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 **6 Writing from research and practice – planning and writing different parts of the thesis or article**

 *In this chapter we consider:*

* *Planning the plan: planning (and actioning) the writing project that accompanies the research process and/or practice*
* *Structure of a thesis or article*
* ***Work with others***
* ***Differences between journal articles, dissertations and theses***
* *Keeping track of different kinds of writing in the thesis or article*

This chapter considers planning, and writing your research and practice with a view to publication. It looks at the doctoral thesis, the master’s dissertation, and research and academic publications unpacked. It does not focus on how to go about the planning and managing of research, nor does it offer ideas about appropriate methodology, methods or data analysis; instead it focuses on the *kinds of writing* you might be expected to produce given the different functions of parts of a thesis, dissertation or article. It offers a close look at the planning and structuring of your writing practices – planning the shape and format, the different steps of the writing and the sections of the work, through to completion. It considers structuring the work itself so that it is manageable to write, and can act as an appropriate shape, a good vehicle for your ideas, interpretations and arguments. It looks at the writing processes, structure, style, form, argument and expression in different sections of a dissertation, thesis and journal article. This chapter builds on Chapter 3, which explains the elements of an article.

Dissertations and theses can be considered as being disseminated and shared when they are submitted and accepted, though you would need to shape and focus each of them for actual publication as you would an article or a book (see Chapter10 on publishing from your PhD). Unlike theses, dissertations are rarely available for public access on library shelves, but are now often available online. I have written a book on developing postgraduate research and writing the master’s dissertation and PhD thesis(see Wisker,2001), so for detailed and extensive discussions and suggestions I refer you to that and the many other good books on producing the PhD thesis (for example, Eley and Jennings, 2005; Trafford and Leshem, 2008).

Here we consider different intents and different kinds of writing expected in various parts of dissertations, theses and articles and the planning and structuring of the writingin those different sections. sections,

The remainder of this part (Part 2) of the book focuses on writing the abstract and conclusions; the literature review; methodology and methods and other key elements of a research- and practice-based piece of writing for publication.

Earlier (Chapter 2 )we focused on choosing what to write, where to send the finished piece of work, and on planning your time. This chapter, Chapter 6, looks at the planning and structuring, and introduces ways of identifying and tackling the various forms of writing required in the different parts of the piece. (There is more on structuring in Chapter 9).

Planning the plan:

 ‘one major difficulty students have is the absence of a plan for their presentation, whether it be a thesis, dissertation or an essay’ (Rudestam and Newton, 2001, p. 103).

Planning is essential. It focuses us on what we are going to write, what is necessary to enable us to write, and when we can write. It makes us think about what is possible and how to both manage our time and to meet deadlines. In the end, while planning takes time, it also saves time, as less work is wasted and you will worry less about what you are doing, and doing next, especially when you are busy with activities other than writing. I would suggest that ensuring you have a plan is essential for every piece of writing, at whatever stage you are in your career, because without a plan you could get lost, see the whole piece as huge and unmanageable, and the steps to completing it obscure. With a plan, even though you might well change it, you can see both where you are going and where the writing about your work is going. You can also see which bits need to be expressed more coherently, need information added, seem a struggle to read, do not fully convey a coherent argument, need emphasis in a discussion, need more theorising or more evidence. You can audit your own work against your plan to identify how far you have got with it, what needs to be done next, what is still a bit ill-expressed and what is complete.

As the work progresses, you can use your plan to identify achievements and see how far you have developed in your writing. You can map achievement against the plan, and see how the ideas and arguments of your work, asserted at the beginning of the piece, are carefully and coherently written in the various sections, through to its conclusions, which emphasise the importance of what has been found, what is argued and what the piece contributes. With a plan in hand, like a good map, you should be able to stand back from the whole and see the argument, story and coherence. A plan will also help you to manage your writing time and activities so that the journey through the research and writing do not seem overwhelming, and you can see when you have made progress and what to do next. A plan and a structure aid both your working practices and the overall coherence of the whole. They also enable you to plan and manage your writing energies – you can see where you are in each of the parts of the work and decide which part needs refining and moving on, what needs adding or subtracting, rephrasing and illuminating. You can plan your time realistically – being able to see progress, stuck points and periods when you can get back into the writing, and then write well so that it can be read, with argument, logic, explanation, theories and use of evidence to back up claims in a readable and linked, coherent fashion.

