University of Malaya

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Practical Guide to Write a PhD Thesis

Nader Ale Ebrahim

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Practical Guide to Write a PhD Thesis
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This presentation is a practical guide on how to write a PhD thesis based on personal experiences and existing literature. It is aimed at all PhD students. A thesis writing may be falling into six rules:

- Identifying the research problem
- Start thesis writing from a day after registration
- Writing a Thesis Plan
- Ask your supervisors: What are their expectations? and maintain regular contact with your supervisors directly/indirectly
- Expand networking
- Continuously write/revise and Publish

Besides of the six rules, the thesis structure, logical coherence and style are also important. This presentation lead how to consider reader’s expectations during the writing procedure. In order to assist the researchers to reduce the writing procedure, the relevant “Research Tools” will be introduced.
MOTIVATION

If there is a better reason to paddle, I don't know what it is.
Questions? What is your thesis:

• Research background
• **Problem statement**
• Research objectives
• Research scope
• Research methodology
• Data collection
• Analysis
• **Results and discussions**
What is a Thesis?

“A thesis is a formal and lengthy research paper, especially a work of original research, written in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a higher degree in a university”

What’s in the thesis?

• Addresses a problem or series of problems
• Describes what was known about the problem(s)
• What you did to solve the problems
• What you think the results means
• How further progress can be made

Source: http://www.slideshare.net/akarim717/how-to-write-a-thesis
Six Rules of Thesis Writing

1. Identifying the research problem
2. Start thesis writing from a day after registration
3. Writing a Thesis Plan
4. Ask your supervisors: What are their expectations? and maintain regular contact with your supervisors directly/indirectly
5. Expand networking
6. Continuously write/revise and Publish
1- Identifying the Research Problem

Researchers begin a study by identifying a research problem that they need to address. They write about this “problem” in the opening passages of their study and, in effect, give you as a reader the rationale for why the study is important and why you need to read their study.

The literature review process

Source: © Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis, Adrian Thornhill and Martin Jenkins 2003
Research methods for business students / Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis, Adrian Thornhill. —5th ed.
2- Start Thesis Writing From a Day After Registration

• Write down a tentative thesis title, even if your thesis is murky in your mind.
• Write down a first cut at your thesis abstract, even if you have not done the work yet!
•  

Source: Priya Narasimhan, (2006), How To Write a Good (no, Great) PhD Dissertation

Example

• Write a journal/conference paper while you are writing the thesis.
3- Writing a Thesis Plan

• Write down the road-map of your thesis today
  – What is the ideal thesis that you would wish for?
  – What results would it contain?
  – How would you evolve the story from start to finish?

Source: Priya Narasimhan, (2006), How To Write a Good (no, Great) PhD Dissertation

• Write each Chapter of the thesis deliverable items

• Write a checklist for each Chapter

  Example 1

  Example 2 (Thesis Checklist)
4- Ask your supervisors: What are their expectations?

Ask your supervisors for continuous feedback
  - Your advisor is your biggest champion, your biggest promoter
  - This person wants to see you succeed and will rave about you and your work enthusiastically to everyone
  - Discuss your thesis layout, problem definition, goals of the month, etc.
  - For sticky issues, your advisor will find you the right “connections” to fill in the gaps in your thesis

Source: Priya Narasimhan, (2006), How To Write a Good (no, Great) PhD Dissertation

Keep good relationship with your advisor (even after you graduate).

Source: Useful Things to Know About Ph. D. Thesis Research, by: H.T. Kung, Harvard University

Find a proper Table Of Content (TOC) according to your supervisor expectation. If you could not find it, follow the following slide structure:
Thesis structure

Materials preceding the text
- Title Page
- Original Literary Work Declaration
- Abstract
- Acknowledgements
- Table of Contents
- List of Figures, List of Tables, List of Symbols and Abbreviations, List of Appendices

The main text
- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: Literature Review
- Chapter 3: Methodology (or Materials and Methods)
- Chapter 4: Results (or Experimental Results)
- Chapter 5: Discussion
- Chapter 6: Conclusion

References and Appendices
Writing Your Thesis Outline

Nothing says "I'm almost done" to your advisor/spouse/parents like pretending you have a plan.

**Step 1:** Aim for a respectable number of chapters:

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. → chapter #’s
6. 
7. 

5 = "That’s IT??”
6-7 = “Not bad”
8+ = “Are you crazy??”

**Step 2:** Fill in the “freebies”:

**Thesis Outline**

1. INTRODUCTION
2. LIT REVIEW
3. METHODOLOGY
4. 
5. 
6. 7. CONCLUSIONS

You’re half way done!

**Step 3:** Make up titles for the “meat” chapters:

1. LIT REVIEW
2. METHODOLOGY
3. (That stuff you did your first year)
4. (Stuff you’re supposed to be doing now)
5. (Make stuff up)
6. 7. CONCLUSIONS

(It’ll be years before you actually have to work on that later chapter, and by then your thesis topic will have changed anyway)

**Step 4:** Voilá! You just bought yourself another two years

So, how’s your Thesis going?

I have an outline!

www.phdcomics.com
Dear Nader Ale Ebrahim:

Your paper, "Virtual R&D Teams in Small and Medium Enterprises: A Literature Review", was recently listed on SSRN's Top Ten download list for ORG: Contemporary Organizational Structures (Topic) and Structural Dimensions & Organizational Behavior eJournal. As of 06/16/2010, your paper has been downloaded 107 times. You may view the abstract and download statistics at http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1530904.

