MONASH University

GROUP OF EIGHT

Education

Writing a Thesis in Education

Academic Language and Literacy Development

2014

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The tasks in this booklet are designed to be used in our workshops and study groups. If you require help doing them by yourself, please consult your Academic Language and Literacy Development Advisor. For more information on our services, please visit:
http://www.education.monash.edu/students/current/study-resources

1. Thesis Writing

1.1 What is a thesis?

A thesis consists of an argument or a series of arguments combined with the description and discussion of research you have undertaken. In the case of a PhD, and to a lesser extent, a Masters (research) thesis, the research is expected to make a 'significant contribution to the chosen field' (Phillips & Pugh, 1994, p. 23). This does not mean to revolutionise the field (though some PhDs may). You are expected to critically review the available publications in the field and attempt to add an element of original research to it. This may simply mean that you adapt someone else's research plan for the situation you want to investigate; in this way you extend the knowledge about an area. Your supervisor will advise you about suitable research.

Minor theses (e.g., for coursework Masters programs or Honours theses) may also contribute to the knowledge in the field, though the main requirement is that they provide evidence of an understanding of the field. Reporting on minor research studies may take a wider variety of shapes than the minor thesis. Accompanied by appropriate commentaries and adequate discussion of the related issues in the field, videotapes, books, and works of art and literature have all satisfied the requirements for Master of Education coursework programs' research report.

Remember, your supervisor is your **first point of contact** for any questions related to your research. You should therefore discuss all aspects of your thesis with your supervisor(s) throughout your candidature.

If you need help with academic literacy issues such as the mechanics of your writing (for example, cohesion and coherence, structure and transitions, voice and agency, referencing and citation etc.), you may consult Dr Raqib Chowdhury (9905 5396, raqib.chowdhury@monash.edu) or Dr Anna Podorova (9904 4346, anna.podorova@monash.edu) in the Faculty. Help is also available from Language Skills Advisors in the university libraries at Clayton, Peninsula and Berwick campuses[1]. Please note that the Faculty's Academic Language and Literacy Development Unit do not provide proofreading or editing services.

In addition, consider coming to our monthly **HDR Seminars**. For more information please visit: http://www.education.monash.edu/students/current/study-resources/hdr-seminars.html
All resources used in these seminars can be found as self-access materials in the HDR folder in **Moodle**.

Research students in Education have access to a range of other resources which can be found here: http://www.education.monash.edu.au/research/degrees/resources/

1.2 Preparing to write/research

The following recommendations may help you to work efficiently, and, eventually, confidently while carrying out and presenting your research.

1.2.1 Know your role as a researcher

The general responsibilities of a PhD student and their supervisors are set out in the HDR ***Orientation Handbook***[2] for research students and the University's ***Graduate Research Handbooks***[3] for research students.

[1] http://monash.edu/library/skills/contacts/
[2] http://www.education.monash.edu/research/degrees/resources/hdr-orientation-handbook.pdf
[3] http://www.monash.edu.au/migr/research-degrees/handbook/

Many of these responsibilities are also applicable to MEd students and writers of theses and their supervisors. An important feature of these stated responsibilities is the expectation that a researcher will be fairly independent, and that he/she will *ask for help* when it is needed rather than expect the supervisor to infer this need. On the other hand, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to teach the beginning researcher how to develop a focus, conduct research and write about this (possibly simultaneously). Remember, though, that in HDR (Higher Degrees by Research) candidature, *teach* does not mean *tell;* rather, it means *guide*.

It is not easy to ask for help, especially when you are feeling surrounded by unachievable tasks and incomprehensible texts. Just remember that independence is related to expertise. No-one can reasonably expect a beginning researcher to know all there is to know about research or about the field they are working on. Nor can a supervisor guess when you feel like you're[4] drowning in a sea of unknowns. You have to tell them that you need to know what the next step should be (and negotiate this with them), or ask them to help you identify the important areas in a field, or to tell you how to go about finding out which central theorist to begin reading. Your sense of independence will grow, and your questions will change as you progress.
Research students may find that an intensive schedule of consultations with the supervisor is necessary in the initial stages. Supervisors may take a more dominant role at this point (usually because they feel they have to help you get things started). If you feel that you are losing a sense of this being *your* work, think carefully about the direction you would like it to take and discuss this as soon as possible with your supervisor.

You should meet your supervisor on average at least once a fortnight. Plan small, achievable tasks to do between meetings, rather than huge assignments. Research students often feel disappointed with the amount of work they achieve in a given time, because their aims are overambitious, or because they do not realise how complicated a task is (Phillips & Pugh, 1994). If you want to discuss something you have written with your supervisor, provide a copy of it at least three or four days prior to the meeting if it is a short piece, more for a longer piece.

1.2.2 Get to know the software available to help you

For all students, it will be very important to know how to efficiently use a computer for accessing information and writing the thesis. Workshops on the use of software are available in the University, and support is available in the Faculty. *Endnote* is a very useful program available to you. Find out how the software can help you to do tasks like filling in citations, maintaining a consistent style, creating a Table of Contents, and importing work done on other software. *NVivo* is also helpful for analysing qualitative data - but you need to know how to use it well in advance of analysing your data (preferably before collecting data).

