Lecture (8)
Writing up your Thesis\Research

Research Methods in Linguistics
1302740

My thesis is written in

Blood
Sweat
Tears
and COFFEE.

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I. Structure and Introduction
1. What makes qualitative research ‘qualitative’?

Qualitative researching is exciting and important. It is a highly rewarding activity because it engages us with things that matter, in ways that matter. Through qualitative research we can explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants, the ways that social processes, institutions, discourses or relationships work, and the significance of the meanings they generate. We can do all of this qualitatively by using methodologies that celebrate richness, depth, nuance, context, multidimensionality and complexity rather than being embarrassed or inconvenienced by them. Instead of editing these elements out in search of the general picture or the average, qualitative research factors them directly into its analyses and explanations. This means that it has an unrivalled capacity to constitute compelling arguments about how things work in particular contexts.

(Mason 2002: 1)
the sense of argument develops through the whole process of data collection, analysis and organization. This makes qualitative writing in essence very different from quantitative writing. Qualitative writing becomes very much an unfolding story in which the writer gradually makes sense, not only of her data, but of the total experience of which it is an artefact. This is an interactive process in which she tries to untangle and make reflexive sense of her own presence and role in the research. The written study thus becomes a complex train of thought within which her voice and her image of others are interwoven. Therefore, ‘unlike quantitative work that can carry its meaning in its tables and summaries, qualitative work carries its meaning in its entire text… its meaning is in the reading’ (Richardson and St Pierre 2005: 959–60). The voice and person of the researcher as writer not only become a major ingredient of the written study, but have to be evident for the meaning to become clear.

(Holliday 2007: 122, underlining added)
Qualitative Research is primarily exploratory research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research.

Qualitative Research is also used to uncover trends in thought and opinions, and dive deeper into the problem.

Qualitative data collection methods vary using unstructured or semi-structured techniques. Some common methods include focus groups (group discussions), individual interviews, and participation/observations. The sample size is typically small, and respondents are selected to fulfil a given quota.
1. What makes qualitative research ‘qualitative’?

- **Quantitative Research** is used to quantify the problem by way of generating numerical data or data that can be transformed into useable statistics.
- It is used to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviours, and other defined variables – and generalize results from a larger sample population.
- Quantitative Research uses measurable data to formulate facts and uncover patterns in research.
- Quantitative data collection methods are much more structured than Qualitative data collection methods.
- Quantitative data collection methods include various forms of surveys – online surveys, paper surveys, mobile surveys and kiosk surveys, face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, longitudinal studies, website interceptors, online polls, and systematic observations.
The main difference between qualitative and quantitative methods is flexibility. As a whole, quantitative methods have relative inflexibility.

Qualitative methods are usually more flexible, allowing more naturalness and acclimatization for the interaction and collaboration between the researcher and the participant.
Several unique aspects of qualitative research contribute to rich, insightful results:

- Synergy among respondents, as they build on each other’s comments and ideas.
- The dynamic nature of the interview or group discussion process, which engages respondents more actively than is possible in more structured survey.
- The opportunity to probe ("Help me understand why you feel that way") enabling the researcher to reach beyond initial responses and rationales.
- The opportunity to observe, record and interpret non-verbal communication (i.e., body language, voice intonation) as part of a respondent’s feedback, which is valuable during interviews or discussions, and during analysis.
- The opportunity to engage respondents in "play" such as projective techniques and exercises, overcoming the self-consciousness that can inhibit spontaneous reactions and comments.

1. What makes qualitative research ‘qualitative’?
Have you noticed whether it is common in your field for authors to use first-person language forms – either in the singular *I/me/my/mine*, or the plural *we/us/our/ours*?

Below is some data on this area of academic English usage. Hyland (2002) analysed journal papers in various subject fields and counted the following instances (per 1,000 words):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>discipline</th>
<th>first-person forms</th>
<th><em>I/me/my/mine</em></th>
<th><em>We/us/our(s)</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Engineering</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. The writer’s voice

Task

› Does anything strike you as odd in the Acknowledgment below?

to make it more appropriate. First, gratitude should be expressed to the students and teachers at... who participated as subjects in this study. Special thanks go the seven pairs of students who... An eternal debt is owed to the supervisor of this thesis.... for his devotion of time and precious advice. He was encouraging and constructive at all times. Without his help and guidance the completion of the thesis would not have been possible. Thanks are also expressed to two other committee members... who played an important role in giving valuable advice from the beginning. Additional advice on statistical analysis has come from ... and help with graphics from ... Finally, my partner is to be thanked for his love and support and his family for their concern.
Adrian Holliday’s ‘map’ for writing up qualitative research:

1. ABSTRACT the essential message
2. INTRODUCTION setting the scene
3. LITERATURE REVIEW
4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THE DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH PROCEDURES
5. DISCUSSION OF DATA
6. IMPLICATIONS
7. CONCLUSION – summing up and recommendations
STRUCTURE AND INTRODUCTION

3. Structuring your thesis research

ABSTRACT

- 1) Summary of your basic message

  • Why did you decide to do this study?
  • Why is this research important?
  • Why should someone read your entire essay?

This study explored and described factors involved in the development of information technology standards through a case study of ANSI/ISO Z39.50: Information Retrieval (Z39.50) Application Service Definition and Protocol Specification. The study's goals were: 1) document Z39.50 development, and 2) develop a holistic understanding of that development. The critical importance of standards for information handling in the digital environment, the evidence of major difficulties in producing standards, and the lack of systematic, empirical research on standards development motivated the researcher to undertake this study.

A multi-method research strategy included a qualitative research approach, case study, and model building. Data were collected from multiple sources: documentary evidence, guided interviews with participants in standards development, and participant observation of Z39.50 development. A systems-theoretic model provided a conceptual framework for the study, and the model served as an analytical tool in data analysis. Inductive analysis allowed the discovery of additional aspects and relationships in Z39.50 development.

