

6. Writing the dissertation

Do all dissertations look the same?

Follow this link to the Centre for Sociology, Anthropology and Politics *Companion for Undergraduate Dissertations* and listen to social science lecturers talking about how to go about writing your dissertation.

<http://www.socscidiss.bham.ac.uk/vidpages/s3vid.html>

Methods writing exercise

In this video clip one of the authors, Karen Smith, gets you to think about what makes a good methods section. This video was made for students at Heriot-Watt University by the Educational Development Unit and the Institute of Petroleum Engineering.

<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=EMkVUt9qToc>

Discussion writing exercise

In a piece of small-scale research, Swales *et al* (2004: 270-2) identified the following different ways to open the discussion section:

- Citing the main results
- Discussing the literature
- Offering general conclusions
- Reminding the reader about the original purpose
- Highlighting the special importance of the research site
- Focusing on the methodology
- Discussing the limitations of the research

Below are the openings from the discussion sections of four journal articles. Which of the openings given above, do the authors use?

1. This article has analysed the ways in which recent critical responses to the human security agenda underestimate the politics involved in conceptual clarification.

Ewan, P. (2007) 'Deepening the Human Security Debate: Beyond the Politics of Conceptual Clarification', *Politics*, 27(3), 182-189

2. Our aim in this article was to investigate the gender differences in older adult health in Singapore.

Chan, A. and Jatrana, S. (2007) 'Gender Differences in Health among Older Singaporeans', *International Sociology*, 22 (4), 463-491

3. In conclusion, although Maisin dances are performed within a Christian setting, they express more than people's affiliation with the Anglican Church.

Hermkens, A-K (2007) 'Church Festivals and the Visualization of Identity in Collingwood Bay, Papua New Guinea', *Visual Anthropology*, 20(5), 347-364

4. This study of the social care workforce in UK soap opera and dramas reveals that social workers and social care workers are portrayed reasonably frequently.

Henderson, L. and Franklin, B. (2007) 'Sad Not Bad: Images of Social Care Professionals in Popular Television Drama', *Journal of Social Work*, 7(2), 133-153

Online guides to structuring your dissertation

Presented as a checklist, Joseph Levine offers a guide to writing a dissertation. His guide is based on many years of experience of working with students in the US. The guide is available in Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic.

<http://www.learnerassociates.net/dissthes>

Robert Chandler breaks the dissertation down into different sections and gives a brief overview of what each section should contain (just as we do in the book).

<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Modules/dissertation.html>

Finding your academic voice in your writing

In order to make the most of the research you have done for your dissertation, you have to be able to put across your message well. It is worth spending some time developing your written English style.

Online support for academic writing

Andy Gillet's *Using English for Academic Purposes* is a comprehensive overview of academic English in Higher Education. The Rhetorical Functions of Academic Writing [function] section of the site is particularly useful and gives clear

explanations and is illustrated with real examples. There are exercises to test your understanding.

<http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm>

The University of Toronto also offers an online guide of Advice on Academic Writing. It covers a range of areas. In terms of developing your writing, the sections on style and editing and grammar and punctuation will be particularly useful.

<http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/advice.html>

The Purdue *Online Writing Lab* has over 200 free resources to develop your writing; lots of handouts, then, to work your way through.

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

Finding the right words

The University of Manchester's *Academic Phrasebook* is a resource for all academic writers. It offers examples of phrases used to achieve different functions in academic writing, such as: referring to literature, presenting findings, writing conclusions. It provides the kinds of terminology that you could employ in your own dissertation.

<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>

Avoiding plagiarism

If you're still not really sure what plagiarism is, then listen to these students talking about what the term means to them. The video was produced for the Higher Education Academy.

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/videoandaudio/plagarism_studentviews

Then you can work through this online *Internet Sampler on Plagiarism*. Through a series of guided exercises, you will look at how you find information and then use that information in your dissertation.

<http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/fil/pages/samplagiarist.html>

The Paul Robeson Library offers an educational game show: The Cite is Right. It will test your understanding of when you do or don't need to cite.

<http://library.camden.rutgers.edu/EducationalModule/Plagiarism/citeisright.html>

Acknowledging the work of others

In this video clip, which was produced for students at Heriot-Watt University by the Educational Development Unit and the Institute of Petroleum Engineering, Karen Smith introduces the concept of plagiarism. She directs you to Heriot-Watt University's plagiarism statement, but you should seek out the statement that your own university uses. She goes on to highlight the ways in which you can use other people's work, namely: summary, paraphrase and quoting.

<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=TKFR6IXgsKE>

Beyond Submission

Publishing

Follow the link below to see *Reinvention: The Journal of Undergraduate Research*. The call for papers is open to students from any discipline. The papers should be between 2000-5000 words. The journal has free access so you can read some of the articles before submitting your own.

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/cetl/ejournal>

Employability

The link below takes you to a series of videos which aim to develop and enhance employability skills. While they were designed originally for students in the Physical Sciences, there is a lot of information that is relevant to students from any discipline.

<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/physsci/home/pedagogicthemes/video/video>

Griffith University has devised a graduate skills toolkit. This outlines the range of skills that employers are looking for in the graduates that they employ.

http://www.griffith.edu.au/centre/gihe/griffith_graduate/toolkit/index.htm

Careers

The following site gives an overview of what social science students in the UK go on to do when they have finished their degrees.

http://www.prospects.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/What_do_graduates_do_2008/Social_sciences_editorial/p!efbmmkc