You must also get to know how to use the electronic databases (available online) which provide access and information related to publications. Workshops are available for these. Ask the Education librarian(s)[5] in the main library.

1.2.3 Decide on the set of writing conventions you will follow

Conventions are the standardised rules you need to follow in writing regarding referencing and citations, bibliographies, style (e.g., language free of gender bias), page setup, punctuation, spelling, figures and tables, and the presentation of graphics. Note that computer programs such as *EndNote* are available on Faculty computers, so you may like to find out which system of conventions they employ and choose accordingly. Programs such as MS Word include 'templates' for dissertations (and other kinds of writing); these help you to maintain a consistent use of conventions throughout your thesis. Note that, more and more frequently, staff in the Faculty prefer you to use the **APA** (American Psychological Association) **referencing style.**

[4] Note that in academic writing it is generally discouraged to use contractions such as "you're", "I'm" etc.
5 http://www.monash.edu.au/library/skills/contacts/fac-education.html

You should discuss referencing styles with your supervisor at the beginning stages. If you need any help understanding how the conventions work, you may consult your Academic Language and Literacy Development Advisors.

1.2.4 Look at other theses in the field

Hundreds of theses are available for your perusal in the Thesis Room of the Teaching and Learning Space (TLS) at Clayton. Look at ones in your field to get ideas about the main features of their:

- organisation (abstract, chapter distribution, hierarchy of sections/subsections)
- language use (discourse markers, cohesive devices, mapping, signposting)
- use of subsections and styles for the hierarchy of headings/ subheadings
- page numbering and font

It will help you a great deal in the final stages if you have decided early on the conventions, the font and the use and style of subheadings and headings, and have used them consistently. Many programs, including MS Word, can help you create and manage heading styles, and to use these to later *automatically* generate your Table of Contents. Doing this manually (and at the eleventh hour) is extremely painstaking and time consuming.

1.2.5 Remember that writing is a thinking process

When we write, we often change or considerably develop what we think. Writing is not just translating into words the images of our thoughts; it's not as simple as that. In writing, we may transform our thoughts, redefine them or, with great pain and effort, give shape to our ideas. Thus, it is important to give ourselves time to write. Many students find it helpful to begin writing early in the process of doing a research degree. With the time constraints on a thesis writer, an early start is imperative. Remember, what you write is not necessarily what you will print in the final draft (though in some parts it may be). It is not necessary, in fact it is often impossible, to do all the thinking and then 'write it up'.

It is also important to remember that writing is experienced differently by different people, and the processes they prefer are also different. Chandler (1994) uses **four metaphors** to categorise writers as: **Architects** (those who consciously pre-plan and organise and do little revision); **Watercolour artists** (who try to write a final draft on the first attempt - little revision); **Bricklayers** (who revise at sentence and paragraph level as they proceed), and **Oil painters** (who pre-plan little but rework text repeatedly). Into (or in between) which category(ies) do you think you fall, if any? It is useful to know how you prefer to go about writing academic pieces, but you may actually find it useful to try out other ways with a thesis, since this is probably a considerably longer piece of work than any you have undertaken before.

1.2.6 Prepare proposals and applications for the Ethics Committee

If you are writing a thesis for a PhD, you will have to prepare a proposal in order to show your department and supervisor that you have developed a suitable focus for your research. In the case of an MEd thesis, the same may apply. A separate **booklet** provides an outline of the contents of a proposal. This booklet is available from the Academic Language and Literacy Development Unit's (ALLDU) webpage[6]. If you'd like to have a printed booklet, please ask your ALLD Advisor for a free copy.

[6] http://www.education.monash.edu/students/current/study-resources/

As soon as you have worked out what you wish to do, you should establish whether or not you need to apply to the University Standing Committee on Ethics in Research on Humans (SCERH) for approval of your research. *If you are going to observe, talk to, consult or deal with living human beings (or animals) in any way, significant or minor, you must apply for Ethics approval.* Applications involve detailed explanation of what you will do, so it is important to think about your methods at an early stage, and in particular to think about how any participants you work with will be protected from harm. Applications are filled out on a proforma available at the following address: http://www.monash.edu.au/research/ethics/human/index.html

The Committee may take some time to consider your application; it is well worth making your application a good one, so it isn't rejected (if you are well-advanced in writing your proposal, this will help in filling out the Ethics forms). You are not permitted to undertake any research involving people or animals *until* you have approval. It is therefore important to work on this application as early as possible.

Increasingly, HDR students are applying for Ethics approval *before* Confirmation. While this risks resubmission based on changes suggested by the Confirmation panel, it also means that you can start collecting data straightaway after Confirmation without any delay. Please consult your supervisor regarding the best time for your Ethics application.

Remember, even if you don't require Ethics approval, the Ethics application form can be a good thinking exercise and a *checklist* of items for you to consider when you begin research.

2. Components of a Thesis

Theses come in various sizes and shapes. The components of many theses are similar although their functions and requirements may differ according to the degree they are presented for. The components and their functions and characteristics are set out below.

