TICK-BOX EXERCISE FOR DISSERTATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Do I provide **BACKGROUND INFORMATION first**, summarising the key points about the subject area?

- Give the reader an overview of the subject area from which your research focus derives
- Toward the end of this overview, tell us what we **DON'T** know **OR** what we need to know more about
- You should provide a few references here…..(Smith, 2000; Thomas, 2009; Berisha. 2016)…..to show what research has been done already and that you are AWARE of the previous research

Do I then provide my **RATIONALE**, explaining the significance/importance/necessity of my study?

- Here, explain to the reader WHAT your research focus is and **WHY** it is important/necessary to carry out
- In other words, answer the question 'Why should we care?'
- You can use personal/professional experience as part of your rationale, but this should then lead into non-personal information (e.g. a societal rationale for the research)

Do I then provide my **RESEARCH QUESTIONS** and finally, a brief summary of the dissertation's structure?

- The questions should be placed from BROAD to NARROW in terms of their focus
- Two-three questions is (usually) sufficient
- One paragraph is enough to outline the structure of the dissertation

LITERATURE REVIEW

Do I move from **BROAD to NARROW** in terms of the topics I present in the sections/sub-sections?

- It is up to you how broad you want to begin with in terms of the first section
- However, the narrower you go in terms of your topics, the closer you are getting to the focus of your research questions

Is **EVERY topic relevant** to my research focus/research questions?

- You need to make sure that every topic covered in your sections/sub-sections relates to your research questions, and helps to inform the focus of your study
- Also, make sure the later sections include information/content that was referred to in the earlier sections – it should all be ONE LONG THREAD OF RELATED CONTENT

Do I **interpret the previous literature** in places and not simply summarise it?

- If all you do is summarise the previous literature, your literature review will be very descriptive **and not analytical at all**
- So be prepared to **DO SOMETHING** with some of the studies (but not all) that you refer to
- For example, say why you agree/disagree with previous work or give an example/illustration of it or explain what it means to you
- This can include pointing out the gaps/weaknesses in previous research, to then remind the reader about the importance of your own study

METHODOLOGY

Do I move from **BROAD to NARROW** in terms of the topics I present in the sections/sub-sections?

- First, who is the sample? How did you recruit them? WHY did you NEED to choose this particular sample?
- How did you collect data – interviews? Say why you chose them. Questionnaires? Say why you chose them.
- Basically, explain the significance of your chosen research methods in terms of how it **specifically relates** to your study

This means, do I **JUSTIFY the choices I have made** for my methods?

RESULTS

Do I simply present the results, possibly in a table, and not interpret them?

- All you need to do here is select the most interesting quotations from your participants (e.g. P1 said this….P2 said this…..); again, don't interpret the results yet
- Make sure you give similar amounts of coverage from each participant, so we hear from all of them

DISCUSSION

Do I **INTERPRET the results** and explain how they **a/** answer my research questions and **b/** what is the main conclusion I can draw from this interpretation – **what does this all mean for the subject area** (e.g. teaching, human geography, psychology, etc.) that I am focused on?

(Possible) Structure:

Research question one

Answer the question based on **interpreting** participants' answers (in other words, find the answers from the interview/questionnaire that pertain to the various research questions)

Research question two

Answer the question based on **interpreting** participants' answers

CONCLUSION

Do I begin with **a summary of what I have found** (i.e. tell the reader what are the main ideas/themes/conclusions that come from answering the research questions)?

- This means summarising what you have found, but in terms of what this means for the subject area overall (e.g. Students seem to prefer blended learning; Climate change appears to be more important to people nowadays; Children appear to prefer groupwork than working alone)

Do I then **discuss the limitations**?

- This can be general limitations (e.g. you can't generalise the results to the wider population) and also things you have learned (e.g. 'I perhaps should have used focus groups as well as interviews, in order to obtain more detailed results')

Do I finish with **a focus on future directions for research and/or what the implications are for my research** in terms of policy/practice/society and so on?

- This involves what would the approach be for the next study (e.g. A larger sample? More countries? More schools? A different type of data collection?)
- Also, you should make clear what is your study's chief contribution to knowledge, in terms of what its main implication is (e.g. A new way to consider cultural identity? A need to have a joint discussion between teachers and students to decide the future of online learning? A need to change policy on childcare?)

FOR <u>EVERY</u> CHAPTER…..

Do I use **CAREFUL LANGUAGE** (e.g. *it is suggested, arguably, it could be said…..*)?

- **NEVER** make opinions sound like facts!
- This kind of careful language is necessary for your interpretations of previous research, when giving your opinions and when drawing conclusions

Do I provide **CONCRETE ILLUSTRATIONS/EXAMPLES** to help explain broad words/concepts/theories?

- Follow abstract/broad words with a clear example
- First, identify the broad words
  - Culture and language are connected ('culture' and 'language' are broad and mean many, many different things; you are in charge of the dissertation so YOU need to tell the reader what YOU mean)
  - Culture and language are connected. *This can be seen with the ways in which certain cultural practices are part of the language, such as using verb suffixes*

in Korean to show respect when speaking to older individuals.

Do I **JUSTIFY** the choices I have made (e.g. for literature I refer to, the structure of my chapter sections, and anything else I can think of)?

- ALWAYS explain to the reader WHY you made the choices you did
- This is part of your RATIONALE and METHODS, but can also include the literature review, in terms of why you chose certain theories/models to focus on, and the reason for the order of the topics
- This expressions below works very well:
  - *I have chosen X for the following reasons. First,…..*

Do I **DO SOMETHING** with my quotes (e.g. explain why I agree/disagree, illustrate them, explain them)?

- Follow a well-chosen quote/reference with your own interpretation
- Smith (2000) argues that a new model of education is needed for the 21st-century. *This can be seen perhaps with the move to online learning as a result of the current pandemic.*