

MUNI
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The dissertation

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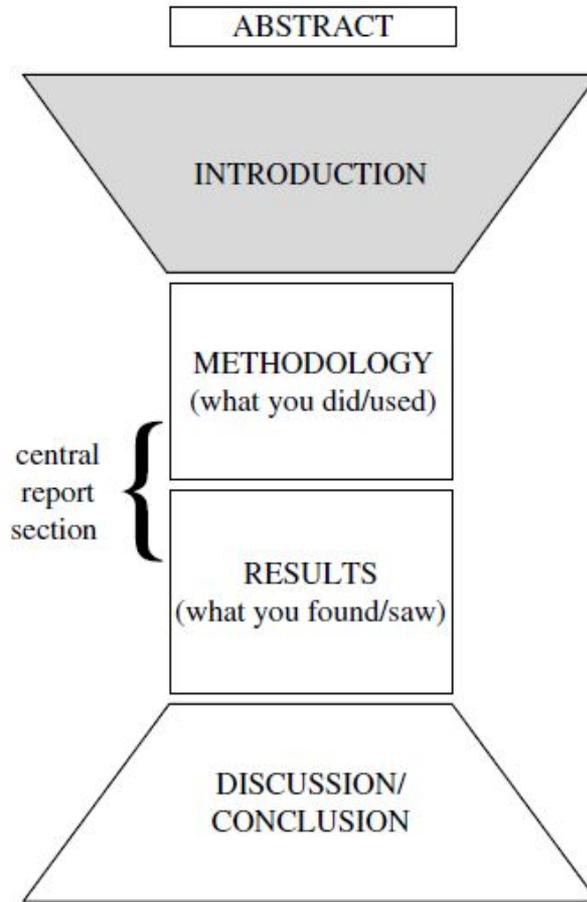
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What is a dissertation?

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Structuring a dissertation



(Glasman-Deal 2010)

Fig. 1. The shape of a research article or thesis.

1. **a)** providing a general introduction and overview of the materials/methods
b) restating the purpose of the work **c)** giving the source of materials/equipment used
d) justifying choices made **e)** providing specific and precise details about materials and methods
f) supplying essential background information **g)** indicating that appropriate care was taken
h) relating materials/methods to other studies **i)** indicating where problems occurred

2. **a)** revisiting the research aim/existing research **b)** revisiting/expanding methodology
c) general overview of results **d)** invitation to view results **e)** explanations
f) specific/key results in detail, with or without **g)** comparisons with results in other research
h) comparison/s with model predictions **i)** problems with results
j) possible implications of results

3. **a)** revisiting the main idea / purpose of the text **b)** revisiting previous sections
c) summarising/revisiting general or key results **d)** mapping relationship to existing research
e) achievement / contribution **f)** refining the implications **g)** limitations
h) current and future work applications

4. **a)** announcing present research **b)** announcing principal findings **c)** claiming centrality
d) continuing a tradition **e)** counterclaiming **f)** indicating a gap **g)** indicating RA structure
h) making topic generalization **i)** outlining purposes **j)** question-raising
k) reviewing items of previous research

