

HOW TO WRITE A DISSERTATION

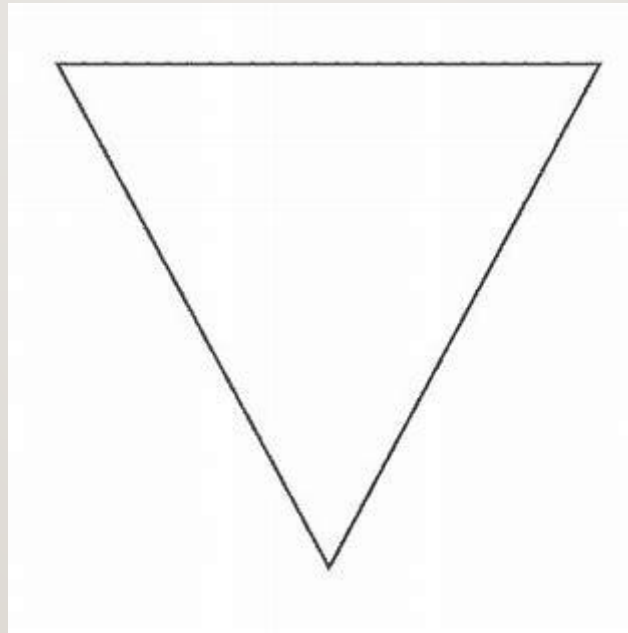
SEED ONLINE STUDY SKILLS SESSIONS

THE MORE YOU EXPLAIN, THE LESS THEY COMPLAIN!

- Key points today revolve around two aspects:
- First, the need to **JUSTIFY** the choices you make and explain their relevance/importance
- Second, the need to **ILLUSTRATE** your interpretations, assertions, broad statements, references to theory and so on

INTRODUCTION

- Consider this as part of an inverted triangle approach – go from broad to narrow:



INTRODUCTION

- **Background first – Present an overview of the subject**
 - Tell the reader what the subject is that you're writing about, by first setting the scene: *what do we already know; what are the inherent issues; what is the subject's history; perhaps define the subject*; and so on; within this section, you can then begin to 'tell your story' – what *don't* we know? From here, you are then setting up the RATIONALE for your own study, as part of a running thread throughout your dissertation

INTRODUCTION: RATIONALE

- Following the background information, present your **RATIONALE** - this is the first time in your dissertation that justification becomes central!
- I would even suggest a separate subheading, such as 'rationale for the study'
- Here, tell the reader why your research is being done, but more to the point, why it *needs* to be done
- The rationale is sometimes described in conjunction with the word PROBLEMATIZE

INTRODUCTION: RATIONALE

- If you're filling a gap, this is not enough – explain why the gap *needs* to be filled!
- Go large – how will your study (potentially) benefit the subject area, field, society?
- Essentially, answer the question, 'Why should we care?'
- Following the RATIONALE, present the research questions and then, the obligatory breakdown of the dissertation's structure

IS THE FOLLOWING RATIONALE CONVINCING?

While there has been much research on language and identity (Edwards, 2010; Smith, 2015; Jacobs, 2018), to include within the context of teaching (Haddix, 2012; 2014), we have little, if any, information on this subject within the context of UK teaching, specifically teacher training. This is an important gap to fill for the following reasons: First, considering the role that accent still plays in the UK, in terms of often forming class-based judgements (Coupland and Bishop, 2007), it is relevant to ask if such negativity exists within a profession often associated with the middle-classes. Second, given the societal focus on equality and diversity, we should consider this from a linguistic perspective, as language serves as a proxy for larger categories, such as race and class (Smith, 2018), and therefore, negative perceptions of accents can tie in with negative perceptions of the speakers, who may otherwise be fully qualified to teach. Third, this thesis also focuses on teachers' professional identities to see if they are in any way constructed based on their accent; and more so, how much, if at all, do teachers have input in this construction, or it is left to those in power, such as mentors? Thus, this thesis focuses on the topic of accent in UK teacher training and in so doing, addresses key societal, and educational, issues – diversity, equality and power – from an otherwise overlooked linguistic perspective.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Again, apply the inverted triangle approach, and move from broad to narrow in terms of the coverage of the various topics:

2. Introduction

2.1 Language and identity

2.2 Language and identity in teaching

2.2.1 The US context

2.2.2. The French context

2.2.3 The Canadian context

2.3 Language and identity in UK teaching

2.4 Perceptions of accents in the UK

2.5 Summary

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Do not just summarise the literature; interpret it!
- This ties in with the need to **ILLUSTRATE**
- In other words, whenever referring to a technical word, making a broad statement or indeed referring to a quote/previous research – give an example!
- If you agree with authors, say why; if you disagree, say why
- It's also a good idea, perhaps once or twice in your literature review, to remind the reader of the gaps/limitations, as a means to remind people why your study is needed and valuable
- Basically, **WRITE FOR IDIOTS!**
- Exercise: Can you think of a technical/broad/theoretical word, or broad concept/expression from your own department?

