***A short guide for students***

***Basic structure of a dissertation***

***Contents***

1. Reasons for writing dissertations

2. Definition of a dissertation

3. Structure

***1. Reasons for writing a dissertation***

A dissertation is an attempt to *communicate*. Science begins with curiosity, follows on with experiment and analysis. It leads to findings which are then shared with the larger community of scientists and even the public. The dissertation is therefore not merely a record of technical work, but is also an attempt to communicate it to a larger audience.

***2. Definition of a dissertation***

A dissertation is a written record of the work that has been undertaken by a candidate. It constitutes objective evidence of the candidate s knowledge and capacities in the field of interest. Although dissertation writing may be viewed as an unpleasant obligation on the road to a degree, the discipline it induces may have lifelong benefits.

***3. Structure***

*A Title page*

The title page gives the title of the thesis in full. The title of your research paper should be short but descriptive enough to capture the essence of what your study is about. It should be phrased in a way that captures the attention of the reader. A statement of presentation in the form ‟dissertation presented for the degree of doctor of philosophy of the University of ……” the candidate s name, the department and the year of submission.

*B abstract*

Write this last after you have completed analyzing and interpreting your data and written up your results and discussion sections. The abstract or summary should summarize the appropriate headings, aims, scope and conclusion of the thesis.

*C list of*

* Abbreviations
* Tables
* Figures

*D table of contents*

*E chapter one: introduction*

* Background of the study
* Statement of the problem
* Aims of the study
* Research questions
* Hypothesis
* Methodology
* Structure of the study

*F.Chapter two: review of literature*

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to provide the reader with a comprehensive review of the literature related to the problem under investigation. This chapter may contain theories and models relevant to the problem, a historical overview of the problem, current trends related to the problem, and significant research data published about the problem. The first section of Chapter 2 generally indicates how the chapter is organized and explains the subsections that comprise the chapter. For example, Chapter 2 provides an extensive review of the literature and research related to principal selection. The chapter will be divided into sections that include (a) history of the principalship, (b) importance of the principal, (c) current selection practices, and (d) recommended selection practices. As Chapter 2 may be lengthy, it is essential to divide the chapter into as many sections and subsections as needed to logically organize the information presented. As Chapter 2 presents information and conclusions drawn by other researchers, citations should be used extensively throughout the chapter. Although you are presenting information from other researchers and writers, avoid overuse of direct quotations. Including many direct quotations produces a literature review that usually lacks transitions and flow, and is difficult to read. Chapter 2 ends with a short summary of the information presented in the chapter. Several paragraphs that

highlight the most pertinent information from the review of literature are usually sufficient.

*G. Chapter three: research methodology*

*Population and Sample*

This section describes the population used in the study and the process utilized in selecting a sample. The sample should be small enough to provide a manageable volume of data, but the sample must accurately represent the population if any valid inferences are to be drawn from the sample results. In general, the sample will accurately represent the population from which it is drawn if (a) sample selection carefully follows an appropriate sampling design, (b) the sample is randomly selected from the population, (c) a large enough sample is selected in relation to the total population, and (d) the sample size is adequate for the data-collecting instrument being used.

In order to provide human subjects protection, specific names and organizational identifiers should be avoided except in broad terms. Such statements as "several small private Midwest colleges" or "teachers from

selected elementary schools within a large urban district" are preferable. Specific identifiers may be used when there is little or no chance of specific identification of individuals or groups (e.g., "teachers from several selected elementary schools in Sioux Falls, South Dakota"). Your description of the population and sample should be thorough enough, however, to permit another person replicating the study to define a similar sample from a similar population.

*Instrumentation*

This section describes the procedures used for developing an instrument to gather data from your selected population/sample. This generally includes sources of items for the instrument as well as a description of the instrument itself (e.g., number of items on the instrument, response format of the items, etc.). Sources of items for an instrument might include information gleaned from the literature review or may be an adaptation of a previous study or commercially available instrument. Instrument reliability and validity data should be described in this section whenever possible.