Note that not all theses must contain all components. Consult with your supervisor and the regulations governing your degree to identify which components you need. A notable exception from the following format are theses that do not have an empirical element, and historical studies. The ways in which data are related to the literature can vary enormously, so that there may be no clearly defined differentiation of function amongst your chapters regarding literature and data presentation.

Although these components appear approximately in the order in which they are often presented in a thesis, they may appear in quite different orders (especially the sections of the body of the thesis) and forms. Moreover, you are very likely to **compose** them in a completely different order. For example, the introduction is often written late, and is certainly revised in conjunction with the conclusion, and the abstract should be written last. Also, your chapter/section names don't have to be generic (such as 'Introduction', 'Review of Literature' etc.). You can choose a more descriptive name, for example: 'Exploring the Context', 'Bilingualism in EFL Settings' etc. When in doubt, **consult your supervisor**!

COMPONENTS of a THESIS: FUNCTIONS and CHARACTERISTICS

Cover page

- identifies topic, writer, institution, degree and date (year and, if you like, month)
- title, candidate's name and qualifications, degree aimed at, faculty, university, month and year presented

Declaration

- states that the material presented has not been used for any other award, and that all sources are acknowledged
- states that the approval of SCERH was received and gives the reference number

An example of a declaration page appears below:

> This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any educational institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.
>
> Signed: ……..
>
> The research for this research received the approval of the Monash University Standing Committee for Ethical Research on Humans (Reference number: …….)

Acknowledgements

- to thank anyone whose support has been important for your work
- the supervisor generally receives the first vote of thanks. Don't forget your participants (though remember confidentiality). This section is the least bound by convention. You may speak from the heart.

Table of Contents

- lists all major divisions and subdivisions marked by numbers and indicates which page they are on
- the titles and subtitles of sections should appear in a style and size consistent with their position in the hierarchy (see style manuals for help in selecting your system)
- numbering hierarchy: 1, 1.1, 1.1.1, 1.1.1.1

Lists of Tables/ Figures/ Illustrations/ Appendices

- lists all of these and the pages on which they appear
- a separate section is used for each of these categories (it is often handy to number such items using the chapter number first: e.g., Fig 1.1, Fig. 2.1, Fig.2.2, etc.).

Abstract

- orients the reader/ presents the focal points of the thesis
- summarises the thesis, mentioning aims/purposes, focus of literature review, methods of research and analysis, the findings, and implications

Introduction (may be given a more descriptive name to reflect the topic)

- provides background information and rationale for the research, so that the reader is persuaded that it will be useful/interesting. It usually also serves as a frame within which the reader reads the rest of the thesis
- provides background information related to the *need* for the research
- builds an argument for the research (rationale) and presents research question(s) and aims
- may present personal motivations behind research
- may present a theoretical starting point
- gives an outline of subsequent chapters

Literature Review (this may consist of more than one chapter with descriptive titles)

- to show the reader/examiner that you are familiar with issues and debates in the field (you need to explain these and discuss the main players' ideas)
- to show the reader that there is an area in this field to which you can contribute (thus, the review must be *critically* analytical)
- this is the section where you cite the most, where your use of verb tense becomes most important in conveying subtle meanings, where you must beware of unwarranted repetition. This is where plagiarism can become an issue.
- you must remember to discuss theory which is *directly relevant* to your research
- in a minor thesis, this may be incorporated into other parts of the piece presented (e.g., in the introduction, in a discussion). Alternatively a literature review may be the main source of data, and fulfill the aims of the thesis, in which case it may need to consist of one or more large chapters

Methodology (research design)

- presents an understanding of the philosophical framework within which you see your inquiry (i.e., discusses epistemology of the research - using literature)
- presents a rationale for the methodological approach (using literature)
- describes and justifies the methods of research and analysis (using literature)
- reveals the boundaries of the research (the scope - this may occur instead in the Introduction)
- describes what you did (past tense) for selection of site, participants, data gathering and analysis
- it may include illustrations (e.g., a timeline depicting stages/steps in the research)
- describes steps taken to ensure *ethical research practice* (shows you are a serious researcher who takes account of how research may affect participants)
- you should discuss issues of validity and reliability and/or credibility here

Results (presentation of data)

- presents the data and findings, ordered/analysed in ways justified earlier (methodology)
- past tense is a feature here (usually)
- data in tables should be carefully set out, checked and discussed

Discussion (analysis of data)

- discusses findings, drawing out main achievements and explaining results
- makes links between aims and findings (and the literature)
- may make recommendations – these could appear in the Conclusion chapter

Conclusion

- draws all arguments and findings together
- leaves the reader with a strong sense that the work you set out to do has been

completed, and that it was worthwhile • summarises major findings • presents limitations • presents implications • suggests directions for future research • ends on a strong note
Appendices • provides a place for important information which, if placed in the main text, would *distract* the reader from the flow of the argument • includes raw data examples and reorganised data (e.g., a table of interview quotes organised around themes) • appendices may be named, lettered or numbered (decide early)
References/ Bibliography • shows the reader which texts/materials you have consulted • is in alphabetical order • may be annotated, though usually is not • should *not* include secondary references (those 'cited in' a primary reference)
Glossary/ Index • helps reader where the context or content of the research may be unfamiliar • a list of key terms/topics

3. Issues in Writing

In this section we look at some of the most important features of good academic writing, especially those pertinent to thesis writing.