Dunleavy tells us that planning the structure of a thesis requires ‘heroic optimism’ (Dunleavy, 2003, p. 43) . This is a scaled-up experience depending on is the length of the piece you are writing and how often you have published previously. For a relatively inexperienced writer, it feels like a challenging task to write a journal article or even a 1,500-word newsletter piece. However, there are some standard shapes, and identifying the key points you want to make and setting them out in advance as subheadings (which can change) can break the back of that immense (80,000 words or even just 5,000 or 1,500) endless empty landscape with which you are faced when the bright ideas and the emerging research information all lie before you.

[B] Structure of a thesis or article

First, let us look at *the structure of the thesis or article as a whole* and then think about the structuring activities that can help you to plan, write and put into action. Later in this chapter, I talk about research as a journey and the thesis as a well-built building, with different forms of writing telling the story or exploring and recounting the journey.

*A PhD thesis or a master’s dissertation* have much the same structure, tone, voice, use of data and argument, and audience or readership as an *academic journal article* in your discipline. This is logical because the main aim of each of these outputs is to be read by as broad or narrow a range of experts in the field as suits and can benefit from your work. However, a thesis tends to be more heavily weighted towards, and more interested in, establishing the appropriateness, thoroughness and the solid credibility of both the literature review and the defence of the methodology and methods. Situating your new work in the established literature, which includes the theories underpinning your work and other people’s work from which yours springs, with which it is in dialogue, is a very significant and lengthy part of a thesis. The defence of the methodology and the theorising behind the choice of methodology and methods (and rejection of others) is also a heavyweight part of a thesis. With a shorter journal article, showing you have done all the reading is important, but you are not establishing your credibility as a relative novice entering the field. Readers want to see what you have found, what you are offering. You are not proving your credibility in the same way as you are in a PhD and the literature review section will be proportionately shorter in an article so that the literature review is perhaps 10,000 words in extent in a social science thesis of 80,000 words in all, and perhaps 600 words in a 6,000-word essay. The length differs between disciplines and universities for the thesis and between disciplines and journals for the article (see Chapter 10, which looks at publishing from your PhD).

**Activity**

*Researching others’ practices – journal articles and dissertations/theses, exploring and analysing others’ structure and expression.*

To develop a clear sense of what a typical, acceptable thesis, dissertation, or journal article in your field looks like, you will find it helps to research the structure and expression, the voice and the way the arguments are developed, also the way that the data is used in the argument. Select work which has already been accepted and published in the case of articles or books, or has been granted a pass mark in the case of theses and dissertations. Look at two or more theses or dissertations. To find them, you can ‘Google’ key words that fit your interests, ask librarians for online theses, borrow from friends, colleagues and supervisors. Auditing someone else’s work in this way should help you ensure the characteristics of what you appreciate works well in their writing , is also apparent in your own wrting .

*Ask yourself, when reading*,how does the *abstract* establish the way in which this research contributes to work done in the field, fill a gap, offer a new view, how it does that, and why does it matter? How does the *introduction* introduce the context, a relatively short indication that this work has an important contribution to make to ongoing dialogue and debate in the field, what its (sufficiently) unique approach or arguments are, and why the work needs not only to be carried out at this time, but also read and shared now. How does it make a case that others are going to benefit from reading it? How do the *literature review/theoretical perspectives* in each paper or dissertation/thesis set out the main arguments, and main areas of theory, published work and ongoing research, then indicate how this piece of research draws on and engages with the areas of theory and contributes in a dialogue to the literature with which it fits, from which it grows, which it develops a new view on, and engages with?

How does the *methodology and methods* section or chapter define clearly the methodology and methods being used; how the methodology relates to the world view; the way the author recognises that knowledge is produced, constructed and tested; why this methodology is being used and where it has been developed, who are the theorists behind it, and what are the limitations; what methods are used and why, and why other methods are not used; the limitations of the methods used and any interesting combination of methods; and lastly, how this work is carried out with what sample or selection, if that is appropriate, and over what time, and why it is this sample over this time.