The researcher characterizes Z39.50 evolution as a continuous development in which multiple stages of standards work can be discerned. These stages reflect changes in stakeholders, goals, participants, and the environment of the standards work system. A revised systems-theoretic conceptual model incorporated constructs that emerged from the data (e.g., mediating mechanisms and relevant environment) to represent more adequately Z39.50 evolution. The concept of mediating mechanisms reflects the dynamic, social nature of standards development and can account for changes over time in system goals. The study demonstrates that complex standards development efforts can be investigated systematically. The research strategy, the conceptual model, and a set of working hypotheses can guide subsequent research.
INTRODUCTION

3. Structuring your thesis\research

- 2) Your statement of topic and focus
- 3) Your vision and motivation for the research, and how you locate it within broader work
- 4) Your choice of research setting and overall data collection strategy
- 5) How your thesis is structured
3. Structuring your thesis

LITERATURE REVIEW

- 6) Your conceptual framework

- 7) What you have learnt from previous research and how you position yourself in relation to current discussions, within which your topic and your methodology are located
3. Structuring your thesis/research

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THE DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH PROCEDURES

- 8) Evidence that you are well informed
- 9) How you chose your core setting and relevant data sources
- 10) What we need to know about the setting
- 11) How you developed an appropriate research strategy
- 12) How you gained access and collected data
- 13) A catalogue of research activities and data collected
- 14) How you structured your analysis and arrived at your choice of themes and headings
- 15) Your system for presenting data (e.g. coding, anonymising)
DISCUSSION OF DATA

16) Structured using the themes and headings
17) What you have learnt from the data
18) How the data provides evidence for what you have found
3. Structuring your thesis\research

IMPLICATIONS

- 19) A summary of what you have found during your research
- 20) What you think it all means
CONCLUSION

21) Your final comments on all the basic points in your argument
Silverman compares the macrostructure of a thesis with telling a story and suggests there are at least three possible types:

1. **Hypothesis**
2. **Analysis**
3. **Mystery.**
4. Structuring your research story

The Hypothesis Story

If we consider all types of research – quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods – this is probably the commonest way of writing up research, and is what most academic journals encourage/expect from researchers submitting their papers for publication:

- You state your hypotheses
- You test them
- You discuss the implications

“I’ve narrowed it to two hypotheses: it grew or we shrunk.”
4. Structuring your research story

The Analytical Story

As the Hypothesis Story tends to be written in the passive voice, telling the Analytical Story ‘is a more conversational way of writing’ (Silverman 2000: 243) and involves asking and answering questions such as:

- What are the key concepts that I have used in my study?
- How do my ‘findings’ shed light on these concepts?
- How do they relate to my original research problem and to the literature I consulted?

‘Rather than hope that the reader will eventually find out these matters, telling an analytic story lays everything out on a plate at the outset’ (Silverman 2000: 243).
4. Structuring your research story

The Mystery Story

- Some readers – though your supervisor may not be one of them! – prefer to be surprised.
- Alasuutari describes the Mystery Story approach as one that starts directly from empirical examples, develops the questions by discussing them, and gradually leads the reader to interpretations of the data collected and to more general implications of your findings (Alasuutari 1995: 183).

Two potential advantages of the Mystery Story approach:
1. it may engage readers’ interest and attention;
2. and it might more accurately reflect the inductive form of much qualitative research, where the intention is for findings (and possibly even the topics) evolve gradually.
Here are the components that David Silverman suggests – in the ‘Writing Up’ section of Doing Qualitative Research – are necessary in a qualitative thesis.

A. The First Few Pages
B. The Literature Review chapter (but he asks ‘Do you need one?)
C. The Methodology chapter
D. The Data chapters (note the plural)
E. The Final Chapter
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>The complexity of classroom discourse</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Background to the study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Exploratory observations</td>
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<td>SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOM RESEARCH</td>
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<td>2.2</td>
<td>Systematic observation schedules</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Influences and diversification</td>
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<td>2.4</td>
<td>A linguistic orientation</td>
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<td>2.5</td>
<td>A sociological orientation</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Relating research to teachers and learners</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CLASSROOM DISCOURSE RESEARCH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Classroom discourse studies</td>
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</tr>
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<td>3.2</td>
<td>Multi-layered classroom discourse</td>
<td>68</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>RESEARCH METHODS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Research questions and analysis overview</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Discourse, context and qualitative research</td>
<td>88</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>The study design</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>The data collection process</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Approaches to data analysis</td>
<td>113</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>CLASSROOM DISCOURSE WORLDS</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Introduction and chapter overview</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Outside world and language learning world discourse</td>
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<td>5.3</td>
<td>Analysis of lesson 9 Island Silks</td>
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<td>Lesson 6: Highland Wool</td>
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<td>5.5</td>
<td>Outside world topics and ESP discourse</td>
<td>155</td>
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<td>5.6</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>175</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>NEGOTIATING CLASSROOM PROCESS</td>
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<td>6.1</td>
<td>Views of classroom process</td>
<td>179</td>
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<td>6.2</td>
<td>The pre-plenary phase</td>
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<td>6.3</td>
<td>The plenary phase</td>
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<td>6.4</td>
<td>Instructions and pre-groupwork</td>
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<td>6.5</td>
<td>Groupwork</td>
<td>208</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>PARTICIPANT PERCEPTIONS OF RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Class room diversity and uniqueness</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>The interview data</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>The individual and the group</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Research questions and main findings of the study</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Relationship to previous research</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Limitations of the study</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A fundamental question is: *How long should the Introduction be?*

Guidance from qualitative researchers varies quite widely on the issue of length. For example, Silverman (2000: 224) took the view that “there is no reason why your introduction should be any longer than two or three pages, particularly if your ‘methods’ chapter covers the natural history of your research”.

The length will depend on precisely what an Introduction covers. You should ask your supervisors’ advice on the specific requirements of your Introduction.
6. Writing the Introduction

- The point of the introduction is to answer the question: What is this thesis about? You answer that question in four ways, by explaining:

1. Why you have chosen this topic rather than any other, e.g. because it has been neglected or because it is much discussed but not properly or fully
2. Why this topic interests you
3. The kinds of research approach or academic discipline you will use
4. Your research questions or problems

(Murcott 1997: 1)
6. Writing the Introduction

- **Stage 1: ORIENTATION**
  1a – General statements (especially on the importance of the topic)
  1b – Background information
  1c – Reference to previous studies

- **Stage 2: JUSTIFICATION**
  2a – Indicating a gap
  2b – Questions/problems
  2c – Value of further investigation (by you) of the topic

- **Stage 3: FOCUS ON YOUR RESEARCH**
  3a – Content: aims/thesis
  3b – Structure
  3c – Limitations
  3d – Means (method)
  3e – Evaluation
One key feature of academic work reported in a dissertation or thesis is that you are expected to place your work in the context of related work and to explain why you thought it necessary to do the research you have done. In other words, you justify your contribution to the field.


