GENERAL GUIDE for ACADEMIC WRITING and PRESENTATION of WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Suitable for postgraduate level in the arts, humanities, business, education, the social sciences and built environment

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INTRODUCTION: Studying and Writing at Postgraduate Level

As researchers and writers at postgraduate level it is likely that you have already developed considerable academic writing skills and analytical ability during previous study and perhaps through work-related experience.

When you register as a postgraduate student on a course, however, you also identify yourself as *a learner.* Being *a learner* gives you permission *not to be an expert*, to ask naive questions about the course material, to question your own assumptions and the assumptions of others, to explore the familiar from new perspectives.

As a postgraduate level learner you can expect to engage with complex and challenging issues and to become critically alert to contemporary debates and concurrent innovations in your chosen field of study.

At postgraduate level - postgraduate certificate and diploma - you will be offered structured opportunities to make critically informed connections between your own values and professional practices and the wider arena of practice, policy and research in your field. You will be expected to ask *What about*? *How*? and *Why*? questions at the forefront of your field of learning. You can expect to be stimulated, challenged and sometimes unsettled, as you venture into new territory, experience new ways of thinking, and try out new ways of engaging with your colleagues in collective learning.

By masters level you should have achieved critical autonomy as a learner with a certain confidence that you have journeyed well and arrived at a sound vantage point from which to view your own professional philosophy and to recognise how that philosophy impacts on your practice.

This academic writing guide is intended as a general reference for writing assignments at postgraduate level, particularly in the arts, humanities, education and social sciences. It is more skeletal than comprehensive, and is likely to be greatly augmented with additional material as you progress through your programme. It could usefully be read in conjunction with the following academic writing and research handbooks which are available in the DIT Library:

Anderson, J. and Poole, M. (2001) *Assignment and Thesis Writing,* 4th Edition, Australia: Wiley

Crème, P. and Lea, M.R. (2003 edition) *Writing at University: a guide for students*, U.K.: Open University Press

Cottrell, S. (2005) *Critical Thinking Skills*, U.K.: Palgrave

Peck, J. and Coyle, M. (1999) *The Student's Guide to Writing*, *Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling,* U.K.: Palgrave

Rose, J. (2001) *The Mature Student's Guide to Writing*, U.K.: Palgrave

Soles, D. (2005) *The Essentials of Academic Writing,* NY: Houghton Mifflin

Wisker, G. (2001) *The Postgraduate Research Handbook: succeed with your MA, MPhil, EdD and PhD*, UK: Palgrave

Crotty, M. (1998) *The Foundations of Social Research: meaning and perspective in the research process,* London: Sage

A note of caution: The guidelines for writing in the broad education, arts, business, humanities and social sciences fields outlined in this guide may be significantly different to the guidelines for writing in other sciences and other fields. If your professional practice is broadly from technology, science or engineering you may need to augment the principles and guidelines here with additional reading. Your programme handbook generally contains information about the expected style for assignments.

1.1 Reading before Writing

You are expected to read widely on any higher education programme, and especially at postgraduate level. For the most part you will read from secondary sources, but you will also be expected to read from primary sources where you are making a detailed and in-depth study of a topic or issue.

Primary sources are generally original works and first-hand accounts of research.
Such sources include reports of research investigations, government reports, annual reports, minutes of meetings, letters, diaries, autobiographies, theses, articles in journals, data collected through interviews and surveys, as well as key publications by the original authors.

Secondary sources of information include translations, commentaries on original works, summaries of primary material, and other written material gathered from primary sources. Encyclopaedias and guidebooks are generally regarded as secondary sources.

Tertiary sources are generally compiled from secondary sources, and include textbooks, brochures and leaflets.

As a reader, you should be alert to the accuracy and reliability of secondary and tertiary sources. It is best to read the primary source if you can at all, though sometimes reading a secondary commentary on a difficult primary source can be an accessible way of getting to an understanding quickly. At postgraduate level it is expected that you become familiar with primary sources.

1.2 How to Find Appropriate Literature

Usually the lecturer or tutor for each programme or module will recommend books or articles selected as an introduction to the subject you are going to write about. In your course/module handbook you are likely to find a list of essential and recommended readings. If your field of study is education, you may find the following journals useful:

Active Learning in Higher Education

Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education

Australian Journal of Educational Technology

British Journal of Educational Technology

Chronicle of Higher Education

Educational Action Research

Education Management Administration and Leadership

Higher - the Times Higher Education Supplement

Higher Education Management and Policy

International Journal for Academic Development

Irish Journal of Education

Journal of Further and Higher Education

Journal of interactive learning research

Journal of Vocational Education and Training

New directions for higher education

New directions for teaching and learning

Studies in Continuing Education

Studies in Higher Education

Teaching in Higher Education.

You will find the following sources to be useful aids in your own research:

(a) Dictionaries, directories and encyclopaedias

(b) Histories of topics you need to research

(c) Annotated bibliographies

(d) 'Readers' on specific areas of education such as the RoutledgeFalmer series available in the DIT Library

(e) On-line and bound collections of conference papers

(f) Periodicals and journals

(g) Reliable websites.

LIBRARY CATALOGUES

DIT Library catalogues can be accessed at the following websites:

http://www.dit.ie/DIT/library/resources/databases/index.html

http://www.dit.ie/DIT/library/subjects/education/index/html

Key reading tip: You should normally start from general literature about your subject and end with special monographs or articles, which means starting with dictionaries/directories and then consulting periodicals and journals at a later stage. This will give you a better perspective on the complexity of the literature involved.

Note: Library Research is considered in the *Handbook for Higher Education Study*.

1.3 How to Make Notes or Record Excerpts

Taking notes effectively and efficiently as you read can save you a great deal of time and trouble when it comes to writing assignments. Here are some useful tips:

1. Do not make notes from the whole article you are reading in preparation for your essay/research paper/report/thesis. Try to find out what the author's main argument is and the main reasons he/she used to back it up. Try to paraphrase it or to copy out excerpts from the central assertions. This will deepen your own understanding of the topic.

2. Examine the views of authors who have a different opinion on the subject and find out why. Again make notes and write out relevant excerpts which you can use as quotations, citations or references in support of your own writing.

3. Critique each article by asking the questions:

a. Does the author use logically sound arguments?
b. Do I agree with them? If not, why not?
c. Does the author omit aspects of the argument which I regard as essential? Why do I think he/she did this?

Answering these questions will help you formulate your own positionality, or stance, on the issues under discussion.

1.4 Approaches to Reading Critically

Postgraduate study requires a lot of reading. A great deal of that reading will be for the purpose of acquiring knowledge and understanding of a range of new topics and issues. However, you will be expected to go beyond this type of reading and to *become critical*. This essentially means being able to make judgements about the material you are reading and to defend the judgements you make.

During your studies you will be expected to think about written material in a number of ways, including the following:

Written material as information
It is a good idea to question any writer's claim that the material is *value-free* or *objective.* No statement can be regarded as free from values, sub-text or selected agenda. The very choice of language itself is a judgement on the part of the writer!

