Thesis & Dissertation Proposal Guide

for

Graduate Students

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http://blogs.ubc.ca/educ500/

FOGS's *Handbook of Graduate Supervision*

(http://www.grad.ubc.ca/students/supervision), recommends the following guidelines for the Thesis or Dissertation Proposal:

The Thesis Proposal

Your thesis proposal should be developed in consultation with your supervisor and committee. The thesis proposal should include:

- □ a background theory
- □ a working hypothesis
- □ a methodology which should be organized under chapter headings
- □ a body of work for analysis
- □ a bibliography

If your thesis will be presented in an alternate format (such as performance), be sure to include this in your proposal.

Some graduate programs require students to undergo a thesis proposal defense. Check with your graduate program about the type of proposal required. Documenting the Proposal

In order to save time and stress later, it is important to keep a bibliography of articles and other pieces of information that you come across as you do initial library research for your thesis proposal. Here are a few tips:

- □ Always keep full bibliographic information (author, title, place and date of publication) for each source you read.
- □ Write a full bibliographic reference on the first page of each article you photocopy.
- □ Keep a running bibliography up to date.
- □ Use a good bibliographic word-processing package; a librarian can help you choose one.
- □ Carry a notebook around with you and jot down new titles or ideas as you come across them.
- □ Work collaboratively if you can: ask friends to look out for articles or book chapters that you might be interested in.

However, this is too general for actually assembling a proposal for your research. I recommend these guidelines for the proposal:

Qualitative Research Design Proposal Format

Section	Pages
Title	
TOC / Outline of Thesis (Anticipated Chapters & Major Sections)	**(1 page)**
Introduction (Brief History of the Problem, Rationale, Theoretical Framings, Positionality— Relation of Self to Problem)	**(1/2 page)**
Purpose (General Focus) (Why?)	**(1/2 – 1 page)**
Problem or Focus of Inquiry (What?) Clear Statement—Research Question(s) or Problem(s)	**(1/2 page or less)**
Review of Literature History of the Problem; Context, Theories	**(6-10 pages)**
Method(s) (How?, When?, Where And Who?) Appropriateness of and Issues around methods chosen Sample (Participants) or Unit(s) of Analysis Data Collection (Protocols or Instrumentation) Sites (Sources) Participant Ethics	**(6-8 pages)**
Data Analysis (How?) Analysis and Coding	**(2-5 pages)**
Report of Outcomes Knowledge Mobilization Plan Recipients of Outcomes Permissions to Share Intellectual Property and Publish Significance of research; Future research	**(1 page or less)**
References	**Attach**
Appendices (e.g. Timeline, consent forms, glossary)	**Attach**

Quantitative Research Design Proposal Format

Section	Pages
Title	
TOC / Outline of Thesis (Anticipated Chapters & Major Sections)	**(1 page)**
Introduction (Brief History of the Problem, Rationale, Theoretical Framings, Positionality— Relation of Self to Problem)	**(1/2 page)**
Purpose (General Focus) (Why?)	**(1/2 – 1 page)**
Problem or Focus of Inquiry (What?) Clear Statement— Research Question(s), Hypotheses or Problem(s), Limitations	**(1/2 page or less)**
Review of Literature History of the Problem, Preliminary Studies, Pilot studies, Theories	**(6-10 pages)**
Method(s) (How?, When?, Where And Who?) Appropriateness of and Issues around methods chosen Sample (Participants) or Unit(s) of Analysis (Variables) Data Collection (Instrumentation) Sites (Sources) Participant Ethics	**(6-8 pages)**
Data Analysis (How?) Variables, Statistical Techniques	**(2-5 pages)**
Knowledge Mobilization Plan Recipients of Outcomes Permissions to Share Intellectual Property and Publish Significance of research; Future research	**(1 page or less)**
References	**Attach**
Appendices (e.g. Timeline, consent forms, glossary)	**Attach**

