

How not to write a thesis

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Five ways to annoy your examiner

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What is a thesis for?

How not write a thesis



YOU are a FRAUD

Principles

- Don't be found out!
- Appear smart
 - Endogeneous simplicity
 - Exogeneous complexity

1. Conventions are dangerous

- Well understood
- Reveal simplicity
- Lack innovation

Conventions to avoid

- Study designs
- Statistical methods
- Evaluation
 - Never admit weakness
 - Benchmarks
- Others?

2. Assure the verisimilitude of intellectual accomplishment

- Written language is full of complexity
- Words
- Sentences
- Structures

Words

- Sesquipedalianism
- Fancy words
- Acronyms

Example

Subsequent to diligent eradication of language infelicities, the codebase achieved executable status

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Subsequent to diligent eradication of language infelicities, the codebase achieved executable status.

After careful debugging, the code ran.

Example

Prior to commencing the experiment, participants were requested to respond to supplementary questions.

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Prior to commencing the experiment, participants were requested to respond to supplementary questions.

Before starting the experiment, participants were asked to answer some more questions.

Some fancy words

Do not use	Use
Because	due to the fact that
Do, make	Implement
Before/after	Prior to/subsequently
Use	Utilize
Start/end	Commence/conclude or cease
Think/understand	Comprehend
Is made up of	Comprise
Part	Component
Wrong	Erroneous

Example

In the FP condition the GS, MS, AS were all significantly higher than in the TP or TPS conditions.

Example

In the FP condition the GS, MS, AS were all significantly higher than in the TP or TPS conditions.

In the First Person condition the Group Salience, Maximum Score and Average Stopping were all significantly higher than the Third Person or Third Person Static conditions.

Sentences

- One (very complex) idea per sentence
- Long sentences
- Smothered verbs

Long sentences

- Short sentences are clear and vigorous
- Tools to lengthen
 - Subclauses
 - Conjunctions
 - Compound nouns
 - Punctuation
- Sesquipedalianism

Simple style

The algorithm has six functions. The main function is there to coordinate the interaction of four of them. The sixth function structures the output ready for display.

Thesis style

The algorithm, which has six functions led by a coordinating component that is responsible for controlling the interaction of four of the constituent elements, structures its output through the final display preparation module.

Exercise: use punctuation

The experiment uses a repeated measures design. The two experimental conditions are high load and low load. The high load condition requires participants to complete a secondary task. The low load has no secondary task. The secondary task is an auditory attention task.

Thesis style

The two experimental conditions comprising the repeated measures design are: high load condition in which participants are required to complete a secondary task which is an auditory attention task; and a low load condition in which there is no secondary task.

Smothered verbs

- Verbs are easily imagined
 - “to be” or “to have”
- Nominalization
- Passive voice
- Fancy words help

Example

The research intended to clarify the trade off between power consumption and reliability.

Example

The research intended to clarify the trade off between power consumption and reliability.

The intention of the research was to produce a clarification of how power consumption and reliability are traded off against each other.

Active voice

The results suggest that power consumption does not affect reliability.

Passive voice

The results suggest that power consumption does not affect reliability.

It is suggested by the results that reliability is not affected by power consumption.

Even better...

The results suggest that power consumption does not affect reliability.

It is the suggestion of the results that there is no effect on reliability of power consumption.

Exercise:

The function notifies the database at the start of the cycle.

Exercise:

The function notifies the database at the start of the cycle.

A notification, which is generated by the function at the commencement of the cycle, is received by the database.

