Getting to grips with postgraduate study

Student Learning Services
Libraries & Learning Services
1. Why am I completing Postgraduate studies?
2. What are my expectations of a Postgraduate education?
3. What does the University expect?

Graduate profile
Coursework Postgraduate Profile
Research Graduate Profile
Doctoral Graduate Profile

Some possible postgraduate ‘ings
Thinking! Learning! Reading! Leading! Creating!
Writing! Transforming! Networking! Participating!
Talking! Enjoying!
Challenging! Researching! Communicating!
Presenting! Contributing! Theorising! Conceptualising!
Philosophising!

Developing transferable skills!
Expanding capabilities!
Allow time to think, talk, read and write!

Take a notebook/ iPad with you to record ideas

The clock just keeps on ticking!

On-line resources:

- **Assignment/ dissertation time calculator**
- **Critical thinking, reading & writing**
- **Reflective practice & writing**

Sample Gantt chart for project management
Participation & presentations are a **BIG** part of postgraduate & work life!

- Lectures are more discussion based – you might have to lead the discussion (in seminars)

- You will present your research (proposal) to colleagues & academics

- You may start giving presentations at conferences
Presentation tips

✓ Prepare – know the material:
  • Know content, process, context
✓ Practise
✓ It’s not all about the PowerPoint! (Death by PowerPoint)
✓ Know your audience
✓ What is your take-home message?
✓ Encourage constructive feedback
✓ Have a colleague take notes or record

What will academics often question you about?
? What the topic is – focused argument / question
? Why the knowledge is important
? How it fits with surrounding knowledge – theories, concepts, models, … & practices
? How it is researched – content, process, context
? So what? – contribution to knowledge, practical application
Prepare for these!
Mission impossible?

Overwhelmed with too much information?

Starring at a blank page?

Don’t know where to start with writing or researching?

Mission possible!

✓ Enrol in a Library & Learning Services workshop
✓ Check out the ‘Study skills’ resources
✓ Get focused
✓ Seek advice from your subject librarian
Reading smarter

• You will need to read a lot
  – a variety of books, journal articles, reports etc.
• You won’t find the ‘right’ answer from any one reading.
• Reading academic literature can be slow.
• But you don’t have to read everything:
  – SD4 (Survey to Decide: Skip, Skim, Scan, Read)
Get real with reading!

• Read from general to specific – Survey & question

• Know your purpose/focus
  – Develop questions & sub-questions to answer

• If you can concentrate on an academic text for 20 - 30 minutes, read in 30 min blocks:
  ✓ 5 min preview/survey first with pen in hand:
    – Abstract, intro, conclusion, headings, tables, figures
  ✓ 20 min close read
  ✓ 5 min recall
Suggestions for reading effectively

- Overview literature – quick survey
- Topic – research question
- My argument
- Focus – sub-questions
- Read literature to answer questions
- Manage literature – use RefWorks or EndNote
- Read actively – underline, highlight, write key words in margin, seek answers to questions ...
- Read critically – think, raise questions, read between the lines, look for gaps...
- Record key points - come up with own examples, write your own response, construct a mind map, draw up a summary table, link the various readings together
Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension

Sample Size and Cost Analysis for Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension Drug Trials Using Various Imaging Modalities to Assess Right Ventricular Size and Function

Addetia et al. (2014)

Source: Addetia et al. (2014)

Excessive highlighting is not effective reading!
Take notes by sub-question related to your purpose

Highlight according to sub-question

What is....?

How does....?

What if...?

Use the sub-questions as headings in your draft

Add a table if that aids summary and critique

### What is....?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Page no.</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Critique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>Broadest definition</td>
<td>Will be a good broad definition for introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Definition from 1980s</td>
<td>Too dated to apply to current context. Contradicts with...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example of using others’ ideas ...

1. In relation to staff workloads and their ability to prioritise urgent cases, the greatest numbers of patients arriving at New Zealand hospital EDs is on Fridays and Saturdays (Brown, 2014)....

2. Variations in the number of patients arriving at New Zealand hospital EDs, and consequently staff workload and prioritisation of urgent cases, depends on the day of the week, and other secondary factors such as major sports or entertainment events (Brown, 2014)...