Instruments developed by the researcher should always be pilot tested (or field tested) to ensure instrument validity and clarity of instructions and items. In general, subjects similar to those who will be in the study sample (but not included in the actual sample) may serve as subjects for pilot testing. Results of pilot testing and accompanying comments should be used, if necessary, to revise the instrument before distributing it to the actual sample. The instrument may also be juried or critiqued by having several "experts"

examine it and make recommendations prior to, or in lieu of pilot testing. While critiquing involves only several experts examining the instrument and making recommendations, pilot testing implies actually following all of the steps of data collection with a smaller pilot sample and analyzing the results from the collected pilot data. While somewhat more time consuming, pilot testing obviously affords the researcher much greater information that leads to a more reliable and valid instrument. The decision regarding pilot testing versus critiquing the instrumentshould be made following discussion with the researcher’s advisor. The advisor and/or dissertation committee, as well as the Human Subjects Committee should always approve the final form of the instrument, as well as material to be pilot tested, before it is distributed.

*Data Collection*

This section describes in detail how the data will be/were obtained and the timelines involved in collecting the data. Information commonly provided in this section includes what materials will be/were distributed (e.g. survey instrument, cover letter, instruction sheets, self addressed stamped envelope, etc.), how they will be/were distributed (e.g. mailed to each participant, mailed to someone who distributed them to each participant, etc.), and when they will be/were distributed (e.g. all surveys were mailed on July 12, 1994, with a follow-up survey sent to all non respondents three weeks later). Beginning and ending dates for data collection are often included in,this section.

*Data Analysis*

This section of Chapter 3 describes in detail treatment and analysis of the collected data. Methods of data analysis are primarily determined by the hypotheses to be tested or research questions to be answered (which also determine the format of the instrument and how the data are gathered) and the level of data being gathered (nominal, ordinal, and/or interval). When several hypotheses/research questions are being addressed, it is helpful to describe the data analysis that will be used for each hypothesis/research question. For example:

1. A response to research question one, regarding teachers' perceptions of instructional materials, will be generated by computing means and standard deviations for each survey item.

2. A one-way analysis of variance will be used to determine if significant differences in perceptions exist between elementary and secondary principals comprising the study sample (research question two).

3. Null hypothesis three, that no significant correlation exists between student gender and intelligence, will be tested by computing a Pearson Product- Moment correlation. When inferential statistics are employed, it is helpful to identify the independent/dependent variables for each analysis. In addition, any complex statistical procedures being used should be briefly described and its source referenced. Tests of significance should be accompanied by a statement of the level of significance that will be used (e.g. all statistical analyses will use the .05 level of significance). The statistical software package being used, as well as reference to any individuals assisting the researcher with data analysis, should also be stated at the end of Chapter 3. The most commonly used descriptive statistics include means, standard deviations, frequency counts, and percentages. Among the most commonly used inferential statistics are chi-square, t test, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and various correlation coefficients. More complex statistical procedures include analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), factor analysis, canonical correlation, multiple regression analysis, and discriminant analysis. Summary (Optional)

This final section contains a brief summary of the methodology described in Chapter 3. In general, summary sections for Chapter 3 are included only when the methodology section is very long or complex. The summary section should provide a smooth transition to Chapter 4.

Qualitative Research Methodology

The general structure for Chapter 3 previously described should suffice regardless of the specific research methodology employed for the study. However, several comments regarding the specific requirements of reporting qualitative research methodology are in order.Unlike quantitative research, in which the researcher collects data as an objective and generally passive observer, many forms of qualitative research (e.g. ethnography, historical research, case studies, and grounded theory testing and development) depend much more directly on the researcher as an active participant in gathering data for the study. Additionally, in many forms of qualitative research design, the method(s) by which data are collected and used to draw conclusions is/are as important as the conclusions themselves. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the qualitative researcher to carefully describe the methodology employed in the data collection phase of the study. The researcher must provide a comprehensive description of the development of the research instrument used to gather data, as well as any changes made in the instrument as the data collection process proceeds. In addition, the researcher’s role in the actual collection of data must be clearly articulated to provide a clear framework within which the reader can better understand why certain data are considered relevant to the study and other data are considered extraneous. The subjectivity that is permitted the researcher in qualitative research implies a greater responsibility to articulate to the reader the basis upon which data may be selectively incorporated or discarded during this phase of the study. Finally, the researcher must carefully describe verification steps or processes (such as triangulation or data saturation) used to substantiate that the data selected for inclusion in the study are valid and reliable. In general, the extra flexibility allowed in qualitative research design requires the researcher to carefully describe how data are collected and utilized within the study.