Written material as proposition or argument
A writer may state the underpinning argument, or may not state it: just imply it. In any case you, as reader, should be alert to noticing how claims are being made and supported.

Written material as emotionally subversive
The impact of emotive writing is that it can cause you to suspend your critical gaze. As a writer yourself you can experiment with this technique to develop a persuasive argument.

Written material as discourse
The selection of a writing style and specific terminology may indicate a system-as-discourse at work. For example, the language and terminology in an EU policy document on occupational training may manifest a value-specific discourse about the connection between education and the world of work. Or, as another example, a feminist may detect a predominance of a male-oriented worldview or a male-oriented value-system in the choice of language and tone in a document. In such cases, it may be useful to ask yourself, as reader:

- *Who has written this piece?*
- *For whom?*
- *What worldview is being presented?*
- *Could it have been written in a different way to reflect a different discourse?*

As you begin to write your assignments at postgraduate level, you will begin to ask yourself if your written material betrays your value-system and beliefs about issues and topics in ways than may be more obvious to the reader than to yourself! One way of becoming aware of the discourses in your writing is to share your writing with colleagues on the course. In this way critical awareness is sharpened both in the reading and in the response.

1. 5 Recognising your Voice: Ontology, Epistemology and Positionality

At postgraduate level you are often asked for your view on issues, your *take* or interpretation, your value-based understanding or *positionality*. As you approach the stage of thesis writing you will be familiar with terms such as *ontology* and *epistemological stance*. Essentially, you are being required to identify your conscious understandings about the nature of knowledge and how you can defend a knowledge claim. You will become familiar with terms such as *objectivism, subjectivism,* and *constructivism*, *positivism, post-positivism, postmodernism*, and so on. These can be slippery terms when it comes to exact definition, but you will need to arrive at a robust understanding by masters level. At that stage you will have an awareness of your own *voice* as a writer in the text. A useful place to begin to come to grips with these ideas is by reading and re-reading the first chapter of Crotty, M. (2001) *The Foundations of Social Research,* U.K.: Sage. It is unlikely that you will stay secure in one mind-set throughout your postgraduate study years, but, uncertainty is a useful prerequisite to interesting enquiry and challenging scholarship!

1.6 Collaborative writing

At postgraduate certificate level you may have opportunities for collaborative enquiry and collaborative writing. This will demand additional skills in selection and judgement. It will also give you a chance to hone your research skills and to debate the judgements underpinning the presentation of research findings in report format.

At postgraduate diploma level you are likely to take these skills further with collaborative projects and co-operative presentations, as well as considerable individual writing. There are higher expectations at this stage with regard to the breadth and depth of study and with regard to the standard of research and report writing.

At Masters level the quality of enquiry and presentation is generally significantly more advanced than at the previous levels with expectations of greater critical awareness of your epistemological stance and understanding of the application of conceptual or theoretical frameworks. At this stage, you should be sufficiently experienced as a writer to attempt a systematic critique of the writings of others, making well supported analytical judgements.

In a nutshell, writing at postgraduate level is a complex skill-set which develops with experience and much practice. It is not necessarily a linear development. At times you can be overly self-critical. But essentially, it is unlikely that you will fail to learn!

1.7 Writing Tips and Traps

A short list of writing tips for successful study in higher education might start with these:

a. Negotiate with significant family and friends about your cognitive absences during your studies. This might give you permission to be pre-occupied

b. Allocate a space at home and at work for your writing and reading materials. Level-arch files and box files are neat and transportable

c. Write often

d. Write on paper first, not on your PC. This makes you very careful about the words you choose since it takes more time and energy to hand-write

e. Keep a jotter handy for gems of thoughts

f. Record book titles and other sources accurately and fully in a secure place so that you do not have the onerous task of chasing them up later

g. Keep a dictionary handy

h. Keep your own glossary of terms

i. Think and write in full sentences

j. When writing, try out different styles of expression

k. Try to avoid stilted, turgid and overly-formal styles

l. Avoid being 'chatty' or conversational in formal assignments

m. Control your passion if you tend to write from a soap-box. Readers do not generally like sermons!

n. Avoid making unsupported knowledge claims. Ask yourself: How do I know that for sure? Can I support the claim to know with evidence from my own research or the research of others?

   If you cannot support what you write, then it is best not to write it at all!

o. Avoid language that may be interpreted as racist, sexist or otherwise offensive

p. Always acknowledge sources of ideas: otherwise you could be accused of plagiarism

q. Make paper copies and electronic backup copies of every assignment you write. This might save serious grief later!

PART 2 Technical Aids to Assist in Writing Assignments

2.1 Manuals on-line with self-study instructions (revised 2009)

The Handbook for Higher Education Study is usually distributed with this academic writing guide, and there is some overlap of content between them. However, in the Handbook you will find a teach-yourself guide to using your PC which is more-or-less similar to the ECDL programme. This guide is also available on-line on the DIT website from late September 2009.

2.2 PC/laptop/notebook tools

Your PC/laptop is the most useful technical aid you are likely to use in assignment production.

On most WORD programmes you will find the following facilities which you are likely to use for production of written assignments:

- spell checker
- syntax checker
- auto-formatting tools
- templates
- bibliography formats
- key word search
- key word listing
- search and change
- footnote
- endnote
- margin settings
- auto-heading.

When saving and transferring material across computers it might be useful to check the date version of WORD programmes: 2003 , 2007 etc… otherwise you might have formatting problems. Computer programmes can usually read back to earlier versions but not forward to more recent versions. This applies to programmes used for diagrams and images as well. It might be wise to seek advice from your campus IT Support Office when purchasing programmes and IT packages so that you do not delay your writing with IT distractions.

TIP: Try to save important writing in more than one place!!

2.3 Scanners, text storage and text transfer

To scan large amounts of text/images you could use a **Scanner linked to your PC or laptop.** The main disadvantage with this technology is the loss of formatting control. It might mean that you have to copy, cut and paste to a new document where you have control of formatting.

CPen scanners are a great invention for scanning small amounts of text and transferring text quickly to your computer. Great for Quotations! But remember to record the page number and book title!

Some **digital cameras** have text recording facilities or **memory sticks** with can be used to transfer text/images from the camera to the computer. It may not be worth buying one just for a thesis!

Flash discs/memory sticks/memory cards for **USB** points are magic! You can carry your entire thesis in your pocket from computer to computer. Just make sure you have access to a card reader and that you keep a back-up copy of your materials!
If you use APPLE Mac make sure use compatible bits for your PC/laptop.
Likewise VISTA can have trick elements.

2.4 Text Manipulation

Your PC can manipulate text in many ways for you. You will see tips and hints listed in the Handbook for HE Study.

2.5 Reference Management Tools

The DIT has a licence for ENDNOTE, a popular referencing management system.

Ask for a demonstration.

There are other similar software packages such as REFERENCE MANAGER which you might like to investigate.

You can download free trials from the internet. But, there is little value in compiling a bibliography on a free site when it might disappear in four weeks!

2.6 Data analysis tools (PC and others)

Data analysis packages such as SPSS and NUDIST are available on some computers in the DIT. Ask the Library staff or course co-ordinator about this.

