews rely on primary sources such as research reports as originally produced and published by scholars who conducted the study. These include journal articles, conference papers, theses and monographs, amongst others.

Secondary sources: These are based on literature review materials that are published or compiled by someone other than the original researcher who carried out the study. Typically, these include bibliographies, indexes and review articles compiled by a second party other than the original scholar.

Tertiary sources: Literature reviews based on tertiary sources are those that depend on search tools aimed at finding original primary or secondary literature. These include encyclopaedias, guides, handbooks and other fact-finding documents and databases.

Using search engines to find information

Search engines are programs that can search documents on the internet for keywords and then list those documents where the keywords were found. Well-known search engines include:

- Google – www.google.com/
- Yahoo – https://yahoo.com/
- Ask.com – https://uk.ask.com/
- Aol – www.aol.co.uk/
- Baidu – www.baidu.com/
- Bing – www.bing.com/
- DuckDuckGo – https://duckduckgo.com/
- Lycos – www.lycos.com/
- WolframAlpha – www.wolframalpha.com/
- Yandex – www.yandex.com

A good starting point is to search for concepts and themes on Google Scholar (www.scholar.google.com) which focus specifically on academic literature including peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, books, preliminary works, abstracts and technical reports. Many university library systems are linked to Google Scholar. If your library subscribes to the journal, you may be directed to the text via a library link after the title of the result, but if it does not, you may find you cannot access full articles without payment. It is advisable to use Google Scholar's advanced search option, which allows you to search more precisely, for example, by exact phrase, author or publication and by date. Google Scholar is only one of a

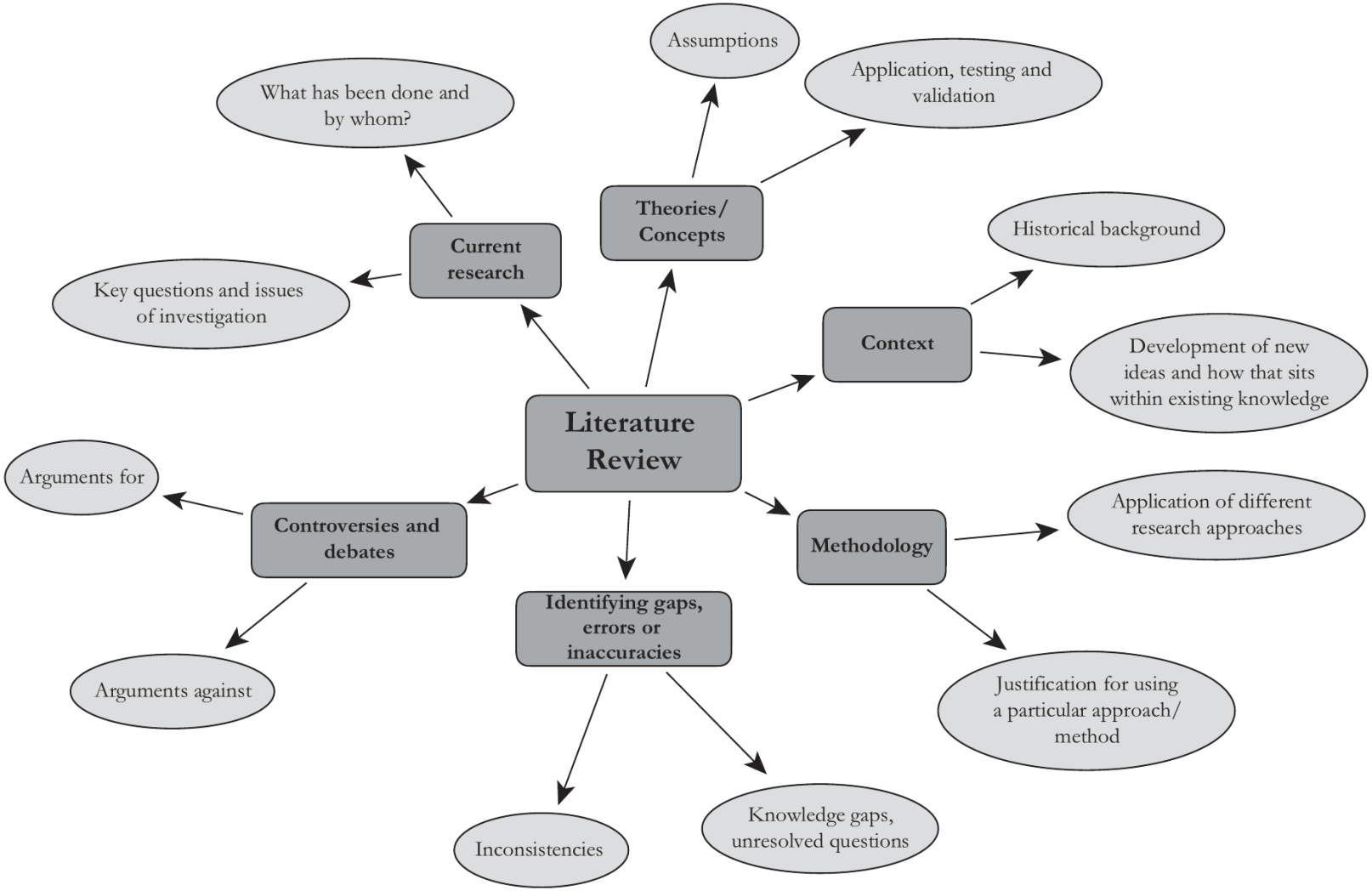

Figure 4.1 Features of a good literature review

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number of search engines and citation databases. As with other sources, it does not offer complete coverage of scholarly works. If you are looking for citation results, look at other sources as well, such as Web of Knowledge. Other sources will use different searching options, some of which will allow greater refinement of your searches.

Essential steps in literature review

A literature review involves a series of steps and processes to ensure you gather, synthesise and critically evaluate relevant materials that reflect existing knowledge in relation to your topic. Reviewing literature is a complex process and unwieldy initial search results will often require constant review and refinement over a period of time. The essential steps in undertaking your literature review are as summarised in Figure 4.2.

Starting your literature review

The first step is to define your general topic and then to undertake a scan of the literature. The purpose of this initial scan is to map your topic area to specific themes to get a sense of what has been done before in relation to the themes or key ideas that you stated. If, for example, your topic is school exclusion and young people and crime, you will need to look at literature on topics such as young people, education and crime and refine as and when you find useful information. You will need to think of other search terms to use; so, if you are looking at school exclusion you may wish to search for similar terms such as truancy, suspension, nonattendance and absenteeism. Although 'young people' is a commonly used term in England, remember that it may mean different things to different people (under 16, under 18, under 21?). In America the use of 'juvenile' is widely used. Your university librarian will be able to offer assistance on how to use search terms for a literature review.

Through this you will be able to identify gaps that will help you focus your topic and identify your research questions. You don't want your topic to be too broad or too vague. With your topic clearly focused, note the key words, ideas or concepts that encapsulate your study. With your search statements in place, it is time to start your search, which could be done manually or through the use of search engines.

A literature search could be based on:

SEARCHING AND REVIEWING LITERATURE

Excerpted from *Writing Successful Undergraduate Dissertations in Social Sciences*

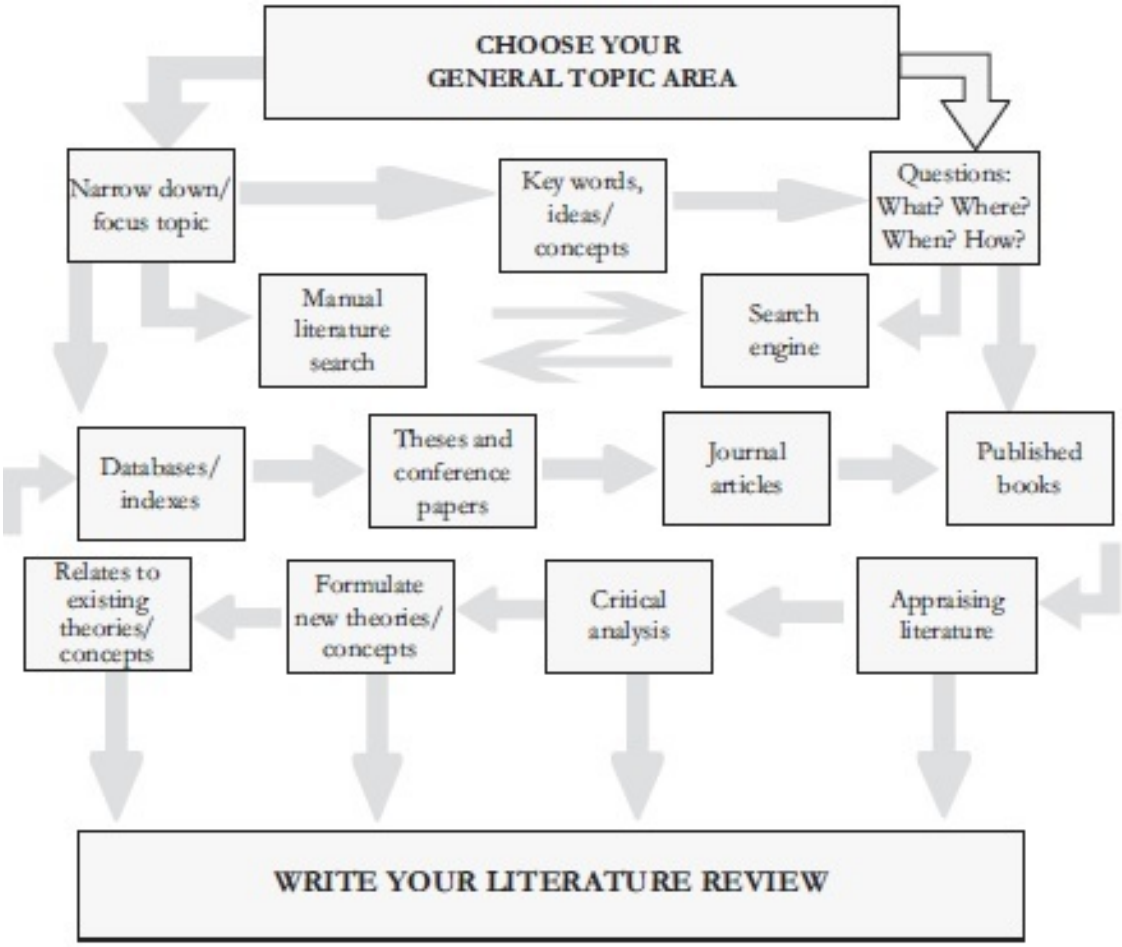

Figure 4.2 Essential steps in writing a literature review

- Published books
- Journal articles
- Theses and conference papers
- Databases or online sources.

You begin by searching for published books. Skim them for relevance, check their bibliographies for useful items and add them to your list. Then search for journal articles. Again, look at the reference list and add any that look interesting to your own. Repeat the same process with theses and conference papers. As you see, this is an iterative process, similar to a snowballing effect; you keep collecting relevant items and growing your bibliographical list.

Below are some suggestions as to where you can start your search for the

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four types of literature highlighted above. It is worth going to see your subject librarian as they will be able to point you to the best catalogues, databases and indexes for your topic that are available at your institution.

Published books

Your library catalogue is a good place to start your search for published books. However, you might want to extend this out to search the catalogues of the following:

- The Library of Congress: the largest library in the world, based in the USA.
- The European Library: this catalogue offers access to the resources of 47 national libraries in Europe.
- The British Library: the biggest library in the UK, which receives a copy of everything published in the UK.
- COPAC: the merged catalogues of major UK universities and national libraries.
- OPACS: library networked catalogues in education, research and public sectors.

Journal articles

Databases, abstracts and indexes are important sources for searching for journal articles. There are a large number of databases that you can use to search for and gather information for your literature review. Many of the databases contain collections that are subject-specific and have primary or secondary contents and articles which you may find relevant to your topic.

Using databases to find and gather information

for your literature review We have already talked about Google Scholar, other useful databases you may consult are:

Scopus

Scopus is Elsevier's abstract and citation database, launched in 2004. It is an extensive abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature in life sciences, social sciences, physical sciences, technology, medicine, arts and humanities. A trusted and highly regarded database by academics worldwide, it contains bibliometrics tools to track, analyse and visualise research. www.elsevier.com/

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PsycINFO

Produced by the American Psychological Association, PsycINFO is a database of abstracts of literature for topics in psychology. It covers a range of materials from journal articles, books, reports, theses, and dissertations on psychological, social, behavioural, and health sciences related subjects.
www.apa.org/pubs/databases/psycinfo/

ERIC

ERIC is an online digital library of education research and information, sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the US Department of Education. It covers a wide range of contents and education-related articles in its database.
www.ebsco.com/products/research-data bases/eric

EconLit

EconLit is an academic literature database published by the American Economic Association. It covers a wide range of contents on literature in the field of economics, dating back to 1969. It is a highly regarded database and a trusted source for economic citations and abstracts.

CINAHL database

CINAHL provides extensive coverage of literature for nursing and allied health journals. As trusted sources, nurses, allied health professionals, researchers, nurse educators and students depend on the *CINAHL Database* to research their subject areas. https://health.ebsco.com/products/thecinahl-database

Web of science

Web of Science is an online citation indexing service originally produced by the Institute for Scientific Information and maintained by Clarivate Analytics. It provides a comprehensive citation search and links the Web of Science Core Collection to regional citation indexes, patent data, specialised subject indexes and an index of research data sets. https://clarivate.libguides.com/woscc/citationreport

The International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)

The International Bibliography of the Social Sciences is a bibliography for social science and interdisciplinary research. It is a useful online resource and the database covers a wide range of topics in the social science disciplines, including anthropology, economics, politics, sociology, development studies, human

geography and environment science and gender studies. It covers journal articles, books, reviews and chapters from edited books.
https://proquest.libguides.com/IBSS

Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)

Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts provides essential information for researchers in sociology, economics, politics, education, health services and allied subjects. It covers topics on housing, education, health services, nursing, social work, substance abuse, mental health and gerontology, amongst others. The database has records from over 500 different journals.
https://proquest.libguides.com/assia

Sociological abstracts

Sociological Abstracts provides valuable international data on literature in sociology and related disciplines in the social and behavioural sciences. The database includes the Social Services Abstracts file that contains data on bibliographic list of current research that relate to social work, human services, and related topics. https://proquest.libguides.com/SocAbs

Theses and conference papers

Theses and dissertations are critical components of academic library research collections and literature review. Abstracts and indexes can also be used to find these kinds of literature. But there are some more specific sites you may consider for your dissertation:

ProQuest Dissertations and Theses: Produced by ProQuest, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses is an online database that provides full-text access to dissertations and theses. The database offers one of the most comprehensive collections of theses in the world with over 2.4 million records.

Index to Theses in Great Britain and Ireland: Index to Theses provides a comprehensive list of postgraduate theses and dissertations accepted by universities in the UK and Ireland since 1716 which you should be able to access through your university library.

EThOS e-theses online service: Produced by the British Library and has access to over 500,000 doctoral theses, which are immediately downloadable.
https://ethos.bl.uk/

EBSCO Open Dissertations: Includes content from American Doctoral Dissertations. It is a free database with records for more than 800,000 electronic

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theses and dissertations from around the world. www.ebsco.com/products/research-databases/ebsco-open-dissertations

DART-Europe: A partnership of research libraries and organisations working together to provide access to European research theses. http://www.dart-europe.eu/About/info.php

Trove: Helps you find and use resources relating to Australia; it brings together content from libraries, museums, archives and other research organisations. https://trove.nla.gov.au

Using communication technologies and social networking platforms to stay abreast of new literature

Social networking platforms (such as Facebook and LinkedIn), microblogging sites (such as Twitter) or researchers' own personal blogs can be an excellent way to find out about the most current research in your area. Many researchers will publicise their work through sites such as these and will sometimes link you to free copies of their articles. It is worth following some of the key researchers in your area; you might even start a conversation with them. If you are wanting to keep up to date with news sources, Reddit, the social news website, will allow you to follow discussions about specific issues relating to your dissertation.