Structures

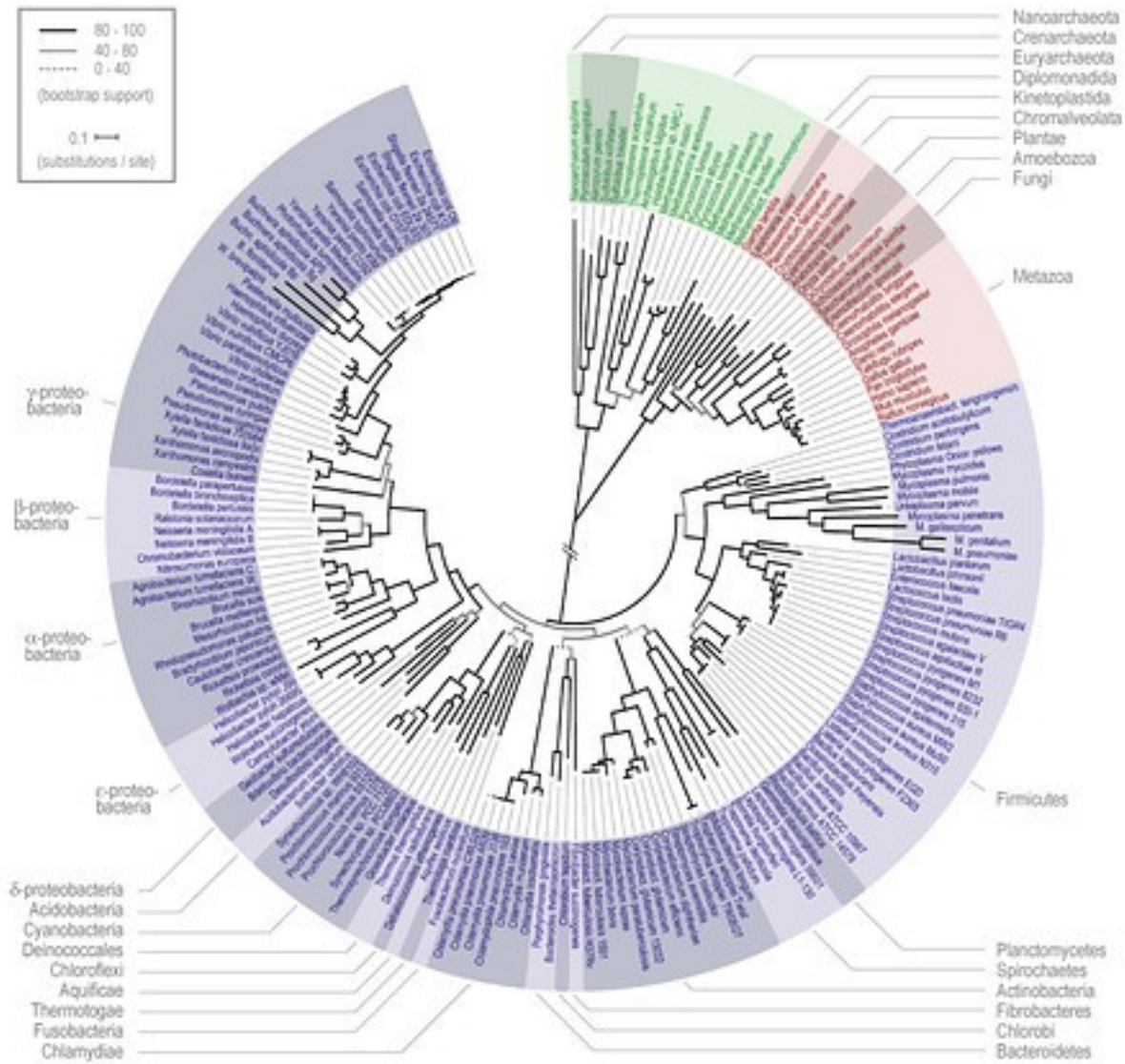
- Long paragraphs
- Sections, subsections, subsub...
- Bullets/numbered lists

