File 20090618.1600: Notes from DPhil writing seminar:

- Conclusions chapter is much longer than introduction chapter (ten pages vs. four pages) since the conclusions chapter typically spends a lot of time talking about future work.

- Thesis does not usually have an index. Instead, the TOC is usually very detailed instead. *However, anything you can do to help your examiners will be greatly appreciated, and if automatically generating an index isn't prohibitive, then by all means do it.*

- Ask the question, 'will this help my examiners?'

- Anything you can do to help your examiners read through your thesis is good to do.

- Introduction: start off very broad, then gradually narrow down to your slim focus—the area that nobody's dealt with yet.

  1. Establish territory
  2. Establish niche
  3. Occupy niche

- In a thesis, the latter two items comprise 2,000 words. In a research article, it's compressed into a paragraph.

- **Highlighting your contribution is vitally important.**

- Pattern: Situation-Problem-Response-Evaluation

  - Situation: background information, topic
  - Problem: the reason
  - Response: how we solved it
  - Evaluation: validation—tests

- The conclusion is a mirror image of the introduction, starting out narrow (with the thesis) and expanding back out.

  - Highlight the important bits (Summary)

- Evaluation: achievements and *limitations*

  - Limitations show what you have learnt.
  - Favourite Viva Question: if you were starting this project now, what would you do differently?
  - The examiners want to see that you learnt something.

- Supervisors want to see writers show *confidence* in their work!

- In the conclusion, it is common to see the present perfect tense ('we have examined') plus present tense ('our models differ significantly from...').

- Look for Andy Cooper's dissertation abstract in the British Library.

- It is important always to claim that your work is new (vs. 'traditional' approaches which is always negative in this context).

- Abstract is usually written in present tense.

References