3.1 Acknowledging sources

The art of referring to the words and ideas of other writers involves many rules and requires subtle uses of vocabulary (e.g., words of attribution and evaluation) and grammar (e.g., verb tense – past and present).

An informative and interactive tutorial with reasonably detailed rules about the conventions and mechanics of citing and referencing can be found on the Monash Library website at:
http://monash.edu/library/skills/resources/tutorials/citing/index.html

Also check Section 3.6 in this booklet.

A chapter from Anderson and Poole (2001) is available for reasonably detailed rules about the conventions/mechanics of referencing (see References at the end of this booklet). Below, Section 3.1.1 looks at two categories of attribution, while 3.1.2 provides a list of common verbs and expressions of attribution. Section 3.1.3 discusses how to use attribution in critical analysis. Finally issues of verb tense and attribution are explored in Section 3.1.4[7].

[7] This paragraph itself is an example of an **advance organiser**, one such as commonly used in introductory paragraphs throughout the different chapters of a thesis.

3.1.1 Information-prominent and author-prominent references

Swales (1990, pp. 149, 153) shows how you can decide whether to focus on the source of an idea or on the idea itself in your writing. He provides two categories of referencing: author prominent, where the author's name appears in your sentence, or information prominent, where the author's name appears only in parentheses (brackets). An adaptation of his examples[8] follows:

Author prominent	Brie (1988) showed that the moon is made of cheese.	The moon's cheesy composition was established by Brie (1988).	According to Brie (1988), the moon is made of cheese.	Brie's theory (1988) contends that the moon is made of cheese.
Information prominent	Previous research has established that the moon is made of cheese (Brie, 1988).	It has been shown that the moon is made of cheese (Brie, 1988).	It is currently argued that the moon is made of cheese (Brie, 1988).	The moon may be made of cheese (Brie, 1988, but cf. Rock, 1989).

It is important to be aware of the *effect* of your choice to use information- or author-prominent in-text referencing. If the focus is on the author, then the reader can see the ideas and discussion as clearly relating to that author's thinking. You can often give more details about a study. This can make it easier for the writer to see ideas as individual and discuss important ideas, facilitating a critical approach (whether positive or negative). An information-prominent way of citing and referencing can sound very authoritative and can also sound like 'truth-telling', even though you have no idea at all whether it is the 'truth'! If you use information prominent referencing, try to be aware of the effect on the reader. If the information seems to be asserting a 'truth' you are not sure of, try to use a different verb (see next section) to shed more doubt and give a little more detail. Try not to use categorical and generalising statements followed by a reference all the time.

Compare the following two boxes, identifying the substantial differences in meaning conveyed.

> Inclusion is the fairest and most productive approach to educating children with special needs (Smith, 1999; Tollington, 2000). The visually impaired achieve high levels of social interaction and intellectual development in mainstream schools (Johnstone, 2001).

And,

> Smith (1999), writing about schooling in Victoria, Australia, argues that inclusion is the fairest and most productive approach to educating children with special needs (see also Tollington, 2000). In a study of 10 young adolescent students with visual impairment, Johnstone (2001) found that all participants achieved high levels of intellectual development for their year level and that they perceived improved wellbeing in social interaction.

3.1.2 Verbs of attribution: words for the brain-weary

Below are some verbs and their synonyms for you to draw on when you want to talk about someone else's ideas or words – a thesaurus of verbs of attribution. Try to work out which verbs give a more positive view of the ideas you are reporting others as saying, which verbs are simply very *neutral* ways of restating what an author says or show that author's *positive* or *negative* attitudes to the ideas, and finally, which verbs express your own slightly negative attitudes towards the author's ideas.

[8] These are also examples of the different ways of **paraphrasing** someone else's ideas.

- Show: demonstrate, establish
- Persuade: assure, convince, satisfy
- Argue: reason, discuss, debate, consider
- Support: uphold, underpin, advocate
- Examine: discuss, explore, investigate, scrutinise
- Propose: advance, propound, proffer, suggest (the view that…)
- Advise: suggest, recommend, advocate, exhort, encourage, urge,
- Believe: hold, profess (the view that…)
- Emphasise: accentuate, stress, underscore
- State: express, comment, remark, declare, articulate, describe, instruct, inform, report
- Evaluate: appraise, assess
- Hypothesise: speculate, postulate
- Disagree: dispute, refute, contradict, differ, object, dissent
- Reject: refute, repudiate, remonstrate (against), disclaim, dismiss
- Claim: allege, assert, affirm, contend, maintain

An argument can be:

- founded on
- based on
- grounded in a theory/view/set of data
- embedded in
- underpinned by

Note that the above words are all **value-laden**. Your choice of word will reveal to your reader your *stance* towards the author you are reporting on. It will show whether or not you consider her claims to be substantiated, even without explicit reference to yourself.

