Getting started with a scientific thesis

Academic Support Centre, 2015
What is a thesis?
Why write a thesis?
I used to hate writing assignments, but now I enjoy them.

I realized that the purpose of writing is to inflate weak ideas, obscure poor reasoning, and inhibit clarity.

With a little practice, writing can be an intimidating and impenetrable fog! Want to see my book report?

"The dynamics of interbeing and monological imperatives in Dick and Jane: A study in psychic transrelational gender modes."

"Academia, here I come!"
Research Design

From Dr. Kim Nicholas, LUMES
Adapted from Hoel (2001) and Hillocks (1987).
Linear & structured

Introduction
Theory/Background
Methods
Results
Discussion
Conclusion

Title Page
Abstract
Key Words
Table of Contents

Reference List
Appendices
Thought process

what people think it looks like

what it really looks like
topic
research problem
Practical Problem

Research Problem

Research Question

Research Answer

From *The Craft of Research* by Joseph Williams
Problem

Conceptual or Practical or Both

Cost?
Practical problems lead to practical solutions – tell us what to do

**Condition:** any state of affairs

**Cost:** some degree of unhappiness

(from readers’ point of view)

Conceptual problems lead to conceptual solutions – tell us what to think/understand

**Condition:** not knowing/understanding something

**Cost:** something more important that we don’t know or understand

From *The Craft of Research* by Joseph Williams
Subject to topic to RQ

Health markets and regulation

Health systems and financing

Convergence of healthcare financing in OECD countries
“...beginner’s mistakes: start plowing through all the sources they can find on a topic, taking notes on everything they read.”

“...the best way to begin working on your specific topic is not to find all the data you can on your general topic, but to formulate questions that point you just those data that you need to answer them.”

From pg. 40-41 of *The Craft of Research* by Booth, Colomb, & Williams
Subject to topic to RQ

Types of questions to ask:

*Free write or list what you already know about your topic

**Ask about the history:**
How does (topic) fit into a larger developmental context?
What is (topic’s) only internal history?

**Ask about its structure and composition:**
How does (topic) fit into the context of a larger structure or function as part of a larger system?
How do (topic’s) parts fit together as a system?
Subject to topic to RQ

Types of questions to ask:

Ask how your topic is categorized?
   How can (topic) be grouped into kinds?
   How does (topic) compare to and contrast with others like it?

Turn positive questions into negative ones.
   What has not contributed to...?
   How does (topic) not differ from...?

Ask “what if?” and other speculative questions.
   How would things be different if (topic) didn’t happen/never existed?
Subject to topic to RQ

Health markets and regulation

Health systems and financing

Convergence of healthcare financing in OECD countries

What factors contributed to healthcare financing convergence in OECD countries?
question
A Good Research Question is...

- Novel (no one knows the answer yet)
- Relevant (addresses a challenge and solution important to your field)
- Answerable (given the constrains you face)
- Valid (constructs of concepts are valid)
- Connected (related to current issue in theory, practice, or research)

From Dr. Kim Nicholas, LUMES
Your readers will ask:

SO WHAT?
Significant (to someone!)

So what?!

Why do I care? Should I?

What’s in it for me?

1. New data!

2. New data that help settle a debate or something puzzling!

3. New data that upset what long seemed settled!

If we understand [paper’s topic], then we will understand the more important thing people in this field are interested in, ________________.

If we understand [paper’s topic], then we can suggest what [a certain actor] should do to ____________.
“Sustainability is important.” & “Sustainability is not important.”

“This essay argues the case that increasing the expansion of [Sweden’s wetlands] must be accelerated.”*

&

“This essay argues the case that increasing the expansion of [Sweden’s wetlands] must **not** be accelerated.”

*Anonymous LUMES student paper
Formulate aim & objectives

Aim: what
Objectives: how
In order to accomplish this, we will (1) generate..., (2) characterize..., and (3) determine...
Look for right answers?
Reading & Note-taking

Scan & sort
Skim & sort
Surface read & sort
Deep read
(1) Note claims-reasons-evidence
(2) How does the text contribute to or inform your topic?
(3) What definitions does the text use?
(4) Evaluate methods – do they serve the text’s purpose?
(5) Any helpful concepts or language?
(6) What connections does this text make?
Reading & Note-taking

What do we know?
What don’t we know?

