

## Editing and endings: video script

Hi, and welcome to the final teaching video about writing your dissertation. If you've now got drafts of your literature review, methodology and results chapters, this is a great point to think about both editing the drafts you have, and writing your introduction and conclusion chapters. You might think it's a bit strange not to begin with your beginning, and to leave the introduction until now, but, trust me, it will be much easier to write once you have your three main chapters done.

During this video, you should be thinking about the structure and contents of your first and last chapters – your introduction and conclusion – and also about how you can use an editing process to make your writing as good as it can be. As always, I'm happy to meet people individually to give you feedback on your writing – please use the link to book an appointment, and you can email me a draft before coming if you like – if you do send me something, please make sure it's at least one full working day in advance of your appointment. Otherwise, print out your draft and bring it along with you.

The best time to write an excellent introduction is when you've got a strong idea of the shape of your whole dissertation – so, what other people have found out about your research area, what you did, what you found out, and why it matters. Having a clear view of what your dissertation is actually about (which might have changed significantly from your original idea, or what you were thinking of doing several weeks ago) will ensure that your introduction is written in a more focused way.

Like any introduction that you've done for your written assessments throughout your degree, this section will take up about 10% of your word count, so will be a substantial chapter. As it's likely to be the first part of your dissertation that's read, it needs to be something that clearly explains the purpose of your research, and the structure of the dissertation, but it also needs to generate interest. If you decide to write an outline which says something like 'secondary literature will be critically discussed in the literature review, and the research philosophy and approaches to data collection will be addressed in the methodology chapter', your reader is going to feel really bored. Instead, capture their attention by being specific throughout your introduction – what aspects of your research area are going to be covered in your literature review? How are you going to carry out your research? You also need to provide your reader with a bit of background, or context. This isn't going to be a repetition of your literature review, but an overview of the key themes which are relevant to your research questions, or the seminal theories and key events which have a bearing on your project. By the end of the introduction, your reader should have a good sense of, and be convinced by, your rationale – the reasons why this research is needed and will be productive. You also need to clearly establish your aims and objectives.

Let's test your ability to provide an interesting and succinct summary of your research. You might have heard of the idea of an elevator pitch – basically, it comes from the idea that you get into the elevator, or lift, with the head of your organisation, and you have

the time it takes for the lift to reach her floor (so, about a minute) to tell her about a great idea you have. I'd like you to go to the Padlet wall, and write an elevator pitch about your dissertation, in less than 200 words. This will cover: what you're researching, why it's important, any contextual information that is needed to make it accessible to another student who may not be on your course, and your main findings. After posting, you can take a look at other people's pitches, and comment on them. Pause the video whilst you do this activity.

Having the purpose and main arguments of your dissertation clear in your mind will help you immensely when editing, as it will enable you to make sure that your writing remains focused. It will also help with editing if you are aware of the distinct function of each chapter; this should ensure that you adhere to a logical structure throughout your dissertation, and mean that it is easier to notice and remove any extraneous material. To assist you with this, I'll now do a quick re-cap of the objectives of the different sections of your dissertation.

You can think of your abstract as being like an advert, which is selling the worth of your dissertation. Just like an ad, you want to briefly mention the most important aspects of your project, giving a succinct overview of why someone should read on: emphasise the necessity of your research, and the most original and pertinent findings.

Your literature review can be compared to patchwork. Just as this owl has been constructed from different pieces of material, a range of previous research constitutes your lit review. You'll notice that the material scraps haven't just been piled up, but have been carefully connected together to make a whole new avian object; similarly, your lit review needs to show the links between existing evidence, bring information together to make something new – in this case, your research project.

An analogy for your methodology chapter is an instruction manual, as this part of your writing will explain exactly how you carried out your research, in enough detail that someone else could follow it and replicate your project. However, it has one important difference – instruction manuals rarely explain the reasons behind the directions, whereas your methodology chapter needs to explain why your research has been conducted in the way you've chosen.

Finally, keep in mind a newspaper report when you're writing your results and analysis chapter. A good newspaper article doesn't just state what happened, but it offers a discussion of the implications of the event, how it relates to previous, similar occurrences, and why the event is significant. Your results and analysis chapter should also do these things – you don't want to just report or list your findings, but also talk about the meanings and consequences of what you've found out, and explore the relationships between your results and previous research.

This is the last dissertation writing video, so it's a fitting place to discuss endings. Have you ever watched a film or read a book which you've really enjoyed most of the way

through, and then been disappointed by the final scenes? Often, your disgust at a conclusion that seems overly simplistic (perhaps the writer or director has abruptly revealed that everything was actually a dream) or unfitting (maybe you're angry that a character did suddenly something that doesn't fit with the personality that's been established) makes you re-evaluate your opinion of the whole book or film – your disappointment might be enough to make you decide that you don't like it after all. Or, conversely, sometimes a really interesting twist or satisfying conclusion can result in you feeling that what you've read or watched is actually much better than you initially thought. So you can see how crucial an ending can be to an overall judgement. With this in mind, let's think about how to make the finale of your dissertation something which will leave your reader feeling contented.