How effective are the *sections on introducing the data*? How effective and clear are the sections on explaining how the data was analysed and why it was analysed in this way? These issues are rarely explained in humanities and arts theses and dissertations, but are strong sections in the sciences and the social sciences, and related disciplines such as business and health professions, which more often use social science methods and methodology. Both science and social science explain how the data has been analysed and why. The data tends to be introduced in detail first in a science piece, followed by theorised discussion that uses analysed data in an interpretive fashion to develop an argument, make a point and argue a case. In a social science piece it is introduced and discussed, interpreted and theorised in terms of the major themes that have emerged through the data analysis processes, and these thematic elements tend to form whole chapters or sections depending on the length of the piece. The argument wraps the discussion of the data in all disciplines. In the arts and humanities, themes in the argument tend to underpin each chapter or section, with the data – quotations, illustrations, records of artistic productions – forming both the evidence on which the argument is based and, in the case of creative work, often presenting the argument itself, which then needs to be explained with an accompanying theorised discussion.

Finally, there will be a *conclusion* section, which does not merely repeat the introduction but instead draws together (i) factual conclusions – what was found, how many, how often and so on; and (ii) interpretative conclusions – that is, what this suggests, how the author has interpreted the facts and findings; and (iii) conceptual conclusions indicating how what the author has found has enhanced or developed human knowledge and understanding, and added to or enhanced meaning.

Reviewing this information on what to expect in each section of an article, a master’s dissertation or a PhD thesis should be helpful when you plan, write then audit your own written work, in the process of writing your dissertation, thesis or article.

[BOXED ACTIVITY TEXT ENDS]

[A]**Work with others**

It can be immensely helpful to read (all the text of or selected parts of) books on writing and structuring, and to try out exercises, then reflect on the implications for your own writing. It is also useful to start to build peer support by writing with others and sharing your insights into the processes, any problems and ways of overcoming those problems. While doing this, pay close attention to how you, your friends and colleagues put a piece of writing together, plan and structure it, as well as how their finished pieces look and read. We can all learn from each other whether we are just starting to write for publication, or have already written and published a great deal..

[A]**Topics to consider and discuss with others – peers and friends**

* How did they decide on their final title?
* How did they decide what was finally written in the abstract and when was that clear to them (it is often drafted first and written last)?
* How did they decide what the competing voices in the literature review were saying in terms of laying out the theories and the field, and then engaging in a discussion with what they were closely focused on?
* How and when did they really understand the methodology and methods they would use? Which ones did they work through? What were the implications? Why did they reject some approaches and choose others?
* How and when did they decide on patterns and emerging trends in their data, their theorised understanding of these, which categories to focus on, and which threads to take from all this to enable an argument to emerge?
* How did they ensure that the claims are backed by evidence; that they didn’t include any extraneous data or discussion that was not part of the claim, the argument and the thread; and, in the conclusion, how did they decide, what they had discovered, why it mattered, and how it changed people’s understanding as well as contributing to knowledge?

[LIST ENDS]

[A]**Differences between journal articles, dissertations and theses**

[B]**Journal articles**

Journal articles can be seen as *mini versions* of dissertations and theses. In much of Europe and Scandinavia they are often actually working parts of a thesis in process for a doctoral candidate, as they will be published parts of the completed thesis before it is submitted. For other academics, journal articles are often a written record and a theorised analysis and discussion of examples of the outcomes from a series of experiments; a long piece of research with a team, cut into manageable chunks, so that various members of the team lead on their specific essays from the research; stand-alone pieces constructed from individual pieces of research; or pieces of writing based on your own individual research. My education work tends to be part of what seems now to be an ongoing life’s work, and is usually written with a co-author, while my essays on literature are also a bit of a life’s work. The latter are designed by me, and appear as pieces of work that emerge and are written through as I track down a particular fascination. This might well have previously seen light as a conference paper, or just be something I am interested in, will use for teaching, has grown from my teaching, or I have been asked to write because I have written in a similar area before. They are always individual pieces, and each needs planning and structuring.

