

What do they want from me? – proof I’m
a competent researcher

- CONTENT:
- Contribution to knowledge
- Originality
- Independent thought
- METHODOLOGY:
- Ability to carry out research in chosen field/understand research methods in chosen field
- Evidence that the candidate has become an independent researcher

What do they want from me?

- SCHOLARSHIP:
- Able to relate your topic to the broader framework of knowledge in your discipline or sub-discipline
- Able to critically assess that broader framework and see where new/further work is needed
- Understand your underlying theoretical position/ provide theoretical justification for your approach
- Take into account the complexity of any research topic

What do they want from me

- PRESENTATION
- Communicate clearly using a sustained and logical argument
- Clearly show what your topic, aims and findings are
- Use the proper conventions of presentation (grammar, spelling, paragraphing etc)
- Assist the reader with introductions, summaries, signposting, interlinking
- Be publishable

Rite No. 1: deciding on a topic

- Feasible (you've probably chosen it already, but it will need refining)
 - Right size – can be done within time limits
 - Can be done within budget
 - Suits granting body guidelines (talk to Research Office)
 - Is methodologically feasible – you can access the data/information



Rite no. 1: the topic

- Allows originality
 - Analyse new data or evidence
 - Revisionist (re-analyse old interpretations) eg. apply a new theory, model or methodology to an old topic
 - Evaluate a methodology or theory
 - Can be a small advance in knowledge
 - Beware of being too original! – it's easier if there is previous work to provide context, so you don't have to research that too



Rite no. 1: the topic

- Suitable for you
 - Might get you a job one day (publicise it!)
 - Interesting (up to 8 years' worth)
 - Suited to your strengths (check out the Generic Skills program if you have weaknesses)
 - Not something you'll get too fanatical about (beware getting infatuated and/or too biased)

