



**CHARLES
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UNIVERSITY**

Northern Institute
People • Policy • Place

Academic Writing: the whys and wherefores

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What are you writing?

- Thesis proposal
- PhD by Thesis
- PhD by Publication
- Journal Article
- Article for general readership or specialised outlet
eg The Conversation

Mullins, D. & Kiley, M. 2002, It's a PhD, not a Nobel prize, *Studies in Higher Education Volume 27, No. 4*

Denhom, C.& Evans, T. (eds) 2006, *Doctorates Down Under; key to successful study in Australia and New Zealand*. Camberwell, Vic. ACER Press

Petrie, M & Rugg, G. 2010, *The Unwritten Rules*

Blogs/U Tubes/Tip Pages eg
<http://patthomson.net> patter

What do markers look for in a thesis?

- 1.Coherence/ a storyline/argument
- 2.Tackles a significant problem
- 3.Situated in existing knowledge
- 4.Is positioned theoretically and conceptually
- 5.Evidence and rigour
- 6.A critical stance
- 7.Voice and tone
- 8.A conclusion and contribution
- 9.Academic presentation

A thesis is an argument

- Argument is about putting forward a position and supporting it with evidence
- “The arguments are clearly laid out and the evidence is provided with clarity and transparency”
- “A sustained, logical and well evidenced argument”

a storyline - coherence

- Examiners say that many theses look like a collection of free-standing sections, not a purposeful, unified whole. NB Thesis by Publication-what about coherence?
- Think about the spine or the thread – what holds it together?

2. Tackles a significant problem

- “tackles an important topic from a unique and innovative standpoint”
- Signal the contribution in posing the problem and the questions and in the discussion of the findings

3. Situated in existing knowledge

- A critical review of relevant literature, theory, policy, approaches to the topic to set up the questions, the methodology and the analysis.
- The literature and theories are used in setting up the problem, the questions, the analysis and the discussion.
- How do your questions, approach, analyses and conclusions link to key debates, theories, literature?

4. A conceptual framework- positioning

- A well argued conceptual framework that maps the territory to be explored, is clear about the assumptions and theories underpinning the approach, identifies core concepts and the positioning of the thesis in the field
- “So often theses I have assessed make claims that theories will be used yet do not refer to them except at the end, or minimally”
- Consider how you will use theory, demonstrate critical analytical skills and awareness of assumptions

5. Evidence and rigour

- “The data “works” - it is accurately described and is then used to answer the questions with appropriate caveats about what can be claimed - **it should be clearly linked to the conceptual framework”**

Critical engagement - scholarship

- The conclusions are clearly spelt out with appropriate limitations, the way they can be used and possible next steps in knowledge development in the area identified
- Problems in the research are confronted; decisions are reported and justified

Voice and tone

Your voice needs to drive the thesis: setting up the problem, the review of existing knowledge, the data collection, analysis and the conclusions and their implications.

“The conclusion is full of others’ opinions where it should be the clear voice of the researcher, asserting the research argument and findings”.

Have a view and express it confidently but...



A measured tone

- A measured tone – engaging with the complexity and nuance of what is there
- it is very problematic it looks as if you have “cherry-picked” the literature or their data to suit an ideology or an argument
- Don’t make over the top claims for what you have found

8. A conclusion not a summary

Final chapter is more than a summary. Position your research, what you have achieved and its significance and what remains to be done.

Talk about what is surprising. Unfinished.

Finish strongly – not with a summary but with conclusions

9. Academic presentation

- The thesis looks professional - well laid out, no typos or grammatical errors or missing references
- Academic writing – style
- Accurate referencing
- Logical order – “structured to enable the flow of ideas to be maintained through a sustained argument as well as a structured flow of ideas”
- Consistency: format, fonts, layout, numbering
- Signposts and road maps– leads the reader through the thesis

- The title should accurately reflect the thesis
- Good road map in the Abstract and introduction
- Reader needs to know what it is about- right from the start -research questions need to be upfront
- Most examiners begin by reading the Abstract, Introduction and Conclusion to gauge the scope of the work
- First impressions count

Doctorate by Publication

- **Challenge not to be repetitious but not to leave big gaps**
- **Usually best with different interlinked studies**
- **Follow the same format as thesis –**
- **Lit review and Data chapter is replaced by publications**
- **Plan the publications up front**

Writing for publication

- **Don't wait till the thesis is finished to draft up publications**
- **Keep a list of possible articles as you write and review your thesis**
- **Don't write a paper/papers and then decide where to submit and write to a journal's style**
- **Research a number of journals Research journal details :editorial board,turnaround times,metrics**

- **Where have the most relevant articles for your thesis been published?**
- **Make sure you reference them- likely that at least some will be asked to review**
- **Purpose and mission of the journal**
- **what type of articles they typically publish**
- **the structure and the research methods.**
- **Word limits**

- **Publishing etiquette and conduct**
 - **Agree authorship early; review at time of submission**
 - **Supervisor/supervisory team/ research team members –as authors? What order**
 - **Don't submit the same paper to more than one journal at a time or substantially the same paper to more than one journal**
 - **Identify your funding agency and ethics clearance**

- **Learn from reviews and reviewers comments**
- **If revise and resubmit make clear changes that have been made in response to reviewers-it will probably be sent back to them**
- **Don't be despondent if you are not accepted the first time!**
- **<http://herkules oulu.fi/isbn9789514293801/isbn9789514293801.pdf>**

Outline for a journal article

- **What is the problem that is addressed?**
- **Why is it important?**
- **How did you study the problem?**
- **What are your results?**
- **What are the implications of the results?**
- **What do you recommend as further research**

Belt Mottonen & Harkonen

- **TIPS FOR WRITING SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL ARTICLES**
- **<http://herkules oulu.fi/isbn9789514293801/isbn9789514293801.pdf>**

Confirmation of Candidature

- *Theoretical Background:*
- **Clear statement of the aims of the research**
- **Understanding of theory**
- **Development of hypotheses/ Research questions**
Quality of literature review
- **Project proposal demonstrates a capacity for critical review**
- *Methods and Analysis:*
- **Appropriateness of method for proposed research** **Understanding of methods**