Another way to keep up to date with your reading is to set up automatic alerts that let you know that a new article has been published in your area. You might set alerts up with specific journals or through a profile on Google Scholar, for example, or a Table of Contents alerting system, such as JournalTOCs: www.journaltocs.hw.ac.uk/. Harzing (2018)'s blog gives some useful guidance on how to keep on top of your reading without overloading yourself.

The bliss of browsing

The previous section has focused particularly on online searches (from catalogues to information gateways). However, you should not underestimate how productive perusing your library collection can be. It is worth spending some time browsing the shelves in the library. Once you have located a book that your search has highlighted, have a look and see what's placed around it – you never know what you might find!

Sourcing references

Having searched a number of sources, you might be overwhelmed by the volume of

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literature that your search produces. This is why it is so important to have defined the parameters of your topic when you begin planning your research, so that you can ascertain what is relevant to your topic and what is not. You should remember, however, that your dissertation is more than the literature that you review; so, set yourself a time-frame for searching and stop when your time is up. You must ensure that you leave sufficient time to cover the rest of your research.

With a list of references that you want to look at, you need to source those documents. If you are lucky, the document will be available at your own library. In this case, you will need only to go and collect it. Increasingly, universities have a large number of resources available in electronic or digital form. Sometimes, however, your library will not have a copy of the reference that you need. Initially, it is worth asking your supervisor if they have a copy you could borrow; if it is a key text in your area, they might well do. If not, then you need to see where the copies are held. If another library in your city has a copy, you might decide to go and access the document there. Most libraries have 'reading access' rights, meaning that you can go to their library and read the source but not take it away. You are unlikely, however, to get access to their electronic services. It is best to phone ahead and see whether it is worth making the trip.

If you are struggling to find a resource, your university will most likely operate an Inter-Library Loan (ILL) system. This means that the source you need will be ordered from another library and delivered to you. If the source is a book, you will be given a date by which you will need to return it. If it is a journal article, then you will probably be sent a photocopy by post or, increasingly, by email, but either way be aware that access will not be instant. You may also have to pay for this service, so make sure that the source is relevant for your research. At this stage, you will have access to the sources that will be the foundation to your research. It is worth checking your list with your supervisor; they will be able to tell you whether there are key references missing.

Working with sources

As you collect your list of references, you can keep a check on their relevance without initially reading them all in depth. You can pick up clues as to whether your source will be useful by reading the abstract, the conclusion and/or the contents page.

You will also need to evaluate the documents you have retrieved and the credibility of the author(s). If you are working with internet sources, you need to be even more careful when evaluating what you read because anyone can put

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anything on the internet (think Wikipedia!). Carefully consider the accuracy of the information you obtain from the internet and note the authorship, dates when the site was last updated and how you accessed the site.

Your institution's library may provide training on information literacy tutorial which will guide you in how to evaluate your sources. In the course of your literature review, you may disregard texts that do not meet the criteria of your study; however, you may need to refer to the bibliographies again to check whether there are sources listed there that look interesting, but which are not on your developing reference list.

It is essential that you keep a record of your sources and references as you go along, this will make your life much easier in the long run when you come to construct your reference list. Even articles you dismiss initially may subsequently prove to be of interest or useful as your ideas become more developed. There is nothing more frustrating than spending time that you do not have searching for the details of a source you can remember reading but did not record. As you collect your sources, you should be keeping a note of:

- Author
- Title (of article, journal, chapter, book)
- Editor (for edited books)
- Edition, volume, issue
- Publisher
- Place of publication
- Web page and date of access for internet sources
- Key words
- How you found the source – keep a record in your search strategies (some information databases will allow you to save searches and set up alerts).

You might also want to add in your comments on the source, to remind you at a later date why this particular piece was important.

There are different ways that you can store this information. The least technical is to make a note of details on index cards, which you then store alphabetically in an index-card box. You could, instead, keep a record in a Word or Excel document. The sorting function will enable you to quickly and easily arrange the references into alphabetical order; the find function will allow you to search for specific pieces of information.

Alternatively, you might decide to use a piece of bibliographic software, uch as Endnote, RefWorks, Mendeley and Zotero or Citationsy. These tools can help

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you manage your references by creating a database which can be searched and organised. They will keep all of your references in one place, they sometimes link to databases and they will make constructing consistent reference lists much easier. It is likely that your institution will support one of these tools. So, go to the library, find out which one is available and sign up for some training. If you start to use the bibliographic software early in your dissertation process, you will find that it saves you time in the long run. Whichever system you use, however, you should aim to keep complete and systematic notes on your references.

Reading the references

You should now have a list of and access to references which are relevant for our study. Now you should start reading those sources critically. Look for the key themes in the documents and try and identify how the sources fit together. This process is going to be time-consuming because you will be reading a large amount of material. Furthermore, once you start your reading, you might find that some of the literature is of little relevance to your study. Don't panic; this is something that many researchers and dissertation students experience and is often a necessary part of the process. It is better to read something that is not central to your dissertation than miss something that might be an important and relevant contribution to the field.

While reading, make notes about the central themes and arguments of the book, chapter or article. Try and get a sense of the theoretical perspective of the author; this will be of use when you come to organise and present your literature review. Also, emphasise the way in which the piece of literature you are reading seeks to set itself apart from other literature. Importantly, start to think critically about the piece you are reading: what is this person trying to say and why? How is it different from the way others have dealt with this issue? This critical component is very important as it demonstrates that you are engaging with relevant literature in an appropriate manner to develop your academic discourse and that you can discriminate between different perspectives and approaches that exist within your chosen field.

Keep track of what you read and try to organise all your notes into themes. As you read, ensure that you also keep a note of page numbers. This is important if you want to come back to the source to check your interpretation and also, when you write your dissertation, you will need to include page numbers in your citations. Making a note now can stop you wasting a lot of time later trying to find

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an elusive quote. Good note-taking and critical reading in the initial stages of your dissertation will lead to a much more effective and focused literature review.

Moving to the literature review

The literature review incorporates the notes that you have made during the reading of the literature that you have found. It is an important part of your dissertation because it performs a number of related functions. It demonstrates to your reader that you have read widely and that you are aware of the range of debates that have taken place within the given field. It provides the proof that you have more than a good grasp of the breadth and depth of the topic of the dissertation.

The literature review can provide the rationale for the research question in the study. This can be done by highlighting specific gaps in the literature – questions that have not been answered (or even asked) and areas of research that have not been conducted within your chosen field. In this way, the literature review can provide a justification of your own research. It can allow you to build on work that has already been conducted. For example, you might adopt a similar methodological or theoretical approach in your work to work that exists within the literature yet place your actual emphasis elsewhere. In this way, you are building on work that has already been conducted by adopting similar strategies and concepts yet focusing the question on something that interests you.

It also helps to define the broad context of your study, placing your work within a well-defined academic tradition. Poor dissertations often fail to relate to broader debates within the academic community. They may have a well-defined research question, yet, without placing this question in the appropriate context, the research can lose its significance. The literature review, therefore, can add weight to your question by framing it within broader debates within the academic community.

Drawing on support from others

Library staff

Library staff are available to answer general enquiries in person, by telephone and online (by email or online form). For subject-specific enquiries, subject librarians or subject specialists will usually be the best people to help, including advice regarding special collections. To get the most out of your subject librarian, make sure you are prepared before you make contact. You may need to make an

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appointment to discuss your queries.

- Think about your questions and write them down in advance.
- If you have a query about a specific publication or research report, allow enough time for the material to be located – an inter-library loan may be required.
- It will help the librarian if you give detailed information about your topic and mention which information sources you have already consulted.

If you have queries about searches, think of key words and terms to start with. The librarian may have ideas on other helpful search terms.

How can a librarian help you?

The librarian can help you to identify relevant bibliographical databases to search in order to identify appropriate materials. The librarian can then help with:

- Explaining the search strategy
- Identifying keywords
- Navigating an information database
- How to save searches and results
- How to access full-text links
- How to set up alerts
- How to broaden or focus your search
- Explaining about subject terms and descriptors
- Explaining about the thesaurus for getting the best results from any bibliographical tool
- Citation searching.

Libraries have online and paper-based guidance on a wide range of information issues. Typically, these include:

- Searching databases and finding research literature
- Web searching
- How to reference (including citing electronic resources) and managing references (for example, using software)
- New developments in search tools and websites
- Academic skills such as writing effectively
- Online tutorials
- Advice and help for students with specific learning needs.

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Libraries may also run training in-house on many of the above, and you may find, depending upon your individual learning style, that attending one or more of these may increase your skills and confidence more quickly than using online tutorials. The hope is that not only will you produce a dissertation that helps you to gain a good degree but that you will learn skills of information literacy that you will be able to use again and again both in your academic and professional careers.

Your supervisor

Do not forget that your supervisor is there to help you as well. They are likely to have expertise in your area and will be able to point you in the direction of some good initial sources. As you build your database of documents, check with your supervisor that you are going in the right direction. You should also share any new references that you find; supervisors will be pleased if you come across references that they have not seen before. Your supervisor will also be able to give you advice as to how you can best structure your literature review (see Chapter 2).

Key messages

- A literature review is an informative, critical and useful synthesis of research or knowledge relating to your study.
- You need to decide on the appropriate literature search strategies for your dissertation.
- Smart searching is key to success in writing your literature review.
- Be systematic in your search and keep a note of everything that you find.
- Make use of the full range of support available to you from within your institution and go and talk to your subject librarian.

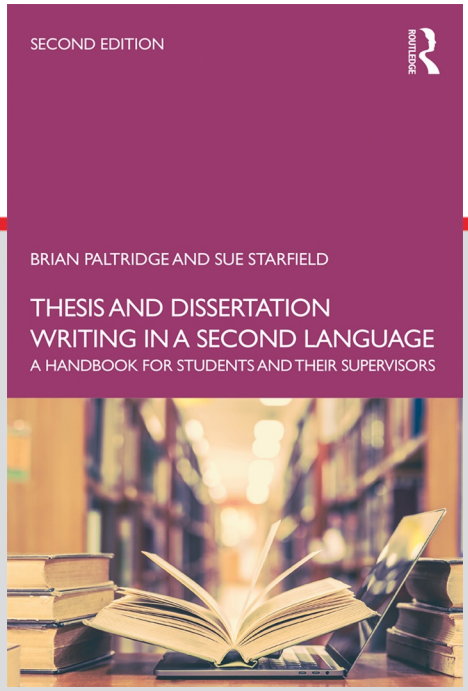
Key questions

- Where can you find information for your literature review?
- Have you defined your research clearly enough in order to construct search strategies that return sources relevant to your research?
- Do you have the right skills to search for material online (journals, indexes, databases, etc.)? If not, where can you get access to such support within your own institution?
- What support does the library offer in terms of help with finding literature and other research (training courses, individual support)?
- Are you familiar with what your own library offers – online resources, books, journals, audio-visual material, etc.?
- How will you structure or organise your literature review?

CHAPTER

6

WRITING THE METHODOLOGY CHAPTER



This chapter is excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

by Brian Paltridge, Sue Starfield.

Learn more

WRITING THE METHODOLOGY CHAPTER

Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

This chapter discusses issues to consider in writing a methodology chapter or methodology section of a chapter that are particularly relevant to second language speakers of English. This chapter is also sometimes referred to as the 'research design' chapter.

While virtually all theses we have looked at thus far contain an introduction and a review of the literature in some format or another as discussed earlier, this is not necessarily the case for the methodology. Although it is hard to imagine conducting a research study without a clear investigative approach, not all fields, particularly some in the humanities, clearly articulate their methodological orientation. The evolution of the thesis genre over time as discussed in Chapter 5 has meant that the conventional Introduction-Methods-Results-Discussion format for reporting on research, in which the methods or methodology chapter typically appeared after the introduction and/or literature review, and was clearly identifiable as such is no longer mandatory, with writers having greater choice as to layout and formats, more specifically in regard to qualitative research (discussed in more detail below and also in Chapter 5). In fact, qualitative research can present particular challenges for second language thesis and dissertation writers, some of which are considered in this chapter, including the presentation of the role of the researcher in the research.

In this chapter we present several examples of methodology chapters and sections (see Boxes 8.1–8.5) to illustrate the diversity of approaches to conceptualising a study's methodological choices. The strongest influences on choice of methodology and methods are, of course, the discipline and the research paradigm being adopted. This is why, as we stress throughout the chapter, it is important that you consult recent theses and dissertations in your own field when you are looking for examples of how to organise your own thesis. It is a good idea to ask your supervisor to help you identify some recently submitted theses in your field that they consider well organised in terms of their methods/methodology sections so that you can examine them. They will probably all differ in various ways but you will learn a lot from this exercise.

Students are often not fully aware of the purposes of the methodology section of the thesis: one of its key roles is provide sufficient information to the reader to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the results and findings (Smagorinsky, 2008; Cotos et al., 2017). Thomson (https://patthomson.net/2014/08/14/the-audit-trail-a-too-common-omission-in-methods-chapters/) explains that the methodology chapter needs to provide an *audit trail* that builds

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the credibility of your study in order to persuade your examiners that you are competent to carry out independent research. An audit trail, according to Thomson, consists of information about the actual data you have generated and information about how you have analysed the data. In order to 'show your workings' (Holliday, 2007, p. 42) or present a clear audit trail, the methods of data collection and analysis need to be explicitly presented, described, and discussed, often with reference to specific literature that supports your claim as to why these are the most appropriate methods for your study.

It is important to understand the distinction between methodology and methods where it is relevant to your disciplinary area and we discuss this below. Failing to appreciate this distinction may lead not only to inadequate description of the approach and framework adopted by your study but also to an absence of argument and justification for your chosen approach. This chapter also considers typical problems reported by an experienced examiner of PhD theses, many of which relate to an underdeveloped understanding of the role and function of this section of the thesis and suggests ways to overcome these in your writing. This chapter is not, however, a guide on how to design a research study, there are many handbooks that offer advice on this (for e.g., Punch, 2012; Creswell, 2014). The focus of this chapter is on writing your methodology and methods chapter.

In addition, it is important for students to realise that simply looking at research articles to provide guidance on how to compose a methodology section may not be adequate as methods sections in contemporary scientific research articles tend to be 'extremely compressed', whereas in theses they are likely to be 'more leisurely and explicit' (Swales, 2004, p. 86). This suggests that more time needs to be spent on thinking about this chapter and more space devoted to it in your thesis. One of the key functions of the methodology section is to enable other researchers to replicate the study; this may account for the lengthier methodology components of research theses as opposed to the more terse research article (Swales, 2004).

The place of the methodology section

The location of the methodology section in the thesis may vary. In the traditional 'simple' thesis (see Chapter 5), it is typically a separate chapter preceding the results chapter, in the 'complex' traditional thesis, each discrete study may contain its own methodology or methods section as shown in Box 8.1.

BOX 8.1 EXTRACT FROM TABLE OF CONTENTS OF A 'COMPLEX' TRADITIONAL THESIS SHOWING FIRST THREE CHAPTERS: CHAPTERS 2 AND 3 HAVE THEIR OWN METHODS SECTIONS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

(*Continued*)

WRITING THE METHODOLOGY CHAPTER

Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

Source: Inman (2018, pp. v–vii)

In order to further illustrate options for the organisation of methods sections, Box 8.2 contains a chapter from a PhD thesis by publication: all three chapters have been either published or will be submitted for publication. The chapter outline looks very similar to that of the 'complex' traditional thesis extract shown in Box 8.1. What is worth noting is the author's use of a numbering system for chapter sub-headings and sub-sub headings. A numbering system can help readers to follow the writer's organisation of the methods sections and can also assist the writer to help organise his or her thoughts. To help you to decide whether or not to use a numbering system, consult recent theses in your field and talk to your

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supervisor about what format he or she prefers.

The chapter extract in Box 8.3 is from a 'simple' traditional PhD (see Chapter 5) that is comprised of four chapters: Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results, Conclusion (Kennedy Neth, 2018). Depending on the type of study being carried out, this may be an option to consider but it does seem less common than the thesis by publication or the 'complex' traditional thesis, particularly in the sciences and engineering fields.