Conventional Dissertation or Thesis Format

	Title Page
	Abstract
	Table of Contents
	List of Tables
	List of Figures
	Preface (if applicable)
	Acknowledgements and/or Dedication
Chap 1	**Introduction**
	Background/ Positionality
	Rationale
	Statement of Purpose
	Statement of Problem
	Limitations
	Definitions (Terminology, etc.)
	Organization of Thesis
Chap 2	**Review of Literature**
	Introduction
	Background
	Theoretical Frameworks
	Conclusion
Chap 3	**Methodology**
	Introduction
	Site of Research
	Methods (description, criticisms, etc.)
	Instrument (if applicable)
	Data Collection & Analysis (Ethics, Techniques, etc.)
	Conclusion
Chap 4	**Findings**
	Introduction
	Data Analysis and Examples
	Key Findings
	Conclusion
Chap 5	**Conclusions, Implications & Recommendations**
	Introduction
	Summary
	Implications
	Recommendations
	Conclusions
References	**References or Bibliography**
Appendices	**Appendix I** (Instruments, etc.)
	Appendix II (Raw Data Samples)
	Appendix III (Data Collection Protocols, dates, etc)

SUGGESTED CHAPTERS FOR A THESIS OR DISSERTATION

Gaalen Erickson

NOTE: Doctoral dissertations are personal constructions of a series of arguments ultimately leading to one or more knowledge claims that are judged to be significant and important for the educational community. This community is typically composed of academics, policy makers and practitioners. The dissertation should try to address at least two of these groups. The outline below is only ONE example of how the dissertation might be organized and it is simply a product of Gaalen's experience working with a number of graduate students. It represents a very traditional approach to developing and laying out the claims in a dissertation and follows to some degree Gowin's Knowledge Vee.

Chapter 1 The Problem and Its Context

- Introduction to the Chapter
- A short overview of what this chapter will contain Context or Background to the Problem
    - What are the contexts in which the problem is situated?
    - How do these contexts influence the problem area General Problem Area
    - What area of educational research is this study addressing Specific Research Questions
    - Identify the specific research question Methods of the Study
- A very brief overview of how you will address these research questions (Sometimes this information is provided in the General Problem Area section, or other sections. Some people wait until Chapter 3 to discuss methods. I think that it is useful to let your reader know briefly)
- Significance of the Problem Area
    - Why is this an important problem for educators to address
    - How is it situated in the research literature? Limitations of the Study
- What are the decisions you made and other factors which limit your ability to make knowledge claims or generalizations about your study
- Overview of the Dissertation
- Outline briefly the contents of each of the chapters

Chapter 2 Review of Literature

- Introduction to the Chapter
- Briefly outline the major headings and issues that you will be addressing in the chapter The Context of The Research Problem
- Develop in greater detail the discussion about the context presented in Chap 1. Review of literature in specific problem areas of your study
- This will vary depending upon your specific area of study. But it should include both empirical work as well as any theoretical/conceptual writings on your topic area.
- Make sure that this is a critical review where you comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the articles or books.
- Try to use this review to make an argument for why you are doing your study.

- Possible arguments might be: a) there is a lack of literature in the area; b) there are conflicting reports in the literature and clarification is required; your work is an extension of existing studies in terms of scope and context.
- Review of literature regarding any theoretical perspectives you are using in your study
- Make a connection between this perspective and your own study

Chapter 3 Methodology

- Introduction to the Chapter
- Briefly outline the major headings and issues that you will be addressing in the chapter Design of the Study
- Description of the methods that you used to address the research questions that characterize your stud y (You may wish to repeat the research questions here).
- Discussion of your reasons for selecting the particular methods that you selected (for example, why did you use a questionnaire, or employ a case study or use interviews, etc.
- Data Collection
- What data will you collect and what methods will you use to collect these data? Participants
- What sampling process did you use to select these participants?
- Description of the sample Data Analysis
- How did you go about analyzing the data

Chapter 4 Findings or Results of the Study

- Introduction to the Chapter
- Briefly outline the major headings and issues that you will be addressing in the chapter
- Organize the subheadings and discussion of your results around the research questions, if possible
- The sub-headings here will depend upon the nature of your study.
- The results may be presented in more than one chapter IF it makes sense. For example if you have two lengthy case studies then you might want to have 2 results chapters. OR, you might want to devote a separate chapter to each research question. This is a choice you might want to make with advisors.