There might be merit in checking out the potential of EXCEL to do your data analysis before embarking on a more complicated package such as SPSS. Most quantitative data analysis can be done well on EXCEL.

On the pages following you can read the contents pages from the three manuals listed above. There may be elements of each which interest you.

2.7 Checking for Resources on Webcourses

Check often for new resources on your Webcourses site.

This *Academic Writing Guide* and the *Handbook for Higher Education Study* are available to all DIT students.

PART 3 Styles and Types of Writing

3.1 Key Characteristics of Academic Writing for the Arts, Business, Humanities, Education and Social Sciences

Academic writing styles vary according to the rules and conventions of the different disciplines. The social sciences, the natural sciences, the humanities, business studies, technologies and engineering all have their own sub-sets of discourse conventions.

The study of education is generally regarded as a social science, with dimensions of the humanities (e.g. philosophy and history) and business (e.g. management and marketing).

As a social science, the study of education operates within known conventions and accepted presentation styles. These convention and styles include:

- underpinning empirical research;
- concise, to-the-point writing style;
- clear organisation;
- succinct presentation;
- passive voice rather than the personalised active 'I';
- competent use of 'jargon' for the academic field familiar with it;
- use of graphs, charts and illustrations;
- a clear system of headings and sub-headings;
- clearly written abstracts;
- accurate use of a referencing system such as the APA or Harvard;
- skilful use of literature to contextualise information and issues;
- a high level of scholarship;
- support for all knowledge claims using evidence from your own research or the research of others.

3.2 Postgraduate standard of writing

At postgraduate level it is expected that all written assignments are:

- technically correct in adherence to academic conventions;
- coherent in organisation of ideas and presentation of argument;
- cohesive in structure;
- scholarly in content and style.

You should consult the assessment criteria used for your own programme, which are generally included in your handbook.

3.3 Types of Writing

Academic writing for academic assignments generally falls into the following three broad types and purposes:

TYPE	PURPOSE
1. Exposition/Informative	to give complete and accurate information on a specific topic/issue, which may- - explain a process; - explain cause/effect; - compare/contrast; - analyse; - interpret; - show problem/solution.
2. Persuasive	to convince the reader of the worth of your particular argument or point of view.
3. Narrative	to outline the linear development of a subject**.**

Most academic assignments are likely to involve a combination of informative, persuasive and narrative writing.

3.4 The Basics of Written Presentation

i. Punctuation
The essential punctuation marks (excluding usage in reference systems) are full stop, comma, semi-colon, and colon.

The **full stop** primarily marks the end of a sentence.
A full stop is used after an abbreviation where the final letter of the word is not the final word of the abbreviation e.g. in Enc. = Enclosure, but not in *Mr* = Mister

The **comma** is primarily used to separate parts of a sentence so that the meaning is clearer for the reader.

(i) A comma separates words in a list e.g. *He brought coal, kindling, matches and turf.*
Note that there is no comma before 'and' in the list.

(ii) A comma separates sub-clauses within a complex sentence where two separate sentences are not required e.g. *The judge, having delayed the contestants for some minutes, eventually announced the winner.*

Commas are best used when the sentence sounds well when read aloud, using the comma to reflect the natural structure of the statement.

The **semi-colon** has two common uses.

Firstly, it is used to separate items in a list after a colon e.g. *The painter sorted out all the materials needed for the job: brushes; oils; paints; canvas; rollers; cleaning cloths.*

In this example, a comma could be used instead of a semi-colon: it would look better!

Secondly, it is used to indicate a certain relationship between two parts of a sentence,
e.g. *It was beginning to rain very heavily; the undertaker opened umbrellas for the mourners.*

The **colon can** be used before a list, as in the example for the semi-colon above.

It can also be used before the lines of a quotation.

The **dash** is used in two contexts, as follows:

Firstly, and commonly, it is used to enclose a word group in a sentence where a list of items is separated by commas e.g.

He uses technology – PowerPoint, internet, WebCT, video-streams – in lecture preparation.

Secondly, but less commonly, a dash can be used to divide element of a sentence where there is a shift in tone or emphasis, e.g.

Punters can now use computer-based betting on the Tote – if they choose to waste their hard-earned money.

An **omission** (where words are deliberately left out) is noted by the use of three full-stops followed by a space.

If the omission is at the end of a sentence, another full stop is added.
An example of the use of omission stops is as follows:

> *By the time you have finished your reading you should have a number of summary sentences which should be able to give you an overall picture of what your reading is about…. Once you have mastered this global strategy … your note taking will reflect this.*
> (Crème and Lea, 2003:59)

Parentheses/Brackets are used to enclose information of minor importance in a sentence. e.g.

Malahide golf course (technically a golf links) is restricted to male club members most days of the week.

Brackets are useful if a writer is restricted in the use of footnotes.

A **hyphen** is used within compound words such as on-going, co-ordinator, two-thirds, three-weeks holidays, inner-city streets, student-centred, problem-based, sub-standard.

Italics are used for titles of books, plays, films etc. and some names such as house names or names of ships etc.

Capital letters are used

(i) for names and titles
(ii) for the first word in a sentence
(iii) for synonyms, e.g. NQAI

ii. Numbers

(i) Numbers less that one-hundred are generally spelled out
(ii) A number as the first word of a sentence is spelled out regardless of its size
(iii) Hyphens are used when numbers are spelled out e.g. twenty-nine
(iv) Street numbers are given in figures e.g. 12 Upper Mount Street
(v) A number is used in a date e.g. January 14
(vi) Time is written in numbers e.g. 12.30p.m.
(vii) Dates such as 1990s have an 's' added with no apostrophe.

iii. The Apostrophe

The apostrophe is used for two main purposes, namely, to show ownership and to indicate that a letter or letters have been left out.

(i) A single owner is shown by *'s* e.g. the *king's crown*
b. More that one owner is shown by *s'* e.g. *the players' jerseys*
c. When a letter/letters are left out an apostrophe is used e.g. *It's five o'clock.*

Note well! *It's* means it is. *They're* means they are *We're* means we are.