Length would seem to be the main difference between theses, dissertations and articles, but there are other distinctions between them, since an undergraduate dissertation might well be the same length as a journal article at between 5,000 and 9,000 words.

Journal articles are like mini theses in their shape, and often the tone can be more accessible than a thesis or dissertation. Because of its brevity, a journal article needs to gain the interest of the readership more quickly than a thesis and to maintain it through usually one or maybe two lines of argument. For a thesis or dissertation, and increasingly for a published essay, the abstract will attract the readership. The audience or readership for a published article might be much more scholarly and focused, or more generalised, depending on what you are contributing – a footnote to an ongoing piece of research, a survey article, or a contribution in a developing field. The thesis or dissertation will be read by the candidate, his/her supervisor, a critical friend, perhaps a family member (in bite-sized chunks), the examiners and possibly the Chair of a viva, if there is to be one. Once it has been finalised, if it is lodged in the library or, increasingly, also online, it is likely to be read by other academics who are already specialists in the field. So the language for a thesis or dissertation is often ‘insider’ language, specialised as well as readable. While the key terms are explained, knowledge of many would be assumed, as it is unlikely that a student of literature is going to stumble as a complete novice into reading a piece about electronic engineering unless they are on a special mission. For theses and dissertations, because of the small readership, insider knowledge and terminology are assumed to some degree. This explains the density of the language of some scientific work in particular. However, theses and dissertations, which are so dense as to be unreadable, expect not to have to explain any terms and assume insider knowledge are unlikely to be welcomed even by specialist examiners. They should be made readable even to this quite small readership. Journal articles will have a much wider readership ranging from regular readers of the journal to specialists hunting down new work on their specialism, to your students (if you have students). So it is important to make the work accessible to all of these readers.

[A]**Kinds of writing in different parts of a publishable piece – the chapters of a thesis or dissertation/sections of an article**

[B]**Language – kinds and tones of writing**

The different kinds of writing in different parts of a publishable piece are explored in both Chapter 3, looking at journal articles, and in Chapters 7 and 8.Different parts of the thesis,dissertation, or the journal article, require different ways of using information, reading, argument and voice.

*The abstract* uses passive language, sets the background and highlights and raises contribution and importance. It does not go into detail, has no personal voice, would not use ‘I’, ‘we’ or ‘they’. Readers want to know, in short, what this piece contributes and how, and therefore why they might want to read it.

*The introduction* is both accessible in tone – it is written in the researcher’s or writer’s voice – and asserts the credibility and right of the writer to produce the piece, so some of the language is of assertion and confidence; some is more informative about the current work, the context; and some develops the main argument briefly against that context. The introduction makes the case, and mentions some of the key work in the field and how this new work contributes to it. In a journal article and in work in the arts and humanities, the introduction tends to involve the literature review and theoretical perspectives; there are no separate chapters or sections for this purpose.

There are different versions of an introduction in different disciplines. However, the intention of this section remains the same – to introduce the piece of writing; introduce the context, and state why it is topical and important; the main issues; the author’s right to speak about the contribution to the field; his/her credibility, unique position, experience and so on; what the major debates and issues are that will be explored; and what the reader will find is the main contribution the author will make.

Some introductions take the approach and comments made in the abstract and develop them further. Some start anew and establish their fascination with the topic and then lead into the previous research in the field and what their work will contribute.

The*literature review and theoretical perspectives* elements can be introduced at the start of the text, and they often appear in the introduction if it is a humanities dissertation, thesis or article. If they are a separate section or chapter, as with the social sciences, or a short separate section with the sciences, this tends to be a very highly theorised, complex and systematically established and developed part of the work. It also needs to lead the reader into the dialogue in the field into which the author’s work makes a contribution, so it needs to be logical and readable.