So, what should your conclusion chapter be doing? Firstly, it needs to provide your reader with the key points made – you have given your reader a huge amount of information, so it's your job to mark out the things that really matter. What are the most significant aspects that bear repeating in an overview? What do you most want your reader to take away from your dissertation? Thinking back to the content of your elevator pitch is likely to help with this. You also want to wrap things up for your reader, so that you can leave them with a sense of closure, with the idea that the project has been fully completed and has achieved its aims and objectives. But you don't need to wrap things up completely, in the sense that your dissertation is completely sealed off. Instead, it's beneficial to look outwards at this stage, and think about future directions for research in the area you've looked at – perhaps addressing connections to current issues or other contexts. Don't ever just make the boring comment 'more research is needed in this area', though (more research is always needed, and you knew that right at the start of this project) – tell your reader specifically what you think needs to be looked into further, as a result of carrying out this research. For example, if your dissertation looked into student motivations for completing their course, and you found out that peer support seemed to be really important, you might suggest that a further study examines what types of peer support are the most beneficial.

To finish this video, we're going to think about how you might edit your dissertation. Editing is a crucial part of the writing process, as no-one can write a brilliant dissertation straight off. The best writing happens when you take the time to go through it, assess where it can be improved, and then make amendments.

You can see the role of editing in this diagram of the writing process, which begins with your idea, then progresses through stages of reading and planning until you start drafting. You'll note that the arrows around the drafting and editing boxes show the cyclical nature of this process. Editing isn't a one-off occurrence, but rather something which you repeat, creating many new drafts, until you achieve something you're satisfied with, or run out of time to make any more revisions. You should also note that I've separated editing from proof-reading – there's no point spending a lot of time

checking the proof-reading elements, such as spelling and grammar, until you have a final draft.

When editing, it's a good idea to go back to your module handbook and look at the assessment criteria. You can't be sure that you're meeting requirements unless you're clear about what they are. These criteria (and their wording) will vary slightly between your programmes, but they will all cover the following aspects: critical understanding (so showing your reader that you've read widely, you're familiar with what other people have done and why it matters, and you can show how existing theories relate to each other, and to your own research), originality and creativity (demonstrating that you've produced some new knowledge, and what you've done is different from what's already out there), clear writing and accuracy (making sure that your reader comprehends the points you make, and that you've presented the information in the best way), a logical structure (indicating that you've thought about the order of your writing and how it links together) and finally, that you have an argument to your dissertation, and that it forms a narrative, or tells the story of your research, and doesn't feel disjointed and disconnected. Keep all these things in mind when you edit your work. It's usually easiest if you don't try and look for all kinds of issues at once, but go through the draft in several stages, each time being aware of a different aspect – so you might do one read through focusing on paragraph structure, and another on criticality.

This table, adapted from a list compiled by the University of Leeds, shows the differences between writing and editing. Pause the video while you take a moment to read it through and think about what each process involves. You can see that one of the aspects of editing is objectivity – this means that it's a lot easier to edit your work if you have some distance from it. Have you ever re-read an assessment after it's been marked, and noticed lots of errors that you didn't spot before you submitted it? That's because the marking period has established some temporal distance. When editing your dissertation, you might not be able to put aside a chapter for a whole three weeks, but try and give yourself as much time as you can between finishing a draft, and editing. In the meantime, you can work on another chapter. Even if you are running out of time towards the end, going away for an hour or so and doing something else will give you a slightly altered perspective. The table also states that editing is about adding and removing, and this is where big alterations can be made, so don't be afraid to delete whole sentences or even paragraphs if you realise that you've drifted off-topic, you've repeated yourself, or you're not making sense. Being brave about significant changes can mean that your editing has a real impact. Don't forget though, that sometimes just adding a word here or there can also have a large effect – especially when it comes to making sure that you have sign-posting words such as 'therefore', 'consequently' or 'however'.

To conclude this video, I want to remind you that researching and writing a dissertation is like going on a journey. You'll have discovered new things – not just about your topic, but also about yourself, and your own abilities. You'll also have learnt lots of stuff –

about doing research, about writing, and about how you are able to project manage and keep yourself motivated. To expand on this metaphor further, think about yourself as a tour guide for this journey. A good tour guide should be able to inform people, entertain them, and perhaps inspire them to embark on their own journey. Your dissertation needs to aim for all of these things too – letting your reader know about your research, writing in a way that keeps their interest, and perhaps instigating further related projects.