

MACQUARIE  
UNIVERSITY



**Faculty of Human Sciences**

**Department of Linguistics**

***Writing Your Dissertation:  
A Guide***

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# Preface

This guide has been produced in response to the need to provide information and guidance to the growing number of students taking the Macquarie University Postgraduate Certificate in Linguistic Research, or electing to complete a dissertation in partial fulfilment of the Master of Applied Linguistics.

For some distance learning students, especially those living or working in remote areas of Australia or overseas, it may be more difficult to obtain access to the information and support they need than it is for students on campus.

This guide provides two kinds of support:

- guidance on some aspects of conducting your research project and turning your findings into a piece of written work of suitable quality to submit for your masters degree or postgraduate certificate
- advice on accessing information and support in the course of your research.

This guide does not duplicate information on research that is covered in LING905, the research methods unit within the Master of Applied Linguistics or the Postgraduate Certificate in Linguistic Research. Some of the information in this guide is specific to Macquarie University and to the postgraduate program in Applied Linguistics. However, much of the guide will also be of assistance to undergraduate and postgraduate students conducting research projects in linguistics/social sciences/humanities as part of course work degrees at other universities.

You should read this guide in conjunction with relevant university regulations to ensure that you have the most up-to-date information on specific requirements of your degree or certificate.

Some sections of the guide have been written chiefly to address the needs of students whose first language is not English. However, much of the guidance offered in these sections on stylistic and other conventions will also be useful for students who are native speakers of English.

Conducting academic research is not an easy process; inevitably, there are ups and downs and moments when it is difficult to decide on the next step. However, research does not have to be a painful process. One of the best ways to make your research enjoyable is to begin by defining your topic and planning carefully. This guide offers some advice on doing this as well as on accessing much of the information that you will need.

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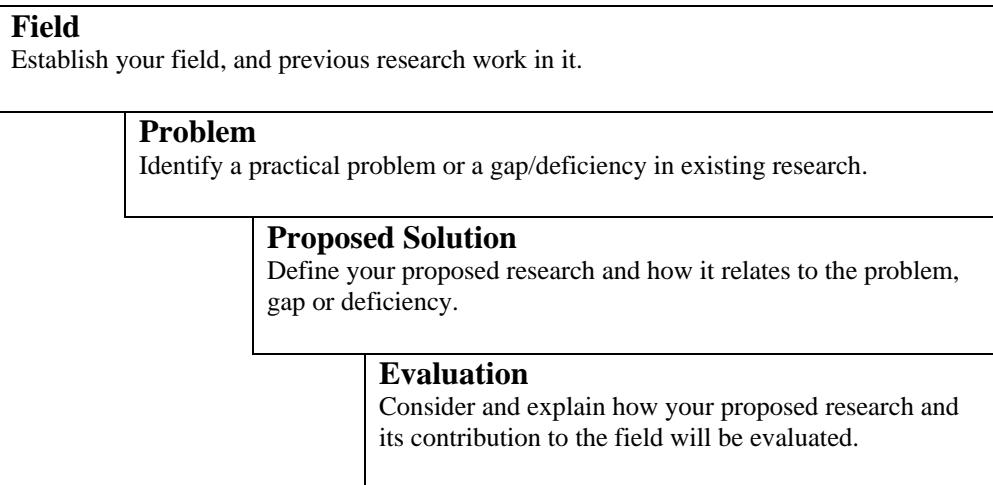
# 1 Planning for Your Dissertation

## ***DEFINING YOUR RESEARCH TOPIC***

The range of possible topics for your dissertation is limited only by your imagination and by what has already been researched exhaustively. Research projects in Linguistics at Macquarie, for example, have dealt with areas as diverse as cross-cultural communication, computer-assisted language learning, genre studies, workplace literacy, bilingualism and translation. It is likely, however, that the best topic for you will be one which relates closely to your personal or professional linguistic interests. This is for at least three reasons.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, you will probably find you are motivated to investigate your chosen topic, pursuing your research with interest and completing a quality dissertation. If, for example, you are an English language teacher and you regularly teach students of a particular first language background or age group, it is likely that researching an aspect of English language acquisition by such students will be both interesting and helpful to you in your work.

Secondly, you probably already know a lot about this topic and can bring this knowledge to bear. This will help you as you define your research area and formulate your research question. A useful way to go about developing a research question is to examine an area where you have observed a ‘problem’ on which linguistics research is likely to be able to throw some light. Your identification of this problem might come from your reading in the area, from your professional experience, from personal observation, or from any combination of these. For example, your experience of teaching students of English whose first language is Chinese may have given you a valuable intuitive sense of the important issues that are involved. This could help you to isolate a specific focus for your research, such as the development of a particular grammatical structure or discourse strategy by students in this group.



Thirdly, you may find that researching an area related to your work or personal interests can help you to identify and gain access to the data you need to collect. For example, if your research involves analysis of classroom interaction between students or between teacher and students, you may well be able to record and transcribe interaction in your own classroom or another classroom at your workplace. This can be of great logistical help, especially for students studying by distance learning and for others who are working full-time and studying part-time.

Many postgraduate students of Applied Linguistics choose to undertake research and write their dissertation on a topic closely related to one of the compulsory or optional units in the degree coursework program. In such cases, the convenor of the relevant unit or another presenter on that unit may well be a potential supervisor. It may also be useful to discuss your preliminary ideas informally with the presenter(s) of that unit. This may help you to decide on your precise area of research and topic. It is worth noting here that many students base their research proposal on the one submitted for assessment in LING905 *Research Methods in Language Study*.

Distance students can direct general enquiries of this kind to the convenor of the relevant unit by telephone, fax, mail or email. If you need help in making contact with potential supervisors to discuss your preliminary research ideas, contact the Co-ordinator, Postgraduate Coursework Programs (see contact details in Appendix 3).

However, before we can assign you a dissertation supervisor, you need to write a research proposal. This should outline your research question(s), a brief justification and rationale for conducting the proposed research, your proposed research methodology, and projected outcomes (see below). This research proposal should normally accompany your application for admission to LING934/935.

## **YOU AND YOUR SUPERVISOR**

If you haven't already personally arranged for a supervisor, you need to formally request for the appointment of a supervisor. This request, together with your research proposal, should also be addressed to the Co-ordinator, Postgraduate Coursework Programs. You may suggest a member of the academic staff whom you believe would be appropriate to supervise your project, although demand in some areas may make it impossible to meet such requests.

Once a supervisor has been appointed, you should follow a series of stages in the supervision process as you proceed from refining your proposed research to the presentation of your finished dissertation. It is important that you take responsibility for maintaining the momentum throughout your candidature, and that you are well prepared for your consultation with your supervisor at each stage.

**Please also note that your supervisor is likely to be overseeing a number of postgraduate student dissertations, including doctoral students, at any one time. There is also a constant stream of new students starting dissertations every semester who will need supervisors. This not only impacts on academics' ability to take on new students and their workloads. To ensure every research student receives a fair and equal amount of supervision, you will only be able to receive supervision for three semesters. This does not mean you cannot enrol for a fourth semester, it merely means supervision will not be available after the third semester.**

Your supervisor's role is to guide you through the stages in your research only, **not to do the research, the writing or the editing for you**. We strongly advise that you map out, from the start, a schedule of meetings or consultations with your supervisor. This will provide you with a series of deadlines to work to and goals to achieve, and will make clear the expectations that you and your supervisor have of one another. For instance, you should negotiate with your supervisor pre-determined deadlines for:

- a finalised research question/proposal
- a research methodology
- a completed ethics application (if needed)
- a completed draft literature review
- a completed data collection phase
- a completed first draft
- final submission.

Most students completing a dissertation meet with their supervisors at least four to five times to do this (see the section below, 'Stages in the supervision process').

Distance learning students, on the other hand, may never meet their dissertation supervisor face-to-face and, therefore, need to establish an alternative pattern of communication. Options include:

**Telephone:** You can telephone your supervisor at the Department of Linguistics, or

**Fax:** You can fax your supervisor on +61 2 9850 9352. Be sure to indicate clearly your fax number, including the area code (and country code if you are overseas) for response.

**Email:** All members of academic staff at Macquarie have access to email. To find out an individual supervisor's email address, contact the Linguistics Postgraduate Office (see contact details on back page). Alternatively, you can send your email message for any member of Linguistics staff to [lingdl@ling.mq.edu.au](mailto:lingdl@ling.mq.edu.au)

Many universities have a Code of Supervisory Practice for the reference of research students and their supervisors. Macquarie University's *Handbook for Postgraduate Research Candidates* covers arrangements between candidates and supervisors and such matters as intellectual property, research ethics and publications arising from students' research projects.

Some relevant documents and their links are:

- *Code of Higher Research Practice*

[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/students/current\\_students/documents/Code\\_of\\_Supervisory\\_Practice\\_070104.pdf](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/students/current_students/documents/Code_of_Supervisory_Practice_070104.pdf)

and

- *HDR Guide for Supervisors & Candidates*

[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/students/current\\_students/hdrguide](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/students/current_students/hdrguide)

Sections of these resources may be useful to you, although much of it relates to students undertaking Higher Research Degrees (MPhil or PhD).

The specific supervision stages to be followed by dissertation candidates at Macquarie are set out in the following section.

## **STAGES IN THE DISSERTATION SUPERVISION PROCESS**

Students are expected to follow a four to five-stage supervisory process as they conduct their research and complete their dissertation. At each stage there will typically be a meeting or consultation. For on-campus students this will usually take place in person, although on-campus and distance learning students alike may prefer or need to communicate with their supervisor by telephone, fax, or email. As part of planning for your research and dissertation, you should plan for your consultations with your supervisor and negotiate with him or her at the outset how your communication will take place. Suggested stages for dissertation supervision are:

### **Consultation 1: Refinement and finalising of research question(s)**

In this first consultation with your supervisor, you should aim to discuss and refine your question(s), agree on the type of data you will need to gather, the appropriate data collection methods for your project, the appropriate methods of analysis of the data.

**You should also discuss at this meeting any ethical considerations associated with your research. Since much research in linguistics involves human participants, it is likely that you will need to apply to the Macquarie University Ethics Committee to obtain ethics approval for your project (for further details see the section, *Research ethics*, in Chapter 2). This is very important and you must do it at a very early stage since your methodology will, in part, be determined by ethical and moral issues.**

## **Consultation 2: Your data**

In your second consultation, you should examine and discuss the data you have collected. You should send a copy of your data to your supervisor ahead of time to give him or her a chance to review them before your consultation.

The main aim of this consultation is to review your data and to once again consider the most appropriate techniques you will use to analyse them.

If you have already begun to analyse your data, you should discuss this analysis, too, and any issues or problems that are emerging.

## **Consultation 3: Analysis and interpretation of your data**

The purpose of your third consultation should be to discuss:

- the analysis of your data
- your findings
- how you will interpret your findings
- how you will write up your findings in your dissertation
- what your findings mean.

Before this consultation you should send your supervisor a copy of your analysis and findings.

Depending on the type of data you are working with, there may be considerable variation in the analysis techniques that are appropriate. It is important to determine the most appropriate approach before you begin to write up your research.

## **Consultation 4: Review of first draft**

When you have written the first draft of the whole dissertation you will be ready for your fourth consultation with your supervisor. Send your supervisor a copy well ahead of time to allow adequate time for him or her to read it before your consultation.

At this stage you should receive comments and suggestions from your supervisor on refining and finalising your dissertation. These should focus on the content and on the approach to its presentation, rather than on matters of style and accuracy. **Your supervisor is not an editor or proof reader.** It is your responsibility to make sure that your text is written in clear, accurate English and is as free as possible from typographic errors.

### **Consultation 5: (Optional)**

If your supervisor's suggestions involve only minor changes to your draft, you may be able to make these after your fourth consultation and finalise your dissertation ready for submission.

If, however, more substantial changes are required, you may need to submit a revised draft and have a fifth consultation, which will be broadly similar to the previous one.