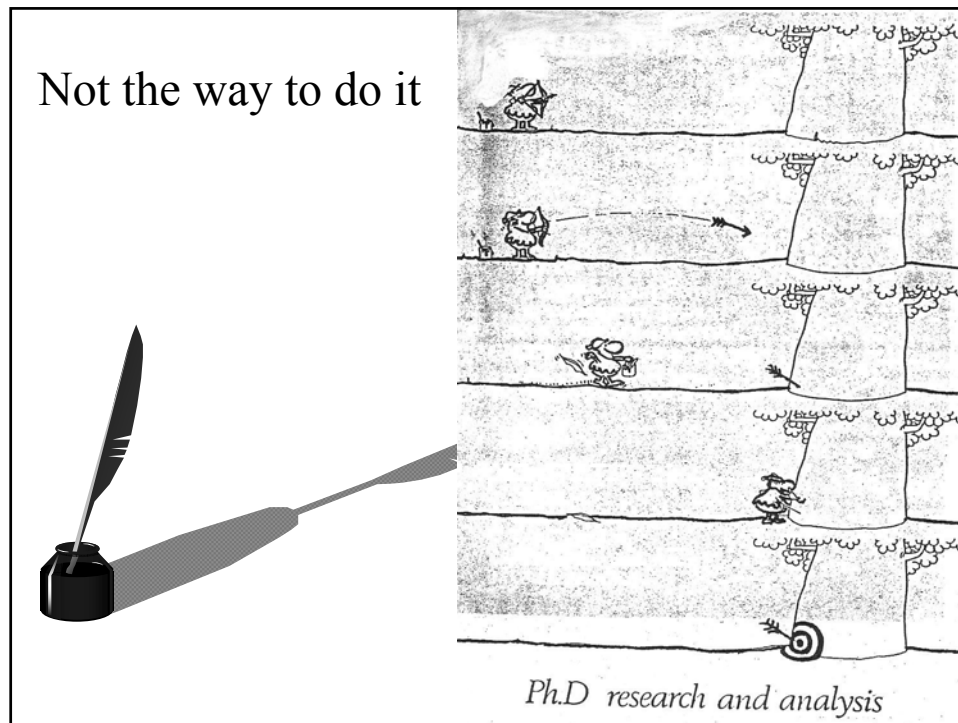


Rite no. 1: the topic



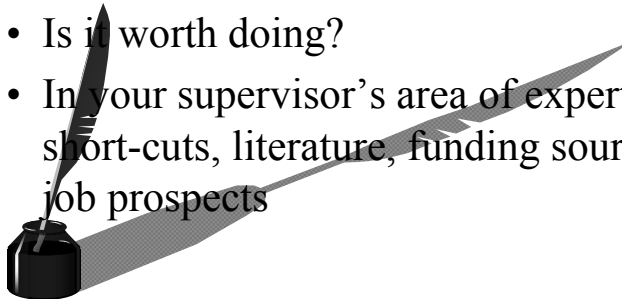
- Make it snappy! – clear, focused, limited, targeted
 - Focused approach from the start, not a Big Fuzzy topic that gradually emerges from the mists of your reading
 - Limited number of research questions/aims/hypotheses
 - Clear theoretical framework and/or methodology (models are good)
 - Use your theoretical framework to help you interpret data - be careful it doesn't take over the thesis
 - Know your methodology well – get advice on the most appropriate methods (especially for quantitative analyses)
 - Put limits on the study – geographical, chronological, data sets, aspects, definitions etc.





Rite no. 1: the topic

- Will it be useful and therefore used? Will it be publishable as a monograph? – keep your potential audience in mind
- Is it worth doing?
- In your supervisor's area of expertise? – knows short-cuts, literature, funding sources, networks, job prospects



Rite No. 2: The research proposal (aka Confirmation Seminar)

- Convincing your supervisory panel this will fly:
 - What's the topic?
 - What's the problem you're trying to solve?
 - Specify aims, research questions, hypotheses (if you have any yet). What's your Big Idea?
 - Is this research needed? Do other scholars in your field think so? Is there a gap?
 - How will you approach the topic? – is there an interpretive framework (theory, model) or is it empirical? Why are you using this framework?



Rite no. 2: the research proposal

- How will you do it? (methodology) eg.
 - How will you decide what data/evidence to collect? Where will you find it?
 - How will you collect it? What sampling method (if needed)? How will you justify that?
 - Do you need a series of experiments? A survey form? A pilot study?
 - How will you process the data/evidence? What analytical methods will you use?
 - Are there alternative methodologies you could have used? – why are you using this one?



Rite no. 2: the research proposal

- Will you need ethical clearance? Have you applied?
- Will you need other permits and approvals eg for fieldwork?
- Do you need new skills? How do you propose to get them? (you can take generic skills workshops or Uni subjects)
- Are you doing research off campus? – what WHS risk assessments have you done?
- What's your timeframe? (not binding!)
- What's your budget?



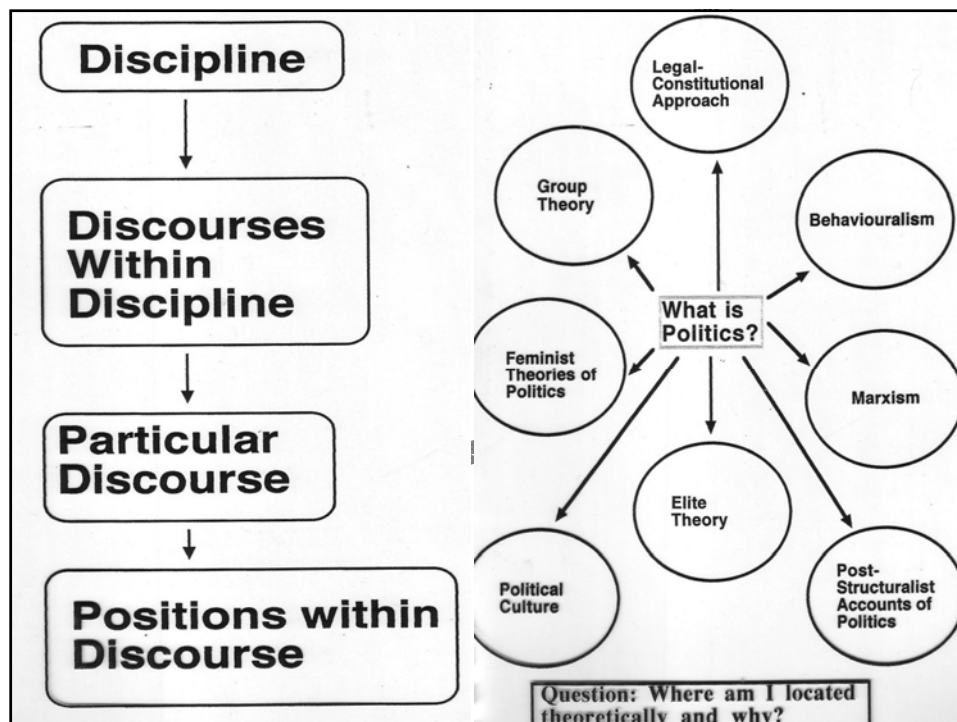
Rite no. 3: Methodology or conceptual framework