ii. **Foreign words and phrases with popular abbreviations**

Foreign words (particularly Latin and French words) are frequently used in writing in other languages. The convention is to use italics for full foreign words. Commonly used foreign word/phrases and abbreviations in academic writing include the list below:

ibid.	= *ibidem:* in the same piece of work (used in referencing where more than one citation or reference is from the same page in a text. If the second or subsequent reference is from a different page in the text, the page number is used with *ibid*
idem	*the same,* (used when a footnote refers to the same work and the same page as the previous)
loc. cit	= *loco citato:* in the place cited (used when a reference is made to the same place, that is the same page, as a preceding but not immediately preceding reference; used with the last name of the author only)
inter alia	= among others
ab initio	= from the start
sub rosa	= literally, 'under the rose', but means that the conversation is confidential
in absentia	= in absence
n.b. nota bene,	= note well,
id est, i.e.	= that is
e.g., exempli gratia	= for example
aug.	= augmented
c. or *ca., circa*	= approximately
ed.	= edition or editor, depending on context

ed(s)	= editors
et al, et alii	= and others
et alibi	= and elsewhere
Fig(s)	= figure(s)
Inter alia	= among others
No(s)	= number(s)
Non seq.	= *non sequitur,* it does not follow
op .cit.	= *opera citato*: in the work cited (used when the reference is made to the same work as a preceding but not immediately preceding reference: it follows the author's name but precedes the page reference)
p. pp.	= page, pages, e.g. p. 43, pp 43-47
par, pars.	= paragraph, paragraphs
P.S.	= Post scriptum
q.v.	= quod vivide: which see
rev. ed.	= revised edition
sec(s)	= section(s)
[sic]	= thus (used to call attention to the fact that an error in spelling, grammar, or fact is in the original. It is enclosed by square brackets and placed immediately after the word or phrase in question.)
supra	= above (used to refer to text already cited)
trans.	= translation, translator
vid or vide	= see
vide infra	= see below
vide supra	= see above
v., vv.	= verse, verses
vol(s)	= volume(s)
vs	= versus

Most examples are from Anderson & Poole, 2001, pp. 168-170

It is **not** recommended that you use these abbreviations in your own work, but you need at least to know their meanings.

v. Footnotes and endnotes

Footnotes and endnotes are used for two main purposes:

a. to greatly elaborate a point made in the main text or to acknowledge a source in great detail

a. to give additional information which would not be appropriate in the main text but which may be essential for particular readers to gain a full understanding of a context.

Some fields of academic study require extensive footnoting/endnoting. The convention in education studies is to write sufficiently clearly in the main text to keep footnoting to a minimum.

3.5 Essential Writing Skills

Academic writing requires that you are skilled in identifying and presenting complex ideas and arguments. Among the writer's skills-set, summarising and paraphrasing are two of the most important.

Note: When summarising and paraphrasing you are **obliged** to acknowledge the sources of the ideas, using accepted conventions.

i. Summarising

Summarising is presenting the ideas of another writer in a reduced manner, capturing the essential ideas and presenting them in the same voice and style as the original writer.
A summary is generally about a quarter the length of the original.
To summarise successfully you need to understand the original writing very well. You need to stay objective about the content and keep your own opinion/judgement of the issues out of the summary

ii. Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is representing your understanding of a piece of text in your own words.
You should read the original piece several times and write your first version of the paraphrase without consulting the original. This will allow you to impose your own style of writing on the paraphrase and to incorporate it seamlessly into your own writing. Then re-read the original to check that you have not misunderstood it, or misrepresented it.
Your paraphrase may be longer than the original as you may need to contextualise it for the reader and cross reference it to other parts of your article/paper/thesis.
The skill of paraphrasing is an essential one in postgraduate writing as it is pivotal in developing and supporting a scholarly argument. It is a key skill in writing an effective literature review.

iii. Structuring

The structure of a piece of writing is the order of the parts and the relationship between them.

Most pieces of writing, regardless of their length, have:

- a beginning /introduction;
- a middle /main body;
- an ending /conclusion.

There may be several paragraphs/chapters in the main body, each of which has a different purpose.

A **paragraph** is essentially a group of sentences which deal with a theme or an aspect of a topic. Each paragraph should have an obvious topic word/theme/phrase/sentence. This is where the skills of summarising and paraphrasing are applied.

The paragraphs in the body of your writing must have unity: all paragraphs must develop, explain, add detail to, or otherwise relate to the topic sentence. The group of sentences in the paragraph should develop the main idea and progress it to the next stage.

The *introduction* generally has a specific function:

(i) it gives an indication of the purpose of the piece of writing;
(ii) defines terms used in the title;
(iii) indicates how the piece is structured;
(iv) indicates the writer's position in relation to the topic.

The *main body* of the written assignment presents the argument and supports points with research.

The *conclusion* brings together the main points made and justifies the arguments. It should give a sense of closure to the piece. The tone should confirm that the purpose of the piece has been attained and that the writer has done what he/she set out to do.

iii. Cohesion and coherence

In general, **cohesion** means that elements relate to each other, and fit together in a plausible way for the reader.

Coherence refers to the acceptability of the argument being presented in so far as it *makes sense* to the reader, and can be clearly understood.

iv. Connecting ideas, sentences and paragraphs

Ideas in your writing will be cohesive and coherent when there are obvious connections drawn by you, the writer. You should read your writing out loud and apply the following questions:

a. Is each sentence complete?
b. Does the punctuation help or hinder understanding?
c. Are there too-many ideas in each sentence, or should short sentences be rolled into longer sentences for smoother reading?
d. Does each sentence connect with the sentence before it?
e. Does each sentence connect with the sentence after it?
f. How are new themes introduced?
g. How are connections made between ideas throughout the piece?

Useful devices for ensuring connection between sentences are the following words/phrases:
Then,
However,
Consequently,
Subsequently,
Accordingly,
Yet,
Although
Regarding,
With regard to,
As a result,
Firstly, …. Secondly….Finally….
In the first instance….
In addition…
As previously mentioned…
As mentioned above…
As indicated below….

3.6 Developing an Argument

In academic writing you may be required to make an argument about which there is considerable disagreement, or at least divided opinion. In such cases it should be obvious from your writing that you are aware of the range of the current opinions. You should be able to provide clear evidence to support your point of view. That evidence may come from either your own research or the research of others. If you make unsupported claims to knowledge in support of your argument you will be challenged! You will be asked: **How do you know that?** This is where the postgraduate student needs to be absolutely clear of his/her epistemological stance, and be able to defend his/her basis for a claim to knowledge.

You will be expected to be skilled enough both to **defend** your own claims and to **persuade** the reader that your claims are **considered, reasonable**, **credible** and **valid.** You will need facts, statistics, scholarly and authoritative sources of literature, examples and cases to develop and defend your argument.

3.7 Drafting, Editing and Proof-reading

A rough draft at postgraduate level is not an untidy, unstructured document. It should have an obvious structure with a high level of scholarship. The *roughness* is only in presentation quality!

The first draft should show clearly:

a. that there is a clear purpose in the writing;
b. that there is a plan in how the work is structured;
c. that the context has been adequately explored;
d. that the writing will be worthwhile!

A draft submitted to a tutor for feedback should satisfy the questions above, and, be free from presentation errors. The tutor is interested in the potential of the writing and in your development as a scholar, not in editing and correcting errors!

Before submitting a draft, check the following:

a. Is the introduction clear?
b. Are all paragraphs structured around a topic sentence?
c. Are paragraphs connected?
d. Is there an explicit conclusion?
e. Have the available sources been fully incorporated?
f. Is the bibliography complete and correct?

Check the appropriateness of the **academic voice** in your writing style: is your style too-chatty or too-casual?

Cross-check all **references.**

Use your spell-checker!

Good writing is not purely about being technically correct and following conventions. It is also about robust form, completeness and coherence, excitement and originality, scholarship and insight.

Re-reading for Submission

When you have finished your research paper/report put it aside for a couple of days and then re-read it aloud. It should make aural sense for you and for the reader!

