

Getting it right from the start!

What's in a thesis?

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Overview of this talk

- Your thesis: What is essential?
- What will be your most important skills?
- The format of your thesis
- Planning your thesis

Your thesis: What is essential?

- It must be *your* data
 - resolve any potential conflict or overlap with other researchers **now**.
- Your data must be *original* and ‘add to the literature’.

What will be your most important skills?

- Planning, planning, planning.....
 - Content
 - Time-line
 - Try to ‘write as you go...’
 - Start your literature review now
 - Write where most comfortable
 - Find balance between ‘good enough’ and ‘perfect’

The format of your thesis

- Front section
- Literature review
- Aims and hypotheses
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion
- References
- Appendices

The format of your thesis

- Front section
 - Title page
 - Declaration
 - Summary
 - Acknowledgments
 - Publications/Presentations
 - Abbreviations
 - Table of contents
 - List of Figures/Tables

The format of your thesis

- Literature review
 - Don't expect to write it in 1 draft!
 - Detailed background and critical appraisal of literature to date
 - Why your thesis is important
 - Use subheadings and tables (imagine what it would be like to read)
 - Be thorough, consider writing a journal review
 - Leading to

The format of your thesis

- Aims and hypotheses
 - Could be separate chapter, or end of literature review
 - All of methods, results and discussion must refer to these aims and hypotheses

The format of your thesis

- Methods
 - Detailed, clear methods including all laboratory reagents, materials (here or appendix).
 - Detailed enough to be reproduced by another investigator
 - Keep the methods in the same order as the results (easier to read for the examiner).
 - Include statistical tests employed.
 - Try to write methods as you go, be detailed (including reagents, suppliers)

The format of your thesis

- Results
 - Tell a story
 - Follow a logical progression
 - Give a brief introduction to each sub-section to help the reader.
 - Use figures, tables where required.
 - Document your results carefully, lab book and electronically.

The format of your thesis

- Discussion
 - Review findings and importance/originality of findings
 - Critical appraisal of work
 - Future directions of work

The format of your thesis

- References
 - Start database early, summarise papers read in a database, update regularly
 - Use electronic system (End Note, reference manager)
 - Use Vancouver style of reference notation
 - Two possibilities (be consistent):
 1. use numbers to denote references in the text eg (34, 49) or ^{34,49}. List numerically in reference list.
 2. refer to refs by author eg (Smith & Jones, 1998a; White et al, 2000) List these alphabetically at the end of the thesis. This second option is more manageable.

The format of your thesis

- Appendices
 - List information that is not part of the body of the thesis but which helps the reader understand more fully your methods and the results obtained
 - Examples: questionnaires, consent forms, mathematical derivation of equations used, raw data, detailed reagents etc
 - May include data which is not yours, but which was important for your study, such as questionnaires/assessment forms

The format of your thesis

- Stylistic issues
 - Write clearly
 - Minimise
 - Jargon, waffle, never-ending sentences, typos (use spell-check)
 - Come to PG talks on ‘writing scientific papers and theses’.

Getting it right from the start..

- Planning
 - Start your literature review ASAP
 - Discuss a time-line with your supervisor
 - Give yourself clear aims and deadlines, and stick to them!
 - Plan an outline of your thesis now

Getting it right from the start..

- Supervision
 - Good supervision is your right
 - How often, and method of supervision should be depend on *your* needs (*student* orientated)
 - Get feedback of written chapters *early*
 - Take opportunities
 - To learn (new methods, statistics)
 - To present (meetings)
 - To critically appraise (meetings)
 - To understand funding (travel, scholarships)

Getting it right from the start..

- Your future
 - *Your* thesis
 - Your C.V.
 - Future jobs.... where will this take me?

And finally...Dos

- Manage and identify stress
- Write as you go
- Seek help
- Plan, keep to time-lines, dead-lines.
- Eat, drink, sleep, laugh.....

Do not:

- Let your thesis become your life!
- Take your thesis too seriously
- Delay starting writing
- Worry if you haven't got any results in first year
- Lose focus, wander off original aims/hypotheses
- Start a new full time job before writing up !
- Delay submission until it is 'perfect'