GUIDELINES FOR WRITING UP CHAPTERS OF A DISSERTATION/THESIS

**A GENERAL CHAPTER OUTLINE FOR DISSERTATION/THESIS TITLE OF STUDY**

# CHAPTER ONE: Introductory Orientation

1. Introduction
2. Background
3. Rationale and relevance of the study
4. Statement of the problem
5. Research objectives
6. Research questions
7. Clarification of concepts in the study
8. Limitations
9. Delimitations of the study
10. Research design
    * Methodology
    * Research methods
11. Summary of chapters in the study
12. Conclusion
13. References

# CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

The literature review examines scholarly and professional publications – both theoretical and empirical – that directly support or challenge the proposed focal area. The literature review is *not* a descriptive summary of relevant texts but a critical evaluation of previous research and literature relating to the research topic. The research problem should be used to frame, integrate and assess the literature.

1. Introduction
2. Review of studies and research that has already been done on the theme of the study
3. Review of the conceptual/theoretical frameworks that have been has already been done on the theme of the study
4. Summary
5. References

# CHAPTER THREE:Research Design

1. Introduction
2. Methodology
3. Research methods
4. Summary
5. References

# CHAPTER FOUR: Research Results

1. Introduction
2. Research findings
3. Discussion of the findings
4. Summary
5. References

# CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion and recommendations

1. Introduction
2. Summary of chapters
3. Findings and recommendations
4. Summary
5. References

**REFERENCES**

**B NOTES ON THE COMPONENTS OF CHAPTERS IN A DISSERTATION/THESIS**

**Title**

The research being undertaken should have a descriptive title that is clear, concise and which reflects the content of the proposed study. When formulating the title consider the nature, purpose and methodology of the research project. The title often changes as the study evolves because of new insights gleaned through the research process. For this reason it is called a *working title*.

# Introduction

The introduction is a general orientation that acquaints the reader to the study. This section introduces the research problem in general and discusses why it is

interesting and useful to research. It highlights the context, which is composed of a set of dynamics of population, ideals, tenets, practices, norms and activities that intricately and inextricably influence each other.

# Background of the study

You look and the studies that were done prior to yours. Start with the ones that were done internationally, regionally then zero in to the local ones. Tou need to find the research gap

# Rationale of the Study

A rationale is a set of reasons that justify the research investigation of the proposed study. It clarifies why the project is being undertaken and what relevance it carries. It should highlight gaps in current knowledge which have been identified through a comprehensive literature review. The rationale indicates the significance and contribution of the study to knowledge production.

# Research problem

A research problem is a statement that indicates gaps in the scope or the certainty of knowledge. It might be defined as an issue that exists within literature, theory, or practice that influences the need for the study . The problem statement needs to be succinct, yet persuasive, based on evidence that is accurate and up-to-date. It effectively answers the question “Why does this research need to be conducted?”

# Research questions

Research questions normally flow out of the problem statement. Developing specific, researchable research questions guide the implementation of the study. A well- written research question will suggest the most appropriate study that should be undertaken to answer the question.

The criteria for a good research question can be described by the acronym FINER:

* **Feasible** (adequate subjects, technical expertise, scope time and money)
* **Interesting** (to the investigator)
* **Novel** *(*confirms or refutes new findings, provides new findings)

# Ethical

* **Relevant** (to scientific knowledge, policy, future research directions).

***Example***

**The research problem**:

High failure rate amongst students who are defined as “problem” students.

**Overall research question**

What meaning does school have for “problem” students?

**Specific research questions**

* How is education perceived by “problem” students?
* What has been the experience of school of “problem” students?
* How do “problem” students perceive expectations of them?
* What do the “problem” students think are the perceptions of them?

# Purpose of the study

The *purpose* describes the aims and objectives of the study. This section ideally starts with the statement, “The purpose of this research is to...”, which is the general goal.

# Objectives of the study Objectives

* are specifics needed to accomplish the goals of the study
* emphasize ***how*** aims are to be accomplished
* must be highly focused and feasible
* are usually numbered so that each objective reads as an 'individual' statement to convey your intentions.

# Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Framework

This is the section in which you develop the conceptual and/or theoretical framework underpinning your study.

# Concept

A *concept* can be defined as the abstract crystallisation of an idea or a phenomenon. It is the conjunction of all the characteristic features or contours of the phenomenon (e.g. the concept of science, culture, economics, etc.). This is done by establishing how other authorities on the subject (i.e. scholars, practitioners, custodians of knowledge, etc) have looked at the concept. Conceptualising includes establishing the *opposite* of the concept – i.e. what the phenomenon under investigation is not. It is also called a *construct.*

# Conceptual Framework

A *conceptual framework* can therefore be defined as the interconnections between the various concepts that underpin your study. It includes specific definitions of the unit of analysis and reviews key concepts to be investigated in the study. For example if your study is concerned with *indigenous knowledge systems* and *development,* the conceptual framework is the interconnections between the concepts. This is often done by looking at theories that authorities have developed on the concept or subject matter.

# Theory

A *theory* can be viewed as an interpretation of the idea or concept. It is a set of assumptions, principles, procedures and propositions used to explain a phenomenon.