3. Although Brown's (2014) findings might assist managers to predict the number of patient arrivals at ED, she neglects to provide any data on lengths of stay and their consequential impact on workload and prioritisation of urgent cases...

Example of synthesising many sources of ideas

Williamson (2002) argues that students should be taught academic writing skills by their course lecturers. However, Jason (2006) takes a different approach by suggesting that they should be taught by tutors independent of the department or faculty. More recently, a new position about teaching academic writing skills has emerged. Taylor (2010) found in his study of 500 postgraduate students that the most effective ways of learning to write well is through individual consultation and attending study skills workshops. This suggests that ...
If you don’t understand a theory or concept ...

- Google it
- Find the original source of an idea
- Consult introductory text books or a glossary/subject dictionary
- Read review articles on your topic
- Email the author for clarification, further information, or to locate his/her other works

On-line resources:

- Effective academic reading
- Increasing your reading speed
- Note-taking
Consider each reading in the broader topic context What does it add? How does it compare? Where are the gaps? Perhaps create a reading/literature map or table

Example table for summarising literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study A</th>
<th>Study B</th>
<th>Study C</th>
<th>This study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aim</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Right how you write!

Learn what it means to write well in your field

✓ Find models of good writing
✓ Put time into rewriting
✓ Build a critical argument
THE ESSAY & REPORT WRITING PROCESS: A MODEL

**CHOOSE & ANALYSE THE QUESTION**
- Consider level of interest, availability of resources, usefulness for exam.
- Check key words which define the topic.
- Ask questions to direct research.
- Use questions to make a rough plan.

**RESEARCH, READ AND MAKE NOTES**
- Check out what's in the library and/or departmental libraries.
- Skim read to locate main ideas.
- Find answers to questions.
- Take brief notes.

**MAKE PLAN OF ATTACK**
- Brainstorm main ideas for approaching essay.
- Order ideas.
- Check that your plan addresses the question.
- Try using flow diagrams or mindmaps.

**FIRST DRAFT**
- Put your main ideas into sentences and paragraphs.
- Write it - don't worry about the reader yet.
- Remember, you can start writing anywhere.

**REVISE & EDIT**
- Refer back to your question - are you on target?
- Check order of ideas.
- Ask someone to read it - is it clear, does it make sense?
- Check style, tone, vocabulary.
- Is it within the word limit?

**FINAL DRAFT**
- Check for surface level requirements.
- Legibility
- Spelling
- Grammar
- Punctuation
- References
- Does it conform to your department's specific requirements?

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**TIME**

varies hugely from individual to individual

More time ➔ there is a chance for ideas to incubate; there's time to talk about your ideas...
Less time ➔ more difficult to get references/materials. First draft may be your only draft!

Source: Student Learning Services, University of Auckland
# Model for Masters Research and Writing Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 - 2 months</th>
<th>3 - 4 months</th>
<th>5 - 7 months</th>
<th>8 - 10 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selecting topic</td>
<td>Reading focussed around question</td>
<td>Mid-year process milestone: progress report to Department’s Postgraduate Committee</td>
<td>Intensive writing phase:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading around the area, theory and methodology</td>
<td>Drafting literature review</td>
<td>Analysing data</td>
<td>Drafting &amp; revising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formulating a question</td>
<td>Reading for and planning method</td>
<td>Drafting method and discussion sections</td>
<td>Editing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing supervision</td>
<td>Planning structure</td>
<td>Reviewing structure</td>
<td>Proofing and production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics approval</td>
<td>Collecting data</td>
<td>Collecting data</td>
<td>Hand in thesis mid-December</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## IT TAKES TIME

## WRITING THROUGH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keeping a journal</th>
<th>Early drafting</th>
<th>Intensive writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing around a point, theory, etc</td>
<td>Getting written feedback from supervisor</td>
<td>Continuing feedback from supervisor and peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing in response to reading the literature</td>
<td>Getting oral feedback from supervisor and peers</td>
<td>Designing layout</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>excitement</th>
<th>boredom</th>
<th>determination</th>
<th>insight</th>
<th>despair</th>
<th>relief</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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Approved by the Board of Graduate Studies September 2010  Last updated 22.09.2010
Plan writing quantitatively

- How many words?
- How many subsections?
- Average paragraph is 150 – 200 words
- One to two paragraphs for introduction
- One paragraph for conclusion
- Map topic quantitatively: what matters most?
Construct your argument (thesis statement).