Chapter 5 Conclusions, Implications of the Study, and Recommendations

- Introduction to the Chapter
- Briefly outline the major headings and issues that you will be addressing in the
- chapter Conclusions of the Study
- The conclusions should be orga.'1ized around your research questions and should
- basically be a sun1mary of the findings reported in your results chapter(s) Discussion of the Study
- In this section you can discuss some of the findings in terms of the literature review that you carried out in Chap. 2 plus add any issues that you consider to be noteworthy and important to comment on.
- This is a section where you can speculate about your findings without worrying

- about providing strong evidence of the claims being made Implications of the Study
- Outline some of the implications of the study for the field. Again, this might mean referring back to your literature review or it may take the form of recommendations for improved practice by researchers, policy makers, or teachers
- Future Directions
- Outline some possible research studies that would further extend your work in some important areas
- This is a section that could map out further studies that you hope to do upon graduation OR that another graduate student who is just beginning might consult for guidance.

BIBILOGRAPHY

APPENDICES

- Include Instruments and any other forms, etc. that were used for data collection
- Include components that were not core t the Chapters but that are meaningful for future researchers
- Data samples if relevant

Conventional Masters Thesis Format*

Chapters

1. Introduction and Research Problem— 20-25 pp.
2. Review of Literature— 30 pp.
3. Methodology— 30 pp.
4. Findings and Data— 30 pp.
    - Quantitative Statistics
    - Interview Examples / Samples
    - Analysis of Data (Qualitative or Quantitative)
5. Conclusions, Implications & Recommendations— 20 pp.

- References
- Appendices (As Necessary)

*** If you are doing a historical thesis or using an unconventional format, please provide a working Table of Contents with the Proposal.**

Research Designs (For Conventional Theses)

Stephen Petrina

Topic (what)- General area of inquiry or study (e.g., immigrant women's rights and independence; second language literacy acquisition; addiction and needle exchange programs; visual communication of pre-K children)

Purpose (why)- Statement of intent or objective in conducting the research. The statement of purpose tells the audience what the research is likely to accomplish. Research typically involves one of six major purposes: *to describe, explain, evaluate, interpret, deconstruct or predict (or confirm or discriminate)*. *To explore* is also a viable purpose, as is *to emancipate*, especially in qualitative research.

Problem Statement, Hypothesis or Question (what)- Articulates and focuses the problem to be addressed in a researchable way. Questions have an advantage of sharpening or focusing the topic but declarative statements are more common.

- Avoid overly broad problems (i.e., Research topic v. problem), overly narrow, local or trivial problems, and hortatory (i.e., urging specific people to take a specific course of action) problems.
- Remember, you will not *prove* anything in research.
- The goal is, however, to persuade people through rhetoric.
- And good rhetoric requires a shift from a proof & prescriptive mindset to a variant & situative mindset.

Rationale (why)- Provides a justification for the research, based on personal interests and desires, institutional needs, and, especially, existing research and current theory. In this way, the significance of the research is provided as well. Typically, the rationale suggests your contribution to existing research literature by identifying the significance for practice, policy, action or theory.