#### §

The entire process outlined above is likely to span at least several months. Nearly all students spread their research and the writing of their dissertation over two semesters, even in coursework masters degrees. If you do not complete on time, you will find that you have to re-enrol for another semester.

The onus is on you, the student, to initiate contact with your supervisor at each stage and to ensure that the necessary drafts are submitted and the necessary meetings held. You should ensure that agreed data, drafts and any other materials reach your supervisor in time for him or her to read them before the relevant meeting. This is essential if you are to derive the maximum benefit from your supervisor's guidance and input.

**Remember that you will only have access to supervision for a maximum of three semesters!**

If at any time during your research you have problems associated with your supervisor, such as communication difficulties of any kind, you should contact the Co-ordinator, Postgraduate Coursework Programs for assistance (see Appendix 3 for contact details).

Chapter 8, *Assessment of your Dissertation*, contains an assessment rubric. This rubric is partially designed to help you with the preparation, design and writing of your dissertation. We advise you to discuss this rubric with your supervisor throughout the preparation of your dissertation.

## **YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

Your research proposal should clearly identify the scope and objectives of your proposed research. It should be *at least* five to ten pages in length, and should be written in a concise but formal academic style, similar to that which you will use for the dissertation itself.

Typically, a research proposal will contain short statements on:

- the context for your research (including information on previous research in the area or on other sources which have motivated you to select this area)
- the significance of the research
- the focus of your proposed study, and a brief explanation of it
- operational definitions of terms and concepts which are crucial to your study
- how the study relates to, and could contribute to, existing literature and/or current research in the area. (You will usually need to refer to some key works in the relevant literature to illustrate this effectively)
- your proposed methodology for the study, including details of your proposed research orientation and approach to the collection, analysis and interpretation of data
- any ethical issues which you expect to arise in conducting the study (see the section in *Research Ethics* for more details)
- anticipated outcomes of your study
- anticipated problems associated with your proposed research and how you intend to overcome them
- a select reference list of the key references found through an initial literature search – both those relating to your topic and those relating to the methodology you propose to adopt.

A carefully prepared outline will be a valuable reference point to help keep you focused on the objectives and scope of your research project. It should also be submitted to your supervisor, who will review it to determine whether your proposed research is of suitable scope and originality to result in a high quality dissertation.

It is important to develop a research project with a focus that is wide enough to enable you to investigate a range of data and arrive at conclusions of sufficient significance to meet the requirements of your course. However, it is equally important to keep your focus narrow enough so that your project remains manageable.

## 2 Data Collection

### ***CHOOSING YOUR METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION***

Most research requires a combination of primary and secondary data. Primary data are data which you gather yourself. Secondary data are data gathered by other researchers.

Some common methods of gathering primary research data in linguistics and other social science disciplines include:

- administering questionnaires
- conducting structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews with individuals and/or groups
- observation
- audio-taping
- video-taping
- keeping a research diary or log, for example when conducting action research.

In deciding how to collect your data you will need to consider factors such as the following:

- the relative efficiency and effectiveness of the different methods for gathering the type(s) of data you need for your project
- relative ease of transcription of the data, once gathered
- time and resources available
- requirements for confidentiality or anonymity of subjects
- costs involved, if any.

Detailed coverage of the advantages and disadvantages of these and other methods of data gathering is beyond the scope of this guide. However, you must decide early in your research project which methods you will use and then use them consistently and thoroughly. It is wise to discuss data collection with your supervisor as early in your research as possible (see the stages in the supervision process outlined in Chapter 1). Some of the publications on research and dissertation-writing, listed in the suggestions for further reading at the end of this guide, also contain useful information to help you make decisions on your approach to collecting primary data.

You will also need to gather secondary data – for example, to add to the background and contextual knowledge that enables you to interpret your primary data. A major source of secondary data will be the reading that your literature search will identify. Some secondary data may also be found in other publications. In the case of linguistics research these could include documents on language or education policy, demographics, immigration, use of language in workplace contexts or the professional practice of translation. The types of secondary data sources you will need to consult will depend largely on your topic and your research methodology.

## **RESEARCH ETHICS**

As a researcher, you have ethical obligations to your sources of information, and especially to people or organizations that cooperate with your collection of data or other aspects of your research project. Consult your supervisor on the possible ethics implications of your research project as early as possible in the planning phase.

If your research involves directly gathering human data of any kind, there will be ethics implications. All staff and students of Macquarie University wishing to conduct research involving human participants must seek approval from the Ethics Review Committee (Human Research). In addition, you might need to seek approval from any organisation from which you wish to recruit participants (e.g., schools, hospitals, or other universities). To find out more about the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee (Human Research), its meeting dates, applications forms etc. visit the Research Office website:

[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human\\_ethics](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics)

What is ethically acceptable or unacceptable may vary considerably depending on the context and the focus of your research. However, you have a general obligation as a researcher to avoid exploiting human participants in any way; for example, by being psychologically, socially, politically, economically or spiritually intrusive. In linguistic research, there are various situations in which ethical issues arise. In Australia they are often encountered by researchers studying language in Aboriginal communities or collecting data from sensitive professional-client encounters.

### ***Conflict of Interest, Consent, Coercion & Confidentiality***

Before examining some of the practical procedures involved in obtaining ethics clearance for the research project that you may be undertaking, it is useful to consider some important issues that arise as part of most research projects involving human participants. These can be summarised under the following headings: **Conflict of Interest, Consent, Coercion and Confidentiality**.

Before embarking on a piece of research, a good starting point in considering the ethical dimensions of the research is to think through *your* 'identity' with regard to your potential participants. For instance, are you...

- a researcher only?
- a researcher AND their teacher?
- a researcher AND their parent?
- a researcher AND a colleague?
- a researcher AND a friend?
- a researcher AND their carer?
- a researcher AND their treating clinician?

## Conflict of Interest

Novice researchers commonly overlook the fact that embarking on a research project adds an extra dimension to their pre-existing relationship (if there is one) with potential participants. Recognising these distinct dimensions of the relationship and the way in which one could potentially impact upon the other is an important step if one is to avoid a conflict of interest. Avoiding such conflicts is not only desirable in the interests of respecting principles of ethical research, but also in order to minimise the risk of damaging a friendship or professional relationship that you may have with those who will be helping you by participating in your research.

Consider the following case study:

*Tom Jones (no relation to the singer) teaches IELTS preparation classes at a private English language college. He has been allocated two classes of 15 students each, and (in line with the school's policy) students have been placed randomly into each of these two classes. Tom is enrolled in a PhD program at a nearby university, and is interested in researching the effects of different pedagogical approaches to preparing students for this particular test. As part of his research he decides (the day before classes are due to begin) to teach one of his classes using a standard IELTS preparation textbook that is commonly used at his college, while the other class will follow a less structured approach that he has developed and wishes to evaluate. At the end of the 10 week program, all of the students have registered to take the test officially, and Tom plans to compare the mean IELTS scores for the two classes at that time.*

*An initial mock test confirms that the two classes are very similar in their initial performance. Tom carries through his plans, and half way through the term, the students sit another mock test, which is scored by two of Tom's teaching colleagues. It emerges that a number of students in the 'experimental' class are performing well below expectations. What should Tom do? As a researcher, he would like to follow through with the two separate approaches he planned for both classes, but as a teacher he wants to do what is best for the students, particularly as this is a 'high-stakes' exam for many of them.*

The situation in which Tom finds himself is one where there is a conflict between his role as researcher and his role as teacher. This kind of conflict of interest can usually be anticipated if one considers the dual role that the researcher must play here, and the design of the study can then be modified *before* the research begins. **In other words, if one recognises and acknowledges the potential for conflict of interest up front, one can then take steps to avoid it.**

In this case, Tom's supervisor may well have been able to point out the potential for conflict, and would then have helped him to re-design the study before it commenced. A second 'line of defence' against such a project getting to the stage where these problems occur would have been Tom's application to the relevant Human Research Ethics Committee. The ethics review process would therefore not only be safeguarding the interests of the potential participants and the university (in whose name the research was being done), but would also assist Tom by (a) pointing out any potential ethical issues that he had not anticipated, and (b)

endorsing his final project plans once changes had been made. By rushing into the study without thinking through these issues, Tom has ended up in a rather awkward situation.

**Key Point: Be sure that you discuss your plans for data collection with your supervisor and have your project approved by the relevant Ethics Committee BEFORE you begin. Ethics approval is usually impossible to obtain retrospectively, as the committee is not in a position to make any recommendations about the conduct of a study that has already taken place.**

## Consent

It is a basic principle of ethical research that those who participate in this research (known in the past as ‘subjects’ but now more commonly called ‘participants’) should give their consent to being part of the research. This consent should be both *informed* and *voluntary*.

In most cases, the researcher *informs* the participants of the aims of the study and what participants will be asked to do if they decide to participate by means of an Information and Consent form. Some guidelines (and a template) for designing this form can be found on the Macquarie University Research Ethics website at:

[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human\\_ethics/forms](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/forms)

The relevant document is the third from the bottom on the table on this web page, and can be downloaded. It is best to follow the template closely in designing your own information and consent form, as it will act as a ‘checklist’ to ensure that you have included the essential elements.

While written consent is the ‘default’ requirement, there are some situations where asking people to read and sign a consent form is clearly not practical or appropriate. In situations where participants are not literate, or where asking for signatures on pieces of paper can be seen as threatening or culturally inappropriate, researchers can apply to use verbal consenting procedures. In such cases, the system for documenting the verbal consent must still be rigorous.

In certain types of research, giving information to participants about the exact aim of the study tends to compromise the validity of the data collected, so that researchers may want to withhold this information, or even engage in initial deception about the true purpose of the study. This sort of practice is sometimes approved, but a clear justification of the need for deception must be provided, and a ‘debriefing’ procedure (for use after the data has been collected) must be set out in the ethics application. Participants are generally asked to give consent a second time to their data being used after the data collection has been completed AND they have been informed of the true aims of the study.

Where a researcher is conducting an anonymous questionnaire or survey, written consent is not generally sought. The act of returning the questionnaire is taken as an indication that the individual is willing to participate. An information statement (without the ‘consent’ portion) is still provided, however.

In addition to the need for consent to be given by participants who have been *informed*, the consent must also be given *voluntarily*. This raises the issue of potential coercion in the recruitment process.

An example of a typical consent form is in Appendix .

### Coercion

In the case study above, no information was provided as to whether or not Tom had obtained consent from his students to participate in his research project. If he had chosen to inform them of the project and had then simply asked them to sign consent forms and give them back to him on the spot, it is very likely that all students would have done exactly this. However, because of Tom’s other role as the teacher of these classes, this approach to obtaining consent would generally *not* be seen as acceptable by an ethics review committee. The issue here is one of potential coercive influences arising from Tom’s position of power as the teacher of these students, and ‘consent’ obtained in this way would not be seen to have been voluntarily given.

In cases where a researcher has no ‘other’ relationship with potential participants, and would not be seen to be in a position of power with respect to them, avoiding coercion can be achieved with relatively simple measures. Generally, all that the researcher needs to do is to ensure that individuals are given time to consider whether or not they wish to participate in a project, and avoid putting them in a position where they are asked to give an answer – ‘yes’ or ‘no’ – on the spot. Recruiting by e-mail is therefore usually seen as less coercive than recruiting by telephone, although the latter is often perfectly acceptable if the potential participant is given time to consider the request and is able to respond later if he or she wishes to be part of the study.

Where a researcher or person recruiting participants is also (for instance) the teacher, supervisor or manager of the individuals being recruited, extra care is necessary to avoid coercion. In addition to the sorts of measures outlined above, it is wise to stress that the decision to participate or not will have no bearing on other aspects of the relationship. If the researcher and potential participant are teacher and student respectively, a guarantee must given (on the information/consent form) that the grading of the course is not dependent on a their participation in the study. If it is possible to design the study so that the decision to participate is communicated to a third party, so that the researcher does not know whether any one individual has agreed to participate, this is often an effective way of minimising coercion. Naturally, however, this is not possible in some studies.

