Writing a Successful Masters Thesis/Dissertation

The Research Proposal

- Interest, interest, interest! You and your supervisor
- Background information i.e., the subject and the context
- Rationale – convince your supervisor that this is an area of importance
- The overall aim of your research – what are you trying to achieve
- The plan. How will you go about completing the thesis – estimated time for completing each section
- The initial literature review
- Possible outcomes of your research study

Exercise

- Take your initial idea and attempt an initial research proposal

A Dissertation Template: The Thesis/Dissertation Structure

- Title: Name: Course: Year
- Abstract
- Acknowledgements
- Table of Contents
- Abbreviations
- List of Figures/Tables
- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: Literature Review
- Chapter 3: Research Methods
- Chapter 4: Findings
- Chapter 5: Conclusions
- Chapter 6: References
- Appendices

The Dissertation Introduction

- Background – What led you to the topic? Why is it worth doing? Who will benefit from the study and why?
- Thinking on background – A gap in existing research, a problem that needs addressing, a topic from a different angle, recent reports identifying the problem
- The research focus – which areas are you researching and which are you not and why – the scope, the rationale – why this focus?
- The overall aim – no need for an elaborate justification here because you did it your focus section
- Objectives – specific not vague e.g., identify the factors, evaluate critically, formulate recommendations etc
- Value/importance of the research – punch home that this is an area worth studying and why!

The Literature Review: Telling a Story

- What is literature – anything that represents research or scholarship on a subject i.e., books, articles, conference proceedings, dissertations, websites etc.
- Credibility factor with supervisors – refereed journal articles, books, dissertations, conference papers, websites.
- The review should tell a story relevant to your topic. It should be viewed as a conceptual triangle – broad to narrow. It is not a list readings that is unconnected by any flow.
- Words/phrases that help the flow – differences (however, by contrast, nevertheless, on the other hand, despite this etc), agreement (similarly, likewise, equally, in support of this, further confirmation is found in etc), one idea leading to another (hence, therefore, consequently, as a result etc)
- Links, links, links!
Research Design

- Why have you chosen the method(s) you have chosen
- Case study – deep probing into a multitude of factors affecting and affected by the case – explanatory and/or exploratory. No generalisations.
- Survey – attention to sample size, data analysis, response rates etc. Surface probing with possibility of some generalisations.
- Action research. The research starts with you. It is your problem/issue and theories/concepts are brought to the problem as the problem becomes clearer or to clarify the problem. You have to reflect on your own position as the person with the problem and as a scholar engaging in the research.
- Quantitative vs qualitative research
- Triangulation

Writing Up

- Simple heading – Case Study Results, Survey Findings
- Brief introduction to chapter – what you set out to do, how you intend to present your results, the context of the results i.e., some information that helps explain the nature of the results
- Description, analysis, synthesis e.g., description (students who ranked the transformational leadership qualities of their instructors highly also gave high rankings to extra effort in the class and satisfaction with their instructor), analysis (the data reveals a link between transformational classroom leadership, extra classroom effort and satisfaction with the instructor) synthesis (research in the commercial field indicates the same link and this link seems to hold true in an educational setting)

Practical Tips

- Presentation – do the ‘dry run’
- Find out who your examiners will be – look for their research interests, make reference to their work if possible
- From what you know of the examiners, anticipate the type of questions you may get.
- Be very familiar in detail with your own work
- Be very careful with grammar and presentation

Conclusions

- Introduction – remind the reader of your initial research objectives and set out what you intend to cover in this chapter
- Research Objectives: Summary of Findings and Conclusions
  - Take each research objective in turn.
  - What did you find out as a result of your literature review and empirical research?
  - What conclusions have you come to?
- Discussion/Recommendations
  - Must follow from the findings/conclusions i.e., nothing new!
- Contribution to Knowledge
- Limitations
- Scope for Further Research

Definition of Plagiarism

- Plagiarism is using the words or ideas of others and presenting them as your own. Plagiarism is a type of intellectual theft. It can take many forms, from deliberate cheating to accidentally copying from a source without acknowledgement
- Unintentional plagiarism can result from not knowing how to acknowledge or incorporate sources of information, or from careless note-taking or ‘cutting and pasting’ of electronic sources.
Types of Plagiarism

• Downloading an assignment from an online source and submitting it as your own work.

• Buying, stealing or borrowing an assignment and submitting it as your own work.

• Copying a section of a book or an article and submitting it as your own work.

• Quoting from a source 'word for word', without using quotation marks is plagiarism.

Types of Plagiarism

• Copying, cutting and pasting text from an electronic source and submitting it as your own work.

• Using the words of someone else and presenting them as your own.

• Using significant ideas from someone else and presenting them as your own.

• Putting someone else's ideas into your own words and not acknowledging the source of the ideas is plagiarism.

• Using sources from the internet without referencing them

How Not to Plagiarise

• Be aware of what constitutes plagiarism
• Employ the technology e.g., Viper (free)
• Be aware of what Lingnan considered to be plagiarism
• Become very familiar with the Lingnan requirements regarding referencing and citations e.g., Harvard, APA