*H.Chapter four: results and discussion*

This chapter begins with an introduction (as do all chapters), which delineates the major sections to be included in the chapter, and may include a restatement of the research problem. While there is no one "correct" format for dividing Chapter 4,information regarding response rate and respondent demographics is usually reported first, followed by reporting of results of data analysis for each hypothesis/research question.

Response Rate

Before reporting findings from data analyses – especially when dealing with survey research – the response rate is often described. This allows readers to gauge how many instruments were distributed, how many were returned, and what the overall rate of response to the survey was. This section may be included as part of the introduction without a specific section heading.

Demographic Data

Following the introduction (and response rate data), the next section frequently provides demographic information regarding the study population and sample. As most surveys include at least several demographic items, this section provides readers with a picture of the demographic composition of the respondents/participants. Information such as gender, age, position, years of experience, etc. are usually reported in this section. This section may also be included without a specific section heading, although a heading is helpful to the readers.

Findings

The remainder of Chapter 4 reports finding related to the hypotheses being tested or research questions being answered. A specific section heading should be used for each section in Chapter 4 that reports findings resulting from

data analysis.

In general, data are reported in tabular (tables) or graphic (figures) form accompanied by text describing the salient information contained in each table or figure.

Note that a table is generally limited to columns of numbers with appropriate column headings. Figures usually contain graphics such as graphs, diagrams, or photographs. It is recommended that extremely long tables/figures or very detailed information not be included within Chapter 4. Due to space requirements (and

questionable interest to most readers), it is better to place this information in an Appendix and note in Chapter 4 where the detailed information is located in the appendix.

Another section presents conclusions drawn from the findings and results of the data analysis. Findings from the present study should provide the primary information for drawing conclusions. Frequently, conclusions provide answers to research questions posed in Chapter 1. While conclusions may be written in narrative form or listed one at a time, listing them one at a time is generally easier for readers to follow and helps maintain clarity of focus for each conclusion. An important observation regarding conclusions is in order:

Conclusions are not the same as findings and should not simply be restatements of findings from Chapter 4. A conclusion should be broader and more encompassing than a specific finding, and several findings may be incorporated into one conclusion. While several findings may be used to support one conclusion, it is also possible that one finding might give rise to several conclusions (although this is somewhat less common). Generally, while specific findings are stated in the past tense (e.g., students expressed greatest satisfaction with university instructors), conclusions are stated in the present tense (e.g., students are most satisfied with university instructors). The following illustrates the relationship between findings and conclusions.

A study of public school superintendents across the United States in 1991 yielded the following findings:

1. Only 5% were non-White

2. Only 8% were female

From these findings the following conclusion was drawn: Women and minorities continue to remain underrepresented in the ranks of public school superintendents. (Note: This conclusion combined both findings

into a single broad statement that appears well supported by the study findings.)

Discussion

The discussion section provides a forum within which the researcher explores and attempts to explain findings and conclusions that emerged from the study. Within this section, the researcher attempts to interpret findings and conclusions, and relate these to both the purpose of the study and to published results from other studies examined in the literature review. This section may be used to forward theories and/or models, or raise questions regarding previously developed theories. the discussion section may be open-ended and take the form that researcher desires. Some researchers choose to discuss each conclusion or finding separately, while others prefer to address several or all of them at once in a general discussion.