7. The language of Introductions

1a – General statements
- Code mixing has a long ... history in Quebec.
- The sceptical paradox is well known:....
- There has been much interest recently in the concept of ... and its relevan
- Research and speculation on ... have been growing at a rapid rate...
- In recent years the study of ... has focused on ...

1b – Background information
- Stage 1b sometimes contains essential facts about the subject–matter which the reader has to know
  in order to understand the text – for example definitions, or other basic information.

1c – Reference to previous studies
- Parkinson (2012) has developed an elaborate framework to show that ....
- There is now a considerable body of research which suggests ....
- Most researchers in the field agree that ....
- Recent studies have shown that ....
- Much recent work ... has indicated that ...
- Jenkins (2009) found ... that ...
7. The language of Introductions

Language Box: Introduction stage 2 – Justification

Stage 2a – Indicating a gap
- Surprisingly, only one extensive article has been published.
- This aspect of ... has not been given much attention.
- The limitation of all these interpretations is that....
- Studies of ... are rare
- Negative expressions (few, little, not much, hardly, etc.) are very common here.
- the literature on ... has concentrated principally on ...
- Most of the data on ... which can be found in the literature pertain to ...
- Most existing research on ... has been based on relatively small samples ...
- which has made it impossible to carry out satisfactory studies ....
7. The language of Introductions

- Language Box: Introduction stage 2 – Justification

  Stage 2b – Indicating questions/problems
  Either direct or indirect questions:
  - Would an analysis of ... bear out their claims?
  - ...requires clarification. Is it ..., or is it ...?
  - But the question remains whether ....

  Stage 2c – Importance of the topic
  Highlight the positive value or advantage of the topic:
  - His elegant model merits testing as a generative theory. ..
  - The article well deserves careful analysis...
7. The language of Introductions

Language Box: Introduction stage 3 – Focus on my research

3a – Content: aims / central idea
- My primary purpose is to...
- I will discuss ... In ... I shall argue that ....
- In this thesis I will claim...
- In this thesis I present results of a pilot study ....
- The aim of this study is to demonstrate that ...
- This study investigates/describes ...
- The object of this thesis is to look critically at ....
- This study attempted to explore ...

3b – Structure
- This thesis will first ..., and then ...
- Having analysed ..., I will go on to ....
- First, brief definitions of ... will be offered; second, ... the language data and the analysis will be presented; third, an attempt will be made...; finally, ...
7. The language of Introductions

- Language Box: Introduction stage 3 – Focus on my research

3c – Limitations
- Since ... is beyond the scope of this study ....
- It is not the purpose of this study to ..., but rather to ...
- I will not attempt here to .... Rather than focus upon ..., my intention is
- I do not attempt to describe or compare ... Instead, I seek to ...
- Only the data from ... are considered here

3d – Means (method)
- My approach is characterised by two assumptions ....
- I have based my study on ....
- The data on which the discussion will be based comprises ....
- This study uses and extends those concepts and is based on ...

3e – Evaluation
- ... offers a possible explanation for ....
- This study offers new proposals ...
- There is some evidence to suggest that the... should be widely applicable,
  although the problem of ... is likely to limit their use.
II. The Literature Review
Harry Wolcott took a radical view of the literature review in qualitative research:

“I expect my students to know the relevant literature, but I do not want them to lump (dump?) it all into a chapter that remains unconnected to the rest of the study. I want them to draw upon the literature selectively and appropriately as needed in the telling of their story... Ordinarily this calls for introducing related research toward the end of the study rather than at the beginning, except for the necessary ‘nesting’ of the problem in the introduction”.

(Wolcott 1990: 17, underlining added)
Silverman (2000: 231), on the other hand, says that the idea of not having a literature review chapter at all may be “too radical for most students (and their supervisors!)”. He goes on to add:

“Nevertheless, even if you decide to write the conventional literature review chapter, what [Wolcott] has to say is a salutary reminder that, in writing a qualitative research dissertation, you should cite other literature only in order to connect your narrow research topic to the directly relevant concerns of the broader research community. Making wider links should properly be left to your final chapter”.
2. Principles

The review should be “written from a particular standpoint, to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the research topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of documents in relation to the research being proposed” (Hart 1998:13). To achieve that, Silverman advocates what he called the four principles of literature review:

1. Show respect for the literature
2. Be focused and critical
3. Avoid mere description
4. Write up the review after your other chapters
2. Principles

- Review Principle 1: Show respect for the literature
  Even though you are pursuing a narrow research topic, you should not show disrespect for previous research or disconnect what you are doing from the wider debate in the field. “Even producers of literature must know the literature, and a major criterion for evaluating work is whether or not it is put in a context of prior scholarship” (Marx 1997: 106).
2. Principles

- **Review Principle 2: Be focused and critical**
  Respect can only get you so far; you need to show a critical perspective on what you have read. “Approach the literature with questions and remember that your goal is to advance it, not simply to marvel at its wonders” (Marx 1997: 106).
2. Principles

- **Review principle 3: Avoid mere description**
  Silverman (2000: 229) says that every supervisor “has horror stories of literature reviews which were tediously and irrelevantly descriptive”, rather than analytical and critical.

- Rudestam and Newton characterise this sort of review as “a laundry list of previous studies, with sentences or paragraphs beginning with the words ‘Smith found…’, Jones concluded…’, ‘Anderson stated…’ and so on” (1992: 46).

- They go on to say that the background literature can be described briefly, even in a single sentence, but that the most relevant studies “need to be **critiqued** rather than reported” (Rudestam and Newton, 1992: 49).
Review Principle 4: Write up after your other chapters

Silverman suggests writing the literature review after you have done the other chapters. Isn’t that rather an odd suggestion? Surely most students aim to complete their literature review before ‘starting their research’, don’t they?
2. Principles

Two possible disadvantages of writing your literature review too early are:

1. Until you have completed the analysis of your data, you may not know which parts of the literature are relevant to discussing your findings.
2. You may be tempted to think of the literature review as relatively easy.