Examples of Research Purposes and Problems

Purpose	Problem
Exploratory The purpose is to investigate the little understood phenomenon of… The purpose is to explore categories of meaning in… The purpose is to generate hypotheses for further research related to…	What is happening in Surrey's intervention for sexuality education? What are the salient themes and categories of meaning for participants in Surrey's intervention for sexuality education? How are the patterns in teachers utilization of Surrey's sexuality education materials related to sexuality education programs in other jurisdictions?
Explanatory The purpose is to explain patterns related to… The purpose is to identify plausible relationships shaping…	What are the attitudes and beliefs that Surrey secondary school teachers bring to sexuality education? How are unpreparedness and phobias interacting to create the patterns underlying the use of Surrey's sexuality education materials?
Descriptive The purpose is to document and describe…	What are the salient methods that teachers adopt in Surrey's sexuality education program?
Interpretive The purpose is to interpret the meaning of…	What does sexuality education mean to students? What feelings surface for teachers as they teach about sexuality?
Emancipatory The purpose is to create opportunities and the will to take up action related to…	How can pro-Gay and Lesbian videos, such as *Out*, empower teachers to help BGLT students? How can teachers assist in accepting and celebrating same sex parents?
Expressive The purpose is to express various relationships among…	How are identities manifested within eight visual portraits of sexuality?
Prediction The purpose is to predict the relationship between…	What is the effect of Surrey's sexuality education program on students' understanding of sexuality?
Deconstruction The purpose is to deconstruct (undermine, contradict, etc.) the binaries of…	What are the messages embedded in Surrey's sexuality education materials?

Stating a Thesis

Stephen Petrina
8 January 2008

Although it's not always necessary or desirable to state a thesis and defend it, this convention for writing is prevalent and generally expected in academia. A good argument is *de rigueur* in academia. It is quite common to hear the professor reiterate "what is the thesis?" or the editor impress on the author the "need to state an argument."

Hence, it is crucial that graduate students can confidently write with this convention of stating and defending theses (claim, premise & warrant, argument, etc.). Quite often, student receive a pattern of comments or margin notes from professors: 'Thesis too vague… paper unwieldy;' 'Thesis too narrow or factual… cannot be developed into a full essay;' 'Did not take a stance… observations are stated instead of assertions.'

The purpose of stating a thesis or argument is to provide dialogue (inspire, raise questions, provoke thoughts, etc.) over an idea, issue, data, knowledge, information, etc. that can be demonstrated to be the case, "hold water," be true, considerable, persuasive, understandable, etc. The challenge is to *state and demonstrate* a thesis (i.e., provide evidence for the thesis stated). In this way, all theses are debatable and discursive; a thesis is an assertion or stand on a topic. It is an arguable position, not an observation The thesis anchors the essay and provides its direction by asserting a controlling idea. It keeps the content of the essay focused.

In academia, this convention typically implies entering an ongoing (current, timely, historical, etc.) conversation within a discipline, across disciplines, between or among authors, etc. This gives the thesis currency but also means that students have to be finely tuned into the discourse and arguments within disciplines, and clear about who is saying what, and where they said it. Of course, this places a burden on the student of interdisciplinarity to engage with numerous and various discourses and sources. But this interdisciplinarity can be powerful for demonstrating contradictions and shortcomings of ongoing arguments.

This convention is not merely limited to academia. Journalists, for example, commonly draw from, or begin with a clear thesis. Witness Anna Maria Tremonti introducing a program on her show, The Current, on the morning of 8 January 2008:

> Today Mr. Arar is a household name. The ordeals of Abdullah Almalki and Ahmad El Maati have been well documented, including on this program. Mr. Nureddin's case, however, has never generated the same kind of heat. Perhaps it's because his time in a Middle Eastern prison can be measured in weeks rather than months or years. Or perhaps it's because of his reluctance to speak publicly for fear of destroying the life he's trying to rebuild.

Notice how she states the thesis in conversation with the literature and other journalists. "Arar is a household name… ordeals of Abdullah Almalki and Ahmad El Maati have been well documented…"— She sums up the literature review, so to speak. Then she states the thesis: "Mr. Nureddin's case, however, has never generated the same kind of

heat. Perhaps it's because his time in a Middle Eastern prison can be measured in weeks rather than months or years. Or perhaps it's because of his reluctance to speak publicly"

Stating and demonstrating a thesis does not imply a defensive or argumentative style. Some defenses of theses truly are arguments and some defenders truly are defensive. However, the vast majority of academic arguments are focused engagements with discourses and ongoing conversations, and range from deadly serious to entirely playful.