BOX 8.2 EXTRACT FROM TABLE OF CONTENTS OF THESIS BY PUBLICATION

Source: Gilson (2018, pp. xi–xii)

Box 8.4 contains an extract from the Table of Contents of a PhD thesis that examines women's participation in sport through a study of perceptions of female boxers. Its investigative approach is largely qualitative and draws on feminist research paradigms but does have a quantitative component, as 146 The methodology chapter shown in the extract reproduced in Box 8.4. The extract shows an outline of Chapter 3, titled 'Methods'. The chapter outline not only provides the reader with the details of the different data collections methods but indicates that the chapter will also discuss the methodological approach taken via a consideration of ontological

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Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

BOX 8.3 EXTRACT FROM TABLE OF CONTENTS OF 'SIMPLE' TRADITIONAL THESIS

Source: Kennedy Neth (2018, p. vi)

and epistemological issues. The overall chapter structure of the thesis is a hybrid, topic-based one as Chapter 1 is the Introduction, Chapter 2 is the Literature Review, and Chapter 3 is the Methods (see Box 8.4). These chapters are followed by three topic-based chapters and a Conclusion.

BOX 8.4 EXTRACT FROM TABLE OF CONTENTS OF HYBRID, TOPIC-BASED THESIS SHOWING METHODS CHAPTER

WRITING THE METHODOLOGY CHAPTER

Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

Source: Aitken (2016, pp. vi–vii)

BOX 8.5 EXTRACT FROM THE TABLE OF CONTENTS OF A TOPIC-BASED PHD: METHODOLOGY COMPONENT IS INCLUDED IN THE INTRODUCTION

Source: Jane (2012, p. 3)

In topic-based theses (more typical in the social sciences and humanities), there may not be a separate chapter with the title 'methodology' or the chapter may have a more metaphorical title or there may be no methodology component at all. Box 8.5 contains the Table of Contents outline of the first chapter of a PhD thesis in media studies in which the methodology section is included in the introduction. The remaining chapters (1–5) are all topic based. It is interesting to note that both the Introduction and the final chapter titled Conclusion sit outside of the numbering system.

WRITING THE METHODOLOGY CHAPTER

Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

ACTIVITY 8.1 LOCATING THE METHODOLOGY SECTION IN THESES IN YOUR FIELD

Examine the contents pages of three recent theses in your field and reflect on why the writer has opted for the chosen format. Consider

- the location of the methodology chapter or section;
- the chapter or section titles and sub-headings;
- whether, if there is no discernible methodology component to the thesis, why that might be.
- what format you might adopt for your study and why you would do so.

Methodology vs Methods

Methodology refers to the theoretical paradigm or framework in which the student is working, to the stance he or she is taking as a researcher (e.g., choosing a quantitative or qualitative paradigm) and the argument that is built in the text to justify these assumptions, theoretical frameworks, and/or approaches as well as the choice of research questions or hypotheses. The methodology develops an explanation as to why the research methods under discussion have been chosen. The section will probably require a restatement of your research aims/questions and involve explaining to the reader how your chosen research method(s) will help answer the research questions. Figure 8.1 provides a 'visual map' of key distinctions between methodology, methods, and materials.

In the annotated extract in Box 8.6, taken from the beginning of the Research Design chapter of the thesis, the writer starts with an overview of the chapter in which he outlines how the research design combines both quantitative and qualitative components. He makes it clear that the chapter contains a 'methodological discussion' which will examine 'empirical dilemmas' in the area under discussion in the thesis – dilemmas which emerge from the theoretical issues discussed in the previous chapter relating to 'conceptualisation'. In other words, part of this chapter will consider theoretical issues at a fairly high level of abstraction (the methodology) although, as the writer tells us, the bulk of the chapter will focus on the qualitative case studies and the quantitative data set (the methods).

In Box 8.6, we have underlined the key verbs that announce what the

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Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

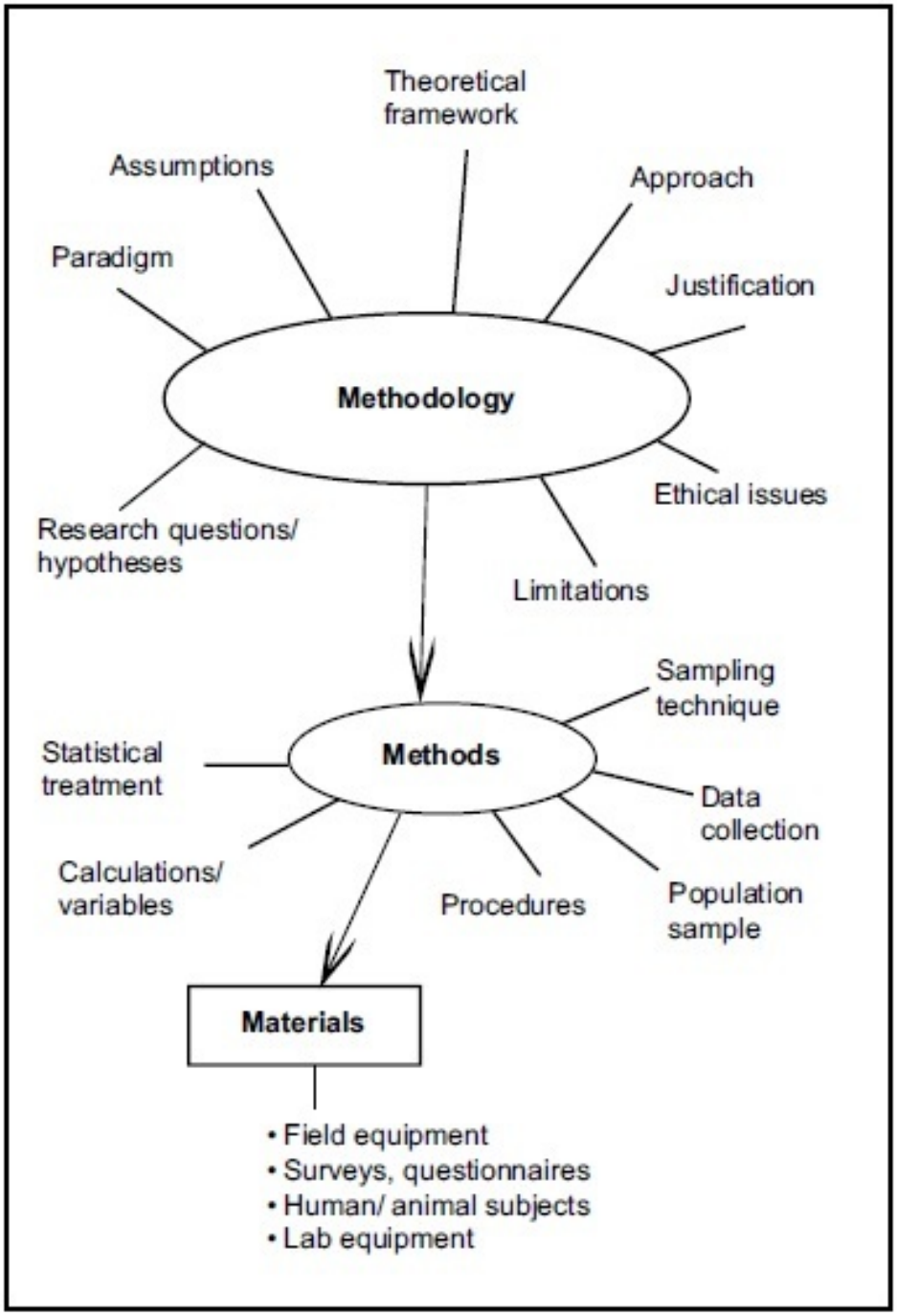

Figure 8.1 Visual map of typical components of methodology chapter.

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chapter will cover. The paragraph begins with a simple *describe* but quickly moves to higher order activities such as *present a more detailed consideration, consider* through to *argue*, emphasising that, in this chapter, the writer is building a justification for his selection of research design and approach.

Some recent research into methods sections in research articles helps us think about the role and function of the methodology chapter in theses and dissertations. While no research has specifically looked at theses' chapters, we can draw on the model developed for research articles which the authors have called, following the CARS model (see Chapter 6), Demonstrating Rigour and Credibility (DRaC) (Cotos et al., 2017). As the authors emphasise, disciplinary norms play a key role in establishing what counts as rigorous and credible research. DRaC has three

BOX 8.6 EXTRACT FROM THE OPENING PARAGRAPH OF RESEARCH DESIGN CHAPTER OF A PHD THESIS IN HISTORY (ANDREWS, 1997, P. 64)

Chapter 3

Note chapter title

RESEARCH DESIGN

Writer uses 'I'.

Writer builds argument through the paragraph to justify choice of research methodology.

In this chapter, I *describe* the research strategy that I have used to study the impacts of the Mississippi civil rights movement. Building on the conceptualisation of movement outcomes presented in Chapter 2, I *present a more detailed consideration* of the empirical dilemmas for research on outcomes. This initial methodological discussion applies generally to studies of movement outcomes. In addition, I *consider* the Mississippi movement as a case study, in terms of its strengths and limitations. The majority of the chapter focusses on the two components of the research design: the qualitative case studies and the quantitative dataset of Mississippi counties. The analysis that flows from these two distinct research strategies is complementary. In fact, I *argue* that both are essential because each answers different types of questions about the relationship of movements to outcomes.

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moves (see below) that embody the purpose of the methodology/methods chapter which is essentially to show that the chosen methods have been rigorously applied and that they therefore provide justification that the data and analysis can be trusted:

> *Move 1: Contextualizing Study Methods* by providing references to previous work and background information, identifying the methodological approach;
>
> *Move 2: Describing the study* by providing all the specific details of the study, and how it was carried out including 'key information necessary for potential replication and for a full understanding of how the study derived new knowledge.'
>
> *Move 3: Establishing credibility* by aiming 'to persuade readers of the quality of analysis and implicitly claim that the study procedure leads to valid and credible findings.'
>
> (Cotos et al., 2017, pp. 97–98)

Methods refers to the actual research instruments and materials used. The chosen methodology informs the choice of methods and what counts as data. For example, interviews, participant observation, and discourse analysis are methods commonly used in qualitative research (see for e.g., Box 8.7), whereas in quantitative research the methods and materials used in a laboratory or other experimental settings may be commonly in use in that field but may also be specific to that site and the study being conducted (see for e.g., Box 8.10). The writer needs to discuss why a particular method was selected and not others. The writer should refer to the literature on the method(s) under review and justify their choice of using the literature. The justification should revolve around the intrinsic value of the research method chosen in terms of yielding the data that not only will enable the student to answer the research questions but could also address issues like limited time, the fact that it is a preliminary study, and financial constraints.

A review of methods used by similar studies

A sophisticated methodology chapter will review the methods used by other, often seminal, studies in the student's area and comment on their limitations and strengths in terms of the methods utilised. In Box 8.8, the writer provides three major justifications for his choice of the unit of analysis. The final one is the

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Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

BOX 8.7 EXTRACT FROM A QUALITATIVE PHD THESIS DESCRIBING METHODS

Methods are the ways in which a researcher gathers, interacts with, and constructs data (Charmaz, 2006). In the approach for this study, methods are tools to help the researcher see the phenomenon being studied through the participants' perspectives. (…) For this research, primary methods for data collection included key informant and semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), health facility assessments, observation, field notes, and review of published and grey literature.

Source: Chynoweth (2015, pp. 38–39)

BOX 8.8 EXTRACT JUSTIFYING CHOICE OF UNIT OF ANALYSIS

Unit of analysis

For the quantitative analysis and case studies I use counties as the unit of analysis. There are three major reasons for using counties rather than municipalities. *First*, the movement mobilised at the county level in Mississippi. There was often variation in the county in terms of which areas had greater levels of participation in the movement. Fortunately, the case studies allow me to examine this variation. Nevertheless, counties were a primary organisational unit because they were the most important political unit in Mississippi containing, for example, the County Board of Supervisors, the most significant political body in local Southern politics (see Black and Black 1987 and Krane and Shaffer 1992). This leads to a *second* reason for using counties as the unit of analysis – important outcomes can be measured at the county level. *Finally*, a large body of political research uses counties as the unit of analysis dating back (at least) to Matthews and Protho's

Justification of choice of methods. Note use of signposting: first, second, finally (our italics).

Refers to previous studies as further justification, including seminal study.

(*Continued*)

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Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

Anticipates results of study.

classic study *Negroes and the New Southern Politics* (1966). Following in this tradition allows the results of this study to be compared to this broader body of research (see for example Alt 1994, 1995; Black and Black 1987; Colby 1986: Davis 1987: James 1988: Roscigno and Tomaskovic-Devey 1994: Salamon and Van Evera 1973: Stewart and Sheffield 1987: Timpone 1995 on electoral politics: Conlon and Kimenyi 1991 on schools: and Colby 1985 on poverty programs).

Source: Andrews (1997, pp. 72–73)

existence of a substantial body of literature which not only gives support to the writer's choice of 'unit of analysis' but will also allow the writer to locate himself within a tradition and enable his results to be compared to the 'broader body of research'. Thus, we see clearly that the description of the methods employed should never be merely a description but always link to the writer's broader rhetorical purpose – to persuade the reader that this is a serious piece of academic

ACTIVITY 8.2 METHODOLOGY SECTIONS

1 Think about the overall role and function of the methodology section in relation to the visual 'map' in Figure 8.1. Use the map structure to generate a mind map of your own methodology section and its key components.

2 Examine methodology sections from a couple of recent theses in your field:
   - Was there a justification of the choice of methodology, theoretical framework, or research design?
   - Which elements of the 'visual map' were included?
   - How were these elements ordered and was a justification offered for their choice?
   - How 'reader friendly' was the section?
   - Did the writers discuss limitations to the research or problems they encountered during the research?

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research, building on, while adding new knowledge to, a solid tradition, by means of reputable methods of investigation.

How the research was conducted and how the data were obtained

In addition, the methodology section should explain how the research was conducted and how the data were obtained – how the particular method(s) were used. This section will require a detailed description of the research processes and procedures as well as an explanation of the reasons for doing so. Writers classic study Negroes and the New Southern Politics (1966). Following in this tradition allows the results of this study to be compared to this broader should consider the extent to which the method(s) chosen have shaped their data. For example, in qualitative research, writers will need to describe:

- how they obtained their informants or drew their sample
- the location/setting of interviews
- the themes covered in the interview
- piloting, adjustments made, reasons for this
- how they overcame obstacles they encountered

Knowing how the data were collected helps the reader evaluate the validity and reliability of the results as well as the conclusions that are drawn from them. Replicability of the study is also an important consideration and is another reason for the detailed description of methods and procedures. In Box 8.9, the writer clearly sets out the four sources of his data and then goes on to describe each, in turn, while highlighting the strengths and limitations of each of the sources.

In a study of master's project reports in Computer Science, Harwood (2005) found that students included discussion not only of procedures used but also of procedures that could have been followed but were not and of procedures that were attempted but failed. This feature of the thesis has also been noted by Swales and Feak (2000) and again distinguishes the thesis from the published journal article where the researcher may not mention the 'blind alleys and false starts … integral to the research process' (Harwood, 2005, p. 254). In the PhD thesis, in particular, the writer may be seeking to alert other researchers to potential pitfalls as well as to defend him or herself from possible criticism that they had not considered all available options.

In Box 8.10, from the section titled *Materials and Methods*, of a thesis in

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Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

BOX 8.9 DESCRIPTION AND EVALUATION OF DATA SOURCE

Data

The research for this study was derived from four major sources: (1) archival collections of participants, civil rights organisations, and government agencies, (2) informant interviews, (3) newspapers, and (4) reports and documentation of various organisations and agencies such as the United States Commission on Civil Rights. Let me describe each, in turn, highlighting the limitations and strengths of each.

Explanation of sources of research data.

Reference to strengths and weaknesses of different methods.