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Smith (2010: 45) states that ‘language and culture cannot be separated’. This can be seen with the ways in which honorific languages such as Korean use verb suffixes to denote added ‘respect’ to older addressees, as well as the use of titles for professions such as doctors. This in turn reflects a vertical culture in which people within society are part of a social hierarchy, in which age, for example, plays a dominant role.
- Many studies have reflected on the need to address the role that World Englishes can play in the EFL classroom (e.g. Alptekin, 2002; Hino, 2017; Smith, 2019). A key factor is that we need to respect linguistic differences, and not see them as deviance. Thus, *I am having a car* is, in Indian English, no ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than *I have a car*; and Korean English *skinship*, to refer to physical touching, is simply making use of the productive suffix *–ship*.

METHODOLOGY

- In this chapter, JUSTIFICATION is again very important!
- Don't just refer to the literature to explain what methods you chose to use (e.g. interviews) – explain WHY
- Likewise, explain why you didn't choose another method/approach
- Perhaps explain how you plan to address the potential drawbacks of your chosen methods
- Basically, always tell the reader the WHY of your chosen methods, and not just the WHAT!

METHODOLOGY

- The overall structure will differ from one dissertation to the next, even within the same department/subject area/focus of investigation
- A lot will also depend on your discipline, of course; is it focused on participants?
Experiments? Interpreting literature (be it film, poetry or art)?
- Below, therefore, is merely one way you might consider arranging your methods chapter:

3 Introduction

3.1 Sampling

3.1.1 Recruitment

3.2 Using a qualitative approach

3.3 Piloting

3.4 Interviews

3.5 Thematic analysis

3.6 Ethics

3.7 Summary

METHODOLOGY

- Jones (2007: 23) explains that ‘semi-structured interviews allow us to adapt a more flexible approach to the interview process’. This flexibility can be seen with the allowance for the interviewee to bring up additional points that might go beyond what is otherwise a set list of questions. Such ‘digression’, however, can reveal a great deal about the individual’s personal journey within the teaching profession. For this reason, it is vital to adopt a method of interviewing for my participants that will allow them not to feel constrained by a one size fits all approach to their history of becoming a teacher, as this is unique to everyone.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- The results can be presented in tables, charts and graphs – visuals are always a good idea
- It's fine to also provide a brief discussion underneath each table, which simply restates, in written form, what is provided in visual form in the tables
- There is no interpretation at this point
- For the discussion, here is where you can accrue a lot of points
- Referring to previous literature is fine, but do so sparingly – most of the discussion should be generated from you and your results

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- One way to present the interpretation of your results in the discussion is to do so by presenting the research questions again
- Underneath each question, you can then answer it by means of providing samples of participants' responses
- Your interpretation of what they told you is the main aspect here

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PI explained that 'teachers don't always have a say in how they construct their professional identity'. This suggests that for PI, there is a lack of agency perhaps (see Thomas, 2017) in terms of the ways in which the personal and professional identities might co-exist. That PI is referring to teachers in general, and not just her own experience, might suggest that this is something she has inside knowledge of, based perhaps on discussions with her fellow trainees. Indeed, how much is this an issue amongst the group, or is it an issue at all? For some, a reduction in accent might be regarded as comparable to a change of clothes to fit the immediate context of teaching.

CONCLUSION

- The first paragraph or so should focus on presenting your overall opinion, based on the overall findings – here, you are again starting broad (e.g. This dissertation has investigated X, finding that.....)
- From here, recap the main topics, in this case seen with the overall findings of the research questions
- Thus, the beginning of the conclusion is a summary of the dissertation's overall AIM(S)/OBJECTIVE(S); the second part is a summary of the answers to the research questions

CONCLUSION

- The final two paragraphs should be as follows: LIMITATIONS and IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY/FUTURE DIRECTIONS (the terms are not rigid at all; but you should focus on the following content, as discussed below)
- Explain the limitations of your research, in terms of what was beyond your control (e.g. a small sample size, so you can't generalise) and what you could have done better (e.g. perhaps focus groups would have been a better choice and explain why of course)
- The final paragraph should explain how your study can be taken beyond the immediate context of the department it belongs to; how can we make use of the findings?; can policy be addressed?; how might things change in some way? What would the next study involve, as a means to address limitations and/or take things to the next level

THANK YOU!

- I also run the SEED-level writing centre, *Write Away*, as well as leading on several other study skills sessions for SEED students
- Please email me for more information on either, and especially if you have suggestions for future sessions
- This can also include summer study skills sessions

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