Most linguistic research is not unpleasant or invasive, and potential participants are in many cases very pleased to be asked to help, and may also be interested in the outcomes of the research. However, it is still important to bear in mind that it is a person's right to decide whether or not they wish to be part of a piece of research, and that they should not feel obliged to participate simply because they happen to be a student, friend, co-worker or family member of the researcher.

Finally, it is also considered good ethical practice to offer participants access to a brief summary of the important findings of a study in which they have participated. This can be provided in hard copy to participants who request it, or the information can be posted on a website for interested participants to access.

### Confidentiality

The results of academic research are generally published or disseminated in a publicly accessible forum. They may form the basis for a research thesis or dissertation, and they may also be published in scholarly journals or presented at conferences.

As a researcher, it is vital to respect the privacy of people who assist you with your research. In some cases, data are collected **anonymously**; this is common in the case of questionnaire surveys, for example. In this sort of research, the researcher has no way of tracing individual responses to individual participants. While it is usual to assure participants that they can withdraw from a study at any time without having to give a reason, this assurance is *not* given in the case of anonymous surveys as it is (of course) impossible to identify one participant's survey form if it has been submitted anonymously.

In many cases, the researcher does know the identity of the participants and needs to be able to match data with individuals. In most cases, however, the identity of these participants is not revealed in dissertations, papers or presentations, where numbers or pseudonyms may be used to refer to different participants. In this case, the data is not collected anonymously, but is said to have been **de-identified** prior to publication.

**Key Point: In completing your ethics application, it is best to show that you are aware of any ethical issues that your project raises and explain how you will seek to address them. An application that demonstrates a frank acknowledgement and awareness of ethical issues is more likely to proceed smoothly than one where the researcher appears to be unaware of the issues raised by the project in question.**

Some other ethical issues to consider when planning your research include the following:

- Does your proposed research involve any risk to the participants from whom you will collect data? If so, what is the risk and how can it be minimised? Are there alternative 'risk-free' methods of data collection available to you?
- Are you planning to use any data collection techniques that might be invasive? If so, are they justified?

- If you will be gathering data by means of a questionnaire or interview, will any of the questions you plan to ask seem offensive?
- Does your research method involve deception? If so, at what point will you ‘come clean’ with your participants? How will you ensure that participants are still happy for you to use their data once they understand that they were deceived? One possibility is to have a separate consent form that participants complete once they have been debriefed about the true purpose of the research.
- What other institutions or organizations will you need to obtain consent from (e.g., schools, hospitals, other universities)?

### ***Obtaining ethics approval for research***

At Macquarie University, the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) is made up of academic representatives from a number of Departments across the university, and includes a medical practitioner, a lawyer and a community representative. The procedures for obtaining ethics clearance will naturally vary from one institution to another. The Macquarie HREC website contains detailed information about the procedure for obtaining ethics approval at this university.

It is a good idea to become familiar with the HREC website, from which you can access the documents and information that you will need for your application. The main page can be found at:

[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human\\_ethics](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics)

### **The Department’s Ethics Representative**

All ethics applications are submitted on a standard application form, and are submitted via the ethics committee representative for the researcher’s faculty or department. This person is your first point of contact with the ethics committee, and can provide advice and assistance if required as you are completing the ethics application. The ethics representative reviews the application, and comments on it before you submit it to the ethics office, where a copy will be distributed to every member of the committee prior to the meeting.

To find the name and contact details for the Linguistics Department representative, go to the following website:

[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human\\_ethics/contact](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/contact)

### **Application Forms**

As indicated above, all of the forms that you need can be downloaded from the Macquarie Research Ethics website. To download a copy of the application form, go to:

[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human\\_ethics/forms](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/forms)

It is best to download the version WITHOUT appendices. Individual appendices can be downloaded separately if they are required. The only appendices that researchers in the Linguistics Department usually need are:

- Appendix B – if the research is being done outside Australia.
- Appendix C – if the research involves participants who are under the age of 18.
- Appendix D – if the research involves accessing private or personal information or files stored in a database.

At Macquarie University, students completing research degrees (or research components of coursework degrees) list their names and details first on the ethics applications. The supervisor's details also need to be provided, and the supervisor signs the application along with the student.

### Application Procedures

The majority of Ethics applications will be processed via an expedited review process where applicants will receive feedback regarding the review of their application within 14 working days of submission. There are no closing dates, allowing applicants to submit applications anytime throughout the year.

If your application is considered to raise significant ethical concerns that requires in-depth discussion due to the subject matter, the population involved, and/or the proposed methodology, then your application may be deferred for review at the regular monthly Committee meetings. For a list of meeting dates, go to:

[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human\\_ethics/meeting\\_dates](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/meeting_dates)

### Application Process

- You will need to submit your application electronically as well as in hard copy.
- **Your hard copy must be signed by both yourself and your supervisor.** Applications that have not been signed by a supervisor will not be processed.

#### *Electronic submission*

- Email your application as a Word attachment to [ethics.submissions@vc.mq.edu.au](mailto:ethics.submissions@vc.mq.edu.au).
- Your complete application (including Information Statements and Consent Forms, questionnaires, advertisements etc.) should all be contained within a **SINGLE** document. **Please do not submit multiple attachments.**
- If you have attachments that are not available electronically, they can be attached to your hard copy application but you must advise the Ethics Secretariat when you submit your hard copy application that some documents have not been submitted electronically.

#### *Hard copy submission*

- Submit your completed, signed, hardcopy application to the Ethics Secretariat.  
*By mail:* Ethics Secretariat, Research Office, E11A, Macquarie University, NSW 2109.  
*In person:* Ethics Secretariat, Level 2, BD Building, Research Park Drive, Macquarie University.

- You only need to submit the original application. NO COPIES ARE REQUIRED.
- Who submits your application? **You**, the applicant, are responsible for submitting your own application.

**Key Point: While the ethics committee may comment on aspects of the research methodology if they feel that it has ethical ramifications, it is not the role of the committee to tell the researchers how best to design a study to answer a given research question. This is properly the domain of the student researcher and his or her supervisor. It is therefore vitally important that research students and their supervisors work through and agree upon the details of the study design before submitting the ethics application.**

### Final Words

While complying with research ethics procedures certainly adds to the workload of a researcher, it is worth remembering that most members of ethics committees are researchers themselves, and that their own projects are subject to the same scrutiny. Without such procedures, a handful of unethical projects would be enough to put at risk the reputation of academic research in general in the eyes of the community. Thus, while they can seem burdensome at times, ethics procedures do protect both the researchers and the institutions concerned.

As a student researcher in the Department of Linguistics, remember to make good use of the resources available to you (most importantly your supervisor and the department's ethics representative) in navigating the research ethics maze!

### 3 Information Sources and Services

When conducting research for their dissertation many students find it helpful to have access to on-line services. For all students this facility can be a valuable tool to help gather research information. Below

#### **AMEP RESEARCH CENTRE**

The AMEP Research Centre provides a number of valuable resources for you (see <http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/resources>). Three of the most useful ones include:

#### DELTA

The Database on English Language Teaching for Adults in Australasia (*DELTA*) is a bibliographic database containing over 7000 records, which covers the teaching and learning of English as a second language in Australasia, and the related fields of literacy, applied linguistics, and second language learning, teaching and testing. Material from South East Asia has been included since mid 1997.

*DELTA* indexes and abstracts books and book chapters, journals and journal articles, electronic articles, websites, theses, book reviews, research reports, government reports and multimedia. Material listed in *DELTA* is available via the Resource Centre of the Adult Migrant English Program Research Centre (*AMEPRC*). The database is updated quarterly. *DELTA* may be accessed at:

<http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/resources/delta>.

#### Journal Watch

The AMEPRC Resource Centre operates a journal-monitoring service called *Journal Watch*. This service consists of monitoring and disseminating the contents pages of major journals in the centre's collection. These are distributed to subscribers and to Macquarie University linguistics students every two months, and subscribers can then request copies of specific articles via document delivery. *Journal Watch* may be accessed at:

[http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/resources/journal\\_watch](http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/resources/journal_watch)

#### ESL journals

Links to free electronic journals in TEOSL and Linguistics:

[http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/resources/esl\\_electronic\\_journals](http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/resources/esl_electronic_journals)

## **ON-LINE SERVICES AVAILABLE THROUGH MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY**

In addition to its own collection, Macquarie University Library provides students with access to a wide range of on-line and/or CD-ROM databases:

<http://www.lib.mq.edu.au/databases/>

The most useful databases for your use will most likely include:

- [Linguistics and language behavior abstracts](#) (LLBA)
- [MLA international bibliography](#)
- [ERIC](#)
- [A+ Education](#)

You can access the Macquarie University Library main catalogue on-line at:

<http://www.lib.mq.edu.au/>.

For current details on accessing the library's services remotely, contact the library (see Appendix 3 for details).

## 4 The Process of Writing Your Dissertation

### ***PLANNING AND MANAGING YOUR TIME***

It is impossible to give precise guidelines on how long your research and dissertation should take to complete. This will depend on the nature of your project, the research methodology you adopt, your individual study style and, probably, your own work and personal commitments.

It is helpful, however, to set yourself some realistic target dates for completing different stages of your research and dissertation. As a rough guide, for example, it would not be unusual to divide your time something like this:

- reading and literature review      20-30 percent
- data collection                      20-30 percent
- data analysis and interpretation    20-30 percent
- dissertation writing                  20-30 percent

Draw up a time line for the period you expect to spend on your research and keep it in a convenient place where you can refer to it often – for example, in your diary or on a pin-board next to your desk. Break down the research and dissertation-writing process into a large number of small steps and tasks rather than just a few major stages. Monitoring your progress against this time line and marking off each step as you complete it is a good way of keeping yourself on track and achieving your goals.

### ***TRANSCRIBING AND PRESENTING YOUR DATA***

The way you record your data and the way you present it in your dissertation will depend on:

- the kind of data you have gathered (for example, samples of spoken language, extracts from written texts, statistics or qualitative responses to surveys)
- how you have analysed and interpreted it
- how important it is for your readers to see the data in full or in part to help them understand the significance of your research.

It is beyond the scope of this guide to advise on the best or most appropriate approach to data collection, transcription and analysis. For such data as transcripts, there is a range of established notation conventions which are commonly used in linguistics research, such as line numbering in discourse transcripts and various symbol systems suited to different purposes. These can help you to present and comment on your data clearly and concisely. It is wise to select an established convention that can accommodate your data and your commentary, and

then follow this convention consistently. Look at some publications in similar areas of research to your own. It may be useful to model your approach on some of these.

When it comes to presenting your data in your dissertation, it is important to make clear their relevance and to make them easy for your readers to understand. If, for example, your data consist partly of responses to a quantitative survey, you will probably be able to reproduce a copy of the questionnaire and summarise responses in a table or perhaps in a graph to illustrate patterns or trends. On the other hand, if your data include transcripts of discourse which are essential to an understanding of your dissertation, you may need to attach these in an appendix or a series of appendices. Within your text, it may be helpful to number sample utterances the first time they appear so that you can easily refer to them later using a unique number. Schiffirin (1994) includes a useful section on methods for working with discourse extracts.

## ***DRAFTING YOUR DISSERTATION***

Writing a dissertation, like writing most other kinds of long document, is an iterative process. You cannot expect to carry out all your research, formulate your conclusions and then write your final version. Instead, you must expect to write one or more preliminary drafts, refining your ideas as you go.

Many students, especially if English is not their first language, find the prospect of writing a dissertation a little frightening. Keep in mind, however, that each section of your dissertation may well be no longer than other essays you have written before.

