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Book Review: How to Write a Thesis (4th Edition)

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BOOK REVIEW

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How to Write a Thesis

Edition: Fourth Edition

Author: Rowena Murray

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This book, entitled “*How to Write a Thesis*”, provides principles, writing techniques, and general guidance for writing a thesis. Each chapter of the book consists of a chapter outline, structured at the beginning of the chapter, and a summary provided at the end. The chapter outline is a helpful checklist and the summary is learning outcome. In this new edition, apart from thesis writing techniques, the author also added new features and writing activities such as discussions and workshops. The book comprises eleven chapters which are clustered under six themes following the conventional process of thesis writing.

Prior to the introduction of the thesis writing process, Chapter 1, entitled *How to Write 1,000 Words an Hour*, introduces benefits of using this book and explains principles of academic

writing, theories, assumptions, and practice used in the book. Although the title of the chapter sounds more emphasized on quantity of what a person should try writing in an hour, quality of academic writing is also pinpointed through principles and strategies of academic writing. In this chapter it was also stated that the features of the book are relevant to all disciplines; however, in my view, it seems too difficult to conclude that the book is a panacea in practice. If the book could have been separately written in a series of different disciplines, it would be more responsive to those direct demands of the varied readers whose works are discipline-specific. For instance, *Writing an Applied Linguistics Thesis or Dissertation of Bitchener* (2010) is a good model of a discipline-specific book.

Starting with the introduction of thesis writing process, the second theme of the book covers three chapters. Firstly, Chapter 2, entitled *Thinking about Writing a Thesis*, was designed to stimulate readers' ideas about what should be considered when writing a thesis and how a thesis is assessed. Next, Chapter 3, entitled *Starting to Write*, gives background information that readers need to know when writing a thesis. The chapter also suggests strategies such as free-writing and generative writing for readers to start their thesis writing. I found these techniques could help to prevent a thesis writer from procrastination particularly when starting to write a thesis. Then, Chapter 4, entitled *Seeking Structure*, suggests readers how to construct a thesis argument. This chapter also explains what a literature review is in provision of useful lists of questions to help the readers be able to be cautious about key elements in the literature review. In this chapter, the issue of 'plagiarism' is also introduced to raise awareness of academic integrity. Nonetheless, there has been no clear-cut yet about to what extent plagiarism practice is considered unacceptable, particularly when considering different disciplinary studies of language learners at the high education level (Puengpipattrakul, 2016). It could probably better help broaden the readers' understanding and awareness of plagiarism if

the following issues were added in the book. For instance, it would be more interesting to address the issue that plagiarism in some cultures are acceptable (Nelms, 2015; Sutherland-Smith, 2008). The next issue is to regard plagiarism in different disciplinary studies which provide different structures for academic knowledge (Bernstein, 1999). Although I found Paltridge & Starfield's (2007) book provides details for inclusion of these issues—plagiarism influenced by students' different cultural background and academic disciplines, the scope of their book focuses rather on the particular aspects of how to write each chapter of a thesis and dissertation. This book "*How to Write a Thesis*", on the hand, provides readers several interesting strategies and techniques to survive on thesis writing.

The next three chapters (from 5 to 7) fall into the third theme focusing on the middle stage of thesis writing. Chapter 5, entitled *The First Milestone*, encourages readers to transfer their role from being writers to readers of a thesis. In doing so, thesis writers can monitor and assess their work. Suggested writing strategies in the chapter include '*writing your first progress report*', '*writing for publication*', '*moving from notes to draft chapters*', and '*writer's groups and structured writing retreats*'. Chapter 6, entitled *Becoming a Serial Writer*, promotes how to manage writing progress and form the writing habit by using a structured approach to produce a text for the thesis and an incremental approach to the writing process. Suggested writing strategies are writing '*study buddy*' and writing in '*binges*' and '*snacks*'. Next, Chapter 7, entitled *Constructing Closure*, requires the use of principle of selection to argue for or argue against other points of view. This is as a halfway point for the thesis writing process. In this chapter, what I found useful and practical to thesis writers are three levels of thesis outlining (Figure 7.2) which assist them with the number of word counts for the well-planned outlining of thesis chapters. Additionally, the outlining can prevent the writers from frustration with the final closure of the thesis. In other words, it eases the writers' decision-making for the closure of each

chapter. Suggested writing strategies are Brown's 8 questions (for drafting abstracts), creating a design for thesis writing, and writing a thesis conclusion. Instructions for writing a 750-word thesis summary are added as the new feature of this chapter of this edition.

Chapter 8, entitled *Fear and Loathing: Revising*, emphasises on revising processes as an editor after the completion of thesis writing. At this phase, the questions of quality of thesis are addressed on how the argument of the thesis can be strengthened at the sentence and paragraph levels and whether the introductions and conclusions perform their 'signaling' function effectively. Suggested writing strategies are forecasting, signaling, and signposting. This chapter reflects one of the book principles: "Quality comes through revision" (p. 17). Consequently, it would be worthwhile utilising the suggested strategies in the chapter to monitor the quality of a thesis.

Being specifically provided to the group of full-time students rather than that of part-time ones, Chapter 9, entitled *It Is Never Too Late to Start*, suggests a fast-track guideline on the entire thesis writing process with useful hints for those who begin the last phase of the thesis writing process. In this chapter, it shows some limited coverage for those full-time postgraduate programs. Thus, those who are studying in the part-time and/or distance learning programs would find this chapter too overloaded since their programs normally takes longer studying time, compared with the full-time ones.

The last theme before thesis submission covers two last chapters of the book, namely chapter 10 and 11. Chapter 10 is entitled *The Last 385 Yards*. It includes techniques of how to make a thesis good such as 'Peer support', 'Style tips', 'Enough is enough', and many more. A PhD 'flight plan' for final checks is added as a new feature in this chapter of this edition. In the last chapter of the book, Chapter 11, entitled *After the Thesis*

Examination: More Writing?, issues of a viva are raised and the ways for preparing the final revision to pass the viva are also provided. The last chapter sounds to be based more on a British spoken examination, ‘a viva voce’, for a thesis defense. On the one hand, those who pursue their postgraduate studies and/or teach postgraduate students in the United Kingdom and/or other contexts in which a viva is applied for academic qualification will find this book relevant and helpful. On the other hand, those scholars and/or students in other English-speaking contexts like Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and so forth may find this book chapter irrelevant to the formalities of their thesis examinations in the end.

Overall, the book contains valuable content which is also as straightforward as its title although there are some ideas sharing and suggested issues discussed earlier in this book review. With the author’s shared experience and press credentials from several academic writing publications, I found that this book is worth reading for English language teaching and learning. It completely provides effective techniques covering the whole process from prewriting to preparing for thesis examination. The book is very helpful to the students who are in their final-year undergraduate studies in the ESL setting and who are in their postgraduate studies in both ESL and EFL contexts. Also, the book is a very useful source of information for both native and non-native English speaking scholars, who first-time supervise and/or have supervised ESL and EFL postgraduate students.

The Reviewer

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