In a thesis or dissertation, the major themes and areas of research are identified, into which the author’s own work fits, from which it grows, and to which it contributes. The main theoretical areas and historical developments are explored, explained and referenced, in so far as this establishes the underpinning knowledge and indicates the author’s credibility in the field. If this is exhaustive – everything anyone ever knew about health promotion or international accounting, without any link to: {a) the arguments and debates in the field; and (b) the author’s own research and the contribution and contradictions it enables – then it sits rather like a dead lump of information. Instead, the writing shows the author’s understanding through managed selection and clear explanation. Selections are made from the theory and the literature to ensure the writer’s credibility is established, and so are the theories, arguments and debates with the theory and theorists, and the arguments and debates within the literature resulting from research using the theory. The author ensures that the arguments and debates are clearly drawn out of this discussion of the theory and the literature, so that these debates and arguments are clear to a reader, who then hears that this work adds to, contradicts, shifts, takes the arguments further, uses the theory in this manner, adds to and re-interprets the previous work.

The theory or theories which underpin the research need explaining, exploring the work of the theorists as it establishes an underpinning view Theories act as a lens, enabling interpretation to take place. The work of the main theorists is not the only work engaged with here, since others have used those theories n their own work, and this is also drawn on to establish the theorised focus of the piece.The literature that engages critically with theory in new studies is discussed , as it moves beyond the theory itself. This newer writing is an example of the ways other researchers have used the theory to explore areas of the field, to ask questions and develop cases. Look at the examples that follow of typical language used in a literature review.

[B]**Examples of writing in a literature review**

[AS DISPLAYED EXTRACTS – LINE SPACE BETWEEN EACH]

*‘Theories of learning, such as Flavell’s (1979) theory of metalearning (being conscious of one’s own learning, owning that learning ) and Vermunt’s theories of variation (2004) suggest that…’ (*This establishes major theorists and their theories*)*

*‘Research which further develops our understanding of the theories of student learning (Flavell, 1979; Vermunt , 2004 focusing on learning the disciplines, includes that of Meyer and Land (2006, 2012), whose threshold concept theory suggests that …’(*This establishes newer theorists who have built on that earlier work and taken it further – theirs are key theories, however, not just uses of theory in a research project.*)*

*‘Building on the work on threshold concepts in the disciplines (Meyer and Land 2006, 2012) , X and Y (2013, 2014)have explored ways in which students acquire and evidence threshold concepts in biology and accounting* …‘.This references the underpinning, important theories of Meyer and Land and then looks at how the researchers / writers have used those theories in their own research practice in their work on learning in biology and accounting . It indicates how this new work is using the theory, then will go on to explore the new work, arguing for the new theory based, knowledge which is created ). .)

This section establishes the pedigree of the theory on which your work builds, the theory that it uses. It will include older references, but won’t try to exhaustively work through telling everything descriptive and informative about every learning theory ever. It will assume some knowledge on the part of the reader, but use the learning theory clearly, explain it and its effects, and defend the use of particular learning theories growing out of this historical basis.

The sense of a debate between theorists, and a debate between those putting the theories into action in their own research is essential for your writing to be able to join the debate, or for you to have a right to speak. Your work has grown from both the theories and their interpretation in practice in contemporary or recent work. You are establishing the background, explaining the theory, exploring and then commenting on and dialoguing with uses of it in practice, indicating that your work has something new to offer, or something to offer in a new context.

[B]**Methodology and methods**

Writing in this section is a mixture of theory, a literature review (of the methodology you are going to use) and informative description, backed up by argument and explanation. You are explaining why you have chosen a particular methodology , (based on your beliefs about how knowledge is constructed, positivist, post- positivist, constructivist and so on) and specific methods (ways which you will use to gather your data, while the actual tools for this eg survey questions, interview questions, observation sheet are the practical ways of putting it all into action). You need to let your reader see that you understand that this choice is based on a view of the world and on how knowledge is constructed (ontology – your sense of being in the world; and epistemology – knowledge construction) in relation to this particular piece of research. You situate your choices in the literature about methodology; for example, you let your readers know that, for the purposes of this piece of research, you believe that knowledge is based on facts which can be discovered through positivist methodology based on experimentation which gives a sense of reliability through repeated experiments, or based on quantitative large scale data collection through, for example a large scale survey or questionnaire or a survey. you believe that this will uncover the truth; and it is reliable because it has been tested (explain the previous testing of the questionnaire/survey/experimental method ) and the items that are proved to work (the wording wasn’t misleading; answers could be differentiated) to indicate that choices of methodology and method are backed up. Or you believe that there are no fixed truths to discover and prove, that knowledge is constructed, and/or interpreted in context, and you choose to use focus group interviews as a method to enable participants to create understanding through discussion. Your writing here is similar to that for the literature review because you are situating your choices in the literature about methodology and methods, and theorising the ways in which you will gather your data. The writing is also informative because you could indicate to a reader that the sample is of X amount because it was chosen in a certain way (random, opportunistic and so on), and that the data is collected, where and when, for what reasons (time of year – students available, people to be interviewed, accessing a location, plants in flower) depending on what you are gathering as your sample.