Do change it if you think it needs changing, but do not go on changing it forever.

3.8 Understanding Assessment Comments

Tutors generally make critical comments on assessed written assignments that indicate specific areas of strength and weakness. You should use such comments to revise and redraft.

Depending on the specific assessment criteria for your module/course, **critical comments** may be as follows:

a. It is not clear from your introduction that you have clarified the purpose of your research.
b. You should use sub-headings to structure your writing.
c. There is no flow to the writing style. You should use more connecting phrases.
d. There is no obvious argument.
e. You make too-many unsupported claims.
f. The writing style is turgid and inaccessible.
g. The style is too-informal.
h. You have not explored the obvious sources sufficiently.
i. You referencing style does not comply with any convention.
j. You are confusing summarising with paraphrasing.
k. Your style is too-informal for an academic paper.
l. You use jargon.
m. It is difficult to recognise the voice of the writer.
n. Your positionality is inconsistent.
o. The theoretical framework is inappropriate for the topic.

You may get **directive comments**, such as the following:

a. Elaborate this point
b. Clarify this point
c. Support this point with more literature/references
d. Re-structure this complex sentence into short sentences
e. Re-word this more simply
f. Use sub-headings to organise the structure
g. Connect your argument to the aims and objectives
h. Check that your conclusions are supported with evidence from the earlier parts of your paper.

You may be able to improve your writing by reading any of the writing guides mentioned in the opening part of this handbook. If you cannot follow assessment comments, you should ask your tutor for more directive advice.

3.9 Technical Documents

You are likely to be used to reading third level education technical documents such as class plans, curriculum descriptions, course syllabi, assessment forms, evaluation reports etc.

All technical documents are characterised by **accuracy**, **clarity** and **objective** writing style.

On most post-graduate programmes you will also have opportunities to produce technical documents such as reports and theses.

A general outline of report style is contained in Part 6? of this guidebook.

At Masters level you could consider the MA **thesis** a technical documents in that it follows specific technical guidelines.

Generic guidelines for a thesis in the social sciences, arts, business, education and humanities are outlined in Part 5? of this guidebook.

3.10 Personal writing

Writing from a personal perspective may be required at postgraduate level. As a writer, you should be absolutely clear about the differences between personal writing and academic writing.

Crème and Lea (2003:101) distinguish between the two types as follows:

Personal writing	*Academic writing*
Recounts, tells a personal story	Comments, evaluates, analyses
Non-technical vocabulary	Subject-specific vocabulary
'I' at the centre	'I' as the observer and commentator
Information comes from the writer's	Information comes form a range of experience sources, and refers to what others say
Personal feelings and views	Evidence and argument
	Conventions of referencing and citation to acknowledge the work of others.

It is, of course, possible to have both personal and academic writing styles in the same piece of postgraduate writing. However, the skill is in knowing *how* to use your *voice* as a writer to be absolutely clear that you are consciously aware of when you are in a personal mode or in an academic/analytical mode.

Researchers who are researching their own practice will commonly use the 'I' convention. This is academically acceptable as it would be nonsense to imply that the researcher is outside his/her own practice! But, the use of 'I' in academic writing generally is not acceptable. You should request specific instructions on this from your course co-ordinator/tutor.

3. 11 Common Knowledge, Plagiarism, Copyright and Ethics

We can assume that all our ideas are informed from many sources. However, in academic writing we distinguish between *common knowledge* that is available from sources such as dictionaries, encyclopaedias, yearbooks etc. and specific knowledge that came from an identifiable source such as a report. In some cases a writer needs to make a judgement about whether to reference a source of common knowledge or not. The rule generally is: if you are in doubt, reference the source!

But you MUST acknowledge distinctive ideas, sources of specific information, verbatim phrases, sources of original terms and sources of statistics you use in your writing.

Using the ideas and information generated by another person in your won work without acknowledging that usage is generally regarded as plagiarism. Sometimes plagiarism is unintentional: simply a result of lack of skill in paraphrasing,

summarising and quotation. However, at postgraduate level it is expected that you could **not** unintentionally plagiarise, and that therefore, you are responsible for your actions. In academia, **plagiarism is a serious issue.** It is so serious that a specific declaration of awareness is required in a thesis document.

To protect yourself from a possible accusation of plagiarism the following conventions should be followed:

a. If you are *summarising* ideas you gleaned from a book/s, you *must* acknowledge where you got them, by using the authors' name/s and the date/s of publication. You must then list the books, with the full references, in your bibliography.

b. If the point you are summarising is particularly controversial or important, you should give the *page number* in the book where the original point is made.

c. All direct quotations in your text should be acknowledged with the *page number* of the source as well as the writer and date.

In summary:
Plagiarism means presenting the words of another writer as if they were your own. This is a serious matter, and if it is detected in any of your writing submitted for assessment it may result in sanctions.
The way to avoid plagiarism is very simple: always put quotation marks around someone else's words and credit the words to their proper source. If you also borrow ideas from another writer, say so and name the source. In this way you can also impress an examiner by showing that you have done some research!
Plagiarism could be regarded as a **breach of copyright.**

Copyright, in the context of our courses, generally refers to ownership of products, ideas or knowledge. In educational research and writing there might be copyright issues about the right to claim credit for research findings and for written material. There are questions about 'ownership' wherever there is scholarship. Here we move into the realm of ethics. In educational research there are well developed ethical guidelines for both the conduct of research and the presentation of research findings.

The DIT, like all higher education institutions, has a designated research ethics committee and set of agreed guidelines available on the intranet. However, on taught courses you are **not normally required to get research clearance from the DIT Ethics Committee**, as it is assumed that academic staff responsible for your courses will supervise your research appropriately.

Note:
Computer-based technology, such as *turnitin,* is now available to detect plagiarised text.

In research leading to a postgraduate thesis you are required to produce an ethics statement which outlines your awareness of, and provision for, any ethical issues relevant to your research.

Two books you might find useful in generating your ethics statements for research and writing are:

McNamee, M. and Bridges, D. (Eds) (2002) *The Ethics of Educational Research*, London: Blackwell

Sikes, P. Nixon, J. and Carr, W. (Eds) (2003) *The Moral Foundations of Educational Research: Knowledge, Inquiry and Values*, UK: Open University Press

PART 4 Referencing

The referencing systems generally accepted for all written assignment for the humanities and social sciences are:

either
The Harvard Referencing System
or
The Referencing System of the American Psychological Association (APA).

Whatever system you are using you should write according to that system consistently and methodically.

You are advised **NOT** to take direction for referencing from websites. It is likely that your programme Handbook will indicate the referencing system to be used in assignment.