Can you think of any other potential problems that might arise if you start writing your literature review too early?
The literature review should provide your readers with answers to the following questions:

1. What do we already know about the topic?
2. What do you have to say critically about what is already known?
3. Has anyone else done anything similar or related to what you propose?
4. Where does your work fit in with what has gone before?
5. Why is your research worth doing, in the light of what has already been done?

3. Content and organisation
3. Content and organisation

Task
What can go wrong in a literature review?
Next are supervisors’ criticisms of four students’ reviews. Read them carefully and then reflect on these questions:

- Did your supervisors make criticisms like those of the literature review drafts
- you wrote during your first year of research? (Did they make any other criticisms?)
- Could any of the comments A–D apply to your current literature review?
3. Content and organisation

A. “Your draft review is basically little more than a list of previous research papers in the field. While it is clearly well researched, it doesn’t give me a sense of what has been more significant and less significant. It is hard to know where you stand’.

B. “You have given a chronological account, which might be fine for an introductory textbook but doesn’t work well as a preface to your own research. Although I know what your research hypothesis is, I don’t see it informing your review of the previous literature. Somehow we need to see the relevant themes and issues more clearly”.
3. Content and organisation

C. “The first part of your review deals with theory, often invoking big names from the past. The second half deals with practice – contemporary empirical findings. At the moment I don’t see a coherent relationship between the two”.

D. “In general, you haven’t shown clearly enough what literature is relevant, and how, to your particular research topic…. You need to prune this material drastically and to increase the space devoted to your own critical understanding of the issues, discussed in relation to what you are setting out to show…. Your line of argument and the steps that you follow in pursuing that line need to be made much clearer; you need to impose a much more transparent structure on your discussion”. (Examples A–C have been adapted from Feak & Swales, 2009: 10–11);
Within the literature review, it may be appropriate to use an organising principle such as:

1. **general-to-specific**, 
2. **chronological** (narrating the development of research or debate), 
3. **problem-solution** (evaluating alternative solutions to a problem), 
4. **contrasting theories or procedures, etc.** (describing and evaluating alternatives).
Although the overall organisation of your review chapter(s) may be thematic, it may be appropriate to use some of those patterns above for different parts of your review.

You may also choose to combine aspects of more than one pattern—for example, a discussion of alternative theories or procedures may have a historical (chronological) dimension; it might also be seen as a chain of solutions (based on previous theories or procedures) to the problem.
Your major decisions in planning your literature review are therefore what to include from previous research and where / in which order to mention it.

When it comes to writing up the final draft of your review, you also have to decide how to include your citations – whether to quote directly from your source or whether to summarise (or paraphrase). You also need to decide which related studies you should discuss as a group, and which studies you should discuss alone.

There are two basic styles of citation:
1. Integral citations
2. non–integral citations
4. Citation styles

- **Integral citations** tend to focus the readers’ attention more on the researcher and rather less on the research. For that reason they are also known as **author prominent** citations.

*Cutrone (2005) found that the tendency of Japanese learners of English to avoid confrontation, by providing regular positive backchannelling, caused frustration in their native English conversational partners, who were unable to decide whether or not their message was really being understood.*

*Read’s (2002) study compared one-way, scripted and two-way, unscripted versions of an EAP listening test.*

*Miller (2002) examined lectures from an ethnographic or generic perspective, but did not empirically assess how the discourse features so far identified might impact on listener’s comprehension.*
4. Citation styles

- 2. Non-integral citations focus attention more on the research and less on the individual researchers involved. They are also known as research prominent or information prominent citations.

The role of students’ note-taking in helping to make lecture content ‘memorable’ has long been a focus of applied linguistic research (e.g. Dunkel & Davy, 1989; Chaudron, Loschky & Cook, 1994).

When the requirement to understand is combined with the need to produce, as it is in university tutorials and discussions, the international students’ feelings of inadequacy and frustration are exacerbated (e.g. Leki, 2001; Liu, 2001; Morita, 2004).
Feak & Swales (2009: 51–52) offer what they call general guidelines for tense usage in the literature review. But they make the point that a writer’s choice of tense is subtle and flexible; tense choice is not a question of grammatical rules but of appropriacy to academic norms – and to nuances of meaning.
THE LITERATURE REVIEW

5. Tense choice in citation verbs

- I. Past Simple tense: for reference to a single study (often an integral citation of researcher activity, but also to research findings)

Arslan (2007) investigated the performance characteristics of biodiesel as an engine fuel.
The performance characteristics of biodiesel as an engine fuel were investigated by Arslan (2007).
Biodiesel was shown to have strong performance characteristics as an engine fuel (Arslan 2007).
II. Present Perfect tense: for reference to an Area of Research (generally non-integral citations)

The potential of biodiesel as an alternative to regular diesel has been widely investigated (Savage 2005; Pinnarat 2006; Arslan 2007).

There have been several investigations of the potential of biodiesel as an alternative to regular diesel (Savage 2005; Pinnarat 2006; Arslan 2007).

Many studies have investigated the potential of biodiesel as an alternative to regular diesel (Savage 2005; Pinnarat 2006; Arslan 2007).
III. Present tense: for reference to Generally Accepted Knowledge in the field

The scarcity of known petroleum reserves makes (or in this case, is making) renewable energy resources increasingly attractive (Savage 2005; Pinnarat 2006; Arslan 2007).
6. Choice of reporting verb

- Using a variety of reporting verbs will help you to make your writing more interesting for the readers.
- Although there are as many as 400 reporting verbs in English (Hyland 1999); in practice, a much smaller number of verbs tend to predominate. Their relative frequency of use varies from discipline to discipline, as the table below shows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Rank 1</th>
<th>Rank 2</th>
<th>Rank 3</th>
<th>Rank 4</th>
<th>Rank 5</th>
<th>Rank 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>suggest</td>
<td>argue</td>
<td>find</td>
<td>demonstrate</td>
<td>propose</td>
<td>show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistics</td>
<td>suggest</td>
<td>argue</td>
<td>show</td>
<td>explain</td>
<td>find</td>
<td>point out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>find</td>
<td>show</td>
<td>suggest</td>
<td>report</td>
<td>demonstrate</td>
<td>focus on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>argue</td>
<td>suggest</td>
<td>describe</td>
<td>note</td>
<td>analyse</td>
<td>discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>find</td>
<td>suggest</td>
<td>note</td>
<td>report</td>
<td>demonstrate</td>
<td>provide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>say</td>
<td>suggest</td>
<td>argue</td>
<td>claim</td>
<td>point out</td>
<td>think</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is a wide choice of reporting verbs in English and each requires one of four different grammatical patterns. Check through the Toronto lists and see whether the information matches the way you thought each verb works grammatically.