The final section of Chapter 4 contains recommendations that emerge from the study. Generally, recommendations are of two distinct types; recommendations for action or practice (based on the study's findings and conclusions, and sometimes headed Recommendations from the Study or

Recommendations for Practice), and Recommendations for Further Study. Frequently a separate section is included for each set of recommendations –each with an appropriate section heading.Recommendations for practice are generally prescriptive in nature and address what could or should be done by practitioners or members of the intended audience in terms of professional practice and policy. These recommendations are based upon results of the study. For example,

1. Since male and female teachers rated elements of the professional development program much differently, the administration should provide gender-appropriate training to the teachers that highlights gender differences. Recommendations for further study contain suggestions regarding followup studies or replication studies. These recommendations usually acknowledge limitations or delimitations that the study included and which further studies could help explain or clarify. These might include different methodologies, expanded populations or samples, or changes in the instrument itself. For example,1. Since the current study was completed using a cross-sectional survey design, a similar study should be planned within the same school that uses a longitudinal design to determine if changes over time become perceptible.

*I List of references*

The list of references following Chapter 4 should include all references that were cited throughout the body of the dissertation. Conversely, there should be no references listed that did not appear as citations within the paper. (Bibliographies, on the other hand, may include works consulted from which no specific citations were used and should be subdivided into sections distinguishing works actually cited in the text from works consulted but not cited. Please note, however, the APA style dictates a reference list rather than a bibliography.)

the same style should be used for references as has been used throughout the dissertation for citations. Careful

attention should be paid to the reference section in terms of omissions, extra inclusions, or differences in dates or the spelling of authors' names between the citation and the reference listing. The following examples illustrate the basic reference formats for a periodical and a book.

Coyote, C. (1998). How to survive dissertation research at The University of South Dakota. USD Journal of Education, 16(4), 24-36.

Coyote, C. (1998). How to survive dissertation research at The University of South Dakota: A guidebook. Vermillion, SD: USD Press.

*J Appendice*s

The Appendixes contain pertinent (and often supplementary) materials that are not important enough, do not fit appropriately in any specific section of the body, or are too long to include in the body of the paper, but which

may be of interest to some readers. Common elements found in the Appendixes include a copy of the data-gathering instrument, a copy of the cover letter, copies of any letters of permission required for the study, and tables that are very long or of only minor importance to the study. A copy of the Human Subjects Committee approval sheet may also be included in an appendix.

***Chapter one: introduction***

***Background of the study***

What is the context of your study? What do people need to know to be able to understand and situate the study within the broader scope of the issues you are going to highlight in the study. The goal of the section is to include background information on the research topic to familiarize the reader about the subject matter of the study.

***Statement of the problem***

The problem statement is among the most critical parts of a dissertation because it provides focus and direction for the remainder of the study. A well-written problem statement defines the problem and helps identify the variables that will be investigated in the study.

***Rationale for the study***

Describe the reason why your study is relevant and worthy of investigation. How would your study contribute to the existing literature ? what are the main conversations and trends of literature in your area of study? What needs more research? Usually you can make that argument by looking at studies in your area and see how the authors state at the end of the studies what future work would be necessary then make an argument for your study.

***Aims of the study***

The following examples illustrate commonly used formats that are acceptable.

1. This study will compare, contrast, investigate, describe, determine, examine, develop, clarify, or evaluate the issue being studied.

2. The purpose of this study will be to determine the variables that explain the difference between males and females and identify those variables that differ significantly between the two genders.

3. This study is designed to investigate graduate students' perceptions regarding the difficulty of coursework at USD and determine which courses are more difficult than others.

***Research questions***

Avoid the use of "Yes-No" research questions which tend to limit the scope of your responses. Frequently, "Yes-No" type research questions can be reworded to a more useful form that results in the collection of more useful data. For example:

"Yes-No": Do educational administrators agree on the causes of student misbehavior in the classroom?

Reworded: To what extent do educational administrators agree on the causes of student misbehavior in the classroom?