Archival Collections

By far, the most valuable source of data for this study was the archival collections that document mobilisation at the local level. The major collections consulted for this study are listed in Appendix B. Nevertheless, one limitation of the archival collections is the almost exclusive documentation of major civil rights organisations (e.g., CORE and SNCC) and the early 1960s: this limitation is reflected in the historical scholarship.

Writer begins evaluation of source.

Source: Andrews (1997, pp. 88–89)

marine biology, the writer provides us with an extremely detailed description of the research setting and of the methods and materials used in the fish tagging program. The information provided would enable the study to be replicated or adapted in a different context, in other words to be of use to others in the field

How the data were processed

It is also essential to describe how the information obtained in the research process was analysed, prior to moving into a discussion of the results or findings. This section may vary in length depending on the amount of explanation that is

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Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

BOX 8.10 EXTRACT FROM MATERIALS AND METHODS SECTIONS OF PHD THESIS IN MARINE BIOLOGY DESCRIBING RESEARCH SETTING AND METHODS AND MATERIALS USED

2.2 Materials and Methods

2.2.1 ERWDA cooperative tagging program

Detailed description of procedures and materials allowing for replication.

Location of study and background information.

Impersonal language. Researcher is not mentioned explicitly.

A cooperative tagging program was developed through the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency (ERWDA) in Abu Dhabi to administer the deployment of conventional tags on sailfish in the southern Gulf. Recreational fishermen and charter fishing captains volunteered to tag and release sailfish to advance scientific knowledge and promote conservation of the species. Captures were accomplished using standard sportfishing techniques including trolling with lures, as well as dead and live baits. Both circle and "J" hooks were used, however circle hooks were nearly always used when live baiting. Tagging activities took place during private fishing excursions and fishing tournaments using FloyTM (Seattle, Washington) model FIM-96 small size billfish

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Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

Use of visuals to illustrate material used.

tags. Each tag consists of an 11 cm length of yellow coloured polyolefin tubing with a unique serial number, return address and telephone number and notice of reward printed along the tag. A medical grade nylon dart is affixed to the tag with a short length of monofilament line. Data cards having corresponding serial numbers along with information fields for date of release, latitude, longitude, weight, lower jaw – fork length, angler and captain address details and remarks were distributed with each tag (Figure 2-1). Tags were infixed approximately 4 cm into the epaxial muscle with a standard stainless steel applicator tipped tagging pole. Tagging was normally conducted while the sailfish were in the water, but in some instances when measurements were required the animal would be lifted onboard the vessel. Standard practice included removing the hook prior to release and using revival procedures (towing fish slowly behind the vessel), when necessary.

Billfisg tagging report Tag No: E03406

SPECIES	النوع	DATE	التاريخ
LATITUDE	المكان	WEIGHT lbs. or kg	الوزن
LONGITUDE	خط الطول	LENGTH in. or cm	الطول
ANGLER	الصياد	CAPTAIN	القبطان
ADDRESS	العنوان	ADDRESS	العنوان
CITY/STATE/COUNTRY	المدينة / البلد	CITY/STATE/COUNTRY	المدينة / البلد
TEL/FAX	رقم الهاتف/رقم الفاكس	TEL/FAX	رقم الهاتف/رقم الفاكس
CONDITION OF FISH/REMARKS			الملاحظات

Figure 2-1 Billfish tagging data card (not to scale).

Source: Hoolihan (2005, pp. 17–18)

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needed in the specific field of study. The degree of explanation needed reflects the degree to which there is agreement or shared understanding in the field; the greater length of methods sections in the social as compared to the hard sciences suggests less unanimity as to methodological practice (Brett, 1994). For example, in the hard sciences, statistical treatments such as 'Pareto curves' or 'multivariate

BOX 8.11 ACCOUNT OF HOW DATA WERE PROCESSED FROM PHD IN MARINE BIOLOGY

2.2.3 Modelling analyses

Detailed account of how data were processed. Note that Brownie *et al.* model class is not described in detail but simply referred to.

Justification of type of analysis used.

The "Brownie *et al.* Recoveries" model class in program MARK (White and Burnham, 1999) was used to estimate probabilities of sailfish survival (S) and tag-recovery rates (*f*) from the harvest of previously tagged fish. Survival rates are useful in that they often have the greatest impact on population growth rates; although in terrestrial species recruitment is the bigger force. The required input file for program MARK was constructed from individual encounter histories using a binary code of 1 or 0 to designate whether or not an animal was encountered on a particular occasion (Figure 2-2).

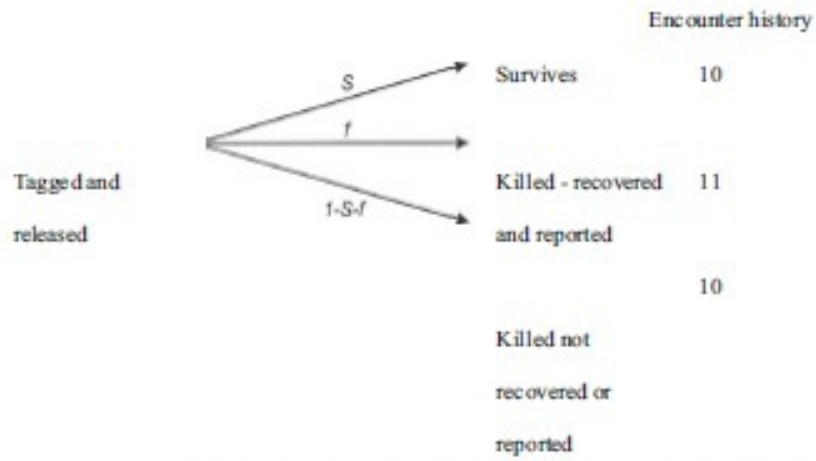

Figure 2-2. History coding for dead recoveries (redrawn from White and Burnham, 1999).

Source: Hoolihan (2005, pp. 20–21)

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Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

BOX 8.12 USE OF IMPERSONAL LANGUAGE IN DATA ANALYSIS SECTION OF A PHD THESIS IN MARINE BIOLOGY

Tagging data *were placed* on a SQL server and accessed through a proprietary software program that included forms for issuing, deployment and recapture of tags. In addition to basic search facilities, specific report writing functions were available to monitor levels of angler/captain participation and the temporal and spatial aspects of sailfish movements. The tagging data *were analysed* to determine recapture rates, days at liberty, distance travelled (linear displacement), spatial pattern of recaptures and estimates of probability for survival and recovery. During the period of 19 November 1998 to 7 April 2004 a total of 2053 ERWDA tags *were deployed* on Gulf sailfish by 45 captains and 841 anglers participating in the program.

Source: Hoolihan (2005, p. 19)

Description of how data were processed. Note use of passive voice and impersonal style. Who analysed the data is not considered important. Impersonal verbs in the passive voice are italicised.

analysis' may not need to be explained in detail as they form part of the shared and accepted procedures of a particular field (see Box 8.11 for an example of this). The language used is often impersonal, with verbs in the passive voice, in order to focus on the processes involved (see Box 8.12). This section should also discuss any problems encountered with the analysis or limitations.

Ethical issues

It is vitally important that students be aware of their university's ethical research requirements. As we reported in Chapter 2, some international students encountered ethics review requirements for the first time when commencing doctoral studies in Australia, underlining how students must become familiar with their new institution's expectations. Issues of informed consent, anonymity, the need for the informant to emerge unharmed from the experience, and issues around power relations are key issues to consider. Your university's ethics requirements will apply regardless of where you are doing your research.

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Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

When writing your methodology chapter, you will need to explain that you have approval from your university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Ethics Committee to carry out your study and, if you are carrying out interviews, include a

BOX 8.13 EXTRACT FROM A METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN CHAPTER

4.6.2 Ethical considerations

Yet another crucial consideration for classroom-based researchers is that of maintaining ethical research practices. In this regard, I had to undergo a thorough university ethics' approval process, which included the submission of drafts of participant consent forms, interview protocols and methodological procedures. My ethics approval took eight months to complete due to the stringent nature of my university's recently formulated guidelines regarding participants from refugee backgrounds. These guidelines highlighted the specific linguistic and social needs of refugee participants, emphasising their vulnerability to mental distress and anxiety. For example, my participant consent forms had to include a section in which I undertook not to cause undue anxiety or stress to participants (see Appendix L). In addition, I had to provide the contact details of counselling services to which I could refer the participants should they have experienced any distress as a result of our interaction. Furthermore, I had to undertake to provide oral translations of the participant consent forms for all learner interview participants. This I effected with the assistance of the L1 interpreters. Only once participants had had the consent forms read to them in their L1 and thoroughly explained to them, were they asked to sign the forms. … Although I found the ethics approval process time-consuming and sometimes tedious and stressful, I felt that it was a useful exercise in reinforcing my observation of key ethical principles throughout the study, including confidentiality and fair and accurate reporting of the findings.

Source: Ollerhead (2013, p. 72)

copy of informed consent forms and interview questions in an appendix. Box 8.13 contains an extract from a Methodology and Research Design chapter of a qualitative study of students from refugee backgrounds in which the writer provides a detailed account of her approach to carrying out her research in an ethical manner.

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Excerpted from *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language*

The particular challenges of qualitative research

There is evidence to suggest that second language students may avoid doing and writing about qualitative research because of the perceived linguistic challenges involved. Belcher and Hirvela (2005, p. 188) report that they have observed second language students being repeatedly discouraged, both by their peers and by academic faculty, from 'taking the qualitative route'. In a study of the issues faced by Hong Kong scholars writing for publication, Flowerdew (1999, p. 257) reported the perception of several interviewees that non-native speakers of English are better suited to writing in the more predictable formats typical of quantitative research articles in the sciences and engineering in which the language used is 'quite simple and straightforward'. Qualitative research papers, as commonly found in arts and humanities, were seen as requiring more sophisticated language skills as well as lacking set formats. As noted by Miles and Huberman:

> The reporting of qualitative data may be one of the most fertile fields going: there are no fixed formats, and the ways data are being analysed and interpreted are getting more and more various. As qualitative data analysts, we have few shared canons of how our studies should be reported. Should we have normative agreement on this? Probably not now - or, some would say, ever.
>
> (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 299)

Thesis writers who opt for the relative 'safety' of quantitative research will in all probability become writers of quantitative research papers, thus diminishing perhaps the likelihood of the unique cross-cultural perspective they might otherwise have brought to the world of international research (Flowerdew, 1999). Those second language researchers who choose the more challenging formats of qualitative research may need to be particularly persuasive and articulate as they grapple with, for example, the complex theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and innovative presentation formats of theses in very qualitative areas, such as the new humanities (see Chapter 5), for, as Richardson (2000) has argued, in qualitative research, writing becomes an integral part of the research process. Nevertheless, as Belcher and Hirvela (2005) have shown, with motivation, encouragement, and support, second language speakers may successfully rise to the challenge of writing a qualitative thesis. They point out, however, that the processes of qualitative research place 'particularly heavy demands on writers and language users' (Belcher & Hirvela, 2005, p. 189), not only in the carrying out of fieldwork,

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interviews, observation, reflection, and data analysis but also because the genres for reporting qualitative research are ill-defined and 'fuzzy'. So, as Turner (2003) advises, students should be aware that there may be risks associated with challenging accepted forms of thesis writing and that successful theses should always be constructed around a convincing, intelligible argument whatever the methodologies or approaches involved.

Two of the second language students interviewed by Belcher and Hirvela (2005) had devised useful strategies for helping them cope with the lack of a predictable format for qualitative research. One of the students, Chantsvang, set up a support group with friends who were writing qualitative dissertations: 'I found myself drowning in data…I discussed what problems I had, and they discussed their problems as we tend to exchange our opinions' (p. 199). Another student, Liang, found that reading a lot of qualitative research articles in her field helped her write up her data: 'I really read carefully how do TESOL scholars do their discourse analysis' (p. 199).

Representation of the researcher (with special reference to qualitative research)

Academic writing is typically viewed as largely de-personalised. Textbooks tell students that for scientific writing to be objective, it should be impersonal and use the passive voice – thus removing or reducing the presence of the researcher in the text. However, in qualitative research, the researcher's role is fundamentally reconsidered as he or she is no longer required to be an 'objective' and detached researcher. Writing accounts of qualitative research can prove challenging for student writers in this regard as they work out how to 'present' their role in the research in the written text. It is vital that thesis writers persuade their examiners that they understand the role of the qualitative researcher (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The short extract in Box 8.14 from the methodology chapter of a PhD thesis shows the writer's awareness of the need to explicitly discuss the complexity of her position in her study and how it may shape her findings. She uses a section heading titled 'the role of the researcher' to introduce the topic. This is known as *reflexivity* and it is important that writers of contemporary qualitative research provide evidence of it (see also the chapter outline in Box 8.4. where one of the sub-headings is reflexivity).

We find that one of the most frequently asked questions is whether the thesis writer can use the 'first person singular' (i.e., use 'I' or sometimes, as in the extract in Box 8.14, 'me'). The quickest answer is usually 'it depends' which, while largely accurate, is, of course, not entirely satisfactory. The response we usually give

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students in our classes is that the conventions of the discipline and/or the approach chosen shape the choices available to the researcher as writer as to how they present themselves in the written text (see also discussion of voice and use of first person in Chapter 3). A quick examination of recent journal articles in your field will reveal the dominant pattern but bear in mind that in the PhD or master's the writer is still a student writing for an examiner, whereas in a journal article it is

BOX 8.14 EXTRACT DISCUSSING THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER IN A PHD STUDY

4.7 The role of the researcher

As qualitative and ethnographic research relies on such relationships of trust between researchers and participants, it was important for me to reflect upon my role as a researcher and to position myself in relation to the participants. The key aspects of identity that determined my positioning were my dual citizenship of South Africa and Australia as well as my status as PhD student and as a teacher of English for over 15 years. Depending on the category of participant (head teacher, teacher or learner), these different facets of identity either served to position me as an "insider" or "outsider".

Writer uses first person 'me' and 'I' to position herself in the research.

Throughout the research process, however, I was very conscious of the complex power relations that each interview and classroom observation presented. These elements of power affected my decisions regarding which classrooms to observe, or specific linguistic groups to interview, the nature and type of questions asked, the classrooms selected and even the physical location and timing of the interviews. A deeper level of power was also presented in my status as an educated, native English speaker. Furthermore, the introduction of interpreters into the interviewing context brought further power variables, including gender, socioeconomic and cultural factors. These variables will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 6.

Writer demonstrates reflexivity in relation to her position in the research and how it may affect the findings.

Source: Ollerhead (2013, pp. 74–75)

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a case of a peer writing for a fellow researcher so this may have an effect on your choice of pronoun. Most importantly, we encourage you to examine recently submitted theses to look out for how the writer 'talks' about his or her role in the research – to what extent is the writer 'present' in the thesis? Then think about how you would like to 'present' yourself in your thesis.

Keeping a research diary/log book

While the logbook is standard in laboratory settings, the research diary is less so in more qualitative research domains. If you are engaged in qualitative research, we encourage you to keep notes on a regular basis of what you did, why you did it, and any reflections on the research process. Not only will diary keeping facilitate regular writing, depending on the nature of the research itself, it may constitute data for the thesis.

Conclusion

Writing the methods or methodology section is often perceived as 'comparatively easy and straightforward' (Swales, 2004, p. 224); as we have shown, underestimating the role and function of the methodology section and in fact the distinction between methodology and methods can lead to an inadequate motivation for your investigative approach. In particular, the longer thesis as opposed to the shorter research article, may require a more elaborated methodology component which may, in turn, require multiple drafts as you come to understand the need to provide justification and argumentation and not simply a list of procedures followed and materials utilised.