- **Pattern 1:** Reporting verb + that + Subject + Verb
- **Pattern 2:** Reporting verb + Noun phrase
- **Pattern 3:** Reporting verb + somebody/something + for + noun/ing
- **Pattern 4:** Reporting verb + somebody/something + as + noun/ing/-ed/adjective
6. Choice of reporting verb
their grammar and your attitude

Pattern 1: Reporting verb + *that* + Subject + Verb

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>acknowledge</th>
<th>admit</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>argue</th>
<th>assert</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>assume</td>
<td>believe</td>
<td>claim</td>
<td>conclude</td>
<td>consider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demonstrate</td>
<td>deny</td>
<td>determine</td>
<td>discover</td>
<td>doubt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explain</td>
<td>find</td>
<td>hypothesize</td>
<td>imply</td>
<td>indicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>object</td>
<td>observe</td>
<td>point out</td>
<td>prove</td>
<td>reveal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>show</td>
<td>state</td>
<td>suggest</td>
<td>think</td>
<td>note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>say</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a) Da Souza *argues* that previous researchers have misinterpreted the data.
b) Researchers *have demonstrated* that the procedure is harmful.
c) Positivists find that social disorders are *exacerbated* by class factors.
d) Singh *asserts* that both states are essential.
6. Choice of reporting verb
their grammar and your attitude

- Note that these verbs all differ in meaning—they cannot be used interchangeably. For example, the verb *argue* in sample sentence (a) indicates your judgement that the author’s conclusion is based on evidence and reasoning, but that other conclusions might be possible.
- On the other hand, the verb *demonstrate* in sentence (b) indicates your judgement that the researchers’ evidence and reasoning are so convincing that no other conclusion is possible.
- N.B. Some verbs in this category may also appear in a subordinate clause beginning with *As*:
  
  (e) As Da Souza argues, misinterpretations by previous researchers need to be corrected.
  
  (f) As researchers have demonstrated, the procedure is harmful.
- This use of *As* conveys the impression that you accept the author’s view, regardless of the reporting verb you choose.
6. Choice of reporting verb
their grammar and your attitude

Pattern 2: Reporting verb + Noun phrase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>discuss</th>
<th>express</th>
<th>examine</th>
<th>describe</th>
<th>present</th>
<th>evaluate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>criticise</td>
<td>define</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a) Cameron *describes* one such strategy.
b) Clegg *discusses* the advantages of membership of the European Union.
6. Choice of reporting verb
their grammar and your attitude

Pattern 3: Reporting verb + somebody/something + for + noun/-ing

| blame  | censure | condemn | criticise | praise | thank |

a) Smith **criticized** Jones for his use of incomplete data (OR for using incomplete data).

b) Both Smith and Jones **condemn** previous researchers for distorting the data.

c) Banting **thanked** Bristow for his contribution to the discovery of insulin.
6. **Choice of reporting verb**

their grammar and your attitude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern 4: Reporting verb + somebody/something + as + noun/-ing/-ed/adjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>appraise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>depict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>portray</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Jones **describes** the findings as based on irrefutable evidence.
2. Smith **identified** the open window as the source of contamination.
3. Benson and Anderson both **described** their findings as tentative.
6. Choice of reporting verb
their grammar and your attitude

- The fact that some of the verbs in those four lists express the attitude (critical distance, doubt, certainty) of the student/writer choosing them is obviously very important.

- You need to know which verbs will convey those attitudes to your readers.

- As we said, if you use the verb ‘argue’ it suggests you think other conclusions are possible; if you choose ‘demonstrate’, it suggests you think no other interpretation is possible.
3. The Methodology Chapter
Methodology can be used here as a *general term* to cover whatever you decide to include in the chapter where you *discuss* alternative methodological approaches, *justify* your chosen research method, and *describe* the process and participants in your study.
THE METHODOLOGY CHAPTER

Students doing quantitative research have an established conventional ‘model’ to work to, which comprises these possible elements:

- Overview of the Experiment/Design
- Population/Sample
- Location
- Restrictions/Limiting Conditions
- Sampling Technique
- Procedures
- Materials
- Variables
- Statistical Treatment

(If your research adopts a mixed-methods approach, then you will also find that model useful for the quantitative chapters).
students writing up an exclusively qualitative thesis, the shape of the methodology chapter is less clear-cut:

“the straightforward character of a quantitative methods chapter unfortunately does not spill over into qualitative research reports. At first sight, this simply is a matter of different language. So, in reporting qualitative studies, we do not talk about ‘statistical analysis’ or ‘research instruments’. But these linguistic differences also reflect broader practical and theoretical differences between qualitative and qualitative research. More particularly, in writing up qualitative research, we need to recognise:

- the (*contested*) theoretical underpinnings of methodologies
- the (*often*) contingent nature of the data chosen
- the (*likely*) non-random character of cases studied

(Silverman 2000: 234)
Silverman’s advice on the best way to deal with these three potentially problematic aspects of writing up qualitative research is to:

- Make explicit what your *theoretical assumptions* are
- Spell out the *factors* that made you choose to work with *your particular data*
- Explain how you can *extend the application* of your study site to other contexts
Murcott (1997) argues that the key questions for the qualitative methodology chapter are:

- *How did you go about your research?*
- *What overall strategy did you adopt and why?*
- *What design and techniques did you use?*
- *Why those and not others?*
Adrian Holliday says qualitative writing requires coverage of the following issues:

- In the ‘Research Methodology’ section:
  - How you *position yourself* in relation to current and past discussion within which your research methodology is located