Argument Tips

Argument by Symmetry

1. If we are entertaining something called the learning sciences, I will argue here that we have to necessarily entertain what I'll call "the learning arts."

Argument by Extension or Implication

1. If web 2.0 transforms the everyday reader into an everyday writer, then by extension the author must be dead. The reader may not have killed the author, as Bathes implies, but…

Argument by Contra-distinction

1. While Voithofer argues that new media research emerges from the principles of new media (i.e., Manovich, 2001), I argue that new media based research has much less to do with new media than with the rhetorical and spiritual power of the new medium. By new medium I refer to…

2. Contrary to Everett who proposes…, I argue that…

Argument by Corrective

1. Although Hayles attends to the nuances of code representing or embodying the unconscious, my point here is that she fails to distinguish programming code from machine code and thereby overlooks an already fragmented unconscious. The implications are that…
2. I wish to throw into sharp relief Stone's association of the body and embodiment with feminism in order to effectively distinguish liberal from material feminisms in cyberspace.

Argument Traps

1. **Tautological Argument**- Argument based on circular logic
   e.g., Teachers should use technology because the net generation uses technology
2. **Axiomatic Argument**- Argument of or for the obvious (often criticized as trivial, superficial, inconsequential or irrelevant)
   e.g., New media can make a difference in how we learn
3. **Inflationary Argument**- Argument drawn from or generating a 'tempest in a teacup.'
   e.g., There is a crisis in policies protecting teachers from student gossip and defamation posts in online forums, such as FaceBook.
4. **Idiosyncratic or Solipsistic Argument**- Argument that is self-centered, self-serving, or overly myopic

e.g., My students made great progress when I used Moodle

5. ***Prima facie* Argument-** Argument that mistakes surface for depth
   e.g., Young students are digital natives requiring different teaching approaches
6. ***Ad hominem* Argument-** Argument that makes personal attacks
   e.g., N.A. Publication has no credibility here and is otherwise a greedy bureaucrat
7. ***Ad nauseum* Argument-** Argument that unnecessarily extends or prolongs an argument
   e.g., Cognition is a function of the brain.
8. **Redundant Argument-** Argument that has already been made
   e.g., Communities of practice are, by nature, both centralized and decentralized
9. **Red Herring or Straw Man Argument-** Argument that misrepresents, misconstrues or distorts a position for rhetorical advantage
   e.g., Hutchins argues that the brain has no role in cognition

Guides

The *Craft of Research* organizes the convention of stating arguments as follows:

7 Making Good Arguments: An Overview 114
7.1 Argument and Conversation 114
7.2 Basing Claims on Reasons 116
7.3 Basing Reasons on Evidence 117
7.4 Acknowledging and Responding to Alternatives 118
7.5 Warranting the Relevance of Reasons 119
7.6 Building Complex Arguments Out of Simple Ones 121
7.7 Arguments and Your Ethos 122
Quick Tip: Designing Arguments Not for Yourself but for Your Readers: Two Common Pitfalls 124

See also:
http://www.logicalfallacies.info/
http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/kingch/How_to_Think.htm
http://www.fallacyfiles.org/index.html

Assembling Theoretical Frameworks

(for elaboration, see *Writing Guide for Graduate Students*)

1. Theoretical frameworks will always be dependent on the clarity of the thesis— that is, on how well an author articulates an argument or thesis (For directions on stating a thesis, see the *Writing Guide for Graduate Students*). First articulate a thesis, which will shape and be shaped by theory— a theoretical framework will follow in coversation with the thesis.

2. Widely explore theories that seemingly emerge from and resonate with your topic, problem, or data— you want your data to speak to, suggest and give rise to your theory. For example, a research topic or problem focusing on teenage girls could suggest gender theory, media theory and the body, or theories of ennui or liberty (i.e., desire for autonomy and independence). However, there will also be times when you may want to work from a theory (e.g., psychoanalysis) toward generating a topic, problem, or data, etc. (Alert: aim for theory grounded in a topic or data and not grounded theory).