3. A picture paints 1,000 words

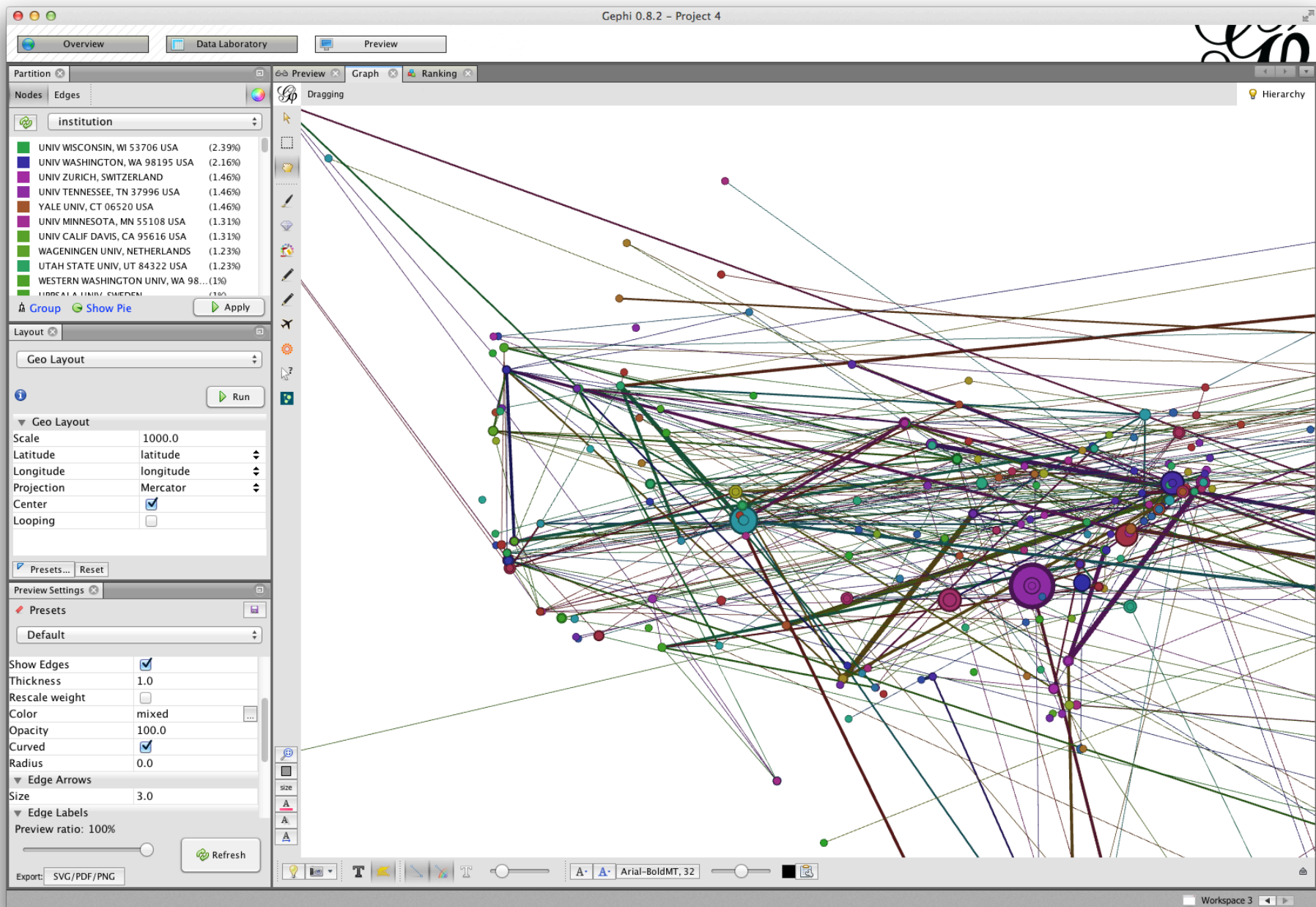
- Use one or other but not both
- Long complicated explanations
- Detailed, complicated diagrams

Complex diagrams

- Lots of elements
- Lots of text
- Inconsistent semantics
- Not easily fitting on one page



How not write a thesis



How not write a thesis

Easy words

- Code, data, test descriptions...
- Clearly represents effort
- Shrink font to fit
- Ideally over two pages

```

import java.util.*;

//At the moment this is just for a small world network
//As there is no general graph class.
public class Analyser{

    private SWSmallWorld fSmallWorld;
    private Hashtable fLabels;
    private final static int UNLABELLED = -1;

    public Analyser( SWSmallWorld pSmallWorld ){
        fSmallWorld = pSmallWorld;
    }

    public PathProfile pathSummaries(){
        PathProfile lAnswer = new PathProfile();
        PathProfile lPartialProfile;
        int lNumNodes = fSmallWorld.size();
        int i,j;
        Node lNode;

        for( i = 0; i < lNumNodes; i++ ){
            refreshLabels();
            lPartialProfile = pathSummariesFrom( i );
            lAnswer.add( lPartialProfile );
        }//for i

        return lAnswer;
    }//pathSummaries

    private void refreshLabels(){
        int lNumNodes = fSmallWorld.size();
        int i;
        Node lNode;

        fLabels = new Hashtable();

        for( i = 0; i < lNumNodes; i++ ){
            lNode = fSmallWorld.getNode( i );
            fLabels.put( lNode, new Label() );
        }//for i
    }

    private PathProfile pathSummariesFrom( int pNodeIndex ){
        PathProfile lAnswer;
        Vector lQueue = new Vector();
        int lQueuePos = 0;

        Node lStartNode = fSmallWorld.getNode( pNodeIndex );
        Node lThisNode;
        Label lThisLabel;
        int lLabelValue;

        lThisLabel = (Label)fLabels.get( lStartNode );
        lThisLabel.setLabel( 0 );
    }
}

```

How not write a thesis

4. “The secret to wit is surprise”

- Need suspense
- Never give the game away
- Shows how hard it is

Useful tricks

- “Studies were done”
- “As will be discussed in chapter...”
- Silence!
- Burying
 - Literature review

5. Don't seek feedback



“Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt.”

Feedback traps

- Conference talks
- Conversations with experts
- Seminars
- Supervisions
- Writing

Write at the end

- Commitment in black and white
- Self-articulation
- Writing isn't that hard
- Practice never helped anyone

To be easily found out

- + Use conventions
- + Write plainly
- + Take time on diagrams and text
- + Set out your contributions
- + Seek feedback
- + Write now!

Reading to avoid

- Pinker, *The Sense of Style*
- Cutts, *Plain English Guide*
- Thimbleby, Write Now! in Cairns and Cox (2008)
- Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*