4.2 Bibliographies: Referencing systems using Harvard and APA systems are illustrated below.

Source	Harvard System	APA System
Book title, *single author*	Tennant, M (1988) *Psychology and Adult Learning*, Routledge, London.	Tennant, M. (1988). *Psychology and adult learning*, London: Routledge.
Book title, *several authors*	Cohen, L, Manion, L and Morrison, K (2000) R*esearch Methods in Education*, 5th ed, Routledgefalmer, London.	Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education*, (5th ed.). London: RoutledgeFalmer.
Book title, *edition*	Tennant, M (1997) *Psychology and Adult Learning*, 2nd ed, Routledge, London.	Tennant, M. (1997). *Psychology and adult learning*, (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
Chapter in a book	Gumport, P J (1997) Feminist Scholarship as a Vocation, In A.H. Halsey et al (eds) *Education, Culture, Economy, Society*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.	Gumport, P.J. (1997). Feminist scholarship as a vocation. In A.H. Halsey et al, (Eds). *Education, culture, economy, society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Article in a journal	Trigwell, K and Shale, S (2004) Student Learning and the Scholarship of University Teaching, *Studies in Higher Education*, 29(4), 523-536.	Trigwell, K., & Shale, S. (2004). Student learning and the scholarship of university teaching. *Studies in Higher Education*, 29(4), 523-536.
Official report	Department of Education and Science (2003) Supporting Equity in Higher Education, The Stationery Office, Dublin.	Department of Education and Science. (2003). Supporting equity in higher education. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
Thesis or dissertation	Murray, T (2003) Can there be objective numeric measurement of creative practice in visual arts? Unpublished MA thesis, Dublin Institute of Technology.	Murray, T. (2003). Can there be objective numeric measurement of creative practice in visual arts? Unpublished MA thesis. Dublin: Dublin Institute of Technology.
Unpublished work	Learning and Teaching Centre (2000) Postgraduate Certificate in Third Level Learning and Teaching, Unpublished document, Dublin Institute of Technology,	Learning and Teaching Centre. (2000). Postgraduate Certificate in third level learning and teaching. Unpublished document. Dublin: Dublin Institute of Technology.

	Dublin.	
E-journal	Stierer, B and Antoniou, M (2004) Are there distinctive Methodologies for Pedagogic Research in Higher Education? *Teaching in Higher Education,* 9(3), 275-286. Full-text [online] Available: Swetswise, [Accessed September 1 2004]	Stierer, B. and Antoniou, M. (2004). Are there distinctive methodologies for pedagogic research in higher education? *Teaching in Higher Education*, 9(3), 275-286. Retrieved September 1, 2004, from Swetswise Fulltext.
Document from the internet	Higher Education Authority (2004) *Creating Ireland's Knowledge Society: Proposals for Higher Education Reform*, Higher Education Authority, Dublin. **http://www.hea.ie/uploads/word/2004KnowledgeIrelandV1.doc** [Accessed 1 September 2004]	Higher Education Authority. (2004). *Creating Ireland's knowledge society: proposals for higher education reform*. Dublin: Higher Education Authority. Retrieved September 1, 2004, from **http://www.hea.ie/uploads/word/2004KnowledgeIrelandV1.doc**
Newspaper item	Reid, L (2004) July 8, *World-class Skills, Education and Training*, The Irish Times, p 7.	Reid, L. (2004, July 8). *World-class skills, education and training*. The Irish Times, p. 7.
Lecture notes	Donnelly, R (2003) What should guide your teaching? Lecture notes distributed in the course – PG Certificate in Learning and Teaching, at Dublin Institute of Technology, Dublin on March 10, 2004.	Donnelly, R. (2003). What should guide your teaching? Lecture notes distributed in the course – PG Cert in Learning and Teaching, at Dublin Institute of Technology, Dublin on March 10, 2004.
Web-site	Dublin Institute of Technology (2004) **http://www.dit.ie/DIT/Homepage/index.html** [Accessed 7 September 2004]	Dublin Institute of Technology. (2004). Retrieved September 7, 2004, from **http://www.dit.ie/DIT/Homepage/index.html**
Image	Map of Dublin.jpg [Picture of Dublin map] [online] **http://www.imagesonline.bl.uk/britishlibrary** [Accessed 2 September 2004]	Map of Dublin.jpg [Picture of Dublin map] [online] Retrieved September 2, 2004, from http://www.imagesonline.bl.uk/britishlibrary
Anonymous Publications	Alphabetise under title *Primary Colors: A Novel of Politics,* (1996) Vintage, London.	Alphabetise under title Primary colors: a novel of politics. (1996). London: Vintage.
No Author	As anonymous publications above.	As anonymous publications above.

Referencing Cited works	Make it clear that you are referencing from a secondary source. In your reference list, cite the secondary source only. Psychologists have identified three basic processes of social influence (Kelman 1961, cited by Atkinson 1987, p 597).	Make it clear that you are referencing from a secondary source. In your reference list, cite the secondary source only. In Kelman's study, he shows the three basic processes of social influence that psychologists have identified (as cited in Atkinson 1987)

Pseudonym publication	Listed under the pseudonym with the real author's name following in brackets. Bell, C [Bronte, C] (1992) *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*, Nutshell Publishers, Rugeley.	Listed under the pseudonym with the real author's name following in brackets. Bell, C. [Bronte, C.]. (1992). *Jane Eyre: an autobiography*. Rugeley: Nutshell Publishers.
Association or Institute as author	The association/institute appears in the author position. Staff and Educational Development Association (1996) *Facets of Mentoring in Higher Education*, SEDA, Birmingham.	The association/institute appears in the author position. Staff and Educational Development Association. (1996). *Facets of mentoring in higher education.* Birmingham: SEDA
Conference Proceedings	McCauley, F (2001) *Celebrating Difference: Gender Equality and Lifelong Learning, Proceedings of the AONTAS Millenium Conference held at the Limerick Inn Hotel, Limerick, 20th October 2000,* AONTAS, Limerick.	McCauley, F. (2001). Celebrating difference: gender equality and lifelong learning. Proceedings of the AONTAS Millenium conference, Limerick Inn Hotel, Limerick, 20th October 2000. Dublin: AONTAS.

4.2 Acknowledging sources, and incorporating citations/quotations into your own writing

General guidelines:

a. In a paraphrased passage only the author and date are required as acknowledgement of the source, e.g.

> During the last decade of the twentieth century, curriculum design became increasingly student-centred (Toohey, 1999).
>
> Toohey (1999) argues that curriculum design became increasingly student-centred in the last decade of the twentieth century.

b. If the same point was made in several works you just list the writers and years of publication in date order, e.g.

> Lecturers are increasingly using a student-centred approach to teaching in higher education (Gredler, 2004; Lukes, 2003; Mannion, 2003).

c. If your material comes from more than one source by the same author you should list the years as follows:

> Boud stresses the urgent need to consider the theoretical underpinnings of experiential learning when planning work-based learning (Boud, 2001, 2003a, 2003b).

d. When a publication has more than one author, you should mention all the authors the first time you refer to the publication

e.g. (Brown, Duguid and Collins, 2001), but use (Brown *et al*, 2001) thereafter.

e. When an author cites another author you need to acknowledge this, e.g.

Giddens (cited in Elton, 2004:22) argues that the school no longer reflects society in urban England.

f. If your source is not published, but is significant, you can acknowledge it as follows:

This particular concept was introduced by Prof. Pat Lyons at a conference in July, 2003 in the University of Stirling.

g. When quoting directly in the text use quotation marks as well as acknowledging the author's name, year of publication and page number of the quote in brackets.
Short quotations of less that two lines are embed in the text using single quotation marks and plain print, e.g.

