

Your Thesis Statement or Dissertation Question

A thesis or dissertation that is narrowly focused in terms of the thesis statement or question offered will impress far more than a lot of ambitious aims and objectives. The more things you seek to accomplish the more the work will lose focus and making direct connections between all these objectives becomes very difficult. As such, be focused and realistic, especially if you are an undergraduate and you have less than a year to achieve a quality piece of research. Remember that aims and objectives are not the same thing. Aims refer to broader issues that you wish to achieve whilst objectives are far more amenable to measurement or quantification. Objectives are specific and one can usually tell fairly easily if these have been achieved yet your aims might be more open to interpretation where their achievement is concerned.

Abstracts

The abstract is presented at the start of your research paper and it will guide the external examiner as well as other readers. Key conclusions will be offered and the contribution your work makes to the existing body of knowledge can be discussed. There is a real art to writing an excellent abstract that demonstrates quality prose and real impact. Once your work is complete, only then should you seek to write the abstract. Pick out the key themes, theories and research conclusions and ensure that your sentences make every word count. An abstract that is convoluted or repetitious will fail to impress the reader and will offer a negative first impression for your examiner. For a Ph.D the abstract might be around 500 words and for a typical Undergraduate dissertation of 10,000 words, the average length would be approximately 250 words.

Literature Reviews

Help or guidance in the completion of your literature review can be important as there are common mistakes that need to be avoided. The aim of a literature review is not simply to show you have read around your topic beforehand, or to paraphrase the literature or the various studies. The aim is to show that you are aware of the commonalities, the disagreements and the similarities between academic contributions. This necessitates the grouping of arguments and normative views so as to weave these together in a seamless manner. You should also note where there is a vacuum in the literature as this might be useful in guiding the direction of your work, especially if you are a Doctoral student.

Methodology

Students are often unsure about research methods and my advice is to be informed by the nature of the enquiry, the ease of access to your sample and also be mindful about your own research strengths and weaknesses. A mixed methodology is generally advisable because this offers greater rigor through triangulation and far fewer researchers are dogmatic positivists or anti-positivists these days. Think about whether your question is

descriptive or explanatory as this also has an influence on the methodological approach. If those you wish to study are hard to gain access to for whatever reason, then more comparative or statistical methods might be more advisable. If you are a words person and have sound social skills, then perhaps the majority of your methodology ought to be qualitative where you undertake unstructured interviews and only use more quasi-scientific statistical approaches as something complementary. Here then Nvivo10 or a manual processing of your data using thematic analysis is more appropriate. There are plenty of free webinars that will get you started with Nvivo10 if you are unfamiliar with this qualitative software package. If you are seeking to make generalisations, carryout macro research and have excellent SPSS skills then your dominant methodological paradigm ought to be statistical.