3. Once you have identified theories that are emergent from and appropriate to your topic and data, begin by assembling and articulating the various authors and ideas into a brief (300-400 words or so) summary. Write in conversation with theorists and your thesis. Write to frame the topic or problem— the thesis will focus and the theoretical framework will frame the topic or problem.

4. In this summary of the framework, take the opportunity to clarify theories and concepts. Also write to orient the framework toward the topic or data. Like the thesis, the theoretical framework frames the reader for understanding or making meaning. Think through a rewrite to frame and orient the reader.

5. If writing a scholarly essay, after you have assembled a summary of the theoretical framework, proceed to write iteratively to thread and weave the framework throughout the essay. If conducting research, after you have assembled a summary of the theoretical framework, proceed to write iteratively to thread, weave, and account for the framework throughout the essay. The emphasis in both cases is on framing for meaning-making.

References

Camp, W. C. (2001). Formulating and evaluating theoretical frameworks for career and technical education research. *Journal of Vocational Education Research, 26*(1), 4-25.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. London: Harper and Row.

Paulston, R. (Ed.) (1996). *Social cartography: Mapping ways of seeing social and educational change*. New York: Garland.

Paulston, R. (1977). Social and educational change: Conceptual frameworks. *Comparative Education Review*, *21*(2/3), 370-395.

Petrina, S. (2008a). *The principles of research (as rhetoric)*. Unpublished manuscript.

Reese, S. D., Gandy, O. & Grant, A. E. (2001). *Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Reviewing Literature

1. Overview/ Introduction of subject, theories and issues involved.
    - Type of literature review (theory, methodology, policy, quantitative research, qualitative research)
    - Scope- what type of resources are best
    - Search for information: wide enough and narrow enough
2. Categories selected as natural divides of thesis and reviewed material:
    - Organize material around the research question or thesis
    - Include areas of controversy
3. Analysis and interpretation of overarching similarities and variances of ideas: Include
    - Provenance: credentials, evidence
    - Objectivity: authors point of view and representation of other views
    - Persuasiveness: which theses are most convincing vs least?
    - Value: Does this work contribute in a significant way to understanding the subject.
4. Summation or conclusions of thesis generating idea in context with materials reviewed.
    - What is known and not known
    - Areas of further research
    - Relevant, appropriate and, useful

Literature Review Matrix

Question (author's view)	**Article Information**	**Analysis** (strengths & weaknesses)
Formulation of problem/issue		
Clearly defined: Scope, severity, relevance		
Would another perspective be more effective?		
Researcher's orientation: interpretive, critical science, both?		
Author's theoretical framework (psychological, developmental, feminist?) what voice?		
Relationship between theoretical and research perspective		
Relevant and representative literature (inclusive) used?		
If research, how well was it done (measurements, analysis, validity)		
"Popular readership", language use, emotional, rhetorically toned, or reasoning		
Structure clear? Deconstruction possible? Cause-effect		

*Matrix 1 adapted by Linda A. Cannon

Category	Criterion	1	2	3	4
Coverage	Justified criteria for inclusion and exclusion from review	Did not discuss the criteria inclusion or exclusion	Discussed the literature included and excluded	Justified inclusion and exclusion of literature	
Synthesis	Distinguished what has been done in the field what needs to be done	Did not distinguish what has and has not been done	Discussed what has and has not been done	Critically examined the state of the field	
	Placed the topic or problem in the broader scholarly literature	Topic not placed in broader scholarly literature	Some discussion of broader scholarly literature	Topic clearly situated in broader scholarly literature	
	Place the research in the historical context of the field	History of topic not discussed	Some mention of history of topic	Critically examined history of topic	
	Acquired and enhanced the subject vocabulary	Key vocabulary not discussed	Key vocabulary defined	Discussed and resolved ambiguities in definition	
	Articulated important variables and phenomena relevant to the topic	Accepted literature at face value	Some critiques of literature	Offered new perspective	
Methodology	Identified the main methodologies and research techniques that have been used in the field, and their advantages and disadvantages	Research methods not discussed	Some discussion of research methods used to produce claims	Critiqued research methods	Introduced new methods to address problems with predominant methods
	Related ideas and theories in the field to research methodologies	Research methods not discussed	Some discussion of appropriateness of research methods to warrant claims	Critiqued appropriateness of research methods to warrant claims	
Significance	Rationalized the practical significance of the research problem	Practical significance of research not discussed	Practical significance of research discussed	Critiqued practical significance of research	
	Rationalized the scholarly significance of the research problem	Scholarly significance of research not discussed	Scholarly significance of research discussed	Critiqued scholarly significance of research	
Rhetoric	Was written with a coherent, clear structure that supported the review	Poorly conceptualized, haphazard	Some coherent structure	Well developed, coherent	