Boud, (2004:34) maintains that 'work-based learning can now be regarded as the dominant learning paradigm of the new century'.

OR

Boud (2004) maintains that 'work-based learning can now be regarded as the dominant learning paradigm of the new century' (p. 34).

Direct quotations of more than two lines should be in italics, indented on both sides, no quotation marks, as follows:

At the end of your essay it is usual to give both a bibliography and a reference list, although in some pieces of work you may just be asked for a reference list alone. This contains only the authors and works you have referenced in the essay, while the bibliography is a list of all the material you have consulted as background for the topic.
(Greetham, 2001:246).

PART 5 Sample House Style for Assignment Presentation

A sample house style for presentation of text documents might include the following:

1.	**Font style**	Times New Roman	
2.	**Font Size**	Text	11 or 12 plain
		Footnotes or End notes	10/11 plain
3.	**Levels of Headings**	(as in Chapter 9, Anderson & Poole (2001 edition)) as follows:	

Up to 5 levels of headings may be used in major documents such as a thesis.

Level 1 **CENTRED HEADING UPPER CASE BOLD**

Level 2 **Centre Heading Title Case Bold**

Level 3 **Side Heading Title Case Bold**

Level 4 *Side Heading Title Case in Italics*

Level 5 *Paragraph heading sentence, lower case, in italics, ending with a full stop.*

In all documents you should be clear and consistent about the levels of heading you are using. Levels of headings force you to think carefully about the function of each sentence and paragraph in your writing. This is very useful if you tend to be less than orderly in your writing habits.

4. **Page numbering** Centred at foot

5.	**Line spacing**	* 1.5 for main text • single for quotations, appendices, figures, tables, footnotes/endnotes • single for reference list/bibliography, leaving one space between entries
6.	**Margins**	left -4 cm right -2 cm top -3 cm bottom -4 cm (includes the page number)
6	**Text justified**	
7	**Quotations**	a. Plain print with single inverted commas for all short quotations embedded in the text b. All quotation of more than two full lines should be single spaced, in italics and indented, without inverted commas. A single space should be left above and below the quotation.
8	**Emphasis**	**Bold** or *italic*s. Do not underline.
9	**Use of colour**	Text in black or dark blue print on white paper. Colour may be used for images, graphs, charts, diagrams etc.
10	**Binding**	Short documents submitted for assessment normally require no binding, but should be stapled on the top, left-hand corner.
11	**Cover**	The cover page for documents submitted for assessment (other than the thesis) should give essential information in the following order: course, module, title, name, submitted to, date.
11	**Printing**	Text on right-hand page only
12	**Paper**	Good quality white paper, 80g. for short assignments, 100g. for theses
13.	**Binding**	Short individual assignments need not be bound, but must be stapled on the top left-hand corner; Group reports may be bound; Standard hardback binding for theses.
14.	**Cover**	**Garda Siochana/Trinity blue** (or nearest shade) with **gold lettering** ***Spine:***

Name (as registered) -top
year of submission -centre,
M.A. -bottom

Front Cover:

Title -	top
Registered Name -	middle
M.A. -	bottom left
Year of submission -	bottom right

Back*:* blank

Three (3) copies of assignments are normally required for assessment purposes.

Part 6: Thesis Production and Technical Aspects of the Thesis (sample)

Supplement to Wisker, G. (2001) *The Postgraduate Research Handbook*, U.K.: Palgrave
and
Anderson, J. and Poole, M (2001) *Assignment and Thesis Writing*, 4th Edition Australia: Wiley

6.1 Organisation of the MA Thesis

A thesis, or dissertation, is an exercise in organisation - research organisation and writing organisation - regardless of the research topic.

There are established expectations regarding theses in higher education, and the format is generally internationally recognisable.

A thesis is generally highly stylised with distinctive and clearly evident component parts.

While the logic of the research design and your treatment of the content of the research are of paramount importance, the organisation and style of your completed document are critical to acceptance of your thesis by readers. It is essential, therefore, that your writing style and language are appropriately formal, even when the first person, 'I', is used.

6. 2 PRELIMINARY PAGES

The general order of preliminary pages in a thesis is as follows:

Title
Declaration
Abstract
Acknowledgements
Table of Contents
List of Figures
List of Tables
(Glossary of Terms)
(List of Abbreviations)
(List of Acronyms)
List of Appendices

6. 3 CHAPTERS/MAIN BODY

The main body of a postgraduate thesis generally has sections

(Chapters) presented in the following order:

a. Introduction
b. Context of the research, rationale for the study, research hypothesis or question, aims and objectives, ethical considerations.
c. (Theoretical Perspective/Conceptual Framework or Paradigm informing the research)
d. Review of the literature

e. Research design, methodology and method
f. Presentation of Findings
g. Discussion/Analysis of Findings
h. Conclusions and Recommendations.

Each of these sections (Chapters) may, of course, have sub-sections devoted to discrete parts of the research work, indicated by sub-headings.

The main body of the thesis is generally followed by:

i. References and citations (used in the text). All references must be fully acknowledged.
j. Bibliography (of all works consulted). This is optional.
k. Appendices

6. 4 APPENDICES

Appendices will vary but generally the following items are included:

- Tables not suitable for the main text
- Figures not used in the text but useful for the reader
- Illustrations not appropriate for the main text
- (Glossary)
- (Abbreviations)
- Letters
- Samples of research documents used
- Text from interviews or focus groups. This is usually presented in smaller font and with economy of space usage.

Appendices are usually listed alphabetically using capital letters: A, B, C, D.

TITLE

It might be worth considering that many people read the title of a dissertation/thesis, while only a few read the entire report. Therefore all words in your final title should be chosen with great care, paying attention to syntax.

The title should have the fewest words possible which adequately describe the contents of your thesis.

It is sometimes helpful to have a question or 'catchy' title, followed by a description of the study in the minimum of words.

ABSTRACT

The abstract should:

1. state the principal aims, objectives and scope of the investigation
2. describe the research design
3. summarise the results
4. state the principal conclusions and recommendations

There are generally no references or statistics in the abstract.

Emphasis should be on the conclusion and recommendations.

6. 5 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Introduction is to supply sufficient background information for the reader to understand the context and purpose of the research, the main aims and objectives, the research design used, the main findings and recommendations.

The Introduction is generally written as one of the final tasks and is generally less than five pages in length.

The content of each chapter is generally summarised.

The first chapter usually ends with an indication to the reader of the approach to expect in the rest of the document.

6.6 CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH, RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES, DELIMITATIONS, RESEARCH ETHICS

This chapter will be based largely on the relevant sections of the Research Proposal.

Remember to change the tense of the verbs to the past tense where necessary!

The *context* of the research should be outlined in sufficient background detail for any reader to understand with ease.

The *rationale* for the research should clearly prove that the research is justified and is worth the effort.

The *aims* and *objectives* should be very clear and outlined in detail. This is essential as the entire research design depends on the clarity of the research aim and achievement of its objectives.