There are two kinds of writing here: theorised and defended in the literature; and informative and descriptive, which explains the choice, sample and process.

[B]**Data analysis and interpretation chapters or sections**

There are two sorts of writing in these sections in the sciences and social sciences, and one sort in most examples of the humanities. If you have analysed data sourced from experiments, sampling, interviewing and other methods, you will need to discuss, explain and defend how you have analysed it and why. For example, you have carried out 20 interviews with head teachers chosen from a stratified sample of schools in the areas of X. You have asked them six questions about leadership in the schools, and the issues and ways of overcoming problems.

You now begin to explain what you have done to analyse the data:

Interview data was transcribed and the respondents’ names were anonymised. Transcriptions are kept on a password-protected PC and coded. The details about the coding are kept in a separate file, so that only the researcher has access to the information about names and codes. The data was read through and re-read, identifying a range of themes arising from the responses in the interviews. The themes that have emerged are…

[EXTRACT ENDS]

Then you would indicate the themes. A finely tuned piece of analysis could even quantify the number of responses that appear in each of the themes. In order to (a) illustrate evidence and prove the time you would need to select specific quotations, not too long (unless it is ethnography, when you produce the whole interview data); and (b) to discuss what is emerging in this chosen theme, and what issues are raised during these specific quotations used in evidence.

This kind of writing is informative and explanatory: why you analysed the data as you did; and then interpretative: what is emerging from the findings and why.

Finally, it is conceptually engaged – how does what is emerging relate back to the theories and concepts that underpin the research in the first place? At this final point you are at a more abstract level in one sense. You are questioning the evidence, what has already been done and found, and you are also at a more conceptual level, because you are saying what you have discovered in relation to the underlying theories established in the literature. You are relating that discovery to the literature, so you will reference the many theorists again. You are also moving on to make comments, which will be elaborated on in the conclusion – that’s why this matters; this is what it contributes. These are conceptual comments. Thus we have here explanatory, informative, analytic, theorised and conceptual writing:

*‘The 20 interviews were transcribed and analysed by reading and discovering the frequency and kind of thematic responses.’*

This is informative, explanatory, quite passive – you could also say: I transcribed/someone transcribed and I analysed.

*‘It was discovered that/I discovered that…’*

This is informative and a more personal voice*.*

*‘Three themes emerged – the themes of professional leadership whereby … and of empathetic leadership … and of problem-solving leadership…’*

This is analytical writing. You now indicate what this could mean.

*‘In relation to the theorists defending my work, the work of XXX and YYY (19..) suggests that empathetic leadership enables … and that those who play empathic leadership roles are more likely to….’*

Now you are interpreting the information you have provided in the data (quotations) in relation to the underpinning theories.

[EXTRACTS END]

If you have read through the literature review again and reminded yourself of the arguments of the theorists, this is where you start to inform the data, interpreting and understanding it by using the theorists and their theories.

[B]**Structuring the data sections**

I used to run a PhD student workshop called ‘What can I do with all of this data?’ in recognition of the moment when, research launched and data coming in, you are suddenly surrounded and overwhelmed by it, every bit seems precious and unrelated to every other bit, there is a shedload of facts, quotations, statistics or results – whatever is appropriate in your field – and you suddenly can’t quite remember what you were looking for in the first place.