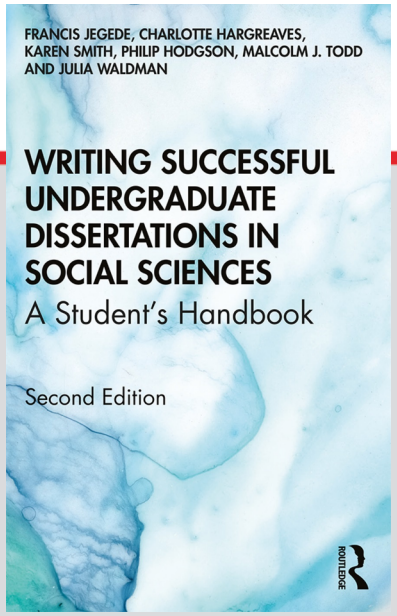
Peter Smagorinsky (2008), a very experienced academic writer, tells us that that the Methodology/Methods section of a thesis or paper is so crucial to the development of the entire argument that he always writes it very early on as what he needs to take into account when writing it affects the organisation and conceptualisation of all the other components. As Smagorinsky puts it, 'a Method section is critical in readers' sense of trust in the claims of the study' (p. 408). The results and findings chapters of your thesis therefore need to be specifically linked to and follow on from the methods.

Students wanting more help with the writing of the methodology chapter may also find it helpful to consult the *Academic Phrasebank Describing Methods* section www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/describing-methods/ where they can find examples of the typical language used to talk about methods and

CHAPTER

7

DATA COLLECTION



This chapter is excerpted from

Writing Successful Undergraduate Dissertations in Social Sciences

by Francis Jegede, Charlotte Hargreaves, Karen Smith, Philip Hodgson, Malcolm J. Todd, Julia Waldman.

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DATA COLLECTION

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Introduction

When you have considered and chosen your research methodology, and thought about the types of data you will collect, as explored in the previous chapters, you will want to decide which data collection techniques to use if you are collecting primary data and plan how and when you will collect your data. This chapter introduces you to some common data collection methods used in undergraduate dissertations: surveys, observations, interviews and experiments. You will then undertake the fieldwork, which is a challenging but usually very interesting part of the research process. Planning is key to undertaking and managing data collection, so this chapter will help you to think through some of the issues and practicalities associated with responsible and rigorous data collection. Analysis of your data is covered in Chapters 9 and 10 but forms an important part of the planning stage needed before embarking on your data collection, so we advise you to read the chapters together. By the end of this chapter, you will have a better understanding of:

- Techniques of data collection
- Data collection dos and don'ts
- Designing research instruments
- What to consider when engaging in fieldwork.

Data collection techniques for primary data collection

There are many ways of gathering your own quantitative and/or qualitative data in a systematic, rigorous and accountable way. Here, we introduce you to a range of techniques to enable you to consider preferences to explore further with your supervisor, to inform your reading of research methods literature and reviews of existing research.

Many students may think of either survey techniques or interviews as a first option, and we want to invite you to consider a broader range of techniques that may fit well within the requirements and expectations of an undergraduate programme of study. We want to encourage you to think about the rich seam of possibilities for answering a range of questions through the use of different data sources.

Not all techniques are suited for all kinds of dissertation. In selecting your data collection technique(s) you will want to ensure that the option(s) you choose will:

a. Generate the right data that will answer your question(s) both in terms of

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the size of the data set (neither too large nor too small) and quality;

b. Fit the resources available to you in terms of time, skills, access and costs.

Some of the most common techniques used in gathering or collecting data in social sciences are discussed below with suggestions as to when they might be appropriate to deploy. The list of techniques covers both quantitative and qualitative data. To a large extent, the type of data you need to collect depends on the research question(s) you aim to answer and similarly your method of analysis is dependent on the type of data you have collected. Beissel-Durrant (2004: 11) presents one approach for creating a typology of research methods in the social sciences and sets out categories of techniques. These are shown in Table 7.1, to which we have added suggestions for when they might be appropriate to deploy.

Here we consider the use of surveys, observations, interviews and experiments in more detail.

Surveys

Data required for your dissertation can be generated through field surveys. Field surveys constitute an important method of data collection, especially where the objective is to measure a set of dependent and independent variables in order to test for any correlation or relationship between these variables. Field surveys often involve collecting a sample of data relating to any human activity or social phenomenon using questionnaires or through a structured interview, though most rely on questionnaires. A questionnaire is a set of questions that is designed to collect information from respondents. A standard survey will usually consist of four parts:

- A short introductory statement about the aims of the research and what the respondents are expected to do. A statement on ethics, privacy and data storage (see Chapter 8);
- Questions covering the background of the participants, for example to gain socio-economic or demographic data;
- The main questions relating to the research question, around which the survey has been designed;
- Other auxiliary or supporting questions and a statement of thanks for participating.

There are many different ways of administering surveys, as is shown in Figure 7.1.

Table 7.1 Strengths and weaknesses of different methods of data collection

Data collection method	*Strengths*	*Weaknesses*
Observations	• Ability to record events as they occur • Evidential – if electronic recording of events or transaction is used	• Data accuracy depends on observational skills • Data/manual notes tend to be subjective and based on what is important to the observer or notes taker • Events may not be replicated to obtain similar results
Experiments (laboratory/ field-based)	• Follows logical scientific principles – inferences and reasoning • Replicable – can be repeated to obtain same results • Verifiable – peer review scrutiny • Generalisable • Generate strong internally valid data	• Weak level of generalisation • Results may not always apply to real-life situation – as real life is more complex
Case studies	• Good for testing hypotheses or interpreting theories • Can generate social, cultural, and political data to explain a particular problem • Data collected tends to be qualitative in nature and contextualised	• Reliability depends on the observational skills and integrative ability of the researcher • Difficult to establish cause-effect relationships • Not easily generalisable – as a single case study may not be readily applicable to all other cases
Action research (intervention/ consultancy)	• Allows researcher to be embedded within a social context such as an organisation • Introduction of necessary interventions or actions, based on theories, to create change • Simultaneous problem solving and insight generation • Links research with practice	• Highly subjective – researcher/consultant's bias • Not easily generalisable, as findings are restricted to the organisational context of the study

(*Continued*)

Table 7.1 (Cont.)

Data collection method	*Strengths*	*Weaknesses*
Secondary/ administrative sources	• Readily and publicly available third-party data • Easy way of collecting data if primary data collection is not possible or too costly	• Difficult to prove data has been collected in a systematic or scientific manner • Data not always suitable for scientific research • Weak internal validity • Difficult to establish cause-effect relationships
Ethnography	• Research rooted in the context of the subject's culture • Long time engagement with and observation of daily life of the studied culture • Allows formal and informal interaction between the researcher and participants	• Based on the narrative skills of eth researcher • Data can only be analysed qualitatively and depends on 'sense making' • Time and resource intensive • Not easily generalisable, as findings are specific to a particular culture
Surveys (field/site surveys)	• Data collected in field settings • Able to generate a large number of variables • Follows logical scientific principles – inferences and reasoning • Social problem can be studied from multiple perspectives using multiple theories • Replicable – can be repeated to obtain the same results • Verifiable – peer review scrutiny	• Difficult to establish cause-effect relationships • Nature of data is non-temporal • Surveys may be subject to respondents' biases • Accuracy of respondents claim – difficult to verify • Weak internal validity of data
Interviews (one-to-one or group)	• Flexible engagement with respondent(s) • Enables collection of rich data as interviewer can probe answers and delve deeper • Sometimes allows for discussion of sensitive issues	• High journey time and costs travelling to participants/respondents • High potential for unequal participation in group interviews • For group interview, researcher needs to be

(*Continued*)

Table 7.1 (Cont.)

Data collection method	*Strengths*	*Weaknesses*
	• Able to pick up and respond to non-verbal cues	confident in managing a group situation • Ample time needs to be allowed for transcription and collation of data • Not usually appropriate for sensitive topics
Interviews (via web cam/ videoconferencing)	• Closest proximity to face-to-face conversation • Bridges problems created by geographical distance • Group (or individual) interviews possible but practicalities may mean maximum four to five for a group is workable	• Problem of digital divide – unequal Internet access by potential interviewees • May experience time delays in giving and receiving sound, thus stilting discussion • Technology may not be reliable
Interviews (social media and other digital technologies)	• Online interviews possible via synchronous chat • May help to put some users at ease, for example, young people, or when discussing sensitive topics • Immediate capture of text data • Can keep digging deeper into answers	• Reliant on good enough typing speeds of researcher and interviewee • May be difficult to get in-depth answers • Lacks personal engagement
Focus groups	• Allows for the views of many to be gathered at one session • Sharing of views and experiences may enrich the data collected	• Weak internal validity of data • Not easily generalisable to other settings because of small sample
Surveys (questionnaire surveys completed by or in presence of researcher, including telephone surveys)	• Researcher has more control over completion rates • Can access answers from those who may not be able to read a questionnaire or complete answers • Statistical analyses can be applied	• Sample number likely to be smaller • Respondents may feel obliged to respond or if they receive a telephone request 'cold' may be suspicious • Types of questions that can be asked may be limited due to lack of privacy and/or direct questioning

(*Continued*)

Table 7.1 (Cont.)

Data collection method	*Strengths*	*Weaknesses*
Surveys (questionnaires sent via email attainment embedded or as attachment)	• Can reach larger numbers and low cost • Can reach dispersed samples • Suited to large numbers of replies • Statistical analyses can be applied	• Access of respondents to email • May need to do several follow-ups to generate enough responses • Literacy of respondents needs to be considered
Surveys (postal surveys)	• Can reach larger numbers and resources involved can be measured quite easily • Can reach dispersed samples • Statistical analyses can be applied	• Postage costs, including costs of return postage and administration time (stuffing envelopes) • May need to do several follow-ups to generate target number of returns • Literacy of respondents needs to be considered
Surveys (telephone/ radio surveys)	• Cheaper than face-to-face • Quality of data is improved if time/date to conduct interview is arranged in advance and interviewees see questions before meeting • Teleconferencing is possible with small numbers	• Non-verbal cues hard to pick up • Some people not comfortable or able to talk on the phone • Possible loss of transmission – may be hard to check out reasons for silence
Surveys (online survey platform)	• Can reach larger numbers and low cost • Can reach dispersed samples • Suited to large numbers of replies • Respondent has time to consider answers • Immediate capture of text data • No collation stage involved • Statistical analyses can be applied	• Access of respondents to email needs to be considered • Conversational style is restricted • Time-lapses may mean important response threads are lost • May need to do several follow-ups to generate enough responses • Literacy of respondents need to be considered • High costs if you cannot access free software.

Adopted from: Bhattacherjee (2012)

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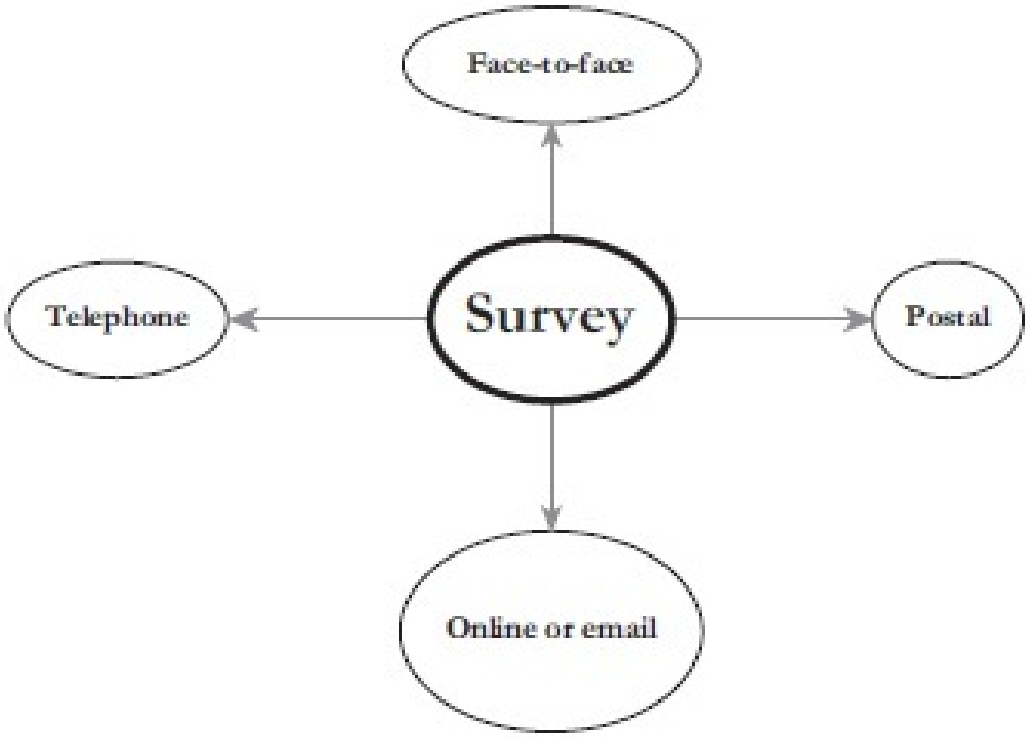
There are advantages and disadvantages of using each of these; for example:

- **In a face-to-face survey**, you can record the data in situ and ensure that the respondent understands what you want to do; however, this can be time-consuming;
- An **email or postal survey** can be useful if you have a large sample; however, response rates can be low;



- Figure 7.1 Modes of survey administration

- **Telephone surveys** get relatively high response rates; however, good communication skills are required;
- **Online surveys** are easy to set up with online survey tools and provide immediate capture of data; however, respondents need to have access to the internet.

Data collected using field surveys technique can be analysed using statistical methods (see Chapter 9). Depending on the time and sequence of collection of the dependent and independent variables, there are two main approaches to conducting field surveys:

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- Cross-sectional field surveys
- Longitudinal field surveys

A cross-sectional field survey requires the independent and dependent variables to be collected at the same point in time using a single data collection instrument (e.g. a questionnaire). A longitudinal field surveys requires data collection over a longer time period. Data relating to dependent variables could be collected at a later point in time than the independent variables. The main advantage of using field surveys is that many variables can be collected during surveys thereby making it suitable for a dissertation that deals with complex issues requiring multiple perspectives. A major weakness of field surveys is that they are prone to respondents' biases as respondents may not always provide the researcher with accurate or true information regarding their feelings or views on the subject of investigation.

Observations

This approach is useful for a dissertation that focuses on the analysis of the behaviour of people or social phenomena in order to undertake some evaluation. It may include behavioural observation or analysis of people's action in particular situations or circumstances. Observational data can be collected manually using field notes or by using computer-based platforms designed to record the observations. For example, in some of our research on the police use of body-worn video (see Cayli et al. 2018), the majority of data that was collected was derived from questionnaires, yet the initial methodology was to include observing officers on duty using body-worn video while on duty and attending training events introducing body-worn videos to the officers for the first time. This would have offered an opportunity to record the conversations, comments and concerns in their 'home environment' where often subjects act more naturally and are more relaxed than when in a formal interview setting. However, similarly to when you design your own research project, we were unable to undertake this aspect of the research due to the prohibitive costs of visiting all of the police sites involved in the international study.

