



Chapter 7

FINISHING YOUR THESIS

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Introduction

This chapter looks at the tasks to be undertaken in order to finish your thesis. Three pieces of work remain at this stage. The first of these is to construct the closing chapter; the second is to edit and proof read the entire text; and the third is to compose or finalise the pages that go both before and after the main body of text. The chapter also considers the possibilities for publication of some or all of the material contained in your thesis.

The final chapter of your thesis

The final chapter draws together the conclusions from your research.

As you embark on this chapter ask yourself two questions:

1. What is the *meaning* of what has been revealed so far in my thesis? To answer this question you must not only consider the findings of your research but also revert to what you determined to be the essence of your research question/s and to the salient themes, issues, debates raised in your review of literature.
2. What are the *implications* of these meanings for my field of study? In addressing this question you have to locate your thesis within a 'chain of knowledge'. In other words you need to be clear about how your work adds to or is at odds with what is already known.

These questions are not meant to dictate the structure of the closing chapter, rather they should prompt the kind of thinking needed to set the tone for how you write the chapter. Up to this point in your thesis you have had to adopt an exploratory stance. In this chapter you need to clearly indicate what it is you now know as a result of your explorations. While, as stated elsewhere in this book, you are not required to produce definitive answers to the research question(s) you set, you are required in this chapter to arrive at a resolution of the problems or issues embedded in your research question(s).

When a thesis is being marked the examiner will look at the degree of cohesion within the thesis in terms of the link between your stated intent at the beginning of the thesis, the findings from your research and the conclusions at the end. Therefore the conclusion you reach has to be pertinent to the task you set yourself in the opening chapter i.e. explore a particular phenomenon or arrive at a better understanding of an event. This is not the time to introduce new material (literature or data) or to raise a new set of research questions. While it is appropriate in this chapter to point to a need for further research, this should be a logical next step that emanates from what you have learned.

As well as matching what is promised at the outset, the final chapter should be directly grounded in both your research findings and the dominant issues, concerns and perspectives identified in the literature you selected to review. Ensure that the conclusions you draw are substantiated by your research. It is important in this chapter not to simply summarise what has been said in the previous chapters. Your language needs to be definite, unambiguous and explicit.

In summary the final chapter should:

- indicate the implications of your study for policy and practice;
- indicate the lessons learned from your methodology – if significant;

(Thinking about question one above (the meanings of your research findings) will help you identify these.)

- outline the significance of your work within your field of study;
- point to further research that would logically build on the work you have done or that would investigate issues that emerged in your study but that you were unable to pursue.

(Thinking about question two above (the implications of these meanings) will help you identify these.)

Editing your thesis

You are not finished with the text of your thesis until you have edited the entire draft.

The purpose is to ensure that you have done the following:

- described and justified your choice of research methodology;
- included a discussion on literature relating to best practice in research;
- clearly outlined your philosophical stance;
- linked the introduction and conclusion;
- backed up any claims/findings with evidence from your study;
- arrived at conclusions that are directly grounded in your findings;
- included all references in the text in the bibliography or list of references;
- consistently adhered to one style of referencing;
- given titles to chapters that are both descriptive and engaging.

Composing a title for your thesis

The purpose of a thesis title is two fold; its first function is to arrest the attention of a potential reader and to then captivate their curiosity. The second is to give a succinct sense of the core subject area with which the thesis deals. Finding a title that encapsulates the content of the thesis and at the same time appeals to your imagination, and that of a reader, can be difficult. It usually requires numerous attempts. Few writers are totally happy with their final version. Bear in mind you can always use a pithy title accompanied by a subtitle which somewhat elaborates it. What you need to bear in mind is that the title should not exceed fifteen words and it should give an indication of the subject matter.

Proofreading your thesis

As you have reworked and edited your thesis you will have made corrections but you still need to proof read the entire text. Your aim should be to achieve technical perfection.

As you read through the text attend to the following:

- Amend sentences that are poorly constructed;
- Correct grammatical mistakes;

- Check that you do not use a mixture of tenses within a section;
- Correct typing, spelling or punctuation errors;
- Check for consistency in the use of punctuation marks when referencing in the text and when listing sources in the bibliography or list of references;
- Check that how you have laid out the thesis (i.e. size of margins, line spacing, placing of page numbers, font size and styles) is consistent with what is required by your department;
- Check that references quoted in the main text appear in the bibliography and that their details are correct and identical in each location.