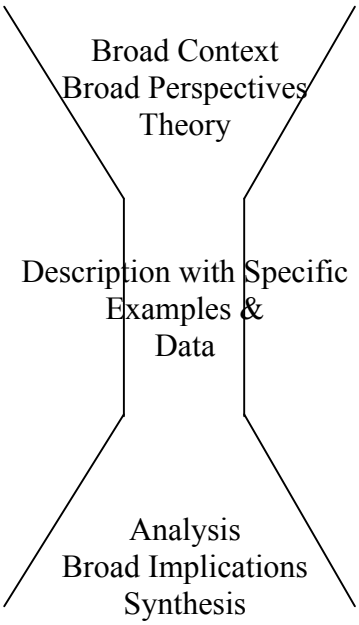
Boote, D.N. and Beile, P (2005). Scholars before researcher: On the centrality of the dissertation literature review in research preparation, *Educational Researcher, 34* (6). pp. 3-15.

Approaches to Writing

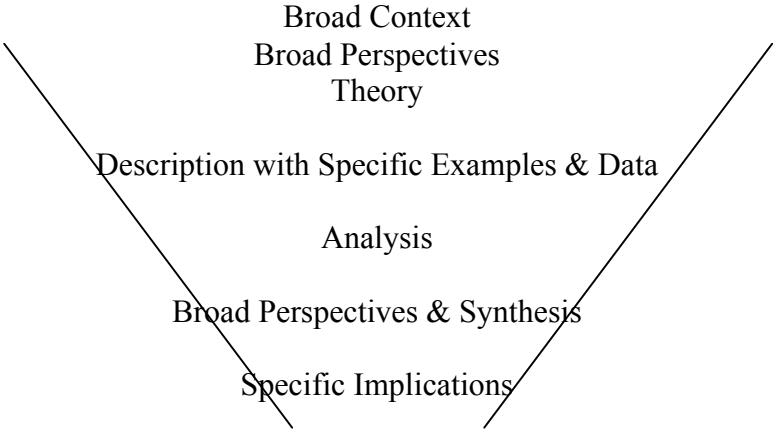
Stephen Petrina

There are a variety of general approaches to writing, including the hourglass, funnel and inverted funnel approaches. Generally, it is important to introduce a topic, describe, analyze and synthesize. Depending on the methodology, it may also be important to deconstruct. In cultural studies, writing (and research) often involves tracking, mapping and framing. Hence, one might track (describe) trends or discourses, map interrelationships among (analyze) trends or discourses, and frame (deconstruct or synthesize) the trends or discourses.

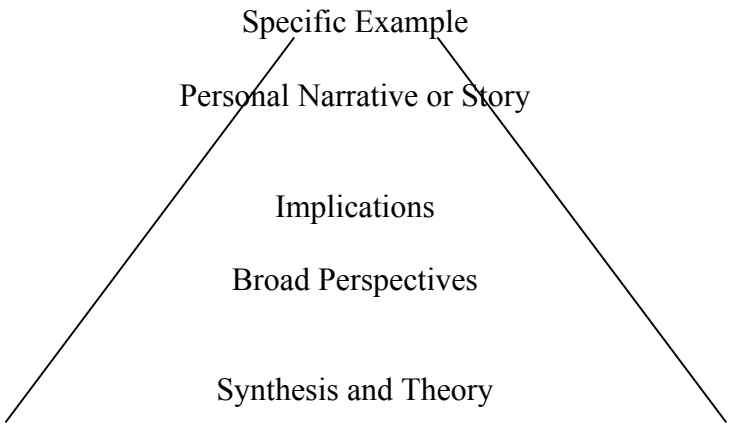
1. Hourglass



2. Funnel



3. Inverted Funnel



Writing Process

1. **Organization**
    a. Chronological Organization
    b. Conceptual Organization
    c. Practical Organization