Interviews

Interview techniques involve formal or informal conversation which can be recorded. Interviews are a very flexible data collection technique, which can be used to collect different kinds of data. Interviews can be structured, un-structured or semi-structured. Structured interviews are associated with quantitative research

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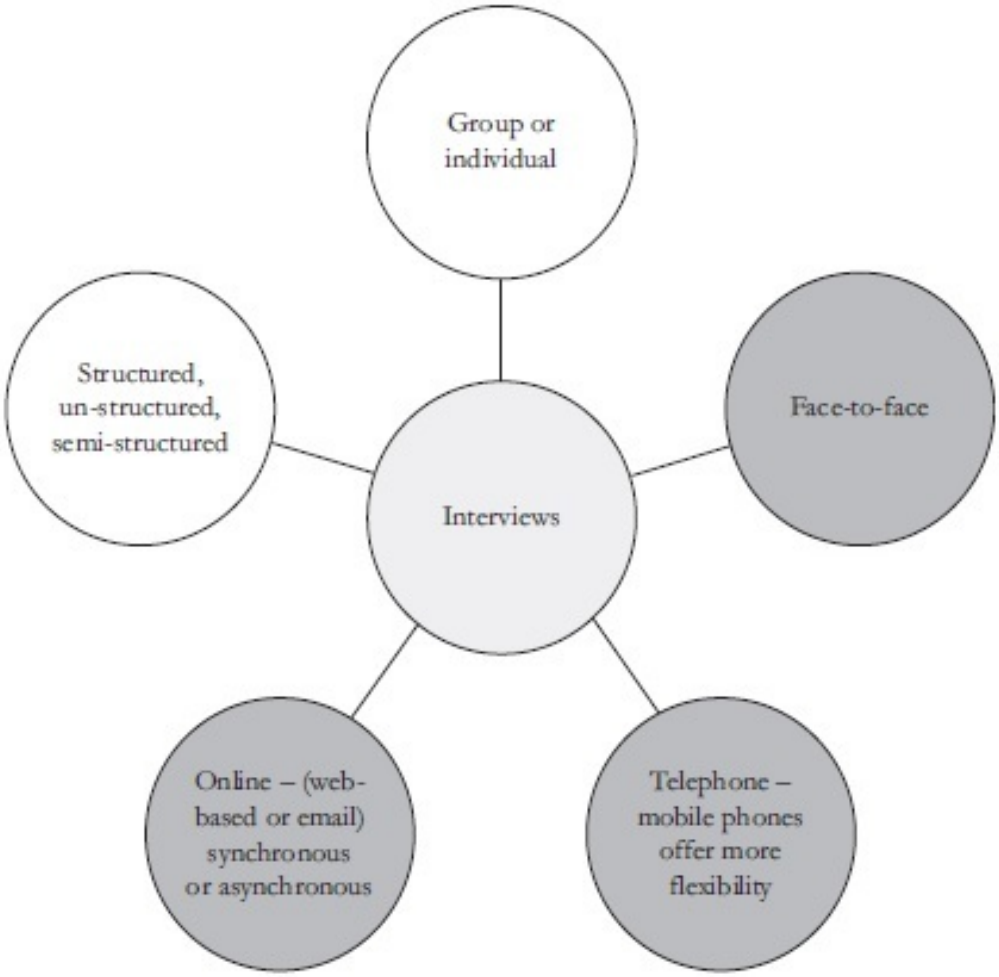

Figure 7.2 Interview modes

and will lead interviewees through a set of standardised questions (as in the discussion on surveys above). In semi-structured and unstructured interviews, you have more flexibility to deviate from your interview schedule and to explore the points that your interview is raising. Less structured interviews are associated with qualitative research. Qualitative interviews are useful for exploring people's feelings, opinions or experiences. Life history and oral history interviews focus specifically on the life experiences of people. In some visual research approaches to interviewing, interviewees might engage with or produce images to stimulate discussion (see Chapter 5) or be involved in some art-based activity, such as making collage.

Interviews can be conducted on a one-to-one or in groups basis such as

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focus groups. Interviews can be conducted face-to-face, online, via the telephone or email (Figure 7.2).

As with the mode of administration of surveys, there are pros and cons associated with how you choose to interview. In face-to-face interviews, for example, you can probe the interviewee and delve deeper into their responses; however, there are journey time and cost implications of meeting people in person. If you are conducting group interviews, you will save on time, but you might find it difficult to manage the group. Interviews via the telephone or teleconferencing can be more flexible as you don't need to be geographically close to the interviewee, but they rely on the technology working and it can sometimes be more difficult to develop rapport. Email or asynchronous text chat interviews provide the interviewee with an opportunity to think about their responses but can lack spontaneity. You should think through the different modes and decide what works best for your project and your potential respondents.

Focus groups are a kind of group interview. They involve bringing a small number of carefully selected people together to discuss a social issue or topic, for example a focus group to explore people's views or feelings on the legacy of former Prime Minister Tony Blair with regards to Britain's involvement in the war in Iraq. This kind of study often involves the use of a moderator (you) to facilitate the discussion so that the group stays focused on the topic of discussion. The idea is to gather information on participants' views, experiences, or comments on the topic of discussion. It is important, in a focus group, that all participants are encouraged to participate, and everyone feels able to express their views; this can be quite difficult for a facilitator to achieve. You also have to be careful that you don't unduly influence the responses from the participants.

Experiments (laboratory or field-based)

Data collected through field or laboratory experiments are ideal for explanatory research. Experiments can be conducted in various settings. While laboratory experiments are common in pure sciences, experiments in social sciences tend to be field-based and usually take place where the social phenomenon of interest is actually occurring. Laboratory experiments allow the researcher to isolate the variables of interest and control for extraneous variables, which may not be possible in real-life field experiments. If your dissertation or your hypothesis is about testing cause-effect relationships in a tightly controlled setting, then experimental studies may be a useful way to generate your data. Most experimental studies involve separating the cause from the effect in a systematic

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way. Data collected through experimental studies can be analysed using statistical techniques (see Chapter 9). Experimental research can be used to assess the effectiveness of interventions (e.g. across a number of schools) through a randomised control trial (RCT). This involves a similar group of individuals, for example they are all the same age being randomly assigned to two or more groups. One of the groups (the experimental group) will engage with the intervention and the other (the control group) won't. Outcomes from the groups are then measured and any difference in responses by the groups is assessed. RCTs are increasingly being used in educational research (see Churches and Dommet 2016). If you engage in experimental research in the social sciences, you should look carefully at your ethics to ensure that you aren't going to submit either your control or experimental group to harm, or that your control group isn't overly disadvantaged if they do not have access to what turns out to be a very positive intervention.

Combining approaches to data collection

Each of the modes of data collection highlighted above present their own advantages and disadvantages. You might wish to consider these and see if any of them might sway your decision to use or not use a particular technique. Some of the options may not be suitable for particular populations or because of the resources available to you. Or you may decide that it will be more effective for you to combine approaches to data collection.

If you decide to use a multi-method approach, collecting more than one set of data using different data collection methods, you will need to plan the order in which you need to collect these. For example, a focus group interview may be used to assist in formulating appropriate questions nd undertaken prior to the design of a survey. In addition to the order, you also want to assess the relative importance in your study of each set of data – understanding this will help you weight the time you need to spend on each appropriately.

Don't, however, try to mix too many methods together in your relatively small-scale dissertation project; you won't have enough time or space to do the methods justice. Using five different methods will not get you more marks if they don't contribute to the overall research findings. It is much better to use fewer methods but to use them really well.

Flexibility and consistency in designing your data collection strategy

You might think the words flexibility and consistency contradict each other, so let

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us explain each of them a little more in relation to doing research. Designing a data collection strategy necessitates a systematic and rigorous approach but one that is sufficiently flexible to be responsive to the resolution of tensions inherent in the actual practice of doing the research. In other words, what you planned and hoped to do may not always be possible for one reason or another.

If you are undertaking research and you are trying to answer a particular set of questions, it helps to apply the same routine to eliciting answers from people. This will increase your chances of getting the types of answers you are hoping for and also lend credibility to your research. However, issues and problems often occur when conducting research, and you need to be prepared for and able to accommodate unexpected events. For example, people may cancel interviews, you may experience low response rates to a survey or weather can affect travelling plans to fieldwork sites – the possibilities are endless. Therefore, it is useful to have contingency plans in these circumstances.

If you anticipate or have problems with data collection that may impact on the data you hoped to gather or have the potential to affect completion of your study, speak to your supervisor as early as possible. This will increase your chances of finding alternatives or managing the risk and impact on your study.

Design of research instruments

Whether you plan to conduct a survey, undertake observational work, conduct interviews or run an experiment, you will be utilising one or more 'research instrument' for collecting data. These might involve anything from a highly structured questionnaire designed to collect data that is quantitative and measurable to the researcher or a more flexible topic-focused interview schedule designed to elicit qualitative data of a descriptive textual nature.

You will need to think about whether your instrument is prestructured, open-ended or a combination of both. This refers to questions or categories of enquiry that are coded at the design stage or at the analysis stage.

In psychological studies, for example, you may adopt the use of a standardised instrument for assessment or other forms of measurement. If you are not using an 'off the shelf' instrument, then you will need to design your own questionnaire or question schedule or observation sheet.

Even if you are designing your own, it will help you if you spend some time looking for examples of instruments designed for other studies, including dissertations from previous years.

In particular, if you plan to use questions about respondent characteristics

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such as age, race or sex, you will be able to make use of the categories adopted in national surveys such as censuses. These ensure you are conforming to current practice with terminology.

We do not have the space in this section to provide an in-depth review of how to construct a valid research instrument for all situations. However, we do highlight some issues that you should explore further and explain why in many circumstances a piloting phase for the instruments is helpful, even if for you this means testing your instrument out with friends or fellow students.

When designing your instrument:

- Keep your research question to the forefront so your instrument will generate relevant data for finding an answer. Decide whether you will need one instrument (for example, a questionnaire) or if you need to supplement with other methods of data collection.
- Identify your target population or intended participants. Spend time gathering background information about them. For example, you need to know where they are located, how best to access them, and via what mode (see below). Determine the size of your sample, and how best to select that sample (see section on sampling).
- Consider your mode of deployment and your audience or focus of enquiry (for example, if using observation) and how this may influence the design of your instrument. For instance, with self-administered instruments there can be little room for ambiguity, whereas a semi-structured interview schedule will allow for a teasing out of both an interviewee's understanding of the question and your understanding of their response. Think about how people might react to your data collection instrument and whether you need to meet them in person, and how many times you might need to be in contact.
- Which sorts of questions (open or closed questions or a combination of both) are likely to elicit the best and most accurate responses? Can you use a questionnaire that has already been designed and tested by someone else?
- Have you considered carefully the structure of your questions, so you are not leading the respondent to reply in a certain way?
- Order and type of questions – surveys may require a different kind of logic than an interview schedule, with the former inviting a 'mix them up' approach of question types and item options, the latter perhaps following a

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more conversational logic.

- Language and presentation should be appropriate to your target population. Check readability and accessibility, for example print size and colour. If you are scanning completed questionnaires for use with analysis software, this will influence their format.
- Decide on what is a reasonable time for completion? Interviewing an eight-year-old child in a classroom setting will require the design of a short instrument, but, if you are observing children's behaviours in that classroom, for how long do you think you could maintain your attention on the task?
- Try to pilot your research instrument. When doing interviews, try to have a few practice runs first, for example, with friends or housemates. This will get you oriented into the research situation and familiar with the process. If you have designed a survey, pilot your survey with a small sub-set of your sample first. This will enable you to test out your questions to make sure the variables you have selected have been measured correctly. Piloting takes time – but it is an important part of the research process that can help make sure you don't make some avoidable mistakes. Figure 7.3 outlines the importance of carrying out a pilot survey.
- Finally, evaluate the efficacy of your research instrument. Has the instrument generated the kind of data you need to answer your research questions, and is the data sufficient for you to draw conclusions or interpretations?

Sampling

Whatever approach you adopt, you will need to consider sampling issues. Sampling involves selection of a proportion of units, people, objects or artefacts upon which to focus your data collection from a larger set, group or population. It is important to seek guidance from your supervisor to assist you in understanding how to construct an appropriate sampling method for your research. The type of sample you choose will relate closely to your research methodology, to the population, objects or artefacts you are studying and will need to fit your resources and capacity. Big isn't always better in undergraduate dissertation sampling. A key thing to remember is to know your population and the audience you are trying to reach in your research.

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Excerpted from *Writing Successful Undergraduate Dissertations in Social Sciences*

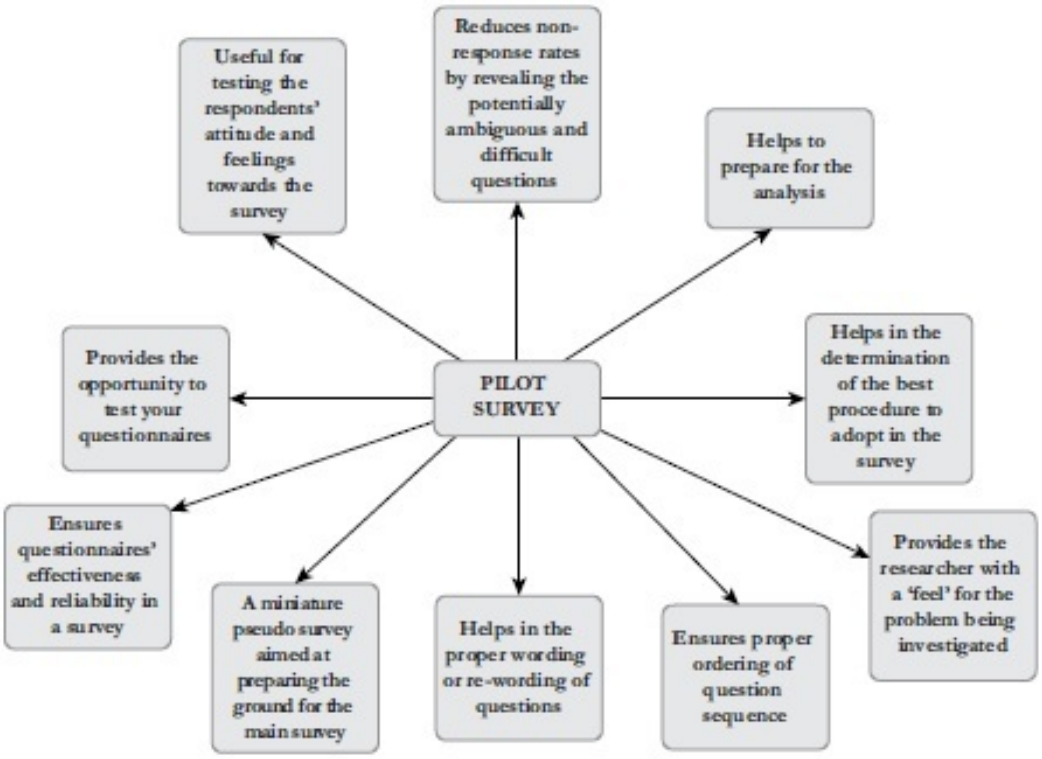

Figure 7.3 A pilot survey – purpose and characteristics

A key question that often arises in applying sampling considerations relates to generalisation, that is the extent to which findings generated from a specific sample or study can be generalised to a wider population, so are concerned with external validity. You may not be in a position or wish to construct a sample that leads to this kind of validity, but your conclusions should be supported by a theory-informed and well-executed process that are deemed reliable, and for experimental and comparative studies should be associated with internal validity. This is concerned with whether the process and assessments actually measure what you intended them to.

Sample selection methods

You will need to read more widely to understand different ways to construct a sample and their different benefits and limitations in specific research contexts, but some of the common methods for selecting samples include:

- *Random sampling*. This involves selecting a sub-group from a homogeneous

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larger population through a process based on criteria that do not relate to any characteristics of the population (for example, choosing every fourth person or entry on a list).

- *Stratified sampling*. In a potential sample population, there may be particular characteristics or sub-groups you want to ensure are represented in your final sample. Stratification involves identifying these and then sampling from within these sub-groups. For example, you may have a class of children and you want to ensure that the 60/40% split by sex is mirrored in your sample. So, you would create a list of two sexes, then perhaps apply a random sampling approach to choosing your numbers within each of these two groups.
- *Clustering sampling*. Multi-stage sampling involves clustering what may appear to be naturally occurring groups within populations that are heterogeneous (for example, schools or electoral areas) in nature and then selecting a sample of these clusters randomly for inclusion in a study, with all units within each cluster included in the sample. So, a simple example is that schools in an electoral area are randomly sampled and pupils in the schools selected are the 'units of study'. All pupils would be sampled in each of the schools randomly selected. If these units are subject to a further random selection stage, this would constitute multi-stage clustering; for example, the sampled units are derived from a random selection of girls in each of the schools.
- *Probability sampling*. This involves setting up a random sampling approach that ensures that ascribed population characteristics have an equal likelihood of being chosen.
- *Purposive or theoretical sampling*. These involve introducing an element of researcher selection into the sample. In undergraduate small-scale research, they may be utilised for practical purposes and are commonly associated with qualitative research, where validity is not based on ideas of representativeness.

Doing your data collection

In this section we offer practical suggestions associated with doing your data collection.

Being organised

The key to successful data collection is planning and organisation. Different modes

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of data collection present different sorts of challenges and opportunities that impact on planning issues. For example, with surveys, a lot of the hard work is done at the design stage, formulating and testing the precision of questionnaire design, while qualitative methods involve a lot of work in collation and organising after the data is collected.

