

READING THE DRAFT(S)

CHECKING THE CONTENT

Reading drafts requires much time, critical ability and patience of supervisors. With regard to the content, the questions below can be used as a checklist by the student to ensure that the work is worthwhile, and by you to focus your reading through the draft thesis or chapters.

Checklist for reading drafts

Evidence of an original investigation or the testing of ideas

- (a) Was the aim of the research clearly described?
- (b) Were the hypotheses to be tested, questions to be answered, or methods to be developed clearly stated?
- (c) Was the relationship between the current and previous research in related topic areas defined, with similarities and differences stressed?
- (d) Are the nature and extent of the original contribution clear?

Competence in independent work or experimentation

- (a) Was the methodology employed appropriate? Was its use justified and was the way it was applied adequately described?
- (b) Were variables which might influence the study recognised and either controlled in the research design or properly measured?
- (c) Were valid and reliable instruments used to collect the data?
- (d) Was there evidence of care and accuracy in recording and summarising the data?
- (e) Is evidence displayed of knowledge of, and the ability to use, all relevant data sources?
- (f) Were limitations inherent in the study recognised and stated?
- (g) Were the conclusions reached justifiable in the light of the data and the way they were analysed?

An understanding of appropriate techniques

- (a) Given the facilities available, did it seem that the best possible techniques were employed to gather and analyse data?
- (b) Was full justification given for the use of the techniques selected and were they adequately described? In particular were they properly related to the stated aims of the research?

Ability to make critical use of published work and source materials

- (a) Was the literature referenced pertinent to the research?
- (b) To what extent could general reference to the literature be criticised on the grounds of insufficiency or excessiveness?
- (c) Was evidence presented of skills in searching the literature?
- (d) Was due credit given to previous workers for ideas and techniques used by the author?
- (e) Is evidence displayed of the ability to identify key items in the literature and to compare, contrast and critically review them?

Appreciation of the relationship of the special theme to the wider field of knowledge [for PhD theses only]

- (a) Was the relationship between the current and previous research in related topic areas defined, with similarities and differences stressed?
- (b) Was literature in related disciplines reviewed?
- (c) Was an attempt made to present previous work within an overall conceptual framework and in a systematic way?

Worthy, in part, of publication

- (a) Was the organisation of the report logical and was the style attractive?
- (b) With appropriate extraction and editing could the basis of articles or a book be identified?

Originality as shown by the topic researched or the methodology employed (for PhD theses only)

- (a) To what extent was the topic selected novel?
- (b) Was there evidence of innovation in research methodology compared with previous practice in the field?

Distinct contribution to knowledge

- (a) What new material was reported?
- (b) To what extent would the new material be perceived as a valuable addition to a field of knowledge?
- (c) To what extent do the conclusions overturn or challenge previous beliefs?
- (d) Were the findings compared with the findings of any similar studies?
- (e) Was the new contribution clearly delimited and prospects for further work identified?
- (f) To what extent does the work open up whole new areas for future research?

(Howard & Sharp 1983, pp. 207-208)

PRESENTATION OF THE THESIS

Institutional requirements often demand that both supervisor and student are familiar with the way a thesis should be presented. There are expectations with regard to the structure, footnoting, use of tables and graphs, inclusion of non-print materials, bibliographies, length, typing or wordprocessing.

Before the student embarks on the final task of having the thesis typed or printed, in most institutions supervisors are required to read it and comment critically on its content. Only after discussion of the whole thesis should the student embark on the final presentation. It is not your task to check that your student follows the institutional requirements; but you might well impress on your student the importance of applying the technical rules, of immaculate presentation, and above all of making it easy for the examiner by relegating much of the raw data into appendices, providing cross-references, explanations and definitions of terms and symbols. Good presentation enhances the content, poor presentation distracts

Ingrid Moses (1985), *Supervising Postgraduates*. Campbelltown: HERDSA.