2. **Description**
    a. What did the author(s) and texts actually say?
    b. What did they not say?

3. **Analysis**
    a. How do the authors and texts compare? Contrast?
    b. What is beneath what they say? What are they *really* saying?

4. **Deconstruction**
    a. What are the binary oppositions in the texts?
    b. How can these oppositions be deconstructed?

5. **Synthesis and Explanation**
    a. How do the authors and texts fit together?
    b. What underwrites what these authors and texts are saying?
    c. Can new directions be created from the totality of authors and texts reviewed?
    d. How does my work or narrative relate to this?

Writing Tips

- **Active Language:** *Always* use active (as opposed to passive) language. This is helpfully presented in Diana Hacker's A Pocket Style Manual. In fact, this is the best guide for writing:

Hacker, D. (2004). *A pocket style manual* (fourth ed.). Boston: St. Martin's Press.

- **Action verbs:** Use active verbs to give voice to authors. APA style suggests that verbs be in past tense for writing reviews of literature, research reports, etc. MLA style advises authors to use the present tense in writing. The key is to be consistent!

  APA Style Manual, 5th ed. suggests the use of past verb tense for reviews of literature. Use past for data and findings. And use present for conclusions, etc to draw the reader into the discussion (see p. 41 and section 2.02).

  APA also states that present perfect tense is suitable for a literature review, although it suggests past tense be used. "MLA disagrees with the concept of citing any written material in past tense on these simple grounds: the cited text exists here and now, regardless of when it was written or when it is read. This is fundamentally what distinguishes publication from oration. It is the essence of written text: technologies for writing give rise to the concept of the "living" word. I, along with others from my foundational discipline (the humanities), disagree with any notion that what exists in manuscript, print or digital artifact should be spoken of in the past" (Teresa Dobson, email correspondence, 2005).

- The following list will help provide variety in giving voice to authors:
  a. acknowledged
  b. according to
  c. agreed with
  d. argued
  e. asserted
  f. cautioned
  g. compared
  h. concluded
  i. contended
  j. continued
  k. concurred with
  l. determined
  m. entertained
  n. identified
  o. illustrated
  p. issued
  q. indicated
  r. inferred
  s. insisted listed
  t. located
  u. maintained
  v. manipulated
  w. obtained
  x. proposed postulated
  y. reasoned
  z. reported
  aa. said
  bb. stated
  cc. stipulated
  dd. suggested
  ee. supported
  ff. wrote

Appendix

Top 10 Tests of Writing

1. Screen Test (Would this research have a role or "play" in other venues (e.g., from education to sociology?)
2. Substance Abuse Test (Is the "so what?" question exaggerated, neglected or mishandled?)
3. Radioactive & Radon Test (Is it “hot’? Is the "so what?" question addressed? Is it relevant?)
4. Vision & Hearing Test (Is there an oversight or myopia? Is there evidence of listening?)
5. DNA Test (Is there evidence of disciplinary or interdisciplinary structure?)
6. Fertility Test (Are there creative insights to generate new interpretations?)
7. Litmus & Acid Test (Are there signs of ideas having gone through tests of trials? Is there wisdom?)
8. Vocational Dexterity & Intelligence Test (How were the data and evidence handled?)
9. Lie Detector (Test of Integrity) (Is what was promised or said really what was done?)
10. Standardized Test (Test of Style) (How is it said? Is it (merely) a reliable, standard form? Is there a form or story to what is said?)