Draw up a plan of your dissertation, indicating approximately how much of your word allowance you expect to need for each chapter or section of the document, and set yourself target dates for completion of first and later drafts of each section and of the final version. It is probably wise to assume that, for most sections, you will need to go through at least two or three drafts before producing your final version.

Also remember that no one – whether English is their first language or not – writes a perfect version of their dissertation at the first attempt. It requires a considerable amount of planning, drafting, redrafting and refining before you arrive at the final version.

Try to set out the structure of your dissertation as early as possible. For most students, the easiest way to do this is to write directly onto a computer or word processor, although you can adopt a similar approach in a loose-leaf file with a series of sections.

Create a file or series of files with the ‘bare bones’ of the structure of your dissertation. Start by compiling a draft table of contents, including chapter titles and section headings as well as a checklist of appendices or other sections that you plan to include. Make two copies of this table of contents.

Keep one copy of this table of contents at the front of your file so that you can always refer to it and remind yourself of the overall shape of your document. This will be a useful guide for you as you write, but keep in mind that it is not fixed and will need to be modified as you go along – probably right up until the final draft of your dissertation.

The second copy of your table of contents can then become a ‘skeleton’ of your dissertation which you can flesh out by writing a section at a time. You can easily note at any time, under relevant headings, the ideas and information that you plan to include in those sections. Of course, this is easiest to do on a computer or word processor, but you can follow a similar approach if you are working on paper by creating a separate section for each part of your dissertation.

Keep working at your file, adding a little at a time here and there to flesh out the content of each section. As you read and review the literature, record any quotations, ideas and references you plan to include in the sections where you think they will appear. Record not only the quotation but also the full bibliographic details (author, title, publisher, date of publication and page number). If you do this straight away you will avoid the very time-consuming and tedious task of compiling your reference list at the end of your research.

The approach described above can help make the task of writing a dissertation much less difficult. If you plan a structure that is carefully and systematically divided into sections, each individual section is likely to be of manageable length. As you complete sections or whole chapters, you will have a tangible measure of your progress.

As you proceed from each draft to the next, it is helpful to get feedback and input from your supervisor, and perhaps also from colleagues or others with an interest in your subject area. You can then incorporate some of their suggestions in the next draft.

It may be helpful to send drafts to your supervisor for comment chapter by chapter, rather than waiting until you have completed a draft of the whole dissertation. This way you are likely to receive feedback more quickly, enabling you to take into account feedback received on some sections while drafting others.

It can also be helpful to get feedback from one or more people who do not have specialist knowledge in your area of research. Although you are writing your dissertation primarily for specialist readers, there is no value in making it more complicated than it need be to express your ideas. While readers outside your field may find the detailed content hard to understand without specialist knowledge, if they can follow the structure of your text and the general direction of your argument, this may be a valuable indication that your argument is clearly and simply expressed.

Once again, we advise you to refer to the assessment rubric (see Chapter 8 *Assessment of your Dissertation*) often during the preparation of your dissertation. It will help you design the structure of your dissertation and help ensure that you meet the criteria against which it will be assessed.

## **COMPUTER AIDS TO WRITING**

As suggested above, most students find that the best way of drafting their dissertation is to write it straight on to a computer or word processor. Besides making the task of drafting and re-sequencing sections of your dissertation easier, most modern word processing software has a range of proofing tools which can be useful, especially for students whose first language is not English. These include spelling checkers, thesauruses and grammar checkers. A word of caution is appropriate here, however.

### ***Spelling checkers***

Beware of trusting spelling checkers too much. Remember that they will only find spelling mistakes which are not real words. They will not pick up words which are incorrect but happen to be real English words (for example, if you type 'food' instead of 'foot', 'students' instead of 'student', 'tow' instead of 'two', or 'fro' instead of 'for'). You must, therefore, still proofread your text manually after running your spelling checker. It is often best to have someone else do this who is less familiar with the text than you are, as they are more likely to spot mistakes.

### ***Thesauruses***

Many word processing packages also have a thesaurus function which offers suggestions of alternative words to help reduce repetition. This can be helpful, but only if you know the words that are suggested and can judge which choices are appropriate in the context.

### ***Grammar checkers***

Some word processing packages also include grammar checkers. However, these are not yet sufficiently developed to be of any great use in serious writing: too often they suggest changes which are inappropriate in the context. They are best avoided.

## **DEVELOPING YOUR REFERENCE LIST AS YOU GO**

There is nothing worse than reaching the end of your research project, by which time you may have consulted dozens or even hundreds of sources, only to find that you have to seek out all of those sources again to check the precise details for inclusion in your reference list.

The best idea is to develop your reference list as you go. The traditional way to do this is to create an index card for each reference and to store these cards in alphabetical order so that a reference list can easily be typed up from them at the end of the project. An easier way to create your reference list is to keep a word processing file in which you enter the bibliographic details for all relevant references as you gather them. You can refer to this file just as easily as a card index, and it will save you a lot of time by eliminating a lot of double-handling of information. For very large or complex reference lists, it may also be worth using special software, such as *Pro-Cite* or *EndNote*, which are designed for managing reference lists. For a straightforward reference list, however, specialist software is unlikely to offer much

advantage. *EndNote* is available to all Macquarie University postgraduate students. To obtain a copy of *EndNote* please go to:

<http://www.library.mq.edu.au/endnote/index.html>

## **EDITING AND PROOFREADING**

Submitting a dissertation which has not been carefully edited and proofread is a discourtesy to your readers and will not do justice to your research.

Proofreading your own work is very difficult, especially with a long text such as a dissertation which you have been working on closely over a long period of time. When it comes to proofreading, being familiar with the text can be a disadvantage. Because you know the content in detail and know what the text is supposed to say, you are likely to read for sense rather than detail. This increases the chance that you will overlook spelling or typographical errors, missing words or other flaws.

When you have completed a final draft of your dissertation, have someone else read it who is experienced in proofreading and has not read your dissertation before. Brief your proofreader clearly so that they understand the stylistic conventions you have chosen to follow. This will help your proofreader to check that you have followed the conventions accurately and consistently.

Many non-native speaker students get some help with their dissertation from a native speaker. This is perfectly acceptable, but naturally there must be limits to this help. Having someone check your text for accuracy and style in English, or help with editing and proofreading, is acceptable. It is not acceptable, on the other hand, if that person alters the content of your dissertation or the direction of your argument.

It is appropriate to acknowledge anyone who has helped you, and the nature of the help received, in the acknowledgments section at the front of your dissertation.

## 5 The Format and Presentation of Your Dissertation

### **GENERAL**

Your dissertation should be presented in a manner which reflects well on the large amount of work that you will have put into conducting your research and writing up your findings.

Today's word-processing technology makes it easy and inexpensive to produce high quality documents, and most people have come to expect a high standard of presentation in written documentation. While the quality of the research reported in your dissertation is of course the most important criterion on which you will be assessed, the quality of writing and layout are also important.

This means that your dissertation should be word-processed and that the final printout should be of high quality. Documents which are handwritten are not acceptable. Documents produced on a typewriter or printed faintly on a dot-matrix printer will not create a good impression.

This is unlikely to present a problem for many students. However, if you are not already proficient in word-processing, it would be worthwhile to invest some time in developing these skills or find someone who can help you with the layout of the final version of your dissertation.

### **THE ELEMENTS OF YOUR DISSERTATION**

Your dissertation should contain the following elements:

#### ***Title page***

This should include the full title of your dissertation, your name and previous degrees or qualifications, the name of the university and school/faculty and the degree for which you are submitting the dissertation, and the month and year of submission. A typical wording is as follows:

**The problem of plagiarism: A textual analysis of ESL tertiary students' essays**

Joni Siah, BA

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Applied Linguistics  
in the School of English, Linguistics and Media, Macquarie University.

June 1995

## ***Declaration of originality of research***

You should include at the front of your dissertation a signed declaration that your research is original and has not previously been submitted for another academic award. A suggested wording is as follows:

I certify that the research described in this dissertation has not already been submitted for any other degree.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge all sources used and any help received in the preparation of this dissertation have been acknowledged.

Signature.....

## ***Table of contents***

This should clearly indicate the structure of your dissertation and direct the reader, with page numbers, to all chapters, major sections within chapters, appendices and any other sections of the document. The table of contents should be set out in such a way that the relationships between sections are clear.

## ***List of tables*** (if applicable)

This should list in order of appearance the numbers, titles and page references for all tables included in your dissertation. These should be numbered in one continuous sequence (Table 1, Table 2 etc.) running through the whole document and should correspond to the numbers and titles that appear as headings or captions with the tables themselves.

## ***List of figures*** (if applicable)

This should list in order of appearance the numbers, titles and page references for all diagrams, figures etc. in your dissertation. These should be numbered in one continuous sequence (Figure 1, Figure 2 etc.) running through the whole document and should correspond to the numbers and titles that appear as headings or captions with the figures themselves.

## ***Acknowledgments*** (if applicable)

You should acknowledge the participation of all individuals and organisations that have helped you with your research, indicating the kind of assistance received – for example, supervision of your research, cooperation with data collection, advice on data analysis, or help with editing or proof-reading your text.

It is usual to acknowledge people by name unless it is necessary to preserve their anonymity for reasons of confidentiality. In such cases it is often appropriate to acknowledge the organisation or group to which the people belong, for example, ‘the students of Somewhere School’, or ‘patients at Anywhere Hospital’.

## ***Glossary / List of abbreviations*** (if applicable)

If you use a large number of special terms, abbreviations or acronyms which your readers may not be familiar with, it may be helpful to include these in a glossary. Such a glossary may be conveniently placed at the end of your dissertation, before the reference list.

## ***Abstract***

This section summarises your research project, giving brief information on your objectives, hypothesis, methodology and data as well as on your conclusions and their implications, including implications for further research. Your abstract should not be more than a few hundred words in length (usually not more than one typed A4 page in one-and-a-half or double line spacing). (For some sample abstracts taken from a range of acceptable dissertations submitted in the Department of Linguistics at Macquarie University, see Appendix 2).

## ***Introductory chapter***

Your introductory chapter should include background information on such areas as:

- the context in which your research was conducted
- your reasons for choosing your topic
- other related research (or the lack of it)
- the scope of your research: what you set out to achieve.

The information contained in the introductory chapter should be much more detailed than the information in your abstract.

## ***Literature review / background***

An important part of the research process is a comprehensive review of existing literature on your topic and on closely related topics. Typically this will involve conducting searches in library catalogues and research databases. This is an iterative process, i.e. after locating source documents which are identified by your initial searches, you may need to explore other references that are cited in those documents. When you have conducted your literature search and read widely on and around your topic, you should be ready to write your literature review.

Remember that a literature review is much more than an annotated bibliography. It should be an informed **critical** analysis and discussion of the ideas and debates put forward by other researchers in your area, and is your opportunity to sift and synthesise the ideas contained in other researchers' work, showing how they relate to your research. The literature review is an important section for readers who may not be familiar with the area you are writing about. The literature review also functions to place your study in a context as well as helping to provide a **rationale** and **justification** for your study. It should be expressed succinctly and clearly and should help them locate your study within a wider research context and to understand the significance of your research. It is difficult to say how long your literature review should be because all dissertations are different. However, as rough guide, it would be fair to say that the literature review should not be more than 3,000 to 3,500 words, given your dissertation should be no more than 15,000 words (or 60-70 pages).

There is a range of approaches to organising and presenting a literature review. No single approach is intrinsically better than any other. Often the literature review occupies one chapter (or sometimes two or three chapters) of a dissertation. However, in some research projects it may be more appropriate to integrate the literature review into the reporting of your research, rather than place it in a separate chapter.

For detailed guidance on presenting literature reviews, consult your supervisor and/or a variety of books on research methods and design (for example: Seliger & Shohamy, 1989; Hart, 1998). There are also a number of useful websites that offer excellent advice on how to write a proper literature review. They include:

- <http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/litrev.html>
- <http://www.languages.ait.ac.th/EL21LIT.HTM>
- <http://www.deakin.edu.au/library/findout/research/litrev.php>

Successful dissertations completed by past students in your course are another useful reference source, containing models of research design in your field.