Now, what kind of an argument might emerge from this? Doctoral candidates and any researcher, whether of professional practice or of a field of their own interest, can find themselves with ‘large quantities of disparate data and little developed idea of how to fit it all together, to make meaning from it’ (Wisker, 2001, p. 89). Like clearing out the attic, some of the gems you discover and want to hang on to can find a place in the written piece, some can be stored away to include in future work, and some less priceless can be thrown away because they are superfluous, repetitions of something already included and without need of duplication. In everyday life, if you want to go back later into the attic, or the shed or understairs cupboard, or wherever you store things, and find a mixture of books, clothing, old toys, ornaments and important papers, it is sensible to store them in locations that are easily accessible, logical and labelled. So it is with data. Some you can use now, as it forms an absolutely crucial element of the argument you are beginning to develop through your writing; some of it helped you to understand what the main issues and arguments were, but you only need a small, single excerpt to make that point; and some of it you don’t need any longer once it has helped that understanding, or don’t need at all because it is interesting in its own right but not at all part of what you are working on or writing about just now.

Data analysis is based on the themes, arguments and specific issues on which you are working, and on the tightly focused, maybe rather cruel process of selection of the absolutely necessary because of the size of the publishable piece. In a thesis you can include more data, properly analysed and argued through, and even more data in an appendix if you feel it will enrich and deepen a certain area of your argument for which there was not enough space in the chapter (but beware of dumping everything you have found in a long appendix- it is better to select and argue for what you have selected). In an essay you can’t do this. You have to be ruthless. Take only the richness which made the overall understanding; and only the absolute essentials to prove your points. This does not mean I am advocating ignoring data that contradicts your argument or which when you analysed it emphasised new, unsuspected areas, just to ensure you get the 5,000 words done. The selection and the sifting is part of the overall comprehending and interpreting process. You begin to understand what the data tells you as you read it all, categorise, process and then theorise and discuss it, so it is important to have a mass of data and to wade through it, seeing the strategies and themes that emerge and looking for the patterns and trends. Once these have emerged, use those that will work in an argument, leaving hints that there are many other riches to discuss later (in a further piece of work) and focus sharply on the essentials emerging from this interpreted and discussed data in your ongoing argument, underpinned by your theories and driven by your research question.

[B]**Conclusions**

Writing in the conclusion is both assured – you have found something, argued it through, proved it – and tentative, suggesting there are limitations to this and more work needs to be done. Conclusion sections for chapters should contain two or three kinds of conclusions: *factual conclusions* state the important findings that add to our knowledge, for example:

[AS DISPLAYED EXTRACT]

*of all civil service workers surveyed, the majority (90%) were confident that they would be able to retire comfortably on their current pension with supplements, while only 10% expressed doubt about this. Half of those who expressed certainty were women and half men (54% women, 46% men).*

These are statements of *fact* adding to our knowledge, statements built on both the detail from your data and your analysis of it.

The next kind of conclusion is interpretative

*This suggests that even with differential pay in the civil service, women are at least as sure as men that their pensions will cover their retirement*.

and conceptual, adding to understanding and to meaning:

c

*Debates remain current about the value of pensions and the ways in which people plan for their retirement. This research suggests that there is a high degree of satisfaction with the current pension structures, which might be related to the comfortable levels of pensions in the civil service as compared with others in less secure, less well paid jobs. We discovered relationships between current comfort levels, attitudes to pensions and a sense of security, which suggest either a level of illusion built on complacency fostered in the civil service job role, or a healthy sense of satisfaction and appropriate levels of pension. Further studies might explore*…

[EXTRACT ENDS]

This contributes to knowledge and expands meaning.

The first section is factual, the second adds to discussion at the level of interpretation, the third at the level of ideas and meaning , the conceptual level, showing that it is adding to meaning and not closing down the debate. The language differs: one states facts, the next interprets and suggests, the third speculates and problematises, philosophises and theorises, operates conceptually, adds to meaning and leaves some of the issues still open – as this was not an experimental closed study – but one that is still constructing knowledge in a social context.

You are making a claim about the meaning your work has deepened or enriched, and you are making a claim about the importance of your contribution. The tone of the conclusion will depend on the discipline. Scientists with positivistic experimental studies can be more assured of their findings; while social scientists tend to be more likely to suggest, indicate and leave some of the problematising open.

There is more discussion of writing the conclusions section or chapter in Chapter 8, where you will also find three examples: one science, one social science and one humanities.