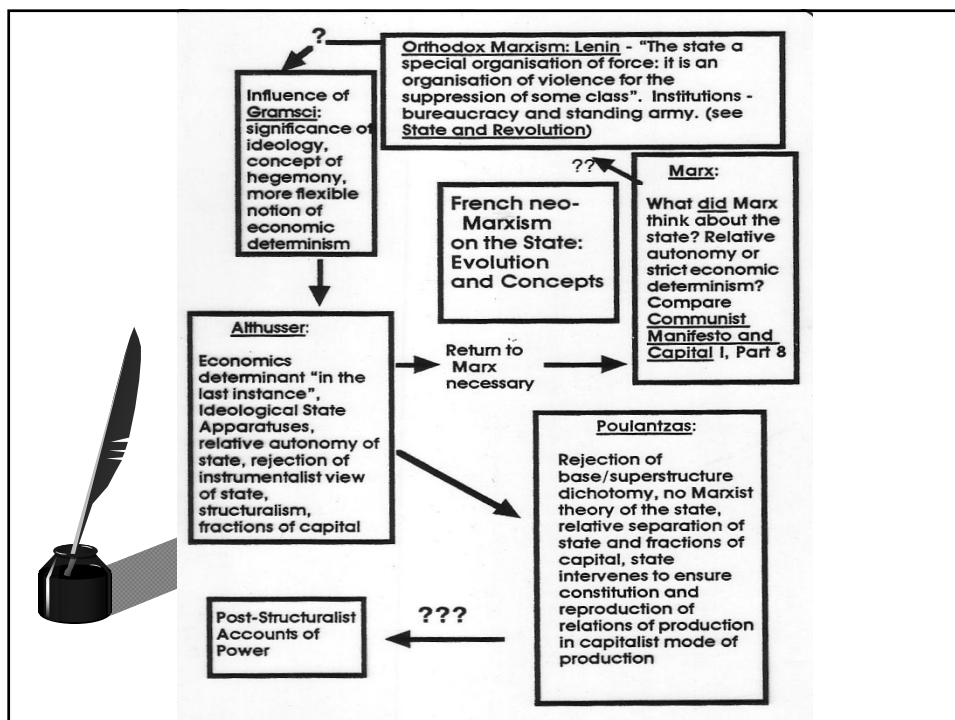
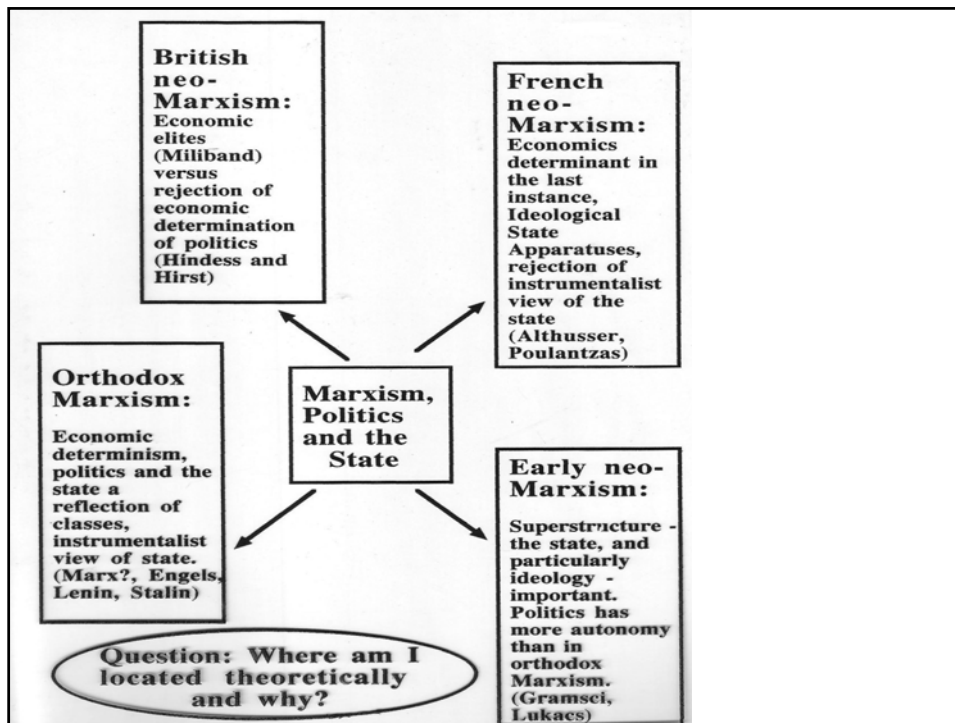
- What's your epistemological / philosophical bent?
 - Quantitative? – measurable, scientific?
 - Qualitative? – detailed observation, getting inside subject “rich analysis” etc.
 - Nominalist? (no ‘reality’ so objectivity impossible) eg postmodernism
 - Realist? (objective approach)
 - Positivist? (scientific – it's possible to find truth)
 - Relativist? (no absolute truth – observations vary according to the observer)
 - Determinist? (behaviour is determined eg by society)
 - Voluntarist? (free will and choice)