You will need to put together a timetable for preparing for data collection including:

- Organising the work associated with data collection (e.g. contacting potential interview respondents and scheduling visits or survey administration, sorting ethical approval, printing any paperwork);
- Working out timelines associated with collation, analysis and reporting of data so that you are aware of where there are possibilities to make up time if you experience any slippage with your data collection timelines;
- Maintaining an efficient and up-to-date filing and data storage system – both paper-based and on your computer for the management of data as you collect it;
- Ensuring fieldwork notes or any other material such as video or digital photographs are dated and logged as they are collected – it is very easy to quickly misplace things or forget details;
- Transcribing material as soon as possible so it is fresh in your mind;
- Ensuring, if you have scheduled a pilot stage, that you maintain your milestones for this early stage – you do not want to be running behind through the rest of the project.

Arranging fieldwork visits

Arrange the dates and times of fieldwork or site visits as early as is possible and discuss your plans with your supervisor. Give as much information in advance as you are able to, but in a style and format that is appropriate to your audience.

Correspondence, including draft email texts, should be checked whenever possible with your supervisor before sending out so that, for example, information letters and consent forms contain the correct information if your institution does not require you to use standardised documentation. Keep accurate records of your correspondence and communications; this will be important if you need to account for low response rates for requests for site visits and participation. You may need to make contact with sites in a number of ways to get a response, for example, by letter, email or telephone. Decide in advance how you will encourage potential

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participants to contribute to your research. Will you follow up your letters? How? When? What is a reasonable level of contact, and when should you assume silence means 'No'? There are no hard and fast rules here, so try to apply principles of fairness and reasonableness when deciding on a course of action.

When you have your visits confirmed, prepare thoroughly with your directions, transport linked with timings – so you arrive relaxed and in good time. Think about the place you are visiting and whether you might encounter any cultural differences and whether you need to modify your behaviour or dress in any way. Construct a list of all the things you need to take with you and do at the visit and afterwards, for example, sending thank-you letters.

Write down your itinerary and leave it with a colleague or friend so that they know where you should be and when. If you are concerned about confidentiality of your subjects, put their details into a sealed envelope and the details of your plans on the envelope so information need only be read in an emergency.

Many social service and health-care users have experiences of being kept waiting, and, to increase your chances of eliciting good data, you want them to be open and welcoming, not irritated by your lateness. If you are delayed, try to call in advance to let the relevant person know. Think carefully about to whom you should give your personal details, such as phone number. You may wish to keep your number hidden to the person you are calling if making contact using a personal telephone. In most situations, switch the phone off during the data collection activity.

Risk assessment

You must consider your own safety when undertaking fieldwork and ensure you have addressed any potential risks. Completion of a risk assessment form is common, and you should ask your supervisor about this if they do not raise it with you. Risk assessment is useful for thinking through the potential risks (however unlikely) that may arise when carrying out your research. You can then think through procedures for (a) minimising those risks and (b) ensuring that you have contingency plans should they arise. Potential risks include the following:

- Actual or threatened violence, psychological harm, unwanted sexual advances, etc.;
- Injury travelling to or from the research venue;
- Unfounded allegations are made against you (e.g. that you made sexual

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advances towards or threatened a participant);

- Being implicated in illegal activities.

The site visit

When you arrive at the site, make yourself known and, if necessary, show a form of identification such as a student letter and any communications confirming the details of the visit. During the data collection activities, depending upon the situation, think about where you are positioned. For example, for your own safety with some groups or individuals, you may consider sitting near the door with interviewees in front of you so that you are nearest to the exit. You should try to arrange interviews in public or semi-public places and avoid seeing people in their private homes.

If you can only arrange interviews in the evening, take additional precautions. If at any point during an interview you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, do not hesitate to end the interview and leave – listen to your feelings. If you are feeling sufficiently uncomfortable, this means you are unlikely to be able to elicit data effectively anyway.

You have thought about your own needs and safety in the planning process. In addition to the ethical issues covered in Chapter 8, you also need to think about the comfort and safety of your research participants, to be considerate in the way you approach your data collection.

It may help you to think about the data collection process from the participants' perspective.

- What concerns might they have?
- What do they need to know in advance of completing a questionnaire or being interviewed?
- What issues might be similar or different if you are talking with them alone to talking with someone as part of a group?
- What do you think they would like to happen afterwards?

Tools and equipment

The range of kit available to assist you with data collection is increasing as technology becomes cheaper, smaller and more sophisticated in function. This supports the use of web-based tools and mobile devices such as laptops, cameras, digital recorders and players as well as mobile phones. Obvious tips for use include:

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- Ensuring your equipment is fully charged and/or has working batteries before you go
- Taking spare batteries
- Testing the quality and range of your recording/filming devices
- Having a back-up plan in case circumstances change and you have to revert to traditional methods such as pen and paper.

How can social media and information and communication technologies help during the data collection phase of your dissertation?

Online technologies may be helpful in the following phases of data collection:

Recruiting participants for your study: you could invite people to take part in your research through social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn or on micro-blogging sites such as Twitter.

Hosting your online survey: there are specific survey sites, such as JISC Online Surveys, Survey Monkey, SmartSurvey, Typeform, Toluna's Quicksurvey and Voxco Survey, as well as within other software packages, such as Google Forms and Microsoft Forms. When your online survey is ready to be launched you can share via the social networking and blogging sites mentioned above.

Transcribing interviews: you could use your smartphone or an app such as RecorderHD to record your interviews, and then a web app such as oTranscribe to help with your transcription.

Managing your data: you might store your research data (or back up your dissertation work) in cloud file hosting sites such as DropBox, GoogleDrive or OneDrive (check your institutional requirements).

Looking after yourself: data collection (and indeed the whole dissertation process) can be stressful. Looking after your health is always a priority, even when writing your dissertation. There are many health and wellbeing apps; if you are UK based, the NHS app is highly recommended.

If you use new technologies as a means of collecting data consider the digital divide', which relates to an unequal access to new technologies in society. There is still a huge gap between the developed and the developing world, between rural and urban areas and between younger people and older people with regards to the use adoption of new technologies. It is important to state that while new technologies can serve as useful tools in data collection, you need to be aware of these issues as the reliability of your result may be affected, if the use of certain technologies in your dissertation is biased against some sections of your population of interest. Your data collection instrument should not be unduly biased

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against non-users of certain technologies.

There may also be biases relating to the adoption and use of different forms of new technologies (Elsbach and Stigliani 2018:1). Some people consider adoption and use of new technologies as essential in an era of modernity and information age; new technologies are perceived as superior. This may not necessarily be the case as using older technologies may, in fact, be more suitable for your dissertation than the new ones. 'New' does not always equate to 'better'; neither does 'old' always mean 'ineffective'. It all depends on your research design and what is most effective for you. An older method of collecting data may indeed be more functional and reliable than the new techniques. On the other hand, some technophobes, who are uncomfortable with new technologies, often consider them as mysterious, non-human, and complex and therefore they should be avoided. This view again does not necessarily hold true. Some social problems can be solved using technological solutions. The use of new technologies can significantly enhance your research experience, and make your dissertation writing experience more enjoyable, less laborious and most cost effective.

Key messages

- There are many different methods and techniques for collecting data, both quantitative and qualitative.
- All methods have strengths and limitations, so use a method that is a good fit for your question and situation.
- Efficient and effective planning and organisation are crucial to ensure you remember all the things you need to do and within the timescales you have set for this phase of work.
- Consult with your supervisor in the design of your research instrument(s) and sampling. Confirm that it's OK to use questions from other studies (with appropriate acknowledgement).
- Make a checklist of all the practical tasks you have to do.

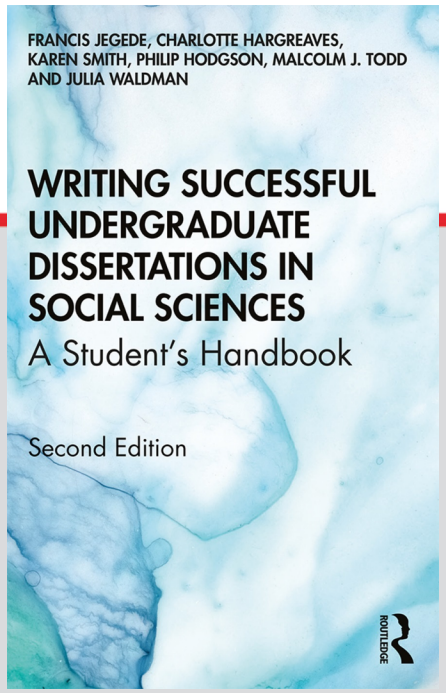
Key questions

- Have you explored different data collection options?
- Have you chosen techniques appropriate to your question, skills and resources available to you, including time?
- Have you appreciated the potential value of secondary sources, rather than privileging primary data?
- Is your detailed planning in hand to ensure you can complete your fieldwork in good time to analyse and report on the data you collected?

CHAPTER

8

WRITING THE DISSERTATION



This chapter is excerpted from *Writing Successful Undergraduate Dissertations in Social Sciences*

by Francis Jegede, Charlotte Hargreaves, Karen Smith, Philip Hodgson, Malcolm J. Todd, Julia Waldman

Learn more

WRITING THE DISSERTATION

Excerpted from *Writing Successful Undergraduate Dissertations in Social Science*

Introduction

This chapter sets out the essential guidelines for writing your dissertation. The chapter provides key information on what makes a good dissertation and how you can make the most of the data you have collected. By the time you start to write the first draft of your dissertation, you will probably already have accumulated a wealth of notes, scribblings and ideas about what you want to write about. Your job, thereafter, is to put all those ideas and materials into a coherent structure. The importance of working with your supervisor's comments and proofreading are also highlighted in this chapter.

By the end of this chapter, you should have a better understanding of:

- How to get started on writing your dissertation
- Different parts of the dissertation and how to approach them
- How to prepare your dissertation for submission
- How our checklists can help ensure you have done all you need to do in writing a successful dissertation.

Drawing up a plan for writing your dissertation

It is highly advisable to draft a plan of the dissertation. There is a lot in common between different dissertations regarding the structure, and, although you do not need to stick slavishly to a standard plan, such a plan is very helpful as a template to impose some order on what may seem an unmanageable task. Splitting up the tasks into chapters, drawing up chapter plans and assigning a word count to each section may really help you with this initial planning.

Structuring your dissertation

The way you compose, write and present each of the component parts of your dissertation in terms of structure may vary from one study to another and depends on your institution's guidelines for dissertation. It is, therefore, important that you check the requirements for your institution. Browsing through past dissertations submitted to your institution by your predecessors may help you identify common structures. Most universities will have good examples of dissertations in the library that you may consult. You also need to pay attention to the style of presentation specified in your institution's guidelines, and other things such as the word limit (minimum and maximum), text fonts, text spacing style, etc.

A well-structured dissertation is usually logically presented and easy to read. The structure of your dissertation will depend, to a large extent, on your

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research aims and objectives. Although there is no single way of structuring a dissertation, most dissertations will comprise eleven parts:

- The title page
- Acknowledgements (if required)
- An abstract
- Contents page and figure/table lists
- Introduction section
- Methods and methodology section
- Literature review and theoretical/conceptual framework
- Analysis, findings and discussion of results section
- Conclusions
- References
- Appendices.

Title page

Your dissertation should have a clear title. The main title, including a subtitle if necessary, needs to reflect what the study is about and the contents of your dissertation. At an early stage, your title may be a provisional one, a 'working title', which you may need to revise or refine later. Your dissertation supervisor may advise on the title in order to help you find and define the focus of the dissertation. As your title says a lot about your study, it needs to be clear, succinct, specific and accurately describe your dissertation. Some institutions require that you indicate your full name on the title page with a statement on your course/programme of study, the name of your institution and your supervisor. For example,

> A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of BSc International Relations and Diplomacy, University of Derby, Kedleston Road, Derby, United Kingdom. Date Submitted: June 2019. Name of Supervisor: Dr Francis Jegede.

Writing and acknowledgements

Acknowledgements enable you to formally recognise and thank individuals, organisations or institutions that have helped you along the way on your dissertation journey. It is entirely up to you to decide who is worthy of mention in your acknowledgements. Many people may have helped you along the way – your supervisor, lecturers, parents, spouses or partners, your interviewees or participants,

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etc. You can get an idea of how to write your own by reading acknowledgements from other dissertations or books. Our own acknowledgements section at the beginning of this book also provides an example for you to follow.

Writing your abstract

An abstract is a short, but very important part of writing a dissertation. Also known as, 'resume' or 'executive summary' in some reports or documents, it is a brief summary of your dissertation. Usually about 300 words long, it highlights the purpose, methods of investigation, findings and conclusion of your study. A well written abstract will enable your reader to make a judgement on what your study is about and how relevant or interesting the study is. It is essentially an overview of your entire study. As it is a summary of everything about your study, it is usually the last section to write after all other sections and chapters have been written. Alternatively, you may decide to write your abstract earlier to help you identify key points or themes in your study that can help in the design of the structure of your dissertation. Your abstract is the first thing potential readers will read after your title page if you submit your dissertation to any publishing journal or research database. So, it's important to make a good impression!

Contents page and figure/table lists

The contents page provides a chronological order of contents of your dissertation. This can be manually created or auto-generated in Microsoft Word, if you apply the built-in heading styles to the headings and subheadings in the texts of your dissertation. Similarly, figure/table lists contain a list of figures and tables in the order in which they appear in your dissertation.

Writing the introduction

The introduction may be the first chapter in your dissertation, but it does not have to be the first thing that you write. Your introduction should set the scene for your dissertation – what you want to do, how you want to do it and what you want to achieve doing it. Your study aims, objectives and rationale for your choice of techniques and methodology need to be made clear in this section. The main purpose of the introduction section is to provide the reader with the background and context to your research and to inspire an interest in your reader to want to read the rest of the dissertation. In this section, therefore, you need to explain the reason for choosing your dissertation topic, the key questions you set out to answer in your study and your motivation for undertaking the project. You should

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give the reader a clear understanding of the structure of your dissertation and key issues addressed in each chapter. It is necessary to split this into subsections, covering specific aspects such as:

- Background to the study
- Study aims and objectives
- Key research questions and hypotheses
- Structure of the dissertation.

It is useful to specify the significance and relevance of your study in this section.

Writing a literature review and linking your study to theories/concepts

The literature review section provides an opportunity to offer a critical overview of relevant past research relating to your dissertation. For full information on how to search and review literature, see Chapter 4. The literature review defines the context in which your research is situated and justifies why this is an important area to study. It is essential in this section to describe the current state of research relating to your study and consider other areas that may be closely related to your study. This allows you to synthesise current knowledge and identify any gap that your study is designed to fill. There are two parts to this section. The first is the review of literature and the second is reviewing specific theories or concepts that underpin your study. A well written literature review section will not only provide the theoretical and methodological context for your study, it could also explain the logic for your study aims and research design. It is advisable that you spend some time to ensure your literature review is comprehensive, critical, informative and relevant to your study, as you will refer back to this section in your discussion of findings section.

It is important to remember that a literature review is different to an annotated bibliography. An annotated bibliography lists the sources that you have identified and offers a summary of them one by one. A literature review, in contrast, will make comparisons between references, identify links and note developments in your subject area. There are different ways in which you can group the literature in your review. Three of the most common approaches include chronological, thematic and methodological.

- In a *chronologically organised* review, you order your review around the development through time of your area of interest.
- In a *thematically organised* review, the literature is presented around emergent issues or topics. Such a presentation of literature willhighlight

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what the main themes are in your area of study. When conducting this kind of review, you will have to extract the key points from each source and look for connections with the other literature you have reviewed. The review will be presented through a series of sections and subsections.

- In *methodologically organised* reviews, the focus is on the methods used by the researcher to carry out his or her research rather than on the content of the research. Such a review will be appropriate if you are looking to develop knowledge about a method or an approach to research.

