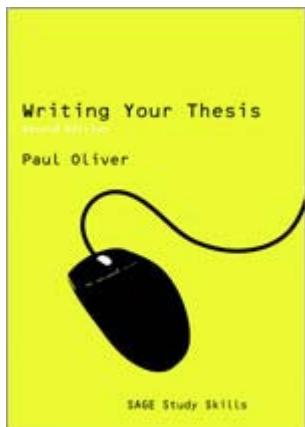


Book Review



Writing Your Thesis

by Paul Oliver

London: Sage Publications (2004).

Paperback £18.99 (ISBN 9781412946896)

Hardcover £60.00 (ISBN 9781412946889)

Review by **Birendra Singh**

This is, in my view, one of the best books on the art of thesis writing on the market. It packs in, in a mere 200 pages, a mine of nitty-gritty advice on how to write a good thesis. 'The characteristics of a well-written thesis', summarised on page 13 in no more than five bullet points, will enable a busy doctoral student to find the gems of crafting a thesis without the need to dig deep into the book. The five bullet points are:

- A clear title and abstract which accurately and succinctly reflect the nature of the research study.
- A structure and format which help the reader to absorb the subject matter.
- An intellectual coherence which starts with precise aims, from which follow the research design, and a clear conclusion.
- Accuracy in grammar and punctuation.
- Consistency in referencing, presentation and the use of terms.

The two part structure of the book is very helpful. Part 1, 'The process of academic writing' introduces the reader to the purposes of writing by posing an enticing question: 'Why do you want to write a research thesis?' There are six chapters in this first part, with none more than 20 pages. A helpful feature of each chapter is a useful summary of the key points.

The first chapter, 'The research thesis' includes a lucid description of the differences between a Masters, a D.Ed. or an Ed.D., and a PhD thesis. It discusses the variety of theses in a matter of fact style and gives a valuable summary towards the end of the chapter of the 'characteristics of a well-written thesis'. The second chapter, 'the intellectual content of the thesis', deals skilfully with the notion of an original contribution to knowledge. Chapter three, 'organising your work', contains good, practical advice on planning, writing strategies, time management etc for both full and part time students. The 4th chapter on the role of the supervisor and the 6th chapter on the layout of the thesis are very useful chapters, but chapter 5 on 'grammar, punctuation and conventions of academic writing' is an excellent feature of this book. It gives detailed advice on accuracy of writing, referencing, abbreviations, italicising, capitalization and the use of hyphen, dashes, numerals and the apostrophe. This is a very useful chapter for all students writing their thesis, but is particularly helpful to students for whom English is not their native language.

Part 2 of the book contains eight chapters, none of which are more than 15 pages long, inviting and encouraging the reader to read the whole chapter without stopping. The chapters are expertly sequenced guiding the readers through the preliminary pages of a thesis (abstract, introduction) to the literature review, methodology, data presentation, data analysis and concluding chapters. It includes a valuable chapter on 'Completing the thesis' reminding students that a well-written thesis is not finished till the process is completed through producing the first draft, amending the first draft, checking for coherence and consistency,

proofreading, checks to be made by the supervisor and the student, the check before temporary binding and the final check before binding.

This generation of research students is very well served by an increasing number of books on the theme of academic and thesis writing. For example, 'How to write a thesis' (Murray, 2002), 'Authoring a Ph.D' (Patrick Dunleavy, 2003) easily come to mind. This book has a student-friendly style and continues the zeal of the other authors in providing the best possible guidance to research students.

I recommend this book to all research students at any stage of their thesis writing. For the student at the beginning of the process it provides a readable, reassuring and authentic guide to the structure of a thesis. For students in the later stages of their writing it should provide a reliable companion to completing the thesis.

References:

Dunleavy, P. (2003) *Authoring a Ph.D.: How to plan, draft and finish a doctoral thesis or dissertation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Murray, R. (2002) *How to write a Thesis*. Buckingham: Open University Press.