Rite no. 3: framework and methodology

- Within this broad philosophical framework, do you have an interpretive model or theory? – eg. feminist, post-colonial, post-modernist, post-structuralist, Marxist, empiricist
- Is there a particular theorist you are using? (eg. Nominalist and Relativist ► Post-structural ► Foucauldian)
- Don't mix incompatible theories!
Pick theoretically and methodologically compatible examiners






Rite no. 3: framework and methodology

- Correct methodology is vital. Get help – from more than one person!
- Make sure your methodology is compatible with your theoretical framework
- Better that you point to methodological shortcomings than your examiner (how have you tried to overcome them?)
- If the methodology is new to your discipline – don't lose sight of your own discipline
- Beware statistical overkill
- Remember, if you change methodology, you may have to re-collect all your data

Rite no. 4: Introduction (former research proposal)

- Reader, meet my thesis. This is what it's all about.
 - Purpose (why am I doing it? Why is it important enough to do?)
 - Aims (what did I want to achieve?)
 - Problem (what problem or important questions did I tackle?)
 - Hypothesis or hypotheses ("thesis") (what are my answers? What did I want to prove?)
 - Brief summary of most important findings (what did I prove?)

Rite no. 4: introduction

- Explanation of theoretical framework/model (what guided my interpretation?) (may need a separate chapter for a detailed explanation)
- Explanation of methodology (how did I do it?) (may need a separate chapter for a detailed explanation)
- Scope (what limits did I put on the study? What areas have I excluded, and why?)
- Definitions (especially if I've used terms in a non-standard way)
- Scholarly context (what gaps were there in the knowledge that my study fills?)