Whichever approach you adopt, you should see that the literature review ends by showing where your own research will add to the knowledge base in your area of interest. Organising your review chronologically, thematically or methodologically will also bring your empirical or theoretical work into sharper focus.

Writing the methods and methodology section

In the methodology section, you need to describe, explain and justify how and why you conducted the research in a particular way. It is important to be clear about things such as why you collected some data, why you chose a particular method of data collection or used any particular equipment, materials or processes. Your methodology section must be clear and detailed enough for anyone who may want to conduct similar study. Remember that in the methods section you are telling the reader what you did in your study. Since it is often straightforward to write, you might decide to do this chapter first. Since you are discussing something that has already happened, you should write this section in the *past tense*: for example, 'I interviewed eight people' or 'Eight people were interviewed' rather than 'I will interview eight people' or 'Eight people will be interviewed'.

The methods section must clearly identify the epistemological and ontological basis of the study and demonstrate a good working knowledge of the methods to be employed. It should include good coverage of the process of the fieldwork and indicate how the analysis was undertaken. As well as covering the ethical issues, it should also contain an element of reflection on the research process. At all stages, you should be making reference to research methods literature.

Here is a list of questions that you should ask yourself as you are writing the methods section:

- Have you stated your hypothesis or research questions clearly?
- Have you clearly outlined how you designed your research?

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- Have you evaluated the type of data that you have collected?
- Have you evaluated and justified the method you have chosen?
- Have you explained the procedure you followed?
- Have you mentioned the equipment you used and the conditions under which you carried out your research?
- Have you described how you will analyse the data?

This is a critical section in your dissertation as it shows the research framework upon which your study is based.

Writing the findings and results section

There are different ways of presenting your research findings and writing your results. It is, therefore, important to follow your institution's guidelines before you write this section. You may also need to check which particular style of reporting is most suitable for your particular study. For example, you may want to make a clear distinction between the results and the discussion of those results, especially if you are writing a technical or a scientific dissertation. Alternatively, you may decide on having a 'Findings' section where you bring the results of your own analysis and your discussion of the results together in one place. Also, you can decide on the order of presentation of your results and whether to start from a generic overview and move on to specific findings, or vice versa, in reporting your findings.

Whichever approach you decide to use, it is important to understand the difference between findings and discussion. In the findings section, you are presenting what you have found in your research and what you interpret those findings to mean. The discussion section, however, is where you link your data analysis back to literature you introduced in your literature review. Some dissertation guidance will put the two together in one chapter, while others will ask for separate chapters. Make sure you check what is required at your institution. In your findings section, it is important that you present your results in a logical and convincing manner. If your results are presented in a confusing way, the reader will not follow your argument and may not trust your conclusions.

If you are presenting quantitative data, there are several things that you should consider. First, have you used the most appropriate way of presenting your data? Nominal data, for example, is best represented numerically by a frequency table and graphically by a pie chart; ordinal data often looks better with a bar chart representation; and for interval or ratio data, a frequency table will probably be very large, so a histogram would be better here. Whenever you introduce a table

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or chart into your dissertation, you need to ensure that this is clearly labelled with a title and a figure or table number. Make sure that all the data that you present is interpreted. It is not sufficient to just describe it. One common mistake that people make is that they merely repeat what is in the graphs in words. This is not interpretation, it is description. You also need to ensure that you refer to all the tables and charts somewhere in the text. If not, you need to ask yourself why those tables and charts are there.

When it comes to qualitative data, there are no fixed rules about the best way to present it. This means that you need to choose extracts from your data that evidence the arguments you are making in your data analysis. These can be, for example, quotes from your interviews or focus groups or notes or photographs from your observations. Quotes and other raw data will bring your analysis to life and will make your findings more credible. As with quantitative data analysis, you should clearly label your data extracts. Whether your results are quantitative, qualitative or a mixture of both, there are some things to bear in mind:

- Have you given a clear overview of what you have found out from your research?
- Have you included any data which are not needed?
- Have you interpreted your data and not just described it?
- Have you labelled all your tables, figures and quotes?

Writing the discussion section

The discussion section enables you to position your research within wider context of existing knowledge in the subject or area of investigation. It is necessary to include in your discussion some information on how your research has contributed to our understanding of the subject or improved existing knowledge. The limitations of your study also need to be acknowledged and their implications for the validity of your results and your conclusion. The discussion section is particularly important and needs to be written carefully as it is the place where you show the significance of your findings and highlight what has been achieved when compared to your original aims. There are arguments for extending the coverage of literature in this section but only in exceptional circumstances, such as when you have obtained completely different results to what you expected. The discussion should be an opportunity to raise the different voices of interest in the research question and to explore the findings in the light of the literature and different perspectives within it.

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Writing the conclusion

Compared to other sections in your dissertation, your conclusion should be relatively short but should contain a detailed summary of your research. In writing your conclusion, all the strands of your argument need to come together to give a convincing and forceful answer to the research question you set out to study. You also need to justify your conclusion and show how you arrive at the conclusion based on your data or information. You need to identify your key findings and policy or practice implications of those findings. Based on your conclusions, you may offer some recommendations. Apart from just being a summary section, your conclusion offers the opportunity to review your work as a whole, to identify the points of comparison and contrast the various texts you have examined, and to show that, in the process of your study, you have developed a more precise, critical understanding of the way they deal with your topic. This is also an appropriate place for you to point to the potential limitations of small-scale research of this kind and to reflect on possible avenues for researchers to address the issues in the future.

Compiling your list of references

After writing all your sections and noting all the sources you used for your dissertation, you need to compile a list of references. This should be structured and listed alphabetically by surnames of authors. You need to make sure that you utilise the referencing style that you prefer or that is prescribed by your institution. Whatever style you adopt, whether it be Harvard, Oscaola, APA or something else, it is important that you stick to one and are consistent in your referencing style throughout your dissertation. It is essential that you list all your references within the text of your dissertation and all sources cited in the text should be included in the list of references. Ensure that you cite your sources correctly to avoid being accused of the serious academic offence of plagiarism.

Acknowledging the work of others

In Western academic culture, there is the underlying belief that academic endeavour aims to build knowledge and that knowledge builds on knowledge already generated by others (through using that knowledge, borrowing it, modifying it or disregarding it). When producing new knowledge, it is understood that the originators of previous knowledge need to be recognised and acknowledged. If you do not do this and you use other people's ideas, words,

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thoughts or work without acknowledging them, then you are committing an academic offence known as plagiarism.

Appendices

Appendices is the section where you show materials that you want your readers to see but do not want to put in the main sections of your dissertation. This could be a sample questionnaire, letters of correspondence, the output of SPSS statistical analysis or full a transcript of an interview conducted. Since these documents often take up a lot of space, it is essential that you check whether the appendices count within the word limit for your dissertation. All appendices should be numbered in numerical order and listed in the table of contents.

Final draft

The process of preparing your dissertation for submission begins with a careful final reading of all your chapters and sections. Here you can:

- Ensure that your argument is clearly developed from sentence to sentence, from paragraph to paragraph and from chapter to chapter.
- Check the accuracy of your spelling and punctuation.
- Make sure that your sentences are well constructed and that you are expressing yourself clearly, precisely and fluently.
- Ensure that you have not contradicted or repeated yourself.
- Check whether your working title adequately describes the content of your dissertation or whether you need to change it.

You need to check that your quotations from and references to both primary and secondary texts are clearly and consistently identified according to the conventions of the referencing systems your institution requires. After completing your first draft, make sure you have covered all areas by checking again that:

- The title page shows the correct title, your name, the award and the date
- All the pages of the dissertation are correctly numbered
- The table of contents is correct and entries link to the correct page number in your dissertation
- There is consistency in terms of style and layout of your dissertation.

Proofreading

Your final task before you submit should be to proofread your dissertation. In this

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final stage, you will be looking for grammatical and typographical errors. At this point, you will have read your dissertation many times, so it will be very familiar to you. You, therefore, need to use strategies to help you see your dissertation through different eyes. If you have been drafting thus far on your computer, print out a copy of the dissertation as mistakes are often easier to spot when in print. Read your dissertation out loud and see whether what you are saying makes sense. You could also read through concentrating on the grammar and spelling rather than the content. Doing this makes you look at each word individually, rather than skim-reading. When you have read through the whole dissertation, make any necessary changes and then go back to check the layout and presentation guidelines given by your institution to ensure that your dissertation is in the correct format. Then you can print the final document, and have it bound (if required).

Submitting the completed dissertation

The completed dissertation should be submitted in the form set out by your institution. If there are no formal styles, submit the dissertation in a format that makes it easy for the examiner to handle.

Academic writing

Academic writing requires a certain formality that places the writer in the background and allows the exposition of a carefully worked argument to come to the fore. You may have included statistics, graphs or other representations of data, including multimedia components in your dissertation as well as text. However, in addition to presenting data, your aim is to persuade the reader that you have understood the processes of research and can present that research in a clear and intelligible manner. Acquiring the skills and ability to write academic essays is a developmental process which improves during your studies and should not end with the submission of your dissertation. It is an ongoing process, especially if you want to develop a career in academia. As you develop your academic writing skills, you need to pay attention to the way you write and always present your arguments in a clear, concise and objective formal way.

Academic writing is formal. It does not have to be stuffy and complicated, but it does need to be written formally. You will have hopefully learnt the basic skills of academic writing during the production of your undergraduate thesis but just to reinforce the writing style required here are some reminders;

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- Avoid using slang, for example: 'the intervention went down a treat', 'the fieldwork was dicey'.
- Don't use contractions. Instead of 'don't', use 'do not'; instead of 'can't' use 'cannot'; instead of 'should've' use 'should have', etc. You'll have noticed that we have used contractions in this book. This is because the norms and conventions are different for study guides and dissertations. Study guides tend to be less formal than academic essays.
- The same is true for abbreviations. These should also be written out in full:
    - e.g. = for example
    - no. = number
    - i.e. = that is
- You can, however, use recognised acronyms, as long as you define them on their first occurrence:
    - Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
    - Statistics Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)
    - British National Party (BNP).
- Numbers below 100 should be written in full: eleven participants; forty-nine students. If you use percentages or other units of measurement, however, you can leave them in figures, e.g. 99%.

Always write with clarity, precision and conciseness, avoiding verbosity. In academic discourse avoid the use of words which are subjective and personal. These are statements such as 'very interesting', 'extremely useful', 'excellent'. Such constructions are not used because you cannot be certain whether you and your reader will interpret these words in the same way. Although questions of objectivity or subjectivity are crucial to social science research, the evidence from your research forms the basis of any evaluation rather than through qualifying statements.

Key messages

- Before you start writing your dissertation, draw up a plan of what you need to write and how the chapters or sections will relate to each other. You may wish to add a word count for each chapter.
- Check that the title refers accurately to the finished dissertation. If it does not, change the title.
- Check how your institution wants you to present your work.
- Make sure you explain the significance and relevance of your study in your

dissertation.

- Make sure you have enough time to do all the final checking and proofreading of your draft before submitting your dissertation.

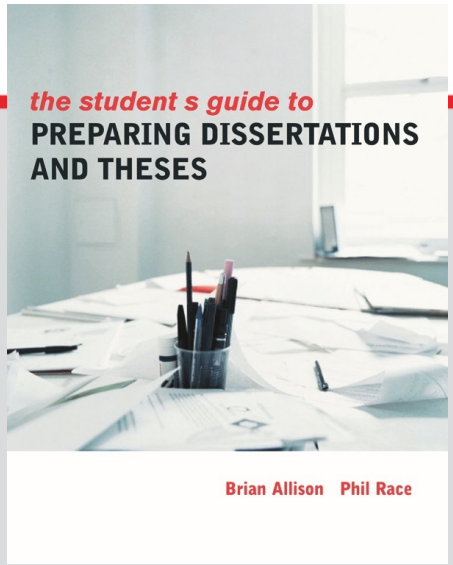
Key questions

- Have you structured your dissertation in a logical, coherent and easy to follow way that brings out the points and arguments you are making?
- Does the order of your chapters or sections reflect a good flow of ideas linking all the elements of your study together?
- Have you reviewed relevant academic literature relating to your study and justified your choice of research methodologies you used in your dissertation?
- Have you checked there is a good balance between and within sections or chapters in your dissertation to ensure you have covered the essential areas of your study?
- Have you asked someone to proofread the draft for you to get some feedback before you finally submitted the dissertation?

CHAPTER

9

REFERENCES



This chapter is excerpted from

The Student's Guide to Preparing Dissertations and Theses by Brian Allison, Phil Race.

Learn more

REFERENCES

Excerpted from *The Student's Guide to Preparing Dissertations and Theses*

To a significant extent, the quality of your dissertation will be judged by examiners on the rigour and consistency of your referencing and Bibliography compilation (and of course on your *choices* of references). Comprehensive reference to relevant work of other authors is an essential part of research presentation. Such reference indicates the author's knowledge of the field in which the research is located and is also used to provide an appropriate context for matter arising in the research itself.

References to the work of others need to be made with discretion. It is important that all references are directly relevant and pertinent to the research project and are not included simply to demonstrate the breadth and extent of the author's reading. At any oral examination or viva, you are likely to be questioned on your knowledge and understanding of the work you have referred to, so it is unwise to include references just for the sake of demonstrating wide reading.

References are primarily included as evidence relating to or supporting points, issues, trends and so on, that have been identified by the author. This function should be evident in the way references are made.

There are a number of ways of making specific reference to the work of other writers. It is self-evident that, as full information on every source is included in the Bibliography, it is only necessary to identify each reference to the extent that enables it to be found in the Bibliography.

As a rule it is unnecessary and inappropriate to include any information in the text that can be found elsewhere in the dissertation, as would be the case in the following example: '... whilst Sit Cyril Burt pointed out in *Mental and Scholastic Tests,* published in England in 1921, that...'. All that is required in the text is the author's surname and the date of publication of the reference. However, there are several ways in which references can be made.

- When the author is being referred to within a sentence construction, only the surname is used and the date of publication is parenthesised.

  While Burt (1921) pointed out that...

- References can be made without actually includcing the author in the construction of the sentence.

  ... an early attempt at formatting a stage theory (Burt, 1921) may be seen as a precursor to...

- When reference is made to more than one author, authors and dates of publication succeed each other in chronological order within the

REFERENCES

parentheses, and are separated by semi-colons:

... and some attempts at developing stages (Wittgenstein, 1995; Brown, 2002; Lowenfield, 2004) may be seen...

- When the flow of the text is uncomfortably interrupted by making references in this way, the reference may be made at the end of the sentence or paragraph providing the direct connection can be recognised.

  ... although earlier attempts at developing stages did not make this apparent (Burt, 1921). Recently, there ...)

- Occasionally, when a specific point has been made by an author it is necessary to inform the reader of the exact page in the text where the point was made. In this case, the page number follows the date within the parentheses.

  ... in discussing the role of the imagination, the point made by Robinson (1996, p. 114) that ...

- When reference is made within the text to a work by two authors, the names of both authors are given. If the reference is parenthetised to identify a particular point or quotation, the 'and' is replaced by an amersand (&). For example, '... Hogwards and Alterio (2003) ...' would be used within a sentence but '... (Hogwarts & Alterio, 2003)...' would be used an an identification.
- When the reference is to the work of three or more authors, the names of all the authors are given in the first reference to the work but subsequently only the name of the first author is given along with the abbreviation *et al.* to indicate other authors.

  For example, '... Douglad, Newby and Jones (1998) ...' would be a first reference whilse subsequent references would be '... Douglas *et al.* (1998) ...' or '... (Douglas *et al.,* 1998) ...' if used as an identification.

- References to organisations or bodies with recognised acronyms or initials are made using the full title for the first reference to the work bu subsequently the acronym or initials may be used.

  For example, '... Department for Education and Skills (2003) ...' would be the first reference while subsequent references would be 'DfES (2003) ...'.

Some organisations, such as Unesco, use the acronym as the offical name and in

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such cases the initials are not punctuated with periods or full stops. It is worth looking at recent examples of (successful) dissertations in your subject areas (and at your institution) to find out more about the abbreviations and acronyms which are regarded as acceptable, and how these are normally handled.