Start with broad questions then more specific ones.

***Hypothesis***

Hypotheses (either directional, research, or in the null form) are stated when the research design is experimental or quasi experimental in nature. Survey research and non-experimental research are generally limited to research questions.

***Methodology***

***Sample***

The group of individuals selected by the researcher from a population to take part in his her study

Research means

The instruments utilized by the researcher to collect the necessary data for analysis. These include experimentation, interviewing, and dcts

***Data collection***

***Data analysis***

***Structure of the study***

The final section in every chapter summarizes its contents. This permits readers to know what information will be found in each chapter and facilitates finding specific information without searching through the dissertation page by page to do so. This section also provides a logical transition into the next chapter of the dissertation. The following presents an example of this section:

Chapter 1 has presented the introduction, background of the study, statement of the problem, ims of the study research questions, hypothesis, methodology and structure of the study . Chapter 2 contains the review of related literature and research related to the problem being investigated (be specific –summarize the actual contents of the review). The methodology and procedures used to gather data for the study are presented in Chapter 3. The results of analyses and findings to emerge from the study are (will be) presented in Chapter 4.

***Writing a review of literature***

***Contents***

1. What is a Literature Review?

2. Choosing Material

3. Searching for Good Material

4. Assessing the Literature

5. Developing the Literature Review

6. Placing the Literature Review in the Dissertation/Thesis

7. Structuring the Literature Review

8. Writing Up the Literature Review

***1.What is a Literature Review?***

A literature review is an objective, critical summary of published research literature relevant to a topic under consideration for research. Its purpose is to create familiarity with current thinking and research on a particular topic, and may justify future research into a previously overlooked or understudied area.

A literature review will try to look at as much of this existing research as possible. It will review major scholarly books in the relevant area, but will also take a keen interest in journal articles, which in many subjects give more up-to date material.

Preparing a literature review thus involves:

• Searching for reliable, accurate and up-to-date material on the topic or subject

• Reading and summarizing the key points from this literature

• Synthesizing these key ideas, theories and concepts into a summary of what is

Known.

• Discussing and evaluating these ideas, theories and concepts

• Identifying particular areas of debate or controversy

• Preparing the ground for the application of these ideas to new research

***2. Choosing Material***

Ask yourself questions such as these:

1. What is the specific question, topic or focus for my study?

2. What kind of material do I need? Theory? Methodology? Policy? Empirical data?

3. What type of literature is available (e.g., journals, books, government documents)?

4. What kind of literature is particularly authoritative in this academic discipline (e.g. psychology, sociology, pharmacy)?

5. Has my search been wide enough to ensure I have identified all the relevant material?

6. On the other hand, has the search been narrow enough to exclude irrelevant material?

7. Is there a good enough sample of literature for the level (Ph.D, Master’s, undergraduate) of my dissertation or thesis?

8. Have I considered as many alternative points of view as possible?

9. Will the reader find my literature review relevant, appropriate, and useful?

***3. Searching for Good Material***

Make sure that all the literature you review is as up-to-date as possible. The sole exception would be ‘classic texts’ such as major works written by the leading scholars setting out formative ideas and theories central to your subject.

A good literature review will have a good range of material setting out as many different perspectives as possible. Try to get a good balance between substantial academic books and more recent journal articles. A good place to start is with a bibliography. For undergraduate dissertations, look first at the bibliography provided with the module documentation. Choose one or two likely looking books or articles and then scan through the bibliographies provided by these authors. Skim read some of this material looking for clues: can you use these leads to identify key theories and authors or track down other appropriate material? Another approach is to try entering a few keywords into library catalogue search engines. You will almost certainly have to try a range of different words to capture as many items as possible. But avoid over-generalisations: if you type in something as broad as ‘social theory’ you are likely to get several thousand results! Try to be specific: for example, ‘Heidegger, existentialism’.Ideally, you should narrow the field down so you get just a few dozen results. Skim through these quickly to identity texts which are most likely to be helpful. If this does not produce enough material, browse along the library shelves in the relevant subject area and look at any of the books that catch your eye.Check the contents and index pages to see if they are likely to help; if not, put the book back and try again. You could also ask one of the subject librarians for further help. Your supervisor might be able to point you in the direction of some of the important literature, though remember this is your literature search, not theirs! For recent journal articles you will almost certainly need to use one of the online search engines. These can be found on the ‘Indexing Services’ button on the Templeman Library website.Kent students based at Medway still need to use the Templeman pages to access online journals, although you can get to these pages through the Drill Hall Library catalogue. Take a look as well at the Subject Guides on both the Templeman and DHL websites.