Draft a working abstract using the following prompts:

- What is your dissertation research about?
- What question is it attempting to answer?
- What gap in our current knowledge does it fill?
- Why are you doing the research?
- How are you doing the research?
- What are you expecting to discover or have already discovered?
- What do you think the significance of your research is going to be?

Ensure each element (e.g. section / chapter) of your dissertation builds / develops the argument.
Argument construction: An example

Broad topic: Postgraduate health sciences research practices in NZ

Focussed topic: Distinctive postgraduate health sciences supervision practices in NZ since 1993

Focussed argument: Postgraduate health sciences pedagogy in NZ since 2000 has been characterised by distinctive practices, which have capacity-capability potentialities

Ask yourself: What is my argument?
Tips for getting started with writing

- Write drafts for yourself
- Let go of perfectionism
- Write the easy bits first
- Make your dissertation a priority
- Write for 10-15 minutes per day
- Plan small actions to start the day
- Set up for each work day
- Manage your work time & environment

- Minimise distractions
- Be accountable (set goals)
- Read other dissertations
- Avoid procrastination
- Push through
- Seek support

I am in the driving seat!
Make your writing happen!

- Write it in a nutshell (overview)
- Get focussed: know your topic and argument
- Write quick and dirty—fix it up later
  - Free write and brainstorm
  - Try low register—first person pronouns, low tone—generate material
  - Write at the best time of day
- Plan the structure
Make your writing happen!

✓ Write early & write something each day
✓ Begin with an easy/interesting section
✓ Model your writing on the structure/style of other writing
✓ Prepare presentations
✓ Set specific writing goals & deadlines

✓ At the end of each session, reflect on your progress & set a goal for next time

✓ Use the writing process to clarify your thinking

✓ Focus initially on getting your ideas down

✓ Be prepared to re-write, re-write, and re-write ...

✓ Separate drafting time from revising/ editing times
✓ Use options in MS Word such as outline view, navigation pane, comment & highlight

✓ Print a hard copy to read over

✓ Use tables & figures where appropriate

✓ Get regular feedback on your writing

✓ Form a writing support group

✓ Consult others about their writing habits
✓ Take the **writer’s diet test** to find out if your writing is flabby or fit.

✓ Find useful **academic phrases**.

✓ Get advice on **dissertation/thesis writing**.
Example online guides

Report writing

Designing academic posters
Welcome to the Doctoral Skills Programme (DSP) Hub

From this site doctoral candidates can find information about the University of Auckland Doctoral Skills Programme (DSP) consisting of a compulsory Induction Day and different workshop strands.

Mapping your masters research

This programme is designed for postgraduate students starting a thesis or research portfolio to help you make a positive start to your research careers. It combines directed online learning with an optional face-to-face workshop facilitated by learning advisors who understand the challenges of completing a research masters.

At the end of the programme you will understand what is involved in completing a research project and know what training and learning resources are available during your studies. The 'Mapping your masters research' programme will complement induction sessions offered by your faculty, school or department.

1. Find an example thesis
2. Assess and develop your research skills
3. Create a project plan

Attend a workshop [Optional]

Guide to masters research
Postgrad study is not a spectator sport!

- Join professional organisations
- Attend School seminars
- Attend conferences
- Join Study groups (Reading; Writing; Theory, Methodology...)
- Teach
- Publish
- Join PGSA
- Use technology wisely
- Identify your skills/capabilities

Why?

- Mentorship
- Learning/development
- Transferable skills
- Sense of belonging
- Social interaction
- Support
- Feedback
- Referees
- Networking
- Disciplinary context/knowledge
Thank you for your time

All the best with your postgraduate study at

the University of Auckland!

😊