- introduction to the results



- statement showing where the results can be found

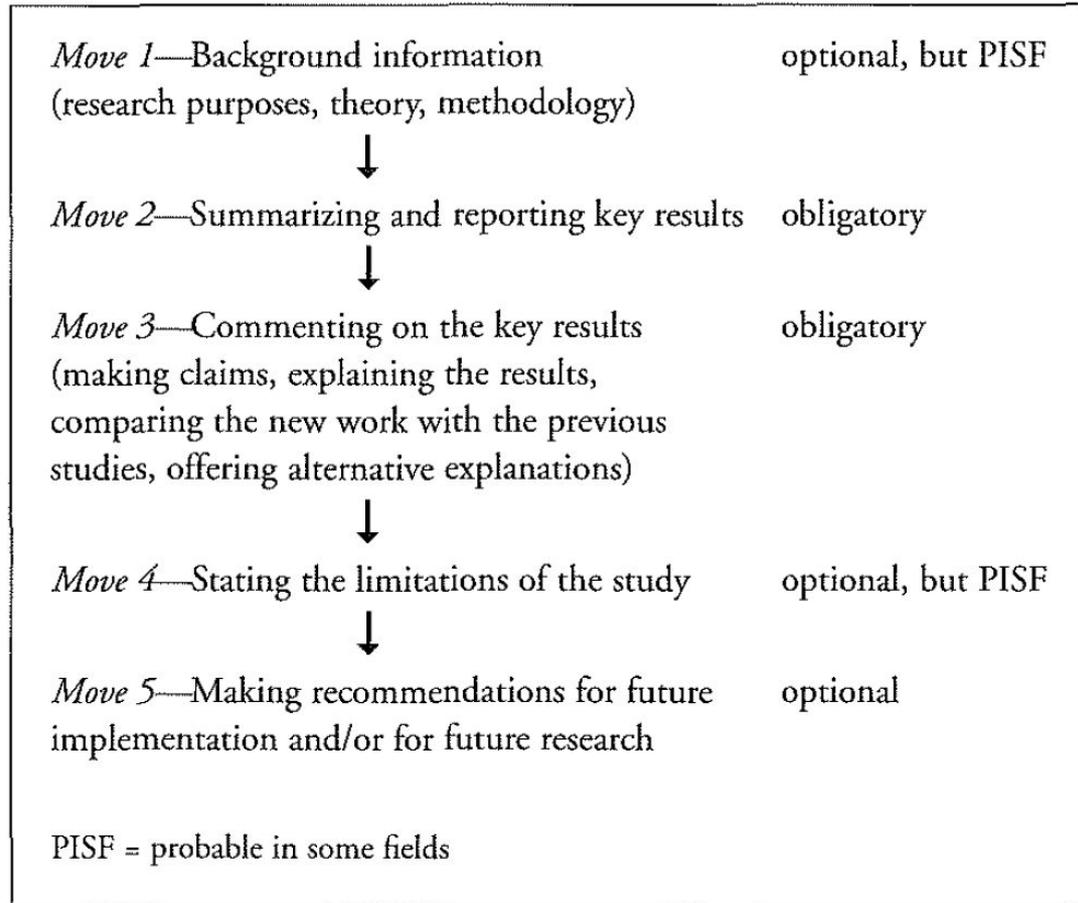


- statement presenting the most important findings



- statement commenting on the results this may include:
 - summary of the results
 - re-organisation of the results to show trends and tendencies
 - conclusion from the results

FIGURE 18. The Structure of Discussion/Conclusion Sections



(Swales and Feak 2012)

Traditional vs. topic-based dissertation

Compare the examples of a traditional and topic-based dissertation.

- How are they similar/different in terms of structure?
- Which do you think is most common in your discipline?
- Which would most suit your dissertation? Why?

(If neither, suggest an alternative structure)

Other sections to include

- **Title page**
- **Abstract**
- **Acknowledgements**
- **Table of contents**
- Introduction
- Literature review
- Methodology
- Results
- Discussion/Conclusion
- **References**
- **Appendices**

Task 1:

Analyse a master's dissertation:

- What type of dissertation is it? (Traditional? Topic-based? Other?)
- How many sections is it divided into? What are the sections called?
- Is a numbering system used for sections and subsections? How many levels does it have? (e.g. 1.5.2 = three levels)
- Which sections are included before the introduction? How are these separate from the main dissertation?
- How does the writer create links between different sections of the dissertation?

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Literature review

Writing a literature review

Discuss in pairs/small groups:

- What is the purpose of a literature review?
- What should be included in it?
- How are a bachelor's and master's literature review different?
- How can a literature review be organised?
- What background information do we need about previous research?
- What are the steps/stages in doing a literature review?

Purpose of a literature review (1)

Your literature review should:

- situate your research focus within the context of the wider academic community in your field
- report your critical review of the relevant literature
- identify a gap within the literature that your research will aim to address

Purpose of a literature review (2)

In other words, your literature review should answer readers' questions such as:

- What research questions are you asking? Why?
- Has anyone else done anything similar?
- Is your research relevant to research/practice/theory in your field? How?
- What is already known or understood about this topic?
- How might your research add to this understanding, or challenge existing theories and beliefs?

(University of Leicester 2009)

What should I include?