Arnaudet and Barrett (1984, p. 153-5) provide a useful resource on verbs of attribution reproduced in the box below:

Neutral verbs of restatement

add	inform (of, about)	remind (of, about)
clarify	present	report (on)
describe	remark	speak / write of

Verbs of restatement with a positive or negative connotation

apprise (someone of)	explain	indicate
argue (about)	express	observe

Verbs of opinion are used to report the content of another writer's opinion (or conclusion or suggestions)

Positive opinions:

affirm	agree (with)	applaud
concur (with, in)	praise	support

Reporting opinion *(usually neutrally)*		
assert	believe (in)	claim
determine	expound (on)	maintain
point out	think	

Verbs of uncertainty are used to report the content of another writer's expression of doubt or uncertainty

challenge	dispute	question
disagree (with)	doubt	suspect (of)
dismiss	mistrust	wonder (at)

In the following sentences[9], choose the verb within brackets which is functionally closest to the underlined verb. Compare your answers with a fellow HDR student.

1. McClelland has observed that affiliative managers spend too much time on the telephone. *(present, appraise, argue)*
2. McClelland appraises *us of the fact the* affliliative managers spend too much time on the telephone. *(admires, evaluates, supports)*
3. McClelland describes the rationale for the training program which he conducts for managers. (p*oint out, mistrust, present)*
4. McClelland doubts the validity of the conclusions of Chris Argyris. *(wonder, remind, claim)*
5. McClelland remarks that power has been given a bad image by social scientists. (*set forth, report, assert)*
6. McClelland maintains that employees respond better to a well-defined authority system. *(suspect, claim, support)*
7. McClelland argues that managers must understand the positive side of power. *(point out, dispute, express)*
8. McClelland recommends that managers attend a training course to make them aware of power. *(describe, challenge, urge)*
9. McClelland dismisses the work of McGregor, Maslow, Argyris and others. (*observe, speak, disagree with)*
10. McClelland reminds the reader of the evidence that has shown that high morale results from a well-defined authority system. *(question, determine, speak)*
11. McClelland thinks that democratic management is so ineffective that companies which use it go out of business*. (assert, present, doubt)*
12. McClelland believes that the institution is more important than the individuals who compose it. *(support, report, wonder)*

3.1.3 Attribution and critical analysis

The following paragraph is an excerpt from a thesis on approaches to intercultural education. Notice the words that indicate what the writer thinks about the ideas of the other writers she mentions. How does she use particular verbs of attribution to convey a particular attitude to the work of the writers she refers to? What words or phrases signal her own ideas?

[9] From Arnaudet & Barrett (1984, p. 153-155)

Clanchy and Ballard (1991) propose a continuum of attitudes to knowledge and specify learning approaches and strategies that correspond to these attitudes. Drawing mainly on anecdotal evidence, they suggest that their three learning approaches, namely the "reproductive", "analytical" and "speculative" (p.11) approaches, are characteristic of certain stages of schooling (in Australia) or of certain cultures. In their consideration of learning strategies, however, they have presented only a limited understanding of the ways in which the strategies assist learning. For example, they see memorisation as a way of retaining "unreconstructed" (p.11) knowledge. The work of Biggs (1996) demonstrates that memorisation serves the purpose of retaining ideas so that they can be considered and understood.

3.1.4 Verb-tense, attribution and authorial stance

Verb tense in academic writing may exercise a greater influence on your reader's interpretation of your text than you bargained for. **Past tense** can give more than a time perspective; it can **distance** the reader from the ideas being expressed. The **present tense** on the other hand is often used to make generalisations – you need to be sure you wanted readers to feel this was a generalisable point. Below is a simplified description of the uses and possible effects of tense on the meaning made.

The tense you select for your verbs in your essay, report or literature review reveals a great deal more to your reader than just the time frame. It tells your reader whose idea is being proffered (yours or someone else's), something about your attitude towards the ideas you are reporting if you have attributed them to a researcher or theorist, and indicates how general or specific the point is. In brief – and note that this is a *simplified* description of the use of tense – the three tenses which appear most frequently are used in the following ways:

> ***The present tense*** is used for: generalisation (in overviews, statements of main points); a statement which is generally applicable or which seems relevant; a statement made by you as writer; or to report the position of a theorist/ researcher to which you feel some proximity, either in time or allegiance (e.g.. Piaget (1969) outlines the stages…).
>
> ***The past tense*** is used to "claim *non-generality* about past literature" (Ostler, 1981, cited in Swales, 1990, p.152); that is, it is used to report or describe the content, findings or conclusions of past research. The specificity of the study is thus emphasised. Past tense can be used in your methodology chapter to describe what *you have done* (rather than to describe reasons behind your methodological choices, which should use present tense).
>
> ***The present perfect*** is used to indicate that inquiry into the specified area continues, to generalise about past literature, or to present a view using a non-integral form of referencing (the name of the author does not appear in the text of the sentence; it appears only in the subsequent parentheses).
>
> ***The future tense*** is often used in the methodology section **in a proposal** to state intention. When you are describing what appears in your writing, use the present tense, not the future (it's not your intention, since you've already done it): e.g., "The sections below describe the process of …", not, "the sections below will describe the process of …"

Now consider the excerpt from the previous section. What subtle difference in message might you receive as a reader if it were written as follows?