### ***Research methodology***

This chapter should set out in detail the methodology adopted for your project, describing the research paradigm selected (and your reasons for choosing it) and the steps followed in collecting, analysing and interpreting data.

### ***Data, analysis and interpretation***

The section covering analysis and interpretation of your data will usually occupy one or more chapters of your dissertation. You should describe clearly the assumptions you have made in analysing the data, and the conclusions you have drawn as a result of your analysis. Aim to demonstrate through your data analysis that your research changes or adds to existing knowledge in the field.

If your data are quantitative, it is often most appropriate to present your results first and then discuss and interpret them. However, if your data are qualitative, it may be more appropriate to integrate your results with your discussion of them.

### ***Summary and conclusions***

Your research project is not the end of the road. Most research generates many new questions – sometimes more than it has answered. This is an essential feature of the process of academic enquiry.

Your dissertation should conclude with a chapter which summarises your research and your findings and indicates areas for further research which you have identified in the course of your research. This discussion should also clearly outline the significance of your findings (i.e. what do they mean?) in the light of the literature you reviewed at the beginning of the dissertation. In other words, you need to link your findings with those of the studies examined in the literature review.

## **Reference List**

Your reference list should list full bibliographic details of all sources you have drawn on in your research.

The reference list should not be an indiscriminate list of everything you have read which relates to your area of research. Rather, it should include all books, articles, conference papers, unpublished theses, teaching materials and other resources which you have either quoted in your dissertation or have consulted or been influenced by in the course of your research.

For information on the style conventions used in presenting bibliographies, see Chapter 6, *Academic Writing*.

## **Appendices** (if applicable)

You should attach as appendices such information as:

- transcripts of data
- samples of questionnaires, correspondence or other instruments used to collect data
- other information which is relevant but which is not required in the body of the dissertation.

## **LAYOUT AND APPEARANCE**

Your dissertation should be printed on preferably two sides (back-to-back) of white A4 paper.

Text should be in **one-and-a-half** (1.5) or **double line** spacing, with margins of at least 3.5cm on the binding edge, 1.5cm on the opposite edge and 2cm at the top and bottom.

Text may be either justified or ranged left. Long quotations which are set apart from the base text should be indented from the margins by the same distance at both sides (see the section in Chapter 6 on 'Quotations').

Pages should be clearly numbered using Arabic numerals in one continuous sequence running through all chapters. For front matter – for example, a preface, acknowledgments or table of contents – you may use a different page numbering system such as lower case Roman numerals.

Headers and/or footers may be used to display other information such as the title of the current chapter.

## **Headings**

If you need to use several different levels of section heading in your text, decide on a type style and size for each and use these styles consistently. If your word processing package allows you to create a style sheet, this can save you a great deal of time and effort in formatting. In general, it is wise not to use more than two or three levels of heading below the level of chapter title. More than this can become difficult for readers to keep track of and the intended relationship between different sections may become unclear.

## **Typefaces**

Use a typeface for base text which is big enough to be clearly legible. In most typefaces **twelve point** is a good size for general use and allows you, if you wish, to use a smaller point size (for example, 10 point) for elements such as long quotations, captions, footnotes, headers and footers. It is good to use slightly larger point sizes (for example, 14 or 16 point) and/or bold or italic type to distinguish major headings and sub-headings.

However, while it is helpful to use the typographic effects available in your word processing package to give your dissertation a pleasant appearance, resist the temptation to use too many typefaces, point sizes or other special effects. These will tend to distract your reader from the content.

As a general rule, use a maximum of two typefaces. It is wise to choose a serif typeface (such as Times New Roman, Bookman or Palatino) for your base text. Research on typography shows that most readers find these easier on the eye when reading large amounts of text, and retain more of the information they read. If you want to use sans serif typefaces (such as Helvetica or Arial), reserve these for smaller quantities of text such as headings, headers and footers, captions etc.

Similarly, avoid setting large amounts of text in capital letters. As with sans serif typefaces, most readers retain less of the information they read in capitals.

## **Emphasis: bold or italics?**

In general it is best to use one style consistently for words which require special emphasis, words used in a special sense and words borrowed from other languages which are not commonplace in English. Italics are more usual than bold type for this.

## 6 Academic Writing

### **CRITICAL THINKING AND ACADEMIC WRITING**

In writing your dissertation it is important to keep in mind the purpose of writing within the English-speaking tradition of academic research. For students from some backgrounds this may differ from what they are accustomed to. In some academic cultures, for example, assembling and reproducing large portions from the writings of acknowledged experts in your area of research may be seen as paying due attention to the importance of their work. In the English-speaking world this is more likely to be regarded as plagiarism (see the section entitled 'Plagiarism' below), and will probably mean that your dissertation contains too few of your own original findings, ideas and arguments to satisfy the university's requirements.

Your purpose in writing your dissertation should be to present, analyse and interpret your research findings in such a way as to inform others studying and researching in the field, while also presenting your own, reasoned and critical argument or point of view on these findings. The process known as 'critical thinking' is thus crucial to the research and dissertation-writing process (see Moore & Parker, 2000). It is not acceptable simply to report descriptively on your own or other researchers' observations and findings. Rather, you are expected to present and synthesise these in such a way that they help to present a clear and logical argument.

These considerations will affect the way you write your dissertation and are especially important in your literature review. Remember that the purpose of the literature review is not simply to show your reader how much you have read about your topic or to describe what other researchers have found and reported in the literature. It is to present your analysis of the literature in a way that is relevant to the investigation of your research question and to the argument that you are putting forward.

The following example, taken from Gebhard (1990), illustrates how you can employ references to other researchers' findings to support your own thesis or argument. In this instance, references to the literature are integrated (see the comments in Chapter 5 on alternative approaches to writing your literature review). The context here is the discussion of several different models for the supervision of trainee teachers of English to speakers of other languages. As this extract is taken from a short article (one chapter in an edited book), the argument is compact and the extent of reference to the literature is limited. The same principle applies, however, for more in-depth arguments and extensive literature reviews such as those in your dissertation. The literature review should refer to and, if appropriate, critique these sources in such a way that their relevance to your topic is clear and they add something to your own argument.

## Non-directive supervision

The essence of nondirective supervision is captured in the following observation by a teacher-in-preparation: 'My supervisor usually attempts to have me come up with my own solutions to teaching problems, but she isn't cold. She's a giving person, and I can tell that she cares. Anyway, my supervisor listens patiently to what I say, and she consistently gives me her understanding of what I have said.' The same teacher also expressed the consequences of this type of supervision for her when she added, 'I think that when my supervisor repeats back to me my own ideas, things become clearer. I think this makes me more aware of the way I teach – at least I am aware of my feelings about what I do with students.'

Supervisors who listen and demonstrate an understanding of what the teacher has said are providing what Curran (1978), who bases his ideas on the work of Carl Rogers, calls an 'understanding response'. An understanding response is a 're-cognized' version of what the speaker has said. In supervision, the supervisor does not repeat word-for-word what the teacher has said but rather restates how he or she has understood the teacher's comments.

Applying a nondirective approach to the supervisory situation I described at the beginning of this chapter, the supervisor could have said something like, 'You just explained to me what and why you did what you did in the classroom. Let me see if I understand what you said. You told me that you wanted to see the consequences of trying a reading lesson where the students read silently while doing tasks, such as underlining words which describe the main character in the story. You said that you did not write vocabulary on the board because you wanted to see if the students would come up with the words they wanted to learn. You also said that you wanted students to [...]'.

According to those foreign and second language teacher educators who have discussed a nondirective supervisory approach (Dowling & Sheppard, 1976; Early & Bolitho, 1981; Freeman, 1982), if the supervisor had been more nondirective when supervising me, I could have had the freedom to express and clarify my ideas, and a feeling of support and trust could have grown between the supervisor and me. [*Here Gebhard is referring to an earlier part of the chapter in which he described some of his own experiences as a recipient of directive supervision.* I could have realized the freedom to try new ideas and to fully invest myself in what I was doing. I could also have had the chance to raise questions about myself as a teacher and about the consequences that my teaching had on the students. I could have gained experience in making decisions on my own, and I could have further realized my own responsibility for my teaching behaviour.

Nondirective supervision can also have a different result. Some teachers report that it makes them feel anxious and alienated. One reason for anxiety may be due to the inexperience of the teacher. For example, I once supervised a new teacher through mostly nondirective means. At one point he asked, 'But what do you think I should do in the classroom? How can I know what to do if I have no experience doing it?' If we follow the assumption that teachers benefit from what they think they need (Copeland, 1982), then a nondirective model of supervision might not always be appropriate.

The way the supervisor understands nondirective supervision could also cause the teacher anxiety. Perhaps the supervisor has simply been using the surface techniques while ignoring the deeper philosophical principles. 'To borrow only certain outward features of the approach without understanding what its real power is would be like using an airplane only as a car or a sophisticated computer only as a typewriter' (Blair, 1982, pp. 103-4).

At the deeper philosophical level, we need to understand the importance of working with the 'whole person' of the learner (Curran, 1976, 1978; Rardin, 1977; Taylor, 1979; Stevick, 1980). Curran advocated such techniques as the nonjudgmental 'understanding response' to break down the defenses of learners, to facilitate a feeling of security, and to build a trusting relationship between learners and the teacher. This trusting relationship allows the teacher and learners to 'quest' together to find answers to each other's questions.

## **AVOIDING PLAGIARISM**

It is important to acknowledge all known published or unpublished sources – whether in print or in other media such as video or audio – which have directly contributed to or influenced your research. To omit such acknowledgment would not only be discourteous and a mark of careless academic practice, but could also leave you open to accusations of plagiarism.

Plagiarism includes the following practices, **both of which are unethical and are unacceptable in academic research**:

- quoting from other sources, either word for word or with minimal changes, without acknowledging that the material is taken from elsewhere and making clear its author and source
- presenting the ideas of others – even if rephrased in your own words – as if they were your own
- having someone else write your dissertation.

You should provide full details for all quotations from, or references to, published sources or the work of other researchers. This means including:

- textual references wherever you quote, paraphrase or summarise parts of specific sources within the body of your dissertation. This includes references to books, articles, periodicals, reports, dissertations, theses, press articles, interviews and personal communications
- corresponding bibliographic details in your reference list. (For details on referencing style, see the later sections on textual and bibliographic references).

It is also particularly important to choose carefully the language you use to report on other researchers' findings so that you do not change their intended meaning or emphasis.

For more information about plagiarism, penalties, ways of avoiding plagiarism and other useful links, see: <http://www.ling.mq.edu.au/support/policies.htm>

## **FORMAL WRITTEN STYLE AND PLAIN ENGLISH**

Written style is extremely important in a dissertation. Although your work will be assessed primarily on the quality of your research and the conclusions you reach, the language in which your dissertation is expressed is also an essential part of the finished product. Inaccurate, clumsy or excessively complex English may make it harder for your reader to understand the content of your dissertation, adversely affecting how your work will be assessed.

Some people, when writing in a formal style, tend to over-use long words or phrases and complex sentence structures. While your dissertation should be written in formal academic style it should also aim to follow the principles of 'plain English'. Avoid using long, complicated or technical words and expressions when shorter, simpler ones will convey your message just as well.

Many style guides and books on clear academic or business writing include checklists of common phrases to avoid and suggest simpler alternatives. If you are unsure about the usage of particular words or expressions, you may also find it helpful to refer to *The Cambridge Australian English Style Guide* (Peters, 1995) or *The Cambridge Guide to English Usage* (Peters, 2004). This book is organised in a manner which makes it particularly useful for writers, whereas some style guides are designed primarily for use by copyeditors.

