

# READING OTHER THESES AS MODELS

Reading other theses in your subject area can help you identify a range of structures and styles that are acceptable and help you develop your own thesis.

Remember, however, that this is usually only the first, or perhaps second, time that these writers have written a thesis. As novice writers, they are not all equally well-written. So what does this mean for you as a reader of other theses?

- They can show you that writing a thesis isn't beyond you. These theses were all successful, and this can give you confidence that you can do at least as well.
- You'll learn as much from a bad thesis as a good one. An effective strategy when you're reading other theses is to think how you would improve them.

**Read critically** when you read theses. Don't follow blindly. You need to tell the story of **your** research, so use other theses to look for possibilities for your own writing.

## Guiding questions to ask when reading other theses

- **Summary or abstract**
  - How long is the abstract or summary?
  - Do you get a clear sense of what the research is about from the abstract?
  - Does the abstract or summary motivate you to read (some of) the rest of the thesis?
- **Table of contents**
  - Is there a 'traditional' thesis structure (i.e., literature review, method, results, discussion, etc.) or is there a more thematic organisation?
  - If it is a traditional structure, has the lit review been combined with the introduction? Has the methods section been combined with the results? Has the results section been combined with the discussion?
  - How many chapters?
  - What are the chapters named? (e.g. 'Introduction', 'Literature review', 'Methodology', etc., or are more content-based titles used?)
  - Is a numbering system used for sections and subsections? How many levels?
- **Introduction**
  - How well does the opening paragraph set the scene?
  - Is there a brief review of current knowledge in the field?
  - Are there indications of gaps, shortcomings and problems in the research to date?
  - Specifically, how is the current research situated within previous research?
  - Is there a clear statement of the research question or problem?
  - Is there 'advanced labelling' (overview of the thesis)? Where is it located?
- **Literature review**
  - Is this in a separate chapter? If not, where is it?
  - How is the lit review structured? In themes? Moving from contextual literature to that more closely related to the current research? Other ways?
  - How is the reader reminded of the research question or problem?

- What themes are covered? e.g. Theoretical issues? Methodological issues? Results of previous studies? etc.)
- What level of critique of the literature is there?
- How does the literature review conclude? Does it show the 'gap' and how the research will fill it?
- **Methodology**
  - Is there a separate methodology chapter?
  - Is the research methodology justified? Are issues of rigour mentioned?
  - Is the research question or problem mentioned again? Where and how?
  - What level of detail is given?
  - Is the epistemology or theoretical perspective mentioned?
  - Are ethical issues discussed?
- **Results and discussion**
  - Are the results separate, or bound up with the discussion?
  - Is the research question or problem mentioned again? Where and how?
  - How are the findings explained?
  - Are tables, charts or graphs used? How and why? How does the text 'talk to' these?
  - Is there comparison of the findings with findings from the literature?
  - Are claims made? How and where are these expressed? How definite or tentative are they? Is this appropriate?
- **Conclusion and recommendations**
  - Is there a summary of the main findings?
  - Is there comparison of the findings with findings from the literature?
  - Is the research question or problem mentioned again? Where and how?
  - Are the implications and the significance of the study clearly stated?
  - Are limitations discussed?
  - Are there suggestions for future research?
  - Is there a separate chapter for recommendations?
  - How are the recommendations written? In dot-point?
  - How does the thesis end?
- **Reference list and appendices**
  - How many pages of references are there?
  - Are there appendices? What are they? How are they numbered?
- **Language issues**
  - How does the writer refer to him/herself? first person (e.g. 'I')? third person (e.g., 'the researcher')?
  - How does the thesis refer to the current study (e.g. 'the present study', 'the present research')?
  - Is there signposting throughout? (e.g. 'In this chapter ...'; 'The following chapter shows ...')
  - How long/short are the paragraphs? Are they well-developed with clear topic sentences?
  - How is sexist language avoided, e.g. Using he/she? Using the plural form, 'their' when referring to a single person? Using sentence structure to avoid the problem?

Some of these questions are adapted from Moore, T. (1997). *Compass - Handbook of the Monash Postgraduate Association*. Clayton, Vic: Monash University.