> Clanchy and Ballard (1991) <u>proposed</u> a continuum of attitudes to knowledge and specified learning approaches and strategies that corresponded to these attitudes. Drawing mainly on anecdotal evidence, they <u>suggested</u> that their three learning approaches, namely the "reproductive", "analytical" and "speculative" (p.11) approaches, <u>were</u> characteristic of certain stages of schooling (in Australia) or

of certain cultures. In their consideration of learning strategies, however, they presented only a limited understanding of the ways in which the strategies assist learning. For example, they saw memorisation as a way of retaining "unreconstructed" (p.11) knowledge. The work of Biggs (1996) in contrast demonstrates that memorisation serves the purpose of retaining ideas so that they can be considered and understood.

3.2. Voice: Letting your own voice be heard ('hedging')

How do you 'speak up' in a thesis without having to say, "I think" or "It is my opinion that…" (rather inelegant expressions)?

Read the following excerpt from Hyland's (1996, p. 477) article on 'hedging', a category of language use that helps to insert your very own voice.

NURTURING HEDGES IN THE ESP CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

There is a popular belief that scientific writing is purely objective, impersonal and informational, designed to disguise the author and deal directly with facts. But while ESP courses often provide the linguistic means to accomplish this invisibility, they often ignore the fact that effective academic writing always carries the individual's point of view. Writers also need to present their claims cautiously, accurately and modestly to meet discourse community expectations and to gain acceptance for their statements. Such pragmatic aspects of communication however are vulnerable to cross-cultural differences and L2 students are rarely able to hedge their statements appropriately. This paper argues that hedging devices are a major pragmatic feature of effective scientific writing and that students should be taught to recognise and use them in their own work. It examines the frequency, functions and realisations of hedges and discussed a range of strategies for familiarising students with their appropriate use.

INTRODUCTION

The term hedging was introduced to linguistics by Lakoff (1972) to describe "words whose job it is to make things more or less fuzzy" (p. 195). It has subsequently been used by sociologists to describe a means to avoid face-threatening behaviour and by applied linguistics to discuss devices such as *I think, perhaps, might and maybe* which qualify the speaker's confidence in the truth of a proposition. In scientific writing these effective and propositional functions work in rhetorical partnership to persuade readers to accept knowledge claims. Hedges express tentativeness and possibility in communication and their appropriate use is a critical, although largely neglected, area of scientific discourse.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how ESP teachers can help develop L2 learners' understanding of the principles and mechanics of the appropriate use of this critical pragmatic feature. First however, I will give a brief overview of hedging in academic writing, sketching its importance…

3.3 Supporting the reader

A thesis is a very structured piece of writing whose organisation has to be clearly established. This can be done through anticipating reader response and using language to indicate 'moves'. In this section we look at the various ways in which we can support our readers through our writing.

3.3.1 Imagining your audience

Try to find out the particular requirements of your audience in respect of preferred conventions. It is always useful to imagine your audience as an *intelligent person* who, however, is *not an expert* in this particular area of your field. This is not to say that you can get away with presenting inaccurate statements, but rather that you need to explain ideas or concepts and arguments clearly to your reader. You cannot assume that your reader always knows everything, nor should you feel that it is insulting to explain specialised concepts. Your reader wants to see how well you understand the issues you have chosen to discuss. Nevertheless, the reader does not want to wait for you to get along with your argument while you are showing him/her how well you know something else in the field (unrelated to your argument or main issue).

3.3.2 Signposting

It is a great help to your reader if you make a clearly signposted 'map' of your writing. You can do this by:

- using subheadings which indicate what you will focus on in that part of your writing. Brown (1993) recommends using verbs in headings and rewriting headings after sections are written. At all events, don't overlook the usefulness of headings in guiding your reader;
- stating explicitly the points you will focus on in the introduction of a chapter or (for a longer piece) at the beginning of a major section; and
- repeating key words or further developing propositions from an earlier sentence in order to make clear the connection between the ideas discussed earlier and those discussed later.

3.3.3 Mapping

The use of mapping or advance organisers is very important in a long piece of work. In such pieces of writing you may insert maps at strategic points (e.g. beginnings of chapters/sections) so that readers reorient themselves and know where they're headed. For example look at the opening paragraph of this section (3.3).

3.3.4 Useful discourse markers

The ways in which parts of your writing are related to other parts can be made clearer by using discourse markers, which can be grouped according to their function in the discourse. Here are some groups of markers that might help you when you need a little variety.