In writing your dissertation, it is important to pay close attention to such areas as:

- accurate and consistent spelling, punctuation and capitalisation (spelling should preferably be Australian standard spelling but should in any event be consistent)
- consistent style in headings, captions, tables, diagrams or other exhibits, and any other elements which are different from the base text in style and/or appearance
- clear and accurate use of language
- accurate and consistent presentation of quotations and references, both within the text and in your reference list
- use of non-sexist language.

Some of these points will be especially important if you are not a native speaker of English. Even though your examiner may be aware that English is not your first language and will assess your dissertation on its content rather than on its expression, poor quality writing which makes the text hard to understand will still have a negative impact. It may be hard to assess how much of the subject matter you know if your writing style makes the subject matter hard to access.

There are many good reference grammars of English and books on academic writing for students whose first language is not English. Some of these are listed in the 'Suggestions for further reading' at the end of this guide. However, the remainder of this chapter deals briefly with a range of major stylistic and mechanical aspects of formal writing in English.

The Department of Linguistics runs a specific writing skills support program for both on-campus and distance students. For more information please visit the following websites:

- for online help: <http://online.mq.edu.au/pub/LINGPWS/>
- for on-campus sessions:  
[http://www.ling.mq.edu.au/support/writing\\_skills/on\\_campus.htm](http://www.ling.mq.edu.au/support/writing_skills/on_campus.htm)

## **AVOIDING SEXIST LANGUAGE**

In Australia it is widely considered unacceptable to use language which discriminates or could easily be interpreted as discriminating against individuals or groups of people on grounds such as nationality, language background, beliefs, gender, marital status, disability, age or sexual preference.

Two of the most common situations in which language must be carefully chosen to avoid any possibility of discrimination are:

- **Pronoun choice.** When referring to a specific individual and it is clear whether that person is male or female, it is appropriate to use the relevant personal pronoun.

When referring to a category of person or to an individual whose gender is not known to your reader, it is best to use an inclusive pronoun system such as *he/she* or *s/he* and *his/her* when you are not referring to a specific individual; for example: ‘The teacher then asked each student to give his/her opinion’.

Since alternatives such as *his/her* can become cumbersome if used frequently, another option in such situations is to use *they* and *their*. ‘The teacher then asked each student to give their opinion.’ While some traditionalists may argue that this usage is not strictly grammatical, it is clearly understood and has become so widely used in writing as well as speech that it is now an acceptable solution to the pronoun problem.

- **Words denoting occupation.** Avoid using gender-specific forms of words which denote occupation – for example, ‘headmaster/headmistress’ or manager/manageress’. Such terms often portray women in a stereotypical manner. Generic terms such as ‘principal’ and ‘manager’ are preferable for both genders.

For more detailed guidance on using non-sexist language, refer to Pauwels (1991) or to a good style guide (see the suggestions for further reading at the end of this guide).

## **QUOTATIONS**

Direct quotations from other sources must be reproduced **exactly** word for word. Where it is necessary for you to add, omit or change words so that only the relevant parts are included or so that the syntax of the quotation fits into the syntax of the surrounding sentence in your text, you should enclose changes in square brackets, thus [ ], and indicate omissions by three spaced dots, thus [...].

Quotations of fewer than 40 words should appear within your text and enclosed in quotation marks. Longer quotations of 40 words or more should be set apart from the surrounding text and indented an equal distance at left and right. These need not be enclosed in quotation marks as the layout makes it clear where the quotation begins and ends. Quotations should not be in italics!

Please note that all quotations must be fully and clearly acknowledged. The following example, taken from Wenden and Rubin (1987), illustrates how this is normally done. This example is set here as a long quote (i.e. indented, both left and right, in smaller type and without opening and closing quotation marks). For shorter quotations, follow the style used for the quotation contained within the example itself.

Morrison and Low (1983) argue that human language use depends on both creative and critical faculties. 'The creative faculty, dipping down into the internal reservoir of stored rules and patterns, assembles strings of language for private consumption or for articulation as utterances' (Morrison & Low, 1983, p. 228). 'At the same time, a critical faculty,... gives awareness of what has been created, making it possible to check, either before or after articulation, for the frequent slips of the tongue, grammatical errors, social infelicities and other deviations from intention that characterize normal speech' (p. 228). Further, they argue that the creative faculty operates beyond the back edge of consciousness and is therefore essentially unruly.

Note also that in the above example, the use of some punctuation conventions from the original publication, such as double quotation marks and the use of a comma between the authors' names and the year of publication, is preserved, even though these differ from our style in this guide (see the section below on Punctuation within quotation marks). Similarly, the authors' spelling of 'characterize' is preserved, even though our style here is the '-ise' form which is generally preferred in Australia.

## **FOOTNOTES**

You can use footnotes where you want to insert additional information but do not want to interrupt the flow of your text. However, it is wise to use footnotes sparingly. If the information is really important, see whether you can integrate it into the main text; if it is not, consider whether it really needs to be included at all. Footnotes should be numbered sequentially and it is common to start again at '1' at the beginning of each new chapter.

Footnotes which appear at the bottom of the relevant page are preferable to 'endnotes' which appear at the end of the chapter or the dissertation. Many readers do not read endnotes as doing so involves moving to another part of the document and then returning to their original place in the text to continue reading. If you are word-processing your dissertation, your software will probably allow you to format and number footnotes automatically. Note, however, that in linguistics texts these days, footnotes are seldom used for textual bibliographic references (see the section on References later in this chapter).

## **PUNCTUATION**

It is beyond the scope of this guide booklet to provide comprehensive guidance on correct and appropriate use of punctuation in formal English writing. There are many grammar and writing books whose purpose is to do that. It is worthwhile to spend a little time studying one or two of these and then keeping one handy for reference while you are writing your dissertation.

There are, however, a few areas of punctuation which are often used in academic writing and which must be used correctly so that your meaning is clear. These are covered briefly below.

### ***Quotation marks***

It is conventional in Australia to use single quotation marks to enclose quotations, and to use double quotation marks around quotations within them.

### ***Punctuation within quotations***

Quotations should accurately reproduce your source in every detail. Punctuation within quotations should appear **exactly** as it appeared in the original text, even if that text follows different conventions from your own.

### ***Colons and semicolons***

Many writers use colons and semicolons carelessly and inaccurately. This can be a source of confusion.

Colons should be used at the end of a lead phrase preceding a list; they may also be used to introduce a statement which expands or elaborates on the first part of the sentence. Semicolons should chiefly be used to separate two statements both of which are grammatically complete sentences but which are complementary or otherwise closely interrelated – as in the preceding sentence.

### ***Brackets***

Use round brackets to enclose supplementary information.

Square brackets should be used principally within quotations to enclose words added, deleted or changed by you or by another person other than the original author (see the section earlier in this chapter on Quotations). You can also use square brackets where brackets within brackets are required (c.f. the convention of using double quotation marks to enclose quotations within quotations).

### ***Punctuation within brackets***

Where you enclose a whole sentence in brackets it should begin with a capital letter and should include a full stop or other final punctuation **within** the brackets. However, where the information in brackets forms part of another sentence, or is a comment on the main sentence but does not in itself form a complete sentence, there should be no initial capital letter, and the final punctuation should be placed outside the brackets. (See above section on Brackets.)

## REFERENCES

References fall into two categories:

- *textual references* – those which appear within the body of your dissertation to indicate the sources of quotations or ideas taken from the work of others
- *bibliographic references* – those which are listed separately from your main text, usually in alphabetical order in a separate section at the end of your dissertation.

Since academic writing makes frequent references to other sources – sometimes many times to the same source – it is normal to include only minimal details within the text and to place full reference details which should appear in your reference list.

### Referencing conventions

The Department of Linguistics at Macquarie University follows the referencing conventions of the American Psychological Association (APA). The following web pages provide useful guides to the APA system of referencing:

- <http://www.apastyle.org/index.html>
- <http://www.ecu.edu.au/LDS/pdf/refguide.pdf>
- [http://www.nceltr.mq.edu.au/publications/style/section\\_three.html#notes](http://www.nceltr.mq.edu.au/publications/style/section_three.html#notes)

There are several referencing conventions used in academic writing. The Linguistics Department at Macquarie University employs the ‘author-date’ system (also known as the ‘Harvard system’ or running references). This system is common in the sciences and social sciences and is the system most used in linguistics. In the text, only the author’s surname and the year of publication are given, as in the following examples:

For a further discussion of memory strategies, see Thompson, this volume and Cohen (1984).

The choice may be dependent upon the student’s beliefs of how language is to be learned (Hosenfeld, 1978; Wenden, 1986).

**Note:** All references that you refer to in your text must appear in your reference list, which should be organised in continuous alphabetical order (see the section below on References).

Some universities or faculties have strict requirements as to the precise conventions that must be followed for references, especially at Doctorate and Masters (Honours) levels. In other universities, faculties or degree programs, any widely used academic convention is acceptable provided that it is:

- consistent with common practice within the relevant discipline
- is used consistently throughout the dissertation
- conveys clearly to the reader all necessary information.

Some brief guidelines on matters of style and punctuation in textual and bibliographic reference are included below:

### ***Textual references***

Where quoting from or paraphrasing sources within the text of your dissertation, you should indicate the source with the author's surname, the date of publication and, where necessary the page number. Style and punctuation should be consistent throughout. Acceptable forms of style and punctuation for textual references include the following:

- Jones and Walters (1992, p. 135) were the first to note this pattern among Vietnamese-speaking phase 1 learners.

or

- This pattern is common among Vietnamese-speaking phase 1 learners (Jones & Walters, 1992, p. 135).

Note that, as in the last example, the final punctuation is never included inside the final bracket in textual references, even when it would be with other kinds of parentheses. Also note the two methods of indicating the page number. Either method is acceptable.

If you refer to more than one publication by the same author published in the same year, use the following convention to distinguish between these:

- Jones, 1992a
- Jones, 1992b, etc.

Where you refer to publications by different authors with the same surname, indicate the author's initial(s) as well as surname. Note that the order of appearance of surname and initials varies depending on whether they appear in brackets or in the text as in the examples below:

- This pattern is common among Vietnamese-speaking phase 1 learners (Jones, J.T., 1992).
- J.T. Jones (1992) was the first to note this pattern among Vietnamese-speaking phase 1 learners.

There are particular conventions to follow when referring in academic writing to publications by two or more authors. These concern your first and subsequent references to such works:

- ***publications by two authors:***
  - first reference: Jones and Walters (1989) found that...
  - later references: Jones and Walters (1989) found that...

- ***publications by three or more authors:***

- first reference: Jones, Walters and Smith (1987) found that...
- later references: Jones et al. (1987) found that...

- ***publications by four or more authors:***

In the case of publications by four or more authors, it is acceptable to use the following style for all references: Jones et al. (1987).

- ***referring to sources cited in other publications:***

If you refer to sources which are cited in publications that you have read, but you yourself have not read the original source, you should make this very clear by using the following style:

Wong-Fillmore (1976) (as cited in Wenden & Rubin, 1987), found that students in her study of five Chicano learners of English used a range of social strategies to enable them to continue to participate in activities which provided contexts for the learning of new material.

You will note that the original work is named in the text, and the secondary source is given the citation. The secondary source only appears in the Reference list, e.g.

Wenden A. & Rubin, J. (Eds.) (1987). *Learner strategies in language learning*. Prentice Hall International: Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

It is important that you do not give the impression that you have read primary sources which you have not read. Also, if you do give this impression and the original source has been in any way misrepresented in the secondary source that you have read, the problem of misinterpretation is transferred into your dissertation.

Overall, it is best that you try to avoid citing sources mentioned in other publications. At postgraduate level, it is expected you cite from the original source if at all possible.

## **References**

References should include the information that a reader will need to be able easily to identify your sources and to locate them in a library if required: author name, title, year of publication, issue number and date (for articles in periodicals), publisher and place of publication.

Items are generally listed in alphabetical order by author surname. Depending on the types of references you are listing and on how they relate to your study, it may be appropriate to divide your reference list into a number of sections: for example, publications, unpublished materials, audio-visual materials etc. There is no rigid rule on this; it is best to develop an approach that suits your purposes.