The final touches

The last task is to compose the pages that go before and after the main text.

Those that precede the text include:

- the Title Page;
- an Abstract;
- a list of Acknowledgements;
- a Glossary of terms;
- the Table of Contents.

The following come after the main text:

- Appendices;
- Reference List/Bibliography.

Title Page

If your department has precise requirements for what should be included in the title page obviously you should follow them. If there are no requirements the following guidelines will help you to compose an appropriate title page:

- Give the full title and the sub-title (if applicable) of the thesis;
- This should be followed by your name (use the exact name under which you are registered – this is the name that appears on your student card.) If you already have a degree this can be indicated after your name if you wish;
- State the degree programme for which the thesis is submitted and the year of the submission;
- If you are presenting a bound thesis the front hard cover should indicate the title of the thesis. The spine should state your name, the name of the degree and the year of submission. Before binding your thesis check if your department has a preference or requirement for a particular colour binding. Some universities and colleges colour code theses according to the level of degree.

Abstract

This is a short précis of the thesis. Its function is to provide an overview of what the thesis is about; why the subject matter is significant to your field of study; what significant findings emerged in the course of your study and their implications for current and future research and/or practice in your area of interest. The abstract is generally written after the main body of text has been completed. Students often find this a difficult piece to write because it requires you to distance yourself from the detail in which you have been immersed and to describe the thesis as a whole.

Acknowledgements

You can decide whether or not to include a list of acknowledgements. If you decide to do so it is an opportunity to thank those who have supported you. These might include your supervisor, colleagues, classmates, or those you consulted in the course of collecting data. Statements of appreciation can also be of a personal nature and include words of thanks to family and friends for their support.

Glossary of terms

This is a list of specialist terminology and definitions of acronyms used in the thesis. Not all theses require a glossary but it is useful to include if the thesis uses a large number of acronyms.

Table of contents

This lists the title of every section of the thesis beginning with the abstract and finishing with the bibliography or reference list. It includes chapter titles and sub headings within chapters. Corresponding page numbers are shown for each listing. When numbering pages within the thesis it is customary to use Roman numerals (i, ii, iii and so on) for those pages that precede the main text and to use Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3 and so on) thereafter through to the end of the thesis.

Appendices

These may contain charts, data referred to in the thesis and other material. They are not required in all theses but if used should appear at the end of the thesis text, before the reference list. Appendices are numbered consecutively (Appendix 1, Appendix 2 and so on) and are listed in the Table of Contents.

Reference List/Bibliography

The reference list or bibliography comes at the end of the thesis. See Chapter Three for more details on compiling a reference list or bibliography and for the difference between them.

Submitting your thesis

Your supervisor or the examinations office in your university will tell you how many copies of your thesis to submit and how they should be presented i.e. hard bound or soft bound. They will also tell you how your thesis will be examined.

What happens to your thesis after you have been awarded your degree?

One copy of your thesis is deposited in the library by the Examinations Office. The thesis is catalogued and placed on closed access. This means anyone who wishes to consult it must ask at the Circulation Desk and sign a form to show that they have consulted it. Occasionally students request their thesis not be placed in the library. This is generally in the case of theses that have been accepted for publication. Requests to withhold a thesis should go to the Examinations Office. Requests for the withholding of theses already held in the library should be addressed to the Librarian.

The Library EPrint Archive

If you wish (and if your university has such a facility), you can also submit an electronic copy of your thesis to the Library Eprint Archive. An Eprint is an electronic copy of a document. Eprint archives work on the principle of open access. This means that documents submitted are freely available via the Internet. This open access ensures the widest possible dissemination for your research and it also contributes to the growing body of research literature that is now freely available online.

Publishing

There may be opportunities to publish part or all of your thesis. In the first instance you should discuss this with your supervisor. The *Institute of Public Administration Yearbook and Diary* gives details of Irish publishers with their contact information. *The Writers and Artists Yearbook* gives details of UK publishers. Contact your library for further details of book publishers.