- In the section on ‘Description of Research Procedure’:
  - How you chose your core setting and relevant peripheral data sources
  - What the readers need to know about the research setting
  - How you developed a research strategy that is appropriate for the setting
  - How you proceeded in gaining access and collecting data
  - What you did as research activities and what data you collected
  - How you have structured your analysis and arrived at your choice of themes and headings
  - What your system is for representing the data, e.g. coding, referencing, anonymising
Task 3.3
On the next two pages, you have the headings used by two PhD students in their qualitative Methodology chapters. (The ‘practices’ mentioned in the second thesis refer to medical practices, or health centres, where she carried out her study)

- Decide whether you think the students have addressed Holliday’s questions.
- Has either of them covered other issues that were not included in Holliday’s list?
THE METHODOLOGY CHAPTER

Chapter 4  RESEARCH METHODS

4.1  Research questions and analysis overview

4.2  Discourse, context and qualitative research
   4.2.1  Views of discourse
   4.2.2  Qualitative research in language education
   4.2.3  Language classroom discourse and participant perspectives

4.3  The study design
   4.3.1  The case study approach
   4.3.2  Observation
   4.3.3  Field notes
   4.3.4  Interviews

4.4  The data collection process
   4.4.1  The research context
   4.4.2  Anticipated problems
   4.4.3  Access, ethics and informed consent
   4.4.4  The teachers, course and participants
   4.4.5  Observations of lessons 1-5
   4.4.6  Methodological modifications
   4.4.7  Observations of lessons 6-10

4.5  Approaches to data analysis
   4.5.1  Transcription
   4.5.2  Approaches to analysing spoken discourse
   4.5.3  Justifying claims in qualitative research
THE METHODOLOGY CHAPTER

Chapter 3. Research methodology and method

3.0 Introduction

3.1 Methodology
   3.1.1 Method of sampling
   3.1.2 Organisation of data
   3.1.3 Contextualisation
   3.1.4 Ensuring reliability, validity and objectivity
   3.1.5 Cross-disciplinary research
   3.1.6 Research ethics

3.2 Institutional authorisation
   3.2.1 First contacts
   3.2.2 Writing the research proposal
   3.2.3 Obtaining authorisation

3.3 Recruitment of practices
   3.3.1 Choice of practices
   3.3.2 Contact with practices

3.4 Data collection
   3.4.1 Self-presentation
   3.4.2 Access

3.4.3 Patient confidentiality
3.4.4 Research assistants
3.4.5 Audio-recording

3.5 Ethnography
   3.5.1 Practices
   3.5.2 Receptionists
   3.5.3 Patients

3.6 Organisation of data
   3.6.1 Transcription
   3.6.2 Categories of interaction
On the issue of *length* and *detail*, Holliday (2007: 53) has written:

Qualitative researchers... can easily underestimate the need for detail in their description of procedure, thus overlooking an important aspect of the demonstration of rigour. One area that requires such detail is the *degree of engagement with the setting*... Honarbin-Holliday, in her study of two Iranian art departments, demonstrates the rigour of her engagement in the section of her thesis entitled ‘Deconstructing the researcher’s methodological behaviours’ as follows:
“The process of collecting data depends on meticulous timekeeping and constant planning and replanning, always looking ahead in order to be ready for diversions. It is my experience that diversions do emerge and no matter how well prepared, events do not necessarily develop according to plan... The fact was that I felt privileged to be a researching artist, and since I had been given the permission to be at these institutions I wished to adopt strategies that would enable me to use my time in the best possible way. Making sure that I would arrive a few minutes earlier, and leave when the staff and students did, helped my status as a colleague, and a co-worker. I kept to a schedule of two full days per week at Tehran University and two mornings, or one morning and one afternoon, at Al-Zahra University. These could not always be the same days, since different tutors came on different days. I did try to keep at least one day per week at Tehran University, and one afternoon at Al-Zahra University, as a constant. These became my days when the students or the tutors could locate me on the campuses, should they wish to discuss particular issues”.

(Honarbin-Holliday 2005: 47-48)
Different use of language in the Methodology chapters of qualitative and quantitative theses reflects the different assumptions of the two broad approaches to academic research.

In their book on writing up experimental research, Weissberg & Buker (1990) were able to state that “several grammatical conventions govern the method section... These concern choosing the correct verb tense and verb voice” (1990: 97)

*govern* → fixed and strict set of rules.
Language in the qualitative methodology chapter

- The procedures you use in carrying out your study should be described in the *Simple Past* tense.
- Sentences included under **Method** that are not written in the Past tense usually do not refer to the procedures used in the study being reported. Instead, *they may describe standard procedures that are commonly used by others*...
- You can use either the Active or the Passive voice when you describe the procedure:
  - *We calculated the F0 frequency in gradually increasing pitches.*
  - *The F0 frequency was calculated in gradually increasing pitches.*
- The Passive voice is used to describe procedure in order to depersonalise the information. The Passive construction allows you to omit the agent (usually “I” or “we”), placing the emphasis on the procedure and how it was done.

(Weissberg & Buker 1990: 101)
THE METHODOLOGY CHAPTER

Language in the qualitative methodology chapter

- Since qualitative research recognises, and even foregrounds, the role played by individuals – the researcher, the informants and other participants – we might expect that the verb voice used in the methodology chapter will be Active rather than Passive, in order to make the description less personal.

- A second important function of the Passive in English is to do with information sequence. In written English it is the norm for old (or known) information to come towards the beginning of the sentence and for new information to come later. The Passive voice provides a mechanism for doing that. Compare these two versions of the same text – which seems to flow better?
The reason why Version B sounds more natural is that all four sentences have the old information before new; in the case of the third and fourth sentences that is achieved by making the old information the Subject of a Passive verb.
4. Your Data Chapters
Biggam (2011) discusses the various tools and techniques available to describe and analyse research data: tables, graphics, diagrams and statistical analysis for quantitative data; and, in the case of qualitative data, such tools as interview transcripts, informants’ texts (e.g. diaries and blogs) and field notes.
Tools for discussing your data

A typical qualitative data chapter might comprise the following elements:

- **Introduction**
  - Scene-setting for the chapter, explaining the general area(s) to be covered
  - Locating the gap in knowledge which the chapter addresses
  - Explaining how the chapter fills that gap
  - Providing an overview of what is in the chapter