[A]**Keeping track of different kinds of writing in the thesis or article**

The grid shown in Figure 5.1 below can help you to plan the writing process, since you can detail for yourself what you have put into each section or chapter, what is missing, what needs to be moved, changed or upgraded. This helps you to keep track of the process. It also helps you to manage your writing time, since, as you become bored and tired and emptied out with one section/chapter, you can look at the grid, find what needs to be done – perhaps only a small piece of work in another section/chapter – and get on with that.

A few years ago I saw an exhibition in Dublin Public Library about the work of the writer James Joyce . On the wall was a chart of his writing trajectory while working on *Ulysses, published in* 1922, a huge novel with a vast array of different sections, writing styles and voices. I was intrigued. Joyce started some sections simultaneously, right at the beginning of his work on the book. Some he stopped for a few months or even years, some he started, stopped, re-started, stopped. Some he began late on in the book. Everything finished together at the end. What struck me was how we might well not need to start at the beginning of whatever we are writing, and keep going until we finish. Instead, we might work on different sections at once, and move between sections. This enables us to keep up momentum, write differently, reduce the octopus shape which I discuss in Chapter 9, where the front matter is very heavy and overworked and the rest hangs a bit disconnected and ill-formed. I was also aware that keeping a chart, such as the one on the wall that depicted Joyce’s journey through *Ulysses* in writing terms, would help me to see where I was going, what was missing, what still needed to be refined and enriched with data or theory, and so keep track of any piece of writing. This is particularly useful if you are doing a day job alongside the writing. It is great for writing an article, and essential for writing a book.

The chart shown in Figure 6.1 can help with your time management and planning, as well as in your awareness of the kind of writing you do at different points in a journal article or a thesis. As you become tired during the complex theorising elements of the literature review, once you have passed the point where you have indicated who argues what and are into the part where you establish your own complex contribution to the field, you might find you feel that you have nothing else to say. If this happens, move on, start writing the information section of the methodology chapter – or do some different kind of work on your research or on your record of practice. For example, pick out some quotations or other pieces of data for the data analysis and interpretations section. Start to draft your interpretation and discussion of the data you have chosen in an exploratory and analytical way, in defence of your argument. This involves different kinds of writing. Moving between sections, conceptual and argumentative, theorising, analytical and merely informative and descriptive enables you to change gear in your writing, find renewed energy and move on.

[A]**Conclusion**

This chapter has looked at different kinds of writing in different parts of an article, thesis or dissertation, recognising the importance of descriptive and informative writing, conceptual and critical writing, where the author theorises, defends, explains, analyses and draws conclusions, and so on, and what kind of language is used to convey the author’s argument, story and new work in each of these contexts. It has provided some examples of the ways in which you might express yourself in the different sections, particularly considering how you move on from one statement or argument to the next. It is important to note, though, that much of this is discipline-related and so you do need to look carefully at the conventions of your own discipline, the practices in the journals you use, and in successful dissertations or theses. Study how they are written, the kinds of language used, how they engage a reader with an argument and manage that golden thread of the argument throughout the whole piece, and where and how they ensure the reader is aware of the story of the work, of the research. You are writing to express your ideas, arguments and findings, but above all you are engaging your reader, so at every stage, with every kind of writing, do make sure it can be read, understood and followed by your reader. The next chapter looks in more detail at writing in the literature review and in the methodology sections.

[A]**Further reading**

Dunleavy, P. (2003) *Authoring a PhD* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 43.

Eley, A. and Jennings, R. (2005) *Effective Postgraduate Supervision: Improving the Student/Supervisor Relationship* (Maidenhead: Open University Press). Available at: [www.mcgraw-hill.co.uk/html/0335217079.html](http://www.mcgraw-hill.co.uk/html/0335217079.html).

Rudestam, K. E. and Newton R. R. (2001) *Surviving Your Dissertation: A Comprehensive Guide to Content and Process,* 2nd edn (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage), p. 103.

Trafford, V. N. and Leshem, S. (2008) *Stepping Stones to Achieving Your Doctorate: Focusing on Your Viva from the Start* (Maidenhead: Open University Press).

Wisker, G. (2001) *The Postgraduate Research Handbook* (2nd edn 2007)(Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).