Style and punctuation should be consistent and should follow conventions set out in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th edition). A style guide such as the *Style Manual for authors, editors and printers* (AGPS, 1994), the *Chicago manual of style*. The following examples illustrate the different conventions for listing and punctuating references which are complete works (including authored books and books without named authors) and for references which are part of a work (for example, articles in journals or chapters in edited books):

Australian Education Council Review Committee. (1991). *Young People's Participation in Post-compulsory Education and Training*, Canberra: AGPS

*The Macquarie Dictionary* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). (1991). Sydney: Macquarie Library.

Ingram, D.E. (1981). The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings: Their nature, development and trialling. In J.A.S. Reid (Ed.), *Directions in Language Testing*, (pp. 108-136). Singapore: Singapore University Press/SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.

Pauwels, A. (1991). *Non-discriminatory Language*. Canberra: AGPS Press.

Swales, J. (1985). English as the international language of research. *RELC Journal*. 16, 1-7.

(An alternative style for indicating journal volume and issue numbers is: *RELC Journal*. 16:1-7).

## 7 Dissertation Submission Requirements

### **LENGTH**

The recommended maximum length of a dissertation for the Master of Applied Linguistics degree is between **10,000** and **15,000** words (approximately 60-70 pages of double-spaced typing). For other degrees within the Faculty of Human Sciences, and in other universities, check on the precise regulations regarding the length of dissertations.

If your raw data includes lengthy texts or transcripts, which may in themselves amount to several thousand words, these are not considered part of the overall word count. (They can be placed in appendices rather than within the body of the dissertation.)

Keep in mind that clear, concise expression is a virtue and that examiners (who will probably have several dissertations and many examination papers to assess) will not be impressed by unnecessary length.

### **NUMBER OF COPIES**

You are required to submit **two** copies of your dissertation but you should keep also a third copy for yourself. The two copies may be available to future students for reference once they have been assessed.

At least one copy should be submitted on non-recycled, acid-free paper for retention by the university.

### **BINDING**

All three copies of your dissertation should be securely bound.

There is no prescribed type of binding at Macquarie for dissertations at undergraduate and masters level (although there is at some other universities). It is worth considering, however, the visual impression that you want your dissertation to create. Many students opt for traditional thesis binding, usually in hard covers covered in black or dark-coloured cloth with gold or silver lettering on the cover and spine. However, less expensive options such as wire comb or plastic spiral bindings are also acceptable.

Loose-leaf binding is unsuitable for dissertations and is unacceptable. Besides the fact that it is bulky, pages can easily become separated, destroying the document's integrity and usefulness.

## 8 Assessment of Your Dissertation

Normally, your dissertation will be assessed by two internal examiners, i.e. two academics within the Linguistics Department. Your supervisor may provide information to the examiners that may help them to assess your dissertation fairly and objectively. On occasions, however, your supervisor may be required to one of the examiners if we cannot find another suitable person due to, for instance, staff being on study leave, etc.

You will be given a single mark (and grade) for both LING934 *Dissertation Part A* and LING935 *Dissertation Part B* (the two 4 credit point components of the dissertation). Each examiner will provide you with a written report outlining the strengths and weaknesses of your dissertation. This report should also be accompanied by a completed assessment rubric (see below). For each of the criteria in the rubric, you will receive an evaluation in the form of an attainment level. The levels range from: *NA* to *Advanced*. Definitions of attainment levels are:

*NA = Not Applicable* (marked as ☑); *Not Attempted* or *Not Achieved* (marked as ☒).

*Developing* is intended to describe performance that is not yet at the basic level of expectations. So features may be present but not enough to pass. It would correspond to a **Pass Conceded**.

*Functional* is intended to describe a level of attainment that meets the basic requirements. There is a high degree of reliance on authority (i.e. little, if any, independent analysis or thought) and very little translation or integration of concepts. It would correspond to a **Pass**.

*Proficient* is a desirable standard for most students to reach and strongly exhibits independence, translation, integration and application. The work may also exhibit limited degrees of creativity and critical reflection. It would correspond to a **Credit**.

*Advanced* is performance beyond core expectations that is highly independent, creative, critically reflective, generative and transformative. It would correspond to a **Distinction** or **High Distinction**.

<b>Assessment Criteria</b>
1. Has conceived of a feasible and realistic research project (i.e. not too large or broad in scope).
2. Has synthesized the entire work in the abstract (i.e. integrated all salient aspects and issues of the study into the abstract).
3. Has reviewed the literature <i>critically</i> (i.e. has not merely described the literature).
4. Has established a strong link between the reviewed literature and the study (i.e. provided a synthesis of the literature reviewed into some sort of foundation for doing the study and shown the importance of the research issue).
5. Has provided a convincing justification and rationale for the study (i.e. explained why the study should be conducted).
6. Has clearly and concisely stated the aims and objectives of the study.
7. Has developed a narrow and focussed research question/s (i.e. not too broad so that extraneous variables will confound the results).
8. Has provided appropriate operational definitions (i.e. clear explanations of the actual procedures used to measure and/or manipulate constructs and variables).
9. Has developed an appropriate and systematic research methodology for the study (subject to the type of research paradigm employed).
10. Has provided adequate justifications for: research methodology employed, and the number and nature of participants chosen.
11. Has considered the ethical implications/issues of the research.
12. Has collected suitable data (subject to the research question/s, research paradigm employed, and the limitations/constraints of the research).
13. Has presented the data/findings coherently, logically, clearly and succinctly.
14. Has drawn logical and appropriate conclusions from the data and related these back to the literature reviewed.
15. Has demonstrated how the conclusions drawn complement the stated aims and objectives of the research as outlined at the beginning of the dissertation.
16. Has shown the implications of the findings (i.e. what do they mean?).
17. Has outlined the limitations and shortcomings of the research and made appropriate suggestions for improvement in any subsequent research.
18. Has suggested areas for further research.
19. Has made a contribution to our knowledge in the particular field or discipline.
20. Has referenced with consistency and accuracy.
21. Has written in appropriate academic style.

This purpose of this rubric is multifold. It is intended to be used:

1. As a guide in the design of a dissertation's structure.
2. As a means to communicate to students (and examiners) expectations and standards.
3. As a feedback tool to provide students with an idea of where they are placed in the framework of dissertation standards.
4. As a self evaluation tool.
5. As a guide for examiners to aid *consistency*, *accuracy* and *representativeness* in assessing, interpreting, grading and reporting.

## 9 Suggestions for Further Readings

### PUBLICATIONS ON RESEARCH AND DISSERTATION-WRITING

**Note:** The titles listed in this section are publications on research and dissertation-writing which are commercially available and may be helpful for users of this guide to consult. Several other publications on this topic were also consulted during the writing of this guide; however, as these are produced mainly for in-house distribution to students at specific institutions, they have been acknowledged in the reference list rather than including them in this section.

Howard K. & Sharp, J.A. (1983). *The management of a student research project*. Aldershot: Cower.

Lewis, F. (1989). *Writing a thesis: A guide to its nature and organisation* (2nd ed.). Canberra: Australian National University: Canberra.

Northey, M. (1987). *Making sense: A student's guide to writing and style* (revised ed.). Toronto: Oxford University Press.

Nunan, D. (1989). *Understanding language classrooms*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice-Hall.

Nunan, D. (1992). *Research methods in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Powles, M. (1989). *How's the thesis going?* Melbourne: University of Melbourne.

Schiffrin, D. (1994). *Approaches to discourse*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Seliger, H.W. & Shohamy, E. (1989). *Second language research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

For further references on research methods, see the reading lists provided as part of the Master of Applied Linguistics unit on research methods and language study.

## STYLE GUIDES

- Australian Government Publishing Service. (1994). *Style manual for authors, editors and printers* (5th edition). Canberra: AGPS Press.
- The Chicago manual of style*. (1993) (14th ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Eagleson, R.D. (1990). *Writing in plain English*. Canberra: AGPS Press.
- Luey, B. (1995). *Handbook for academic authors*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marshall, A.R.A. & Phillips, D. (1989). *Scholarly writing: a guide for students of education and the social sciences*. Armidale: Dept. of Administrative and Higher Education Studies, University of New England.
- Miller, C. & Swift, K. (1981). *A handbook of non-sexist writing for writers, editors and speakers* (revised British ed.). London: The Women's Press.
- Murray-Smith, S. (1990). *Right words: A guide to English usage in Australia* (2nd ed.). Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, Australia.
- Pauwels, A. (1991). *Non-discriminatory language*. Canberra: AGPS Press.
- Peters, P. (1995). *The Cambridge Australian English style guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. (2001) (5th ed). Washington DC.: American Psychological Association.

## ACADEMIC WRITING AND STUDY SKILLS GUIDES

Several of the books in the list below are especially useful for students whose first language is not English. However, they also contain useful information for all students writing dissertations.

- Anderson, J. & Poole, M. (1970). *Thesis and assignment writing*. Brisbane: John Wiley & Sons.
- Ballard, B. & Clancy, J. (1988). *Studying in Australia*. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.
- Bate, D. & Sharpe, P. (1990). *Student writer's handbook*. Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Cuba, L. (1993.) *A short guide to writing about social science* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper Collins College Publishers.

- Fabb, N. & Durant, A. (1993). *How to write essays, dissertations and theses in literary studies*. London: Longman.
- Flower, L. (1981). *Problem-solving strategies for writing* (4th ed.). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers: Orlando, Florida.
- Hart, C. (1998). *Doing a literature review: Releasing the social science research imagination*. London: Sage Publications.
- Hubbuck, S. M. (1985). *Writing research papers across the curriculum* (3rd ed.). Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Peters, P. (1985). *Strategies for student writers*. Brisbane: John Wiley & Sons.
- Peters, P. (2004). *The Cambridge guide to English usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, M. & Smith, C. (1988). *A study skills handbook for students studying in English*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Weissberg, R. & Baker, S. (1990). *Writing up research: Experimental research report writing for students of English*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

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- Connole, H. (1993). *Issues and methods in research: Readings and Study guide*. Adelaide: External Studies, South Australian College of Advanced Education.
- Gebhard, J.C. (1990). Models of supervision: Choices. In J.C. Richards & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Second language teacher education* (pp. 156-166). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- George, R., Hipp, H, Love, A. & Stevenson, M. (1993). *Learning resources for students studying at a distance: An orientation to study for undergraduate students*. Adelaide: Distance Education Centre, University of South Australia.
- Macquarie University (Postgraduate Studies Section). 1995, *Handbook for postgraduate research candidates*.
- Maxwell, T. (Ed.) (1992). *A thesis and dissertation guide for students of the faculty of education, nursing and professional studies, UNE*. Armidale: Faculty of Education, Nursing and Professional Studies, University of New England.
- Moore, B. (1995). *Handbook for research students in the faculty of education*. Adelaide: University of South Australia.
- Moore, B.N. & Parker, R. (2000). *Critical thinking* (6th ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Sajavaara, K. (1994). *The thesis: A writer's guide*. Finland: Department of English, University of Jyvaskyla.
- Wenden A. & Rubin, J. (Eds.) (1987). *Learner strategies in language learning*. Prentice Hall International: Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

# Appendices

## **APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE CONSENT FORM**

**DO NOT PUT ON LETTERHEAD  
UNTIL APPROVED BY ETHICS COMMITTEE**

***(A Model for an Information and Consent Form)***

Name of Project: \_\_\_\_\_

You are invited to participate in a study of *(state what is being studied)*. The purpose of the study is *(state what the study is designed to discover or establish)*.