Start a literature matrix
## Topic: ________________________________

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<tr>
<th>MAIN IDEA A</th>
<th>SOURCE #1</th>
<th>SOURCE #2</th>
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See: https://writingcenter.fiu.edu/resources/synthesis-matrix-2.pdf
When to write?
Research Design

From Dr. Kim Nicholas, LUMES
Every day.
The eternal struggle.

Getting stuff from here to here.
Writing = Thinking
Writing is good for your health.
Benefits of writing regularly

- 6 year study of 32 people
- 16 regular writers (30 minutes/day, consistently)
- 16 binge writers

**FIGURE 11.1 Effects of BDS**
Drafting

• Just keep writing
• Not necessarily in order of the final text
• Writer’s block & procrastination
  – Routine
  – 10 min. warm up (freewrite!)
  – Write about writing
  – Pomodoro
  – Feedback!
  – Writer’s groups
Focus Statement Template // Academic Support Centre

I am working on/studying______ [TOPIC] __________because I want to find out who/what/when/where/whether/why/how_____ [QUESTION] _______ [SIGNIFICANCE] in order to help readers understand better ___________________/tell readers what to do to change/fix/improve___________________.

[METHODS]**To do this, I will conduct a case study/an observational study/historical research/field-experiment/_________________. I will collect/construct/gather qualitative/quantitative data/empirical material through interviews/observation/content analysis/questionnaires/_________________.

I will analyze the data from____________________ (this theoretical perspective)/with_____________________ (this framework).

[RESULTS SPECULATION]The results of this research will show/explain/develop/have implications for_______________________and lead to further research on__________________________.

**To do this, I will discuss/problematize/analyze the theory of/concept of/process of____________ in relation to____________.
If writing for an extending amount of time is painful...
Pomodoro Technique
Pomodoro Technique

1. Choose a task
2. Work with intense focus for 25 minutes
3. When distracted, quickly note them on paper
4. After 25 minutes, note what you have done
5. Take a break for 3-5 minutes
6. Work for another 25 minutes
7. After 4 pomodori, take a longer break (30 min)
YOU’RE AMAZING!

YOU’RE AWFUL.

IGNORE BOTH OF THEM
In this (paper/chapter/article/thesis/book) I/we draw on (theorist’s work) to make our argument that (1-2 sentence summarizing your argument). (Name of theorist’s) emphasis on (specific concepts that will be used) is especially useful to our analysis as it allows us to think through (major purpose through which the theory is put). To this end (name of theorist’s) conceptualisation of (name of major aspect of theory) is generative for grasping how (major application of theory in relation to your argument). It is here also that (theorist’s) attention to (another aspect of theory) is of value for informing (another piece of argument for which the theory is essential).


In this book we draw on the work of Foucault to make our argument that psychopathology has become instrumental in schools and that schools play an instrumental role in expanding the new psychopathologies of children and young people. Foucault’s emphasis on truth, power and the constitution of the subject (Foucault 1983, 1997a, 2000) is especially useful to our analysis as it allows us to think through the ways in which psychopathology at school is produced and has productive effects. To this end Foucault’s (1982) conceptualisation of power as productive is generative for grasping how schools can indeed be instrumental in a field that, on first glance, appears to be the province of medical and health sciences (especially psychiatry, clinical psychology and psychopharmacology). It is here also that Foucault’s attention to dominant and subjugated knowledges is of value for informing how to understand how dominant knowledges of school disorders such as ADHD, direct attention from those practices that enable psychopathology to sit comfortably in contemporary schooling and educational environments.
Notice phrases other’s use to write:

The data our consistent with X’s hypothesis that __________.

While X’s work clearly demonstrates__________, ________ will be required before we can determine whether __________.

Although Y and Z present firm evidence for __________, their data cannot be used to argue that__________.

Good research = good questions
Good writing = start early + practice + feedback
Academic Support Centre

Academic writing
Presenting
Study skills

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