# Theoretical Framework

Before determining the empirical aspect of your research it is important to consider the theoretical framework that undergirds your academic or intellectual enquiry. A theoretical framework can be described as a set of assumptions, concepts, values and practices through which an individual/group of people view reality. It may be described briefly as ‘ *How you see and interact with the world’.* Common theoretical frameworks that undergird research include positivist, naturalistic, post-positivist, critical realist, feminist, constructivist and interpretivist frameworks. Where relevant it is important to describe the philosophical correlates of the theoretical framework on which your research is based, for example, Systems Theory, Critical Theory, Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Feminism, Postmodernism, Critical Rationalism, Empiricism, and African philosophy. A *theoretical framework* can therefore be viewed as a framework that undergirds the study of a research problem in order to come up with recommendations for solving the problem.

# Research Design, Methodology and Methods

The following section deals with three inter-related but different elements of the research proposal: *research design, methodology* and *methods*. The table below highlights the differences between research design, methodology and method:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Research Design** | **Research Methodology** | **Research Method** |
| Focuses on the **end product**, i.e. what kind of  study is being planned and what kind of result is aimed at.  *Point of departure*: research problem or question  Focuses on the logic of research, i.e. what kind of evidence is required to  address the research question adequately? | Focuses on the philosophy  / theory behind the research **process** and the kind of tools and procedures to be used.  *Point of departure:* reasoning behind employing specific tasks (data collection, data analysis or sampling)  Focuses on the individual (not linear) steps in the research process | Focuses on the kind of tools / techniques and procedures to be used.  *Point of departure:* the specific tasks (data collection, data analysis or sampling) at hand  Focuses on the relevance and appropriateness of the techniques to be employed |

Adapted from Mouton, J (2001) How to succeed in your Master’s and Doctoral Studies, A South African Guide and Resource Book, Van Schaik Publishers, Pretoria **What is a research design?**

A research design is a plan or ‘blue print’ of how you plan to carry out the research,

i.e. the framework of the study. It basically reflects a decision taken at the outset about the *type* of research you are going to employ for your investigation. Approaches to research design are often categorised as *quantitative, qualitative* or *mixed methods.*

Types of research design include, but are not limited to, the following:

* Quantitative research designs
* Qualitative research designs
* Mixed methods

# What is methodology?

The research methodology is the philosophy / theory underpinning the methods employed to collect and analyse data. It also provides you with a vantage / standpoint from which to view the methods, and thus the instruments you select to do your research. In other words methodology is the reasoning behind the choices for the approach that you will employ to collect and analyse data. In essence it is the ***why*** of the empirical aspect of your research. This is usually influenced by your paradigm, the purpose behind your research question and the conceptual framework on which your study is based. The methodology should be discussed comprehensively and should be substantiated from evidence drawn from the literature review. This section informs the discussion on speci fic methods for data collection and analysis, e.g. what is the philosophy behind interviewing?

# What is research method?

The research methods are the tools / instruments / techniques used to collect and analyse data. They are the ***how*** of the empirical aspect of your research. These are the *practical details* of the methodology all of which should be justified. The main elements of this stage are:

* sampling
* data collection
* data processing
* data analysis

# Rigour and Triangulation

Multiple methods can be employed to investigate the same phenomenon in order ensure *validity* and *reliability* (or *credibility*, *transferability, trustworthiness* and *dependability*) of the data. This is called **triangulation.** Other methods for reducing bias and ensuring rigour in your study should be articulated.

# Limitations and Delimitations of the Study Limitations

Limitations identify the potential weaknesses or constraints (e.g. resources) within the study. These may be methodological and/or conceptual. Any limitations or threats to validity need to be discussed in this section. These can be highlighted in reference to similar studies, if available.

# Delimitations

Delimitations relate to the scope of your field of study, e.g. literature that will not be reviewed, population/resources that will not be studied and methodological procedures that will not be employed. These include gender, age, economic, social, political, discipline-related demarcations, etc. Reasons for the choice of scope have to be clearly justified.

# Ethical Considerations

Research ethics is a means of ensuring vulnerable participants are protected from exploitation and other forms of harm. It is critical to ensure whether or not your topic requires ethical clearance. Clearance from the university Ethics Board/Committee is required when research involves:

* Analytical discussions of specific groups
* Experiments with animals
* Obtaining information from people that could be potentially damaging or embarrassing to them
* Invading a person’s privacy.

# Outline of chapters

In this section you visualise how the study will eventually crystallise into the chapters of your dissertation/thesis. At the proposal stage this outline is provisional and will be refined during the write-up of the study.

# References

It is important to acknowledge the literature sources that you have consulted and cited. In-text references and a complete bibliography/reference list at the end should be done according to accepted requirements. Ensure that this element of your research process is done correctly from the outset to avoid plagiarism and frustration during the final stages of your write-up. It is important to be consistent in the use of in-text referencing and in the entries of the bibliography.

It is advisable to follow the Harvard style of referencing which is both alphabetical and chronological.

# C RESEARCH SCHEDULE

The research schedule is a projection of tasks, timelines and resources required to fulfil those tasks. This can be illustrated in the form of a table or a Gantt chart. It also includes check-points – or audit trail - for evaluating how your research is progressing. In essence it is a work plan, which is an important element in project management.