The study is being conducted by *(provide the names of the Chief Investigators, their School affiliations, and contact telephone numbers)*.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to *(describe the tasks or procedures, their frequency and duration, and the information to be obtained)*. *(Acknowledge any recording using audiotapes, videotapes, or photographs.) (Describe any risks or discomforts.) (Describe any payment of money or other remuneration.)*

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. *(Acknowledge who will have access to the data.)*

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

---

I, *(participant's name)* have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name:  
(block letters)

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

Investigator's Name:  
(block letters)

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee (Human Research). If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Ethics Review Committee through its Secretary (telephone 9850 7854). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

**(INVESTIGATOR'S [OR PARTICIPANT'S] COPY)**

## **APPENDIX 2: MODEL ABSTRACTS**

The NCELTR Resource Centre holds copies of a large number of English and Linguistics dissertations and theses submitted at Macquarie University. Many Master of Applied Linguistics students on campus find it helpful to consult these models when planning their dissertations. They may offer useful ideas on research topics and methods as well as on the presentation of your dissertation. For the benefit of distance learning students, abstracts from several dissertations previously submitted in the Department of Linguistics at Macquarie are included below, illustrating the scope of a range of topics and the approaches adopted to these research projects and the resultant dissertations.

### **I**

#### **Factors affecting the quality of language courses taught in open learning mode** (Master of Applied Linguistics dissertation by Betty Leask, March 1994 Synopsis)

Recent policies influencing the provision of courses in languages other than English in Australia have led to an increasing demand for language courses taught in open mode. This study investigates criteria for evaluating the quality of open learning LOTE courses, where quality is defined in terms of the extent to which a course meets the needs of learners.

The literature review finds that there is little written about open learning language courses in schools. From documentation covering both the schools and the tertiary sectors the review identifies seven factors which may affect the quality of open learning language courses. These factors are investigated further through thirteen case studies representing a sample of language courses taught in open learning mode in Australia and New Zealand. Case studies are taken from both schools and tertiary institutions.

The research procedure was qualitative and descriptive with some quantification of data. Data was collected using an evaluative survey. This formed the basis of a research interview. Data was analysed according to evaluative criteria incorporated into an evaluative framework.

The Evaluative Framework was developed with reference to the literature review, commonly accepted principles of language teaching, research into the field of second language acquisition and the research questions. It was refined after a preliminary analysis of the case study data.

The Framework consists of twelve criteria and indicators of achievement for each criterion. The development of criterion scales enabled the quantification of the qualitative data collected in the case studies and a comparison of the outcomes of courses offered in different modes.

The report discusses the seven criteria for the quality of open learning delivery of languages identified in the literature review with reference to research into second language acquisition and the findings of the case studies. It is found that technology has much to offer in providing quality learning experiences in open learning LOTE but that there are a range of other factors which must also be considered when designing and delivering courses.

The report recommends that the evaluative framework be trailed as a design tool, enabling course writers to plan for quality.

## II

### **The interpretive link between poetry and music in Copland's *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson***

(Master of Applied Linguistics dissertation by Lynn Amitrano-Hudson,  
March 1995)

#### **Summary**

Music critics, such as Douglas Young, have suggested that Aaron Copland 'has found a language equivalent to Emily Dickinson's' in his song cycle *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Young, 1972: 35). Copland himself claimed that 'the poems themselves gave him his direction, one that he hoped would be appropriate to Miss Dickinson's lyrical expression' (Copland, 1989: 158). This thesis argues that the selections in Copland's musical design were motivated by the semantic and lexico-grammatical patterning of Dickinson's poems.

Each song will be analysed to find its 'long line'. According to Copland, this essential structural principle gives a musical composition 'a sense of... direction... and continuity from the first note to the last... (which) produces in the listener a satisfying feeling of coherence' (1939: 32, 117-118). This musical analysis will be combined with an examination of the lexico-grammatical and semantic design of the poems, starting at cruces or critical points where there is a shift in the song.

Halliday's and Hasan's theory of text structure will inform this text analysis. Its argument that 'coherence' is produced through cohesive structures in the text resembles Copland's 'long line principle' (Halliday, 1985; Hasan, 1985). 'Resources of cohesion' such as reference, ellipsis, and logical and lexical relations will be uncovered in the poems to reveal how they have influenced the long line of the songs (Halliday, 1985: 318). Furthermore, 'the polyphonic structuring' of the texts and their clauses as 'message, exchange, and representation' will be compared to the combination of Copland's four fundamental musical elements: rhythm, melody, harmony and timbre/tone colour (Copland, 1939).

**III**  
**Communication strategies used by Indonesian learners of English in natural  
conversation with native speakers of English**  
(Master of Applied Linguistics dissertation by Helena I R Agustien)

**Summary**

This study is aimed at documenting communication strategies (CSs) used by two groups of Indonesian learners of English (ILEs), who have different backgrounds in terms of previous English learning experiences, in natural casual conversations with native speakers of English. The first group consists of postgraduate students majoring in different subjects and this group is called the non-linguistic group (NLG). The second group consists of those majoring in applied linguistics and therefore it is called the linguistic group (LG).

The LG is assumed to have a higher English proficiency because its members had at least four years of formal intensive English training at the tertiary / undergraduate level. Each of the group had a separate conversational session but both conversed for about 90 minutes. The conversations were recorded and then analysed using Tarone's CS taxonomy (1977) but any other CSs found in the data were also counted although they are not included in those of Tarone.

It was found that the NLG used nearly three times as many CSs as the LG; that generally speaking the two groups have similar patterns in terms of the proportions of CS use; that the two groups differ very much in the use of comprehension indicators functioning as showing appreciation to the interlocutor in that the NLG almost never used them whereas the LG used them quite a few times; that both groups share 'favourite CSs and among them are the new CSs not included in Tarone's taxonomy which include approximation, message abandonment, repair, repetition, over-elaboration, context manipulation and team effort; and that new CSs (context manipulation and team effort) are found in the study. Lastly, CSs are found to operate at both individual and social levels. Individual CSs include approximation, language switch, topic avoidance, message abandonment, over-elaboration and context manipulation. Social SCs include team effort, appeal for assistance, comprehensive indicator and clarification request. Some CSs operating at both individual and social levels are circumlocution, repair and repetition.

## IV

### **The problem of plagiarism: A textual analysis of ESL tertiary students' essays**

(Master of Applied Linguistics dissertation by Joni Siah, June 1994)

#### **Summary**

This study explores the problem of plagiarism within the context of academic writing from multiple sources primarily through a textual analysis of ESL (English as a Second Language) tertiary students' essays. The sample texts used for the analysis were course assignments from an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program. Based on systemic-functional grammar, the textual analysis represents an attempt to investigate the linguistic features of plagiaristic writing.

Elicitation techniques such as questionnaires and interviews were also used to investigate students' and teachers' attitudes towards and experiences with this problem in academic writing.

The study distinguishes between plagiarism of ideas and plagiarism of words and reveals significant patterns in the nature of plagiaristic writing across two different essay tasks. Teaching implications are drawn for application to the EAP course.

## V

### **The role of translation in bilingual editing of magazines**

(PhD thesis by Maria Po-suen Cheng Choy, November 1994)

#### **Abstract**

In cross-cultural or intercultural encounters of the modern age, mass communication has become a daily feature of our technological civilisation, and mass media have facilitated effective international information flow. Bilingual editing becomes an important medium of mass communication. The effectiveness of such communication rests upon the grammatical, lexical, sociolinguistic, socio-cultural, discourse and strategic competence of participants (editors, writers, translators and readers). It rests upon their ability to creatively use and to sensitively respond to language. In this dynamic process of communication, a bilingual editor not only plays the role of translator but also acts as a mediator; as Hatim and Mason (1990:223) suggest, s/he 'has not only a bilingual~ ability but also a bi-cultural vision'.

In view of the diversity of usage of bilingual editing in the media, this research delves into the role of translation from English to Chinese in the bilingual editing of magazines in Hong Kong. This area is of interest for four reasons: first, since the press medium engages most translation practitioners, a study in this area may help future practitioners to have a better understanding of this science and art and its practice; second, text types are highly diverse, allowing room for discussion of translation devices; third, Hong Kong is a typical meeting place of the East and West and bilingual editing serves as a tool of information flow; fourth, the rising status of Chinese in Hong Kong approaching 1997 will enhance the role of bilingual editing.

The study focuses on translation only from English and Chinese, or vice versa. Inasmuch as there is very little academic attention to bilingual editing and its nature, processes and techniques, or to the role of translation in bilingual editing, it is believed that this research will help facilitate cross-cultural communication between Westerners and Chinese.

The objective of this study is to derive new insights into the translation process with the support of contemporary approaches, and to descant on different lexical, grammatical and cultural features between English and Chinese; and most important, to elicit from the above features a set of parameters which may promote consistency and precision in the discussion of translating articles of the abovementioned press medium.

Editors and theorists agree that an understanding of the source language text is essential. To review the basis for understanding the source language correctly, a text analysis of an English text and its Chinese translation will be performed. This analysis will take a functional approach which is based on Halliday's model of analysing the functional grammar of English. The first concern is with the analysis of clause complexes. The thinking behind this concern is influenced by Bell's approach to the clause. Such a functional approach is applied to the Chinese text. This does not mean a complete application of Halliday's functional model to the Chinese language, but the functional approach will be used as a tool to reveal the relationship between the two languages as well as to analyse the source language. Case studies developed from the textual analysis of different types of magazines and from discussions with the translators or bilingual editors about their views of the translating process will be presented. Samples of articles illustrating the difficulties and challenges are also cited.

## VI

### **Lexical-phonemic and semantic processing in aphasia**

(Master of Arts (Honours) thesis by Tanya L Warms, March 1998)

#### **Abstract**

The aim of the set of experiments described in this thesis was to study the relationship between the underlying phonemic and semantic competence of aphasics' single word processing, and their overt speech and language characteristics. It also aimed to investigate the independence of lexical from sub-lexical phonemic processes believed to be used in spoken output.

The experiments involved covert language tasks such as the identification and matching of pictured words, and overt tasks, such as naming pictures. The results showed that firstly, the pattern of deficits of phonemic and semantic processing was generally consistent with the overt speech and language behaviours usually displayed in the traditional aphasic syndromes. Secondly, the processes involved in phonological output were severely disturbed for all aphasics regardless of type. Thirdly, most of the aphasics were unable to segment words phonologically and this was found to be independent of naming proficiency.

The analysis of covert cognitive psycholinguistic functions as described in this thesis provides a new basis for the examination and planning of treatment of aphasia. This study also lends support to those theories of normal language processing that propose there are two lexical-phonemic processes (one for heard words and one for spoken words); and to theories that postulate separate lexical and sub-lexical processes exist for spoken output.

### **APPENDIX 3: CONTACT DETAILS**

Linguistics Postgraduate Office  
Linguistics Department  
Macquarie University NSW 2109  
Australia

#### **Postgraduate officers:**

*Ms Lorraine Whybrow & Ms Kylie Coaldrake*

Telephone: +61 2 9850 7102

Fax: +61 2 9850 9352

Email: [lingpgo@ling.mq.edu.au](mailto:lingpgo@ling.mq.edu.au)

#### **Co-ordinator, Postgraduate Coursework Programs in Applied Linguistics:**

*Dr. Stephen Moore*

Telephone: +61 2 9850 8742

Facsimile: +61 2 9850 9352

Email: [stephen.moore@ling.mq.edu.au](mailto:stephen.moore@ling.mq.edu.au)

#### **Departmental Ethics Officer:**

*Dr Peter Roger*

Telephone: +61 2 9850 8742

Facsimile: +61 2 9850 9352

Email: [peter.roger@ling.mq.edu.au](mailto:peter.roger@ling.mq.edu.au)

#### **Macquarie University Library:**

Website: <http://www.lib.mq.edu.au/>

#### **Liasion Librarian:**

*Ms Jo Hardy*

Telephone: +61 2 9850 7535

Email: [jo.hardy@mq.edu.au](mailto:jo.hardy@mq.edu.au)

*Ms Karen Marks*

Telephone: +61 2 9850 9009

Email: [karen.marks@mq.edu.au](mailto:karen.marks@mq.edu.au)