Top Ten Lists are updated on a daily basis. Click on the following link to view the Top Ten list for the journal ORG: Contemporary Organizational Structures (Topic) Top Ten and Structural Dimensions & Organizational Behavior eJournal Top Ten.

Click on the following link to view all the papers in the journal ORG: Contemporary Organizational Structures (Topic) All Papers and Structural Dimensions & Organizational Behavior eJournal All Papers.

To view any of the Top Ten lists, click the TOP button on any network, sub network, journal or topic in the Browse list reachable through the following link: http://www.ssrn.com/Browse

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Sincerely,

Michael C. Jensen
Chairman
Social Science Research Network

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5- Expand networking

1. Attending conferences for networking and making contacts
2. Build an academic network around yourself outside your university
3. People should get to know you, not just your advisor
6- Continuously write/revise and Publish

- your published papers, as a permanent record of your research, are your passport to your community

- Publishing is one of the necessary steps embedded in the scientific research process. It is also necessary for graduation and career progression.

- You need a STRONG manuscript to present your contributions to the scientific community

Source: How to Write Great Papers, 2012, By: Anthony Newman Publisher, Elsevier, Amsterdam
Lindsay’s laws

1. Research is finished only after it is written up. What you write must communicate and persuade.

2. The hallmarks of scientific writing are precision, clarity and brevity, in that order.

3. Try to write as if you were speaking to someone: “see a face”. This way you get to say it directly and clearly.

4. Write (your chapters) in four drafts:
   (a) First: putting the facts together
   (b) Second: checking for coherence and fluency of ideas
   (c) Third: readability
   (d) Fourth: editing

Writing Literature Review
Writing your literature review takes time. You may need to complete several drafts before your final copy. It is important to have a good introduction that clearly tells the reader what the literature will be about.

An introduction must tell the reader the following:

– what you are going to cover in the review
– the scope of your research
– how the review ties in with your own research topic.

Source: https://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/lsu/content/2_AssessmentTasks/assess_tuts/lit_review_LL/writing.html
Introduction

This is a good example of an introduction because it has a topic sentence which indicates what will be covered and also tells the reader the specific focus of the literature review in the concluding sentence.

Many theories have been proposed to explain what motivates human behaviour. Although the literature covers a wide variety of such theories, this review will focus on five major themes which emerge repeatedly throughout the literature reviewed. These themes are: incorporation of the self-concept into traditional theories of motivation, the influence of rewards on motivation, the increasing importance of internal forces of motivation, autonomy and self-control as sources of motivation, and narcissism as an essential component of motivation. Although the literature presents these themes in a variety of contexts, this paper will primarily focus on their application to self-motivation.

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A paragraph is a group of connected sentences that develop a single point, argument or idea. Paragraphs need to link to other paragraphs so that the themes, arguments or ideas developed are part of a coherent whole rather than separate bits.

A paragraph should include:

- a main statement / idea that you are putting forward, ie topic sentence
- evidence from research to support / argue your idea, showing where the writers agree and / or disagree
- student analysis of the research literature where appropriate
- summing up and linking to the next idea (paragraph).

In the literature review, you will need to show evidence of integrating your readings into each paragraph and analysis of the readings where necessary.

Source: https://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/lsu/content/2_AssessmentTasks/assess_tuts/lit_review_LL/writing.html

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Integration of multiple sources

To develop an integrated argument from multiple sources, you need to link your arguments together. The model below is a guide.

- **Topic sentence** - outlining your main claim or key point for that paragraph
- **Supporting evidence from the readings**
- **Contrasting theories from research**
- **Concluding sentence** - linking to the next paragraph
Integration of student analysis

It is important to integrate your analysis and interpretation of the literature in your literature review. Read the following paragraph and see how the arguments have been integrated into the paragraph along with student analysis. Analysis is not just student opinion, it needs to be supported by the literature.

By its very nature, motivation requires a degree of individual satisfaction or narcissism. Robbins, Millet, Cacioppo, and Waters-Marshal (1986) suggest that motivation has as its very basis the need to focus on, and please, the self. This is supported by Shaw, Shapard and Waugaman (2000) who contend that this narcissistic drive is based on the human effort to find personal significance in life. It can be argued that the desire to improve one’s status is a highly motivational force, and is central to the idea of narcissistic motivation. The narcissistic motivational strategies put forward by Shaw et al. (2000) are concerned with motivation for life in general, but may also have applications in the context of work. These strategies, with their focus on personal needs, demonstrate that narcissism is an essential component of motivation.
### Appendix B: Data Tables

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Keeping up-to-date
Keeping up-to-date
Paraphrasing
In the competitive market, virtual teams represent a growing response to the need for fast time-to-market, low-cost and rapid solutions to complex organizational issues.
Desktop search
Reference Management
EndNote

- *EndNote* is an almost indispensable tool for the serious researcher. And best of all, its free to all UM postgraduates!
Smile - your research almost done!
Thank you!

Nader Ale Ebrahim, Ph.D
Independent Researcher
Technology Management Consultant
"Research Tools" Advisor

http://aleebrahim.info/
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