- **Main section**
  - Relating themes/findings to the relevant research literature
  - Presenting (extracts from) the data
  - Describing/summarising that data
  - Interpreting the data, using illustrative examples

- **Conclusion**
  - Concise summary of the main findings
Caution in interpretation

- The interpretation of qualitative data involves questioning the basis for our assumptions; in a quantitative study, such ‘questions’ may be answered statistically.
- So in your data discussion you have to take care over the degree of certainty you express when offering reasons for why things are as they are in your data, and when interpreting your research findings.
- This cautious aspect of academic writing is known as hedging. We talk about hedged claims being ‘tentative’, ‘limited’, ‘moderate’ or ‘modest’. On the other hand, claims that are stronger than the data permits are said to be ‘overstated’, ‘exaggerated’, or ‘immoderate’.
- Cases where a writer has provided no support at all would be criticised as ‘unfounded’ or ‘unwarranted’ claims.
Caution in interpretation

Expressing caution

- **Modal verbs**  *must / should / may / might / could (have... ...ed)*

- **Full verbs**  *appear to / seem to (have... ...ed)*
  *suggest / point to / believe / think*

- **Adverbs**  *apparently / perhaps / possibly / potentially*
  *relatively / comparatively*
  *arguably / conceivably / presumably (?)*

- **Nouns**  *possibility / potential / (on the) evidence (available)*

- **Adjectives**  *possible / potential / plausible / probable / likely / reasonable to assume*
Useful language for the Data Chapters

- **INTRODUCTION**
  - **Scene-setting**
    *This study / thesis aims to explore... in general and... in particular...*
    *My intention is to illuminate / bring to light / reveal....*
    *The issue of ... has grown in importance in the light of recent ....*
  - **Locating the gap**
    *Although..... , previous work has not specifically addressed...*
    *Concerns have been expressed about...*
    *So far, however, there has been little discussion about ....*
    *However, insufficient attention has been paid to ....*
    *In addition, no research has taken into account...*
  - **Filling the gap**
    *My study is designed to remedy that weakness by...*
    *My main focus will be on this under-researched area of...*
  - **Orientation**
    *This chapter will begin by/with... before addressing... and finally...*
    *In this chapter I begin by/with... before considering...*
Useful language for the Data Chapters

- **MAIN SECTION**
  - Relating to previous research
    
    *My findings are broadly similar / rather different to those of..*
    *This suggests similar / different perceptions of... to those of... in earlier work by...*
    *This also chimes with the findings of..., who reported that ....*
    *Like... / Unlike...*
  - Presenting the data
    
    *I have used ... as the organising principle for presenting extracts from...*
    *The first transcript extract shows...*
    *The next three questionnaire comments illustrate...*
    *In the next episode, we have a clear example of...*
Useful language for the Data Chapters

- **MAIN SECTION**
  - Describing / summarising the data
    - *This extract is an interesting example / instance / case of ....*
    - *These findings suggest that in general ....*
    - *As can see, … tend to…*
  - Interpreting the data
    - *One possible reason / influence / factor could be....*
    - *The reason for this is not clear from the data, but it may have something to do with....*
    - *It may be that these participants consider....*
    - *The tendency to… might be.... / might suggest…*
    - *One of the themes to emerge from these self-reports / comments / diaries is....*
5. The Final Chapter
Having cycled painfully to the top of the hill, the great temptation at this point is to relax and freewheel down to the finish. In practice, such relaxation of effort is reflected in the all too common ‘summaries’ found in the final chapter of dissertations.

“your final chapter is necessary with the main function is to stimulate your readers by demonstrating how your research has stimulated you”. (Silverman 2000: 250)
The conventional final chapter of a thesis has two main functions:

1. to refer back to what you have written, reminding the reader of your argument, and giving some sort of evaluation and/or interpretation
2. to point forward to what you think might happen in the future, with suggestions or recommendations, or predictions or warnings.

In addition, according to Phillips and Pugh (1994: 59–60), In the most general terms [your final chapter] is a discussion as to why and in what way... the theory you started with is now different as a result of your research work. Thus your successors (who include, of course, yourself) now face a different situation when determining what their research work should be, since they now have to take account of your work.
In their analysis of conclusions to quantitative dissertations, Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988) suggest there are six potential elements:

a) **Restatement** of hypothesis (or purpose)
b) **Summary** of main points / findings; whether they support the hypothesis; whether they align with, or differ from, other researchers' findings
c) Possible **explanations** for the findings; and/or **speculations** about them
d) **Limitations** of the study
e) **Implications** of your findings
f) **Recommendations** for future research and **practical applications**
Below are the headings of the final chapters of three qualitative theses. Compare them with the quantitative elements listed by Hopkins and Dudley–Evans. What additional components can you find in the qualitative theses?

8 CONCLUSIONS
8.1 Research questions and main findings of the study
8.1.1 Classroom discourse “layers” and discourse worlds
8.1.2 Characteristics of stages of the lesson
8.1.3 Participant perceptions of rights and responsibilities
8.2 Relationship to previous research
8.3 Limitations of the study
What to include?

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusions
7.2 Limitations of the study
7.3 Professional recommendations
7.4 Autobiographical reflection

8. Review of the research and implications for receptionist training
8.0 Introduction
8.1 Review of the research
  8.1.1 Attitudes of subjects
  8.1.2 Method of data collection
  8.1.3 Problems during data collection
  8.1.4 Problems resulting from the research design
  8.1.5 Performance of researcher
  8.1.6 Summary
8.2 Social meaning in front-desk discourse
8.3 Receptionist training
  8.3.1 Feedback sessions
  8.3.2 Recommendations for training
8.4 Future directions
8.5 Conclusion
From that small sample of Conclusions chapters, it looks as if a possible qualitative equivalent of Hopkins & Dudley–Evans ‘model’ would contain these potential elements:

- (concise) Recapitulation of purpose and findings
- Relationship with previous research
- Limitations of your research (Anticipation of criticisms)
- Problems arising during the research
- Implications of your findings
- Recommendations (for research; for action / policy /change)
- Your contribution to research
- Autobiographical reflection
THE FINAL CHAPTER