The delimitations section outlines and justifies what aspects of the research topic are included in the research and what aspects are deliberately left out.

The section on *ethics* outlines the standard academic position on the research and outlines the specific ethical aspects of your own research.

As with all sections of the thesis this chapter should be written in formal style, well supported with relevant data and literature.

It should be clear to the reader that the research is justified and that it will contribute something worthwhile to the particular field.

6.7 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OR PARADIGM INFORMING THE RESEARCH

This section will have been introduced in the Research Proposal document. Again, it should be supported with adequate references and written in formal style.

Some theses will have more emphasis on the theoretical or conceptual framework than others, especially where data are being interrogated from a theoretical perspective as the main analytical approach. Your thesis supervisor will advise in this regard.

6. 8 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The main purpose of the literature review is to outline current theories and arguments related to your research topic and to outline the main debates, research and key authors who have contributed to the field.

There are various ways of approaching the presentation of the relevant literature and theory in this section, and indeed to including literature at different junctures throughout the thesis. It is advisable to have consistency between the Proposal, and Thesis in this regard. Your supervisor will advise you appropriately in the context of your own research.

6. 9 RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This is a crucial chapter in any thesis since the validity of the study will to a large extent depend on the care taken in the planning and implementation of the research. This section should be carefully written, as, ideally, your research design should stand up to the test of 'replication' by other competent researchers.

Your discussion and conclusions chapters depend largely on the validity and accuracy of your research data, so great care should be taken both to describe the research design and to outline the approach to data analysis.

You need to refer to literature in support of your selected methodology and methods, especially where unusual or complex design is involved.

If your method is relatively new it may require detailed information to defend its validity.

If you are using mixed methods it is necessary to justify the decision.

Do NOT attempt to offer any findings of your research in this chapter as its purpose is to outline the research design only.

It is likely that most of the issues in this section will have been considered in some detail in the Thesis Proposal. Your supervisor will advise of any issues emerging from assessment of the Proposal.

6. 10 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This is a vital part of your thesis: the conversion of data into information for the reader.

There are many variations as to how findings may be presented, and you should use an approach appropriate to your own research context.
You could take the approach of a clear, crisp, direct presentation in an orderly and logical fashion or, you may wish to present the findings in a more discursive way, interweaving literature with the findings.
Your research may require presentation of extracts from logs, field notes, interviews etc..
You could, if you choose, start with a very brief description of the research methods used and a presentation of the findings without discussion or analysis.

It is not necessary to present each and every finding with equal weighting. You may use your judgement to emphasise important or significant findings, including variables, in relation to verification or rejection of your research hypothesis/question. It is important to present any negative findings which impact on your research hypothesis/question.

There is some merit in indicating what you did not find, or what surprised you.

The presentation of data from quantitative research (including tables, graphs, statistics, etc.) may differ significantly from data from qualitative research. However, in both cases the data should be presented relative to the research method used.

In reviewing the overall presentation of findings, it is important to keep in mind how the earlier chapters led towards the findings chapter, and, how you intend to handle the Discussion of Findings chapter. The reader needs to be led smoothly through the chapters in a systematic and logical fashion.

6. 11 DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

You may wish to divide this section into clear sub-sections so that complex topics can be given adequate treatment. Such sub-sections should arise from the way you have ordered the earlier chapters. This gives a unity and coherence to the material both for your self as writer and for the reader.

If you have outlined a specific theoretical or conceptual perspective for the study in the earlier chapters, you should use that perspective as a framework for analysis of the data here.

The following are suggested as general guidelines for an approach to the discussion of findings chapter, but variations are possible:

1. Try to present the principles, relationships and generalisations shown by the Findings. Remember that you are discussing the findings, not re-presenting the findings or summarising them
2. Indicate where the findings lacked correlation, were surprising, or where they unsettled assumptions made in the original research design
3. Show how your findings agree with, or contradict, previously published results of similar studies
4. Be brave in discussing the theoretical implications of your findings, if relevant
5. Indicate any practical implications of the findings as they relate to the aims and objectives of the study

6. 12 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions chapter will be closely connected with Discussion of Findings chapter and earlier chapters.

This chapter generally answers the questions: ***'So what?'***

This section should clearly connect the aims and objectives with the discussion of findings, and outline for the reader the significance of the findings, or otherwise, in the research context.

Any conclusions drawn should be clearly supported by the data presented, without exaggeration or deliberate misinterpretation.

Your conclusions should indicate your judgement on the relative importance of your study.

Some theses will have a stronger emphasis on the recommendations section than others, especially with regard to policy and practical the nature of your own research will dictate how much emphasis should be given to these sections.

In any case, recommendations should:

- be constructive and realistic
- arise obviously from the research findings
- be carefully worded
- indicate practical solutions/strategies/policies etc.
- be few in number.

To round off the Thesis you should very briefly refer to the purpose of the research, the main findings and conclusions, and whether or not, you have succeeded in achieving the main aims.

6. 13 Sample thesis title page

Towards an Epistemology

of

Artificial Intelligence

A thesis submitted to the Midlands University in part fulfilment of the requirements for award of Masters (M.A.) in Work-based Learning

by

Kurt Replies

June 2008

Supervisor: A. Another

Department of Informatics, Faculty of Humanities, Midlands University

6.14 Sample thesis declaration

Declaration

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards award of the **Masters (M.A.) in Work-based Learning** is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part-fulfilment of the award named above.

Signature of candidate:.....

Date: .....

PART 7: REPORT STYLE

In higher education students are frequently required to submit reports, either individually, or as part of a class group exercise.
In either case, you are likely to be working to a research and reporting brief designed by course teaching staff. Usually such exercises are *real-life* in style, but notional in reality. The object of the exercise is generally to enable you to acquire the skills of collaborative research and report writing: skills that are essential in real life!

Reports have a number of features which are different to the standard academic essay, for example:

a. they are written with a particular readership in mind
b. they have clarity of communication as the key determinant of writing style
c. they generally explain: *why* the research was done (terms of reference), *how* it was done: (procedure/methodology) and the *outcomes* (findings, conclusion and recommendations)
d. they generally have a set of recommendations, or action points, as the final section
e. long reports generally have an executive summary, glossary of terms and appendices
f. information is frequently presented in figures, tables, diagrams and visual images
g. the style of writing is impersonal, logical, direct and succinct with an emphasis on facts and details rather than on argument and discussion
h. bullet points are frequently used instead of continuous text
i. there is significant use of sub-headings, numbering and standardised layout

7. 1 Sample title page for a report

Report on

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Prepared by

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
For

XXXXXXXXXXXXX

Date

XXXXXXXXXX

7. 2 Sample Contents Page format for a report

CONTENTS

Page

Part 8: Sample cover page for a module assignment

Department of Informatics

POSTGRADUATE (Certificate, or Diploma or Masters) in Work-based Learning

MODULE (or assignment)

……

PARTICIPANT:……

STUDENT NUMBER:

FOR ASSESSMENT BY: ……

DATE SUBMITTED: ……