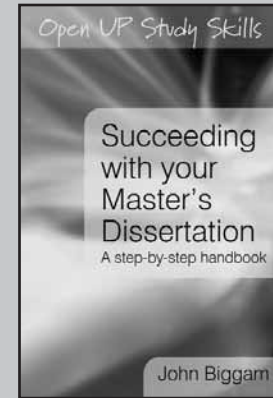


Review

Succeeding with your Master's Dissertation A step-by-step handbook

Title:	Succeeding with your Master's Dissertation: A step-by-step handbook
Author/Editor:	John Biggam
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This handbook does exactly what it says on the cover. It provides the step-by-step guidance needed by students to plan the stages of their research, from establishing a research brief or proposal, to the end goal of a focussed dissertation. Its publication is timely in that it will meet the needs of the increasing numbers of trainee teachers and practising teacher on Master's courses and engaged in action research. Supervisors will be able to relax, assured that their students will have a secure text to guide them through, at least, the initial lack of confidence. This handbook is written in a style which is inviting and accessible. It is equally applicable, other than Master's level, to undergraduates and experienced researchers.

One purchaser, from a well-known internet book supplier, writes the following feedback:

"I cannot tell you how pleased (and relieved) I am to have found a book like this."..... "Until I found this book, I knew what I wanted to achieve and was progressing with it. However, I lacked confidence in my approach and worried over certain areas of my work."..... " Moreover, I was more than half-way through writing up my study when I came across this book, and it's bolstered my confidence no end."

I fully concur, from knowing similar difficulties facing my own post-graduate students. On being sent the handbook for review, I skip read it from cover-to-cover with ease and interest, and was impressed by how easily the text flows from research issues using case studies highlighting good and bad practice to applying the information.

In the introduction and in each chapter, John Biggam, outlines the essential skills for each stage of the enquiry leading to the eventual dissertation: from planning a

proposal, to clarifying research objectives, to conducting a literature review, to focus on writing the dissertation. Throughout the text there is guidance on good practice and there are highlight boxes titled, 'a common mistake by students'. Summaries of key points leaves readers clear of what has been covered and how this may apply to their own research.

After the introduction, the text is split into a further nine chapters. Counting the introduction as chapter 1, these are:

- 2 Preparing for your dissertation
- 3 The dissertation Introduction
- 4 The Literature review
- 5 Research methods
- 6 Writing up your findings
- 7 Concluding your dissertation
- 8 Finally: writing the abstract
- 9 Practical issues
- 10 Summary of good practice to adopt and bad practice to avoid

In the research methods chapter there are concise descriptions of approaches to research strategies, covering experimental, historical and action research. This then leads to the place of 'grounded theory', its advantages and disadvantages for implementing a research project. The chapter then moves onto justifying a research strategy and to applying appropriate research methodology. The distinction between strategy and methodology is explicit, and should help to avoid the confusion often encountered by new researchers. Concepts such as validity, reliability and sufficiency of methods and collected data are adequately explored, but, intentionally, not to the depth of replacing other sources. Other chapters follow similar lines

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of discussion in informing the reader of key issues whilst, at the same time, leading to more authoritative sources.

The handbook's appendices contain very useful short exemplars, which compliment the chapters. These are:

- Sample Introduction
- Sample chapter outline
- Sample Literature Review Introduction and Conclusion
- Sample Research Methods
- Sample Conclusion
- Sample Completed Marking Sheet
- List of useful verbs and research objective keywords

The appendices containing the 'sample introduction' and 'sample chapter outline' will almost certainly help students to overcome the blank page syndrome which they face when starting a new writing task. I recommend reading these appendices before reading the rest of the handbook.

The references section of the handbook, as a lead to other texts, will provide a very good start point for new researchers to 'read around' their research.

Overall, the structure of the handbook, whilst offering a prescribed approach, does allow students to approach their dissertation individualistically. This book is a primer, intended to lead the student on to more detailed material to help with their research enquiry. I wholeheartedly recommend this book, to students and to their supervisors, without any reservations whatsoever.