Ordering points or sequencing

Firstly, …; secondly, …; finally,…

Adding something

Moreover, …; Furthermore,…; Further,…; In addition,…; Additionally,…

NOTE: "Besides" is mainly used in speaking

Comparing (similarity)

Similarly,…; … likewise,…; equally,…

Comparing (difference – establishing contrast)

However,…; in fact,…; On the other hand,…; …, rather,…; In contrast, …; On the contrary,…; Nevertheless,…; Nonetheless,…; …, yet …; Despite…; In spite of…; Notwithstanding…

Introducing a cause

As a result of…; Because of…; Because…; Owing to …; Due to…

Introducing a result

Consequently…; Therefore…; Hence,…; As a result,…; Thus,…; So …; Then…

Exemplifying

For example,…; For instance,…; Notably,…

Re-stating

In other words,…; that is,…; namely,…

Generalising

In general, …; generally,…; on the whole,…

Summarising

In summary,…; In conclusion,…

Adapted from Parrott (2000, pp. 301-307)

3.4 Common problems (grammar, style, conventions)

Below are examples of some commonly confused words/expressions in academic writing. Can you think of more?

- **Et al. (and others)**

Only one of these two words is abbreviated. **Et** is a whole word meaning *and*, while **alii**, a word meaning *others*, is abbreviated to **al.** (note the full stop/period mark). For example, "Held et al. (1999) confront the question of whether Western capitalism and institutions are the drivers of globalisation".

- **Use of the '&' sign**

The **&** (ampersand) sign in referencing appears only in brackets or in the reference list at the end of your thesis. Thus, you would write 'Carver **and** Gaines (1987) conducted the first study', or 'The first study that examined stress focused on identifying one's own emotions' (Carver **&** Gaines, 1987).

- **Plurals and singulars**

- Datum/data (the data were categorised…)
- Phenomenon/phenomena (… was understood to be a phenomenon)
- Focus/foci (or focuses) (The foci of this study were …)

- Criterion/criteria
- Research/information (used as non-countable nouns in the singular)

Often confused spelling

- **Affect/effect**:

When these words mean influence, **affect** is used as a **verb** and *effect* is used as a **noun**.
e.g., Chocolate *affects* my skin badly.
The *effects* of chocolate on my skin are disastrous.

When the words mean something different from influence they are used differently grammatically. To **effect** (verb) something is to successfully complete it, while a person's **affect** (noun) refers to their feelings.

- **Practice/practise**

For Australian spelling, the verb uses an "s".
e.g., I would like to practise the skills I have acquired.
The noun is spelt with the c and contains another noun "ice"
e.g., The pract**ice** of leaving children alone in the car should be discouraged.

- **Its/it's**

Its is used when you are talking about something belonging to the thing you have already mentioned. **It's** is a **contraction** or a shortened form of "It is" or "It has" - the apostrophe stands for the letter omitted.
e.g., *The methodology appears in Chapter 3. Its approach is principally quantitative. (It's a pity it couldn't also be qualitative)*

- **That or which?**

In academic writing, **which** often needs to very specifically define the issues **that** it is discussing, the word "that" is used more frequently than "which". Both these words introduce information **that** is related to a word or phrase **that** appeared earlier. "That" is used when you wish to specify more closely the defining characteristics of the word or phrase (the word or phrase **that** appeared earlier). "Which" is used to provide *extra information* rather than to specify or define. You need a comma before "which", but not before "that" ("that" must stick to the word it is defining).

- **'As' and 'that'**

Many writers use both 'as' and 'that' to introduce what other authors are saying. They both mean the same thing, so you must choose only ONE of these words.
e.g., *As* Strunk and White (1959) argue in their widely read study of language *that* simplicity in language use is best.
This should be one of the following:

- **As** Strunk and White (1959) argue in their widely read study of language**,** simplicity in language use is best.
- Strunk and White (1959) argue in their widely read study of language **that** simplicity in language use is best.
- In their widely read study of language**,** Strunk and White (1959) argue **that** simplicity in language use is best.

- **Parallel structures**

Note that the last problem sentence above is one that was caused by the failure to use parallel grammatical forms for the stem "the main factors that contribute". The sentence should read: *Cognitive bias is one of the main factors that contribute **to the confidence** we have in our decision making as well as **to the accuracy** of our confidence.* Both underlined terms are nouns and they are preceded by a "to". They are joined by words such as 'and', 'as well as', 'or', or possibly form part of a list, where items are separated by commas or semi-colons.

- **Hanging (dangling) modifiers**

In a sentence with two parts, the writer's intention might be to give the reader one piece of information that can enlighten us about the other (main) part of the sentence. This extra information seems to remain hanging or dangling if the writer forgets to indicate clearly who is doing what in both parts of the sentence.

e.g., *After fail**ing** the VCE test, **the teacher** helped the student*.
(Did the teacher fail the VCE test?)
This should read: *After failing the VCE test, the student was helped by the teacher*.

The rule is that if you have an –ing word at the beginning of the first part of the sentence, the action of that word must be carried out by the first word of the second part of the sentence. That is to say, the subject of the two parts should be the same, even if it is not explicitly stated in the first part. To put it in grammatical terms, when we use a present participle (an 'ing' word) in an initial clause, but do not state the subject (the person doing the action), we expect the subject to be identified at the very beginning of the second clause (after the comma).