- the **key issues which underlie the research project**
- the **major findings on the research topic**, by whom and when
- the **main points of view and controversies** that surround the issue being investigated
- a **critical evaluation of these views**, indicating **strengths/weaknesses of previous studies** on the topic
- **general conclusions about the state of the art** at the time of writing, including **what research still needs to be done; the gap in the research that the study will aim to fill**

(Paltridge and Starfield 2007)

Bachelor's vs. master's literature review

Table 7.1 Degrees and the nature of the literature review

<i>Degree and research product</i>	<i>Function and format of the literature review in research at these levels</i>
BA, BSc, BEd project	Essentially descriptive, topic focused, mostly indicative of main current sources on the topic. Analysis is of the topic in terms of justification
MA, MSc, MPhil dissertation or thesis	Analytical and summative, covering methodological issues, research techniques and topics. Possibly two literature-based chapters, one on methodological issues, which demonstrates knowledge of the advantages and disadvantages, and another on theoretical issues relevant to the topic/problem.

(Paltridge and Starfield 2007)

How do I organise it?

- **chronologically**; although be careful not just to list items; you need to write critically, not just descriptively
- **by theme**; this is useful if there are several strands within your topic that can logically be considered separately before being brought together
- **by sector** e.g. political background, methodological background, geographical background, literary background
- **by development of ideas**; this could be useful if there are identifiable stages of idea development that can be looked at in turn
- **by some combination of the above, or another structure**

(University of Leicester 2009)

Task 2:

Look at the literature review in the dissertation you found.

- How is it organised?

Example:

Burke's (1986) survey of the experiences of overseas undergraduate students carried out at The University of New South Wales discovered that the most common difficulty identified by these students was an inability to speak out in classroom discussions.

(Paltridge and Starfield 2007)

Providing background information

Information we need from the literature review about previous research:

- Who carried out the research?
- Who were the subjects of the research?
- Why was it carried out?
- Where was it carried out?
- How was it carried out?
- When was the research published?
- What was the result of the research?

(Paltridge and Starfield 2007)

Task 3:

Look at the literature review in a dissertation. Find one example of reference to previous research which answers all these background information questions:

- Who carried out the research?
- Who were the subjects of the research?
- Why was it carried out?
- Where was it carried out?
- How was it carried out?
- When was the research published?
- What was the result of the research?

How do I 'do' a literature review?

What would you do at each stage?

1. Locate relevant literature
2. Critically read the literature
3. Prepare to write
4. Write the literature review

(Paltridge and Starfield 2007)

Using a reading/synthesis matrix (1)

Table 1 Review of Literature

Author/ Date	Theoretical/ Conceptual Framework	Research Question(s)/ Hypotheses	Methodology	Analysis & Results	Conclusions	Implications for Future research	Implications For practice
Maisto Pollock Lynch Martin Ammerman (2001)	Coping factors in relationship to decreasing substance abuse with adolescents one year post drug treatment	What factors contribute to the variability in adolescent functioning regarding substance abuse one-year post treatment?	Quasi-experimental design involving 166 subjects in Pittsburgh adolescent research center. Initial baseline assessment and 1 year later. Pre and posttest measures included ACQ, ISE, CTI, LEQA, SCQ, and DUSI.	First set of analysis involved one-way ANOVA. Four independent t-tests conducted to determine specific group differences. The final set utilized ANOVA with repeated measures 1 year later. 36% of subjects discontinued alcohol use.	All clinical groups demonstrated improvement at one year.	Stress and coping model useful for examining clinical course of alcohol use disorders in adolescents.	Differences between participants at baseline regarding coping factors indicate significance of acquisition of such skills as part of treatment intervention.

Using a reading/synthesis matrix (2)

Author, date	Research question; rationale	Theoretical framework	Methods: sample, study type, etc.	Major Findings	Limitations, gaps	Conclusions	Implications for future research & practice	Themes that emerge	Other important issues

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Homework

Writing an abstract (2)

- Think of an academic text/talk you have written/given (or are expected to write/give) and write its abstract (max. 250 words)
- Include a title and keywords
- Consider my feedback on your ‘Marshmallow abstracts’
- Upload your abstract to the Peer Review Application by:
DEADLINE: midnight Wednesday 20 November