There is no answer to the question ‘how many books and journal articles should I review?’ It all depends on the length of the dissertation, the nature of the subject, the focal point of interest, the level of study (undergraduate, Masters, Ph.D) and so on. Obviously, if your dissertation is going to be mostly an interaction with existing scholarship you need a longer literature review than if your subject involves new empirical research. Nor are you expected to know about everything written on your subject, especially at undergraduate level. The key point is that you should aim to use the literature review to set out the boundaries of existing knowledge in your chosen area: what have other important scholars already said about this subject? Watch out for the obvious gaps! So, how many books and articles? Enough! Maybe – as a very rough and ready rule of thumb – 8-10 significant pieces (books and/or articles) for a 8,000 word dissertation, up to 20 major pieces of work for 12-15,000 words, and so on. But use your judgement!

***4. Assessing the Literature***

Skim through the books and articles identified as potentially relevant. Focus particularly on obvious ‘helps’ such as chapter summaries, journal abstracts, and even the index. Look for clues: how will this piece of literature contribute to your study (if at all)? If the answer is ‘not much’ then choose something different. Now re-read the chosen material carefully. Look especially for:

1. The key point discussed by the author: is this clearly defined?

2. What evidence has the author produced to support this central idea?

3. How convincing are the reasons given for the author’s point of view?

4. Could the evidence be interpreted in other ways?

5. What is the author's research method (e.g. qualitative, quantitative,experimental, etc.)?

6. What is the author's theoretical framework (e.g. psychological, developmental, feminist)?

7. What is the relationship assumed by the author between theory and practice?

8. Has the author critically evaluated the other literature in the field?

9. Does the author include literature opposing her/his point of view?

10. Is the research data valid– i.e. based on a reliable method and accurate information?

11. Can you "deconstruct" the argument – identify the gaps or jumps in the logic?

12. What are the strengths and limitations of this study?

13. What does this book or article contribute to my own topic or thesis?

As you ask these questions, make sure you also take careful notes on the content of each book or journal article. You will need these notes for your later summary. Keep the references!

***5. Developing the Literature Review***

A literature review is made up of a series of ‘mini book reviews’ on material read for the assignment. But remember: a good book review always has at least two distinct components:

• A brief summary of the content of the book/article together with an equally brief description of the importance of this piece of research for your own study – why include this particular book or article? Remember, most books or articles are usually making just ONE key point; so, what is that one point in this particular book/article, and how does that claim relate to your own research project

• A critique of the book or article: this involves an analysis of the argument, including an assessment of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the evidence presented. Does the author produce sufficient evidence to establish the point they want to make? What has conveniently been left out or skated over? Where is the counter-argument, and has the author dealt with this adequately? What is the author not saying, what would contradict their argument, and so on. Look carefully for the holes in the presentation; remember, every author is

spinning the evidence to make it show what they want it to show. Can you spin the same evidence in another direction? If so, what impact would this have on the overall argument? What if this particular author is completely wrong? Or, perhaps more likely, what if this particular author is only partially right? What difference would that make to your understanding of the topic?