The following sentences are very common examples of writing that may cause confusion due to grammatical, stylistic errors or referencing conventions. See if you can work out what the problems are.

- *Identifying the cause of stress, work-related stress is better understood.*
- *There are a number of areas will be researched.*
- *Holmes and Rahe's life events checklist was the first study on stress.*
- *The data is relatively old, yet useful.*
- *Carver & Gaines (1987) did one of the first studies which examined stress.*
- *Differences among individual's abilities to appraise and express their emotions are effected by their social learning.*
- *It is interesting in light of the criticism of the SOC as contaminated with emotionality (Korotkov, 1993) that Antonovsky is at pains to point out the cognitive nature of this perception despite its emotional sounding terminology.*
- *Cognitive bias is one of the main factors that contribute to the confidence we have in our decision making as well as being an accurate confidence.*
- *Having evaluated the curriculum, different teaching methods were introduced.*
- *As Strunk and White (1959) argue in their widely read study of language that simplicity in language use is best.*
- *There are many studies in inclusive education focus on socialization.*
- *We should all aware of how negative feedback affects students.*
- *Johnson et. al. (2003) reviewed many researches on gifted mathematical thinkers.*
- *These researchers undertook the study by first reviewing the literature on giftedness, then interviewing maths students with high grades and identified the traits of mathematical giftedness.*

3.5 Reporting with style

A stylish reporter combines the virtues of clarity and good language sense. Try your hand at improving the style of the items below:

1. *Each and every good writer never ever uses tautological expressions or says the same thing twice (in the same sentence).*

2. *Each subject prefaced by 'each' use a verb in the singular.*

3. *A good writer should always remember to never split an infinitive (or at least not always).*

4. *There was a difference of opinion among the two teachers, even though the Principle had made every effort to create harmony between all staff members.*

5. *The GAT (General Achievement Test) was used for validation of results. While the VCE provided the main source of assessment.*

6. *"That' is the relative pronoun, which we use in a defining clause, while 'which' is used in a clause, which gives an extra bit of information, which is a parenthetical clause.* 'Which' is preceded by a comma, but 'that' isn't.

7. *The new policy which was introduced in 1999 was one of the most problematic policies for teachers that has ever been used.*

8. *And I thought to myself, "What a wonderful world …". Can we think to anyone else?*

9. *It is not everyday that you see such an everyday occurrence.*

10. *A good researcher must have stamina, which is necessary for accurately revealing what the data are trying to say. Moreover, clear criteria for good research is very important.*

11. *Our researches led us to the very important issue of the economical context.*

12. *The writing of complex ideas often involves the use of parallel structures, which build up a series of ideas, adds layers of meaning and acting as a kind of echo of the first structure(often a verb).*

3.6 Referencing and citing conventions

The art of referring to the words and ideas of other writers involves many rules and requires subtle uses of vocabulary (e.g., words of attribution and evaluation) and grammar (e.g., verb tense – past and present).

A useful tutorial with reasonably detailed rules about the conventions/mechanics of referencing appears on the Monash Library website at http://www.lib.monash.edu/tutorials/citing/

3.6.1 Attribution and critical analysis

In the Ballard and Clanchy excerpt in Section 3.1.3, notice the words that indicate what the writer thinks about the ideas of the other writers she mentions. How do they use particular verbs of attribution to convey a particular attitude to the work of the writers she refers to? What words or phrases signal her own ideas?

3.6.2 The APA style

The most commonly used set of referencing conventions in Education is the American Psychological Association's (2010) *Publication Manual (6th ed.)*, commonly known as the APA. The reference list of this booklet uses APA conventions. For a free interactive online tutorial on the most common types of citation and referencing, see: http://guides.lib.monash.edu/content.php?pid=346637&sid=2835402

Note some very basic APA rules:

- **Book titles** are in italics but only the first word (and the first word in subtitle) and proper nouns are capitalised
- **Journal names** are in italics and capitalised – the volume number also appears in italics
- **The titles of articles in journals and chapters of books** are in plain font and are not capitalised
- When a **chapter of an edited book** (one where the different chapters are written by different authors) is referenced, the chapter is treated in the same way as a journal article, but instead of the journal name, the book in which the chapter appears must also be referenced in the reference list entry. Note that the book is introduced by the word "In", which is followed by the initials of the author (first) and *then* the family name. This is the reverse of what you do in the rest of the list, where the family name comes first and then the initials of the given name.

In the following list of references,

- find the chapter of an edited book
- find an article from a journal
- find a book
- find the electronic version of an article

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For more details and more complex referencing, please refer to the website listed above.

Re:cite - QUICK LOOKUP
For a fast and interactive online lookup on specific referencing styles, please visit the following website:
http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/recite/index.html?style=0

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ADDITIONAL SUGGESTED READINGS:

Expression

Peters, P. (2007). *The Cambridge Australian English style guide*. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

Peters, P. (2004). *Strategies for student writers.* Brisbane: John Wiley & Sons.

General Writing Guides

Bailey, S. (2011). *Academic writing: A handbook for international students* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge.

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