

Dissertation Writing in Practice

Turning Ideas into Text

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1

Identifying the Research Gap

When you come to write your dissertation, you need to convey three types of information to your readers: you have to explain the background which led to your study; you must describe how the study was carried out and finally you discuss your findings and present the conclusions that you have reached. This first chapter considers how a writer presents the background information, that is, the introductory part of a dissertation. (As we explained in the Introduction, throughout this book we are using the term ‘dissertation’ to apply to what is variously called a dissertation or a thesis.)

Before we do this, however, we should take a look at what research itself is. Research is defined by *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* (third edition, 1991) in the following way:

Research is a detailed study of a subject or an aspect of a subject. When you do research, you collect and analyse facts and information and try to gain new knowledge or new understanding.

As we can see from this definition, a researcher is trying to find *new* knowledge or *new* understanding. For any research to have a purpose then, there must be some gap in the current knowledge. The gap may be in the form of a newly discovered problem or an incomplete answer to a previously researched problem. It may be that a phenomenon has not been investigated in a particular place before or with a particular group of people or from a particular perspective. Whatever the situation, the first task a writer faces is how to make this gap clear to readers. This is done by explaining what stimulated the

study and by reviewing the relevant literature to show what was known and what was not known at the outset of the research.

There are several ways of organising this introductory material in a dissertation. The first chapter may consist of a short introductory section of just two or three paragraphs, followed by a detailed analysis of the literature in the field. (We will call this a Type 1 dissertation.) Alternatively, the introductory section can be extended to form a chapter on its own, before the literature is reviewed in detail in a second chapter (Type 2 dissertation). These two types of organisation are perhaps the most common ways of presenting the introductory material. However, in some dissertations, particularly in the humanities, there is no separate section or chapter called the Literature Review or Literature Survey, just as there are no Method and Discussion chapters. These are topic-based or text analysis dissertations (Type 3). After an introductory chapter, which explains the overall theme of the research, each individual chapter of the dissertation consists of its own introduction and an analysis of text or discussion of the topic of that chapter, with reference throughout to the literature. Yet one more type of dissertation, though a less common type, is a dissertation which consists of a compilation of published research articles (Type 4). The introductory chapter here is similar to that of a Type 3 dissertation in that its function is to explain what links together all the separate studies reported in the articles which form the chapters. (You can see a detailed breakdown of different types of dissertation organisation in Chapter 5.) In the following sections, for ease of reference, we will use the term Introduction to refer to both the introductory section of a Type 1 dissertation and the introductory chapter of Types 2, 3 and 4 dissertations.

WRITING AN INTRODUCTION: MAIN STEPS

The overall purpose of an Introduction to a dissertation is to make the reason for the research clear to the reader. You could see the Introduction as starting the reader off on a journey through the dissertation. It has to give the reader some idea of

the starting point of the journey, i.e. the situation which has led the writer to conduct his/her research in the first place, and then explain how the writer will travel to reach the chosen destination, that is, what the research will do to arrive at a new situation. Alternatively, you could see the Introduction as an explanation of how you will make changes to a building that is in need of renovation or extension: first of all you must describe the present building and point out its drawbacks before you explain what changes you propose to make to it.

However you picture the Introduction, it is clear that to achieve its overall purpose of explaining the reason for the research, this section/chapter has to identify the research gap that you intend to fill. To do this, there are generally four basic steps which the writer needs to take. These steps are presented in Table 1.1 below:

Table 1.1 Four basic steps to take in an Introduction

- Step 1:** Describe the problem/difficulty/situation that interests you.
- Step 2:** Establish, briefly, what has already been said and done in this area.
- Step 3:** Point out what has not been done/what is not yet known, i.e. the gap.
- Step 4:** Explain what you hope to do to add to the body of knowledge.

(Based on Swales' CARS [Creating a Research Space] model in Swales, J. (1981) *Aspects of Article Introductions*, University of Aston, Language Studies Unit)

If we look at the Introduction below taken from a journal article in the field of dentistry, it is easy to identify the four steps outlined in Table 1.1, even though we may not understand all the concepts presented:

EXAMPLE 1.1.

[Square brackets have been added to indicate sentence numbers for ease of reference.]

DNA Ploidy and Proliferate Pattern in Benign Pleomorphic Adenomas of Major Salivary Glands

Pleomorphic adenoma is the most common salivary gland neoplasm and frequently recurs after simple surgical excision due to incomplete

removal of its unencapsulated portion or to the presence of “satellite nodules” [several references given in the original]. [1] Malignant change of the lesion is known to occur, although its incidence is frequently difficult to estimate when based solely on qualitative histopathological features [several references given in the original]. [2] It is generally agreed that the vast majority of these neoplasms are essentially benign, but the existence of locally malignant variants, or lesions with malignant potential, has been described [several references given in the original