***6. Placing the Literature Review in the Dissertation/Thesis***

There is some discussion amongst academics about the position of the literature review:

• The ‘traditional’ place is immediately after the introduction to the dissertation or thesis – the second section or chapter after an initial sketch of the project

• Some scholars prefer the literature review to be placed after the presentation of empirical evidence so that the literature review acts as a kind of foil to the main findings. This is fairly common in the qualitative (broadly ethnographic) tradition

• Some scholars, especially in the qualitative tradition, prefer the literature review to be distributed over the assignment as a whole, so the entire dissertation or thesis reads like an on-going conversation between empirical research and scholarly theory So, this is probably one of the (many!) things you will want to discuss with your supervisor. But unless you have been told otherwise, it is almost certainly better to play safe and put the literature review in the ‘traditional slot’ after the introduction.

***7. Structuring the Literature Review***

Try to build the literature review around your key topic or thesis: be relentless – show how each piece of literature contributes to, or challenges, your central theme. The overall structure of the section or chapter should be just like any other: it should have a beginning, middle and end. In other words, you need to guide the reader through the literature review, outlining the strategy you haveadopted for selecting the books or articles, presenting the topic theme for the review, then using most of the word limit to analyse the chosen books or articles thoroughly before pulling everything together briefly in the conclusion. By far the most common approach to the central ‘presentation of the evidence’ section is to work systematically through the books or articles selected. A paragraph or two is usually enough on each item, but remember you will needfor each book or article comments on:

• The content – a brief summary of the main ideas and evidence

• The strengths and weaknesses of the argument – the all-important critique

• The relevance of the book or article for your particular project: how does this contribute to your own thinking and/or research? If you are writing a Ph.D thesis, then the literature review is typically one chapter (perhaps 8-10,000 words), but this can vary enormously, depending on your subject. Ask your supervisor! If you are writing a Master’s dissertation, your literature review should probably be around 2-3,000 words, again depending on a wide range of factors. Ask your supervisor! If you are writing an undergraduate dissertation, your literature review will probably be about 2,000 words – but the same principle applies: ask! One variation on the traditional linear approach is to organise your literature review into historical order. Others prefer to start with the main theories and give more space to these, leaving the less important stuff for later. Some people prefer a less linear approach. Instead of simply working through a list of 8-20 items on your book review list, you might want to try a thematic approach, grouping key ideas, facts, concepts or approaches together and then bouncing the ideas off each other. This is a slightly more creative (and interesting) way of doing the review, but a little more risky – it is easy with this approach to lose coherence and logical sequencing.Whichever approach you adopt, make sure everything flows smoothly – thatone idea or book leads neatly to the next. Take your reader effortlessly through a sequence of thought that is clear, accurate, precise and interesting.

***8. Writing Up the Literature Review***

As with essays generally, only attempt to write up the literature review when it is ‘ripe’ – that is, when you have done all the reading, note-taking and planning for the chapter or section, and allowed yourself adequate thinking-time’. Then start writing. Find a neat way of introducing the review, then guide the reader through the material clearly and directly. Use evidence – never make unsubstantiated claims, but back everything up with argument and data. Avoid too many quotes and always give references for any quotation. Sometimes students use long quotation as a way of padding out the essay or in an attempt to cover up a lack of understanding. Don’t do this: it always shows, and will be picked up by the marker. Always summarise material in your own words as much as possible. Save the quotes for ‘punch-lines’ to drive the point home.

Be selective in the number of points you draw out from each piece of literature;remember that part of the object of the exercise is to show your tutors that you cause your judgement to identify what is central and what is secondary

• Summarise and synthesise – use your own words to sum up what you think is important or controversial about the book or article

• Be cautious - never claim more than the evidence will support. Too many dissertations and theses are ruined by exaggerated or sweeping generalizations Be tentative and careful in the way you interpret the evidence

• Keep your own voice – you are entitled to your own point of view provided it is based on the evidence presented. Having said that, make sure you back up your opinions with clear argument, and on the whole, it is usually better to avoid too much ‘I’ language; better to be a little more indirect and tentative (‘this tends to

suggest’, ‘it could be argued’ and so on)

• Revise, revise, revise: refine and edit the draft as much as you can. Check for fluency, structure, evidence and referencing. Don’t forget the basics: grammar and