Useful expressions for a qualitative final chapter

- Recapitulation of purpose and findings
  - The aim / purpose / objective of my study was to...
  - This research was intended / designed to...
  - This thesis had the aim of exploring whether...
  - What I found was that... a tendency to...
  - One of the themes to emerge from my analysis of... was...
  - The findings suggest that X is a strong motivational factor for...
  - I found that X was a major perceived influence on....
  - The participants/informants showed some / a clear preference for...
Useful expressions for a qualitative final chapter

- Relating to previous research
  - These findings are broadly in line / harmony with those of researchers such as…
  - These findings are consistent with previous research
  - The findings run counter to the conventional / widely expressed view that...
  - My findings are (to some extent) at odds with those of...
  - Although these findings are generally compatible with … there are several areas in which they
THE FINAL CHAPTER

Useful expressions for a qualitative final chapter

- Limitations of your research / Anticipation of criticisms
  - Some common expressions for stating limitations of research scope:
    - I should stress that my study has been primarily concerned with...
    - My/This analysis has concentrated/focused on...
    - The findings of my study are restricted/limited to...
    - I have addressed only the issue/influence/role of...
    - I should make clear that I have deliberately/intentionally not...

  Typical openings for stating that certain conclusions should not be drawn:
  - However, the findings of my study do not imply that...
  - My findings cannot / should not be taken / read as evidence for...
  - Unfortunately, the nature of my data does not allow me/us to determine whether...
  - The lack of... means that we cannot be certain/sure that...
THE FINAL CHAPTER

Useful expressions for a qualitative final chapter

- Implications of your findings
  - My study offers suggestive evidence for …
  - The study appears to support the argument for a change in...
  - On the face of it, this would suggest that X may be an important factor in...
  - If the tentative conclusions of my study are confirmed by… then there will be a case for...
THE FINAL CHAPTER

Useful expressions for a qualitative final chapter

- **Recommendations**

  For future research:
  - *I think possible areas for further research / investigation include...*
  - *Future research into... should / might usefully focus in particular on.. in other contexts.*
  - *One avenue for further study would be research into the specific...*
  - *Without further research into... it will not be possible to...*
  - *It is important / relevant to investigate (whether)...*

  For future action/policy:
THE FINAL CHAPTER

Useful expressions for a qualitative final chapter

- Your contribution to research
Useful expressions for a qualitative final chapter

- Autobiographical reflection
6. The First Few Pages
Have you read any other theses in the course of your research?
If so, when you were deciding whether a particular thesis was relevant to your work, which parts of the thesis did you read?
Write in the numbers 1, 2, 3 etc. next to the parts listed below, to show the order in which you would read them to decide whether it was worth reading the whole thesis.
NB: One of the parts listed is not normally part of a thesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Abstract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology chapter</td>
<td>Data discussion chapter(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>Index</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE FIRST FEW PAGES

- Have you read any other theses in the course of your research?
- If so, when you were deciding whether a particular thesis was relevant to your work, which parts of the thesis did you read?
- Write in the numbers 1, 2, 3 etc. next to the parts listed below, to show the order in which you would read them to decide whether it was worth reading the whole thesis.
- NB: One of the parts listed is not normally part of a thesis.

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Appendices</td>
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Silverman (2000) emphasises the importance of ‘the first few pages’:

- “If you follow my advice and devote most attention to your data analysis chapters, then you may tend to treat these beginnings as routine matters, speedily disposed of. However, the impression you create at the start of your dissertation is very important and the writing of the first few pages should never be regarded as... a triviality” (2000: 221)
The Title

- *Titles should catch the reader’s attention while properly informing them about the main focus of your research (Silverman 2000: 222)*
- Some students keep to the thesis title they composed in their first year of research; others change their title towards the end of their research, when they know precisely what their final thesis will be.
- The title for your thesis is sometimes ‘fixed’ from the point when you send in your research proposal to the Deanship of Graduate Studies.
- This aims to allow the Deanship time to find and decide academics to act as Examiners of your thesis.
- The title that appears on your thesis has to be the same as in your proposal.
- However, it is possible for the Examiners to recommend a change of title at the oral examination, for example, if they feel you should give greater emphasis to a particular aspect of your work.
Here are two versions of a PhD thesis title. One was the student’s working title and the other her final title. Which one do you think was which – and why do you think that?

*Early-stage French as a Foreign Language in Taiwan: a case study involving L2 oral proficiency, motivation and social presence in synchronous computer-mediated communication*

*Early-stage L2 oral proficiency development in synchronous CMC*
Have a look at the six thesis titles below. Comment on format, punctuation (including capital letters) and use of abbreviations.

1. *Front desk talk: A study of interaction between receptionists and patients in general practice surgeries*

2. *Developing interactional listening strategies in a foreign language: A study of two classroom approaches*

3. *Classroom discourse and participation in an English for Specific Purposes context*

4. *Noticing tasks in a university EFL presentation course in Japan: Their effect on oral output*

5. *Extensive reading and L2 development: a study of Hong Kong secondary learners of English*

6. *Systematising EAP materials development: Design, evaluation and revision in a Thai undergraduate reading course*
The Abstract

- Some books on academic writing say that the Abstract is often what the student writes last, in reporting their own research.

- It is worth taking time and trouble over the Abstract because, for many potential readers of your work, it will be on the basis of your Abstract that they decide whether or not to read the whole thesis.
Classically, a full abstract contains the following elements:

1. **Background**  
   the key background information in brief

2. **Purpose**  
   the principal aim and scope of your research

3. **Method**  
   concise summary of the method(s) you used

4. **Results**  
   the main findings of your study

5. **Conclusion**  
   the overall conclusion and/or recommendations

- The key to writing an effective abstract is to have a clear focus on being *concise* and selecting only the *most salient* details of your research. There is always a word limit or a space limit.
- A thesis Abstract is typically written in around 300 words
The Contents Pages

- Does anybody actually read the Contents Pages?
- What are they for?
- What do you think is their most important purpose?
### 4. Transactional patterns in front desk talk

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### 5. Relational patterns in front desk talk

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The Acknowledgments

- The Acknowledgments are the most **personal** part of your thesis, where you have the opportunity to express your gratitude to all the people who have helped you over the months (may be years) you have spent on your research.
- Obviously, your Acknowledgments will not be assessed and you will not be failed on the basis of what you write there. However, from a socio-cultural perspective, there are certain constraints on what is appropriate.