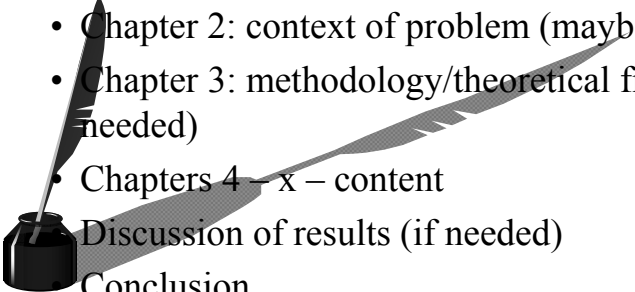


Rite no. 4: introduction

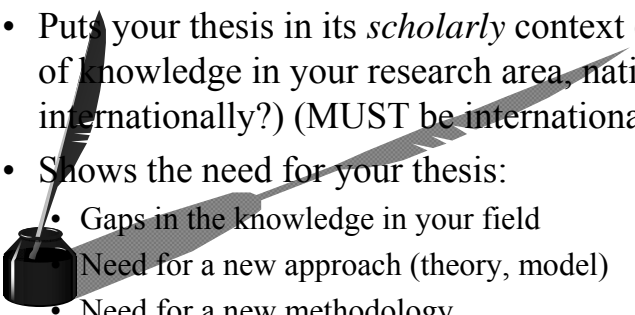
- Brief overview of chapters (how did I organise my thesis?)
- This thesis is hot stuff (why should the examiners and other readers be impressed? – what's the value of the thesis? But - don't go overboard)
- Write the introduction early and re-draft regularly to help keep you on track
- Make sure it agrees with the conclusion or discussion chapter (examiners read the intro and conclusion first!)
- Make sure all the other chapters link to it in some way
- This is your most important chapter – put the effort in



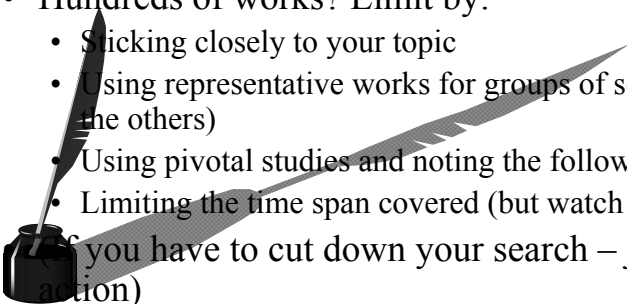
Rite no. 4: introduction

- The usual chapter lineup:
 - Introduction
 - Chapter 1: literature review (scholarly context)
 - Chapter 2: context of problem (maybe)
 - Chapter 3: methodology/theoretical framework (if needed)
 - Chapters 4 – x – content
 - Discussion of results (if needed)
 - Conclusion
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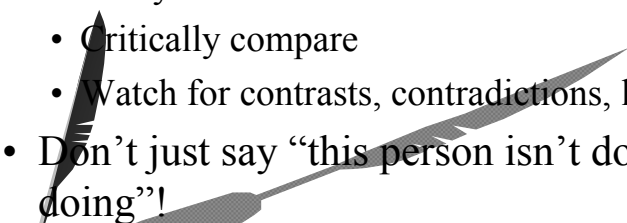
Rite no. 5: literature review

- Usually the substantive piece of writing for the Confirmation Seminar
 - Does not include thesis content (data, evidence)
 - Puts your thesis in its *scholarly* context (what's the state of knowledge in your research area, nationally and/or internationally?) (MUST be international for a PhD)
 - Shows the need for your thesis:
 - Gaps in the knowledge in your field
 - Need for a new approach (theory, model)
 - Need for a new methodology
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Rite no. 5: literature review

- Shows off your scholarship (understanding of your discipline in your research area, and ability to critically appraise other scholarly works)
 - Hundreds of works? Limit by:
 - Sticking closely to your topic
 - Using representative works for groups of sources (just mention the others)
 - Using pivotal studies and noting the followers
 - Limiting the time span covered (but watch classics)
 - If you have to cut down your search – justify your action)
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Rite no. 5: literature review

- Don't just summarise or write an annotated bibliography.
 - Analyse
 - Critically compare
 - Watch for contrasts, contradictions, links, groupings.
 - Don't just say "this person isn't doing what I'm doing"!
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Rite no. 5: literature review

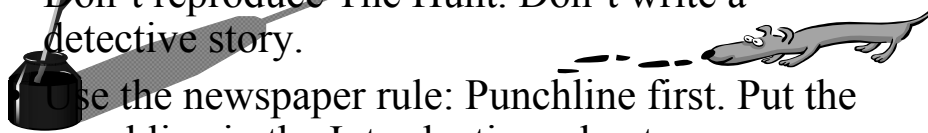
- Re-check the state of your field of knowledge just before you submit (and include relevant work of examiners!!)
- How to begin? – keep a log of all sources, with an evaluation of it in relation to your thesis and other sources
- How to structure? – historical, conceptual, methodological. Can have lit reviews in each chapter.

