

BOOK REVIEW

Students First: Maneuvering Through the Maze of Dissertation or Thesis Writing

A Practical Guide to Dissertation and Thesis Writing. Mark Stephan Felix and Ian Smith. Newcastle Upon Tyne, United Kingdom, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019, 201 pp. GBP 61.99, ISBN: 978-9976-59-470-6.

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Writing a good dissertation is not an easy task as there are specific standards and mandatory requirements with which the student must strictly comply. Although there are specific requirements prescribed by each university, there are additional standards required, such as the requirement of originality and the creation or expansion of new knowledge in the field. A dissertation must be undertaken and completed at the doctoral level, passing all the requirements, including the oral defense and a publication. No matter how well the student has performed in the coursework and other requirements, the degree will not be awarded until the individual student has successfully defended the dissertation and the full or part of the dissertation is published, as required by the university's regulations, as well as the standard of the community of each field. Despite thousands of students enrolled in various doctoral programs each year, the completion rate, according to the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), is only 56.6%. Many doctoral students do not complete their doctoral program as they did not succeed in their dissertation and are classified as "ADB" (All but Dissertation).

This book is an academic book and is about how to write a dissertation and thesis successfully. It could be used as a reference and guideline for students in doing their dissertation. It could also be used by students at all levels and various research stakeholder groups, such

as members of research funding organizations. It was written based on the authors' experience in teaching and conducting several research projects, including the supervision of their students' dissertation and thesis, plus being members of the dissertation proposal and final dissertation examination committees. Various problems frequently found in their previous experience in various capacities have become a major part of this book's foundation.

Although the book is about both the dissertation and thesis, this paper will be focusing on the dissertation as it would be more specifically beneficial to many doctoral students who are struggling in their dissertation writing. Unlike studying at the doctoral level, the master's students can choose a non-thesis program where no thesis is required for graduation.

The contents of this book are divided into 12 chapters. The presentation of this book is well thought out and well organized. It covers all the very important components of conducting a research project. It begins with the first chapter that provides a general and brief explanation about the research topic, problems, and some important definitions, including dissertation and thesis. A broad explanation and differences between these two terminologies were made as a basis for the beginning of the book. The second chapter describes the methods and techniques for determining the

research topic, which is a very important starting point for researchers. The chapter provides a very interesting step-by-step exercise that could help the students to decide on selecting a research topic appropriately. The third chapter emphasizes the importance of reading as a basis for a literature review for the research project. This is a very helpful chapter as it explains the importance of the student's reading and suggesting how to read follows with the thinking that is necessary to form the basis for the whole research project. The fourth chapter goes to the next important step, which is how to write an introduction chapter. This is one of the most important chapters, as the researchers are required to present the significance of the research project along with other requirements to justify whether it is worthy of the approval of the proposed project. The chapter provides tips and examples of how to write it properly. The fifth chapter provides a detailed explanation of how to write a literature review. It provides a step-by-step procedure for writing a literature review properly. The sixth chapter presents the research methodology in detail, which includes the methodology and research design for qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. The seventh chapter deals with how to present and defend the research proposal, which normally does not appear in other textbooks of a similar nature. The eighth chapter is about the fieldwork, explaining some important points for data collection, including handling logistical issues. The ninth chapter is about data analysis and the findings of the research project. It explains briefly about both the qualitative and quantitative data analysis and how to present the research findings. The 10th chapter is about the discussion of the findings of the research. Three types of implications of theoretical, policy, and practical are explained. The 11th chapter deals with the conclusion part of the research project. The highlight of this chapter is the suggestions on how to write this chapter appropriately, including the emphasis of references and citations. The last chapter is about writing the abstract of the research project. It suggests the essential contents to be included in the abstract and how to write it concisely.

The content of this book is very well planned and organized. It covers all the necessary and the most problematic parts of conducting a research project, especially by students who are considered novice researchers. The selection of the research topic is a common problem for students, and this book

provides an excellent guideline for the new researcher. The writing of a literature review is considered one of the problematic areas in writing a research report nowadays. The practice of cut-and-pasting is widespread and involves a very high risk of plagiarism. It is an undesirable practice, and this book provides a very good guideline for writing this chapter. The research design plus data collection and analysis, including the presentation and discussion parts of the research project, are also well presented. The most exceptional parts that are rarely found in other books of this type are the chapter on how to defend a research proposal and the chapter on how to write the abstract. The content of this book is reflective of its title. It is considered a real guide not only for students but also for the readers to conduct better research. For students, if they read it carefully and do all exercises provided in the book and follow each step in each chapter from the beginning through the end, it would help them succeed in completing their dissertation and thesis.

The format of this book is very well planned and designed. It could be a very good example for use in writing an academic textbook. One very clear example is the very well designed exercises in each chapter for the readers to learn step-by-step, such as the exercise on how to decide upon a topic (see Chapter 2, pp. 27–32). In addition, the exercises at the end of each chapter are very well designed, as they are designed to facilitate continuous learning from the first to the last chapters. A quick check at the end of each chapter helps the readers evaluate what they have learned in that chapter. The use of actual case studies and samples from previous experience, such as in Chapter 2 (pp. 24–25), helps the readers to learn better.

This book is a very well written book. The language used is very clear and very easy to understand. It is a very reader-friendly book. The pronoun “you” used throughout the book makes the readers feel close to the authors and helps them feel happy and ready to learn.

There are a few points that, if they are including in this book, it will help the readers gain additional knowledge and be helpful to them in doing their dissertation and thesis. Firstly, as the use of mixed methods research is in a high trend, an additional explanation of mixed-method research would be helpful. Secondly, as we are faced with various new challenges, some new research areas would be needed, and if an explanation on trends in future research areas is included in the book, it will help the readers expand

their ideas in planning their dissertation project to be able to respond to the new trends and challenges.

Although English competency is usually a requirement for doctoral students, there are a lot of doctoral programs that are provided in local languages. At the same time, English or international programs constitute a relatively small number. To expand the benefits of this book to those non-English program students and other groups of research stakeholders in non-English speaking countries, it is my opinion that this book should be translated into various local languages.