My Literature Review (a chronological structure)

- Before x, this field of study did not exist / was covered under the umbrella of / concentrated on the aspects of...
- x brought the topic into prominence by proving... began a debate which still dominates the area...has now been superseded...laid the groundwork which still sets the terms of discussion...
- one aspect was questioned by y who showed it did not apply...backed up by d, e and f who demonstrated that it also did not apply...
- further work done by e, f, g and h which confirm the overall hypotheses but have refined them as follows...
- Since then, the American school of thought has tended to concentrate on these aspects...as demonstrated in the works of j and k...
- Australian studies have shown different emphases...three examples are...
- Recent poststructural analysis has resulted in revisionist interpretations which say...as shown in the works of...have been criticised by...
- New methodological approaches have also revolutionised...m,n, o and p have used...
- Gap has been identified...(my work)...work still to be done...

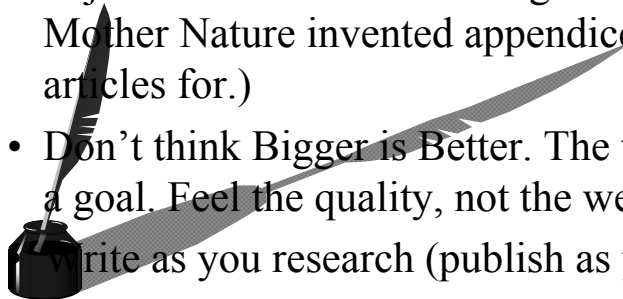
Rite no. 6: the writing process

- Do a thesis outline by chapters. Revise it regularly. This helps to keep you on track.
- Prepare an abstract of the chapter in advance. What's the purpose of the chapter? How does it help to fulfil your aims? This is the basis of your chapter introduction (NOT a detailed summary).
- Don't reproduce The Hunt. Don't write a detective story.
- Use the newspaper rule: Punchline first. Put the punchline in the Introduction, chapter introductions, topic sentences for paragraphs.



Rite no. 6: writing

- Try to keep chapters short. (And relevant).
- If it's "interesting", it's not relevant (don't put it in just because it's interesting! That's what Mother Nature invented appendices and journal articles for.)
- Don't think Bigger is Better. The word limit is not a goal. Feel the quality, not the weight.
- Write as you research (publish as you write?)



Rite no. 6: writing



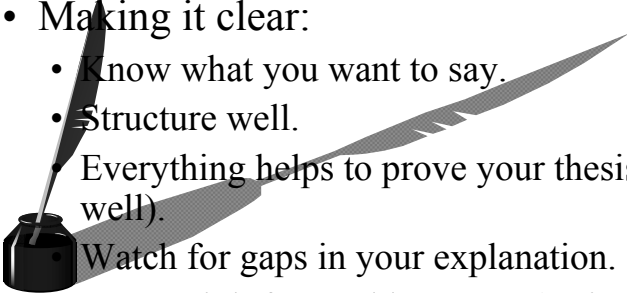
- Write regularly. If interrupted, leave a pick-up point.
- Don't underestimate writing time (3 pages a day is good going).
- The first draft does not have to be perfect – just get it down!
- Tell your supervisor what you want feedback on – content, structure, language (depending on the draft)

Rite no. 6: writing

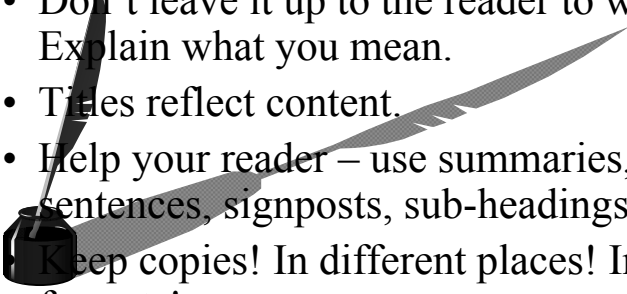


- Hint: when your supervisor gives you back that chapter, don't say "Oh, I've already changed that"
- Ask your supervisor for a good model to follow (one that's recent and been published)
- Don't bluff! (You can fool your supervisor, but not your examiners)

Rite no. 6: writing

- Don't impress your readers. Try to communicate with them.
 - Clarity is better than jargon.
 - Making it clear:
 - Know what you want to say.
 - Structure well.
 - Everything helps to prove your thesis (hangs together well).
 - Watch for gaps in your explanation.
 - Use straightforward language (active voice helps).
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Rite no. 6: writing

- Don't make the reader work too hard. Use conventions of spelling, grammar, punctuation, paragraphing etc.
 - Don't leave it up to the reader to work it out. Explain what you mean.
 - Titles reflect content.
 - Help your reader – use summaries, linking sentences, signposts, sub-headings.
 - Keep copies! In different places! In different formats!
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Has communication occurred? – why spell correctly?

- According to research at an English university, it doesn't matter in what order the letters in a word are, the only important thing is that the first and last letter is at the right place. The rest can be a total mess and you can still read it without a problem. This is because we do not read every letter by itself but the word as a whole. Cheers.



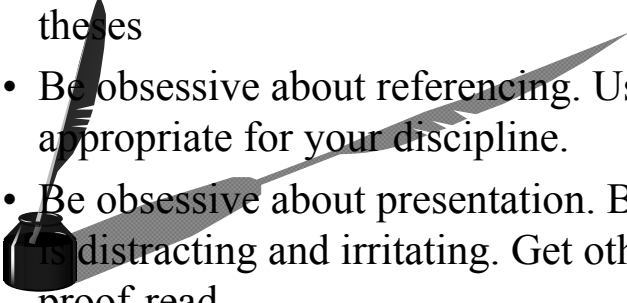
Rite no. 7: conclusion/discussion

- Summary/pulling together – problem, hypothesis, findings and what they mean, all in relation to any theory/models used
- No new material
- What are the implications of your research? The potential uses? Benefits to the World?
- Suggest areas for future research.
- Point out your own flaws (and reasons for them) before the examiner does.

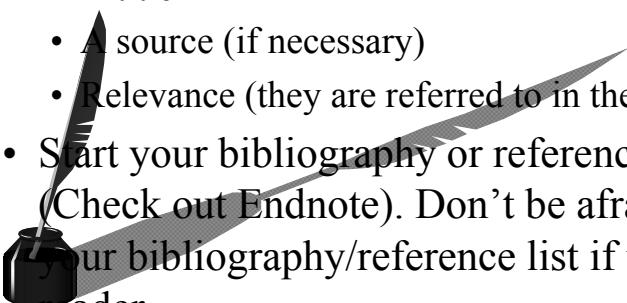


Second most important chapter (leaves that lasting impression)

Rite no. 8: getting ready to submit

- Murphy's Law of Theses no. 56: this stage takes twice as long as you expected
 - Check Uni/School guidelines on presentation of theses
 - Be obsessive about referencing. Use a format appropriate for your discipline.
 - Be obsessive about presentation. Bad presentation is distracting and irritating. Get other people to proof-read.
- 

Rite no. 8: getting ready to submit

- Make sure photos, graphs, tables etc. have
 - A figure number
 - A title
 - A source (if necessary)
 - Relevance (they are referred to in the text)
 - Start your bibliography or reference list early. (Check out Endnote). Don't be afraid to subdivide your bibliography/reference list if this helps the reader.
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A kind of summary:

- Once upon a time, researchers believed that...
(Statement of problem) (Literature review)
- But then I thought that maybe...(Aims)
(hypothesis)
- So what I did was...(Theoretical model)
(Methodology)
- And I've discovered that...(Findings)
- Which changed the way we...(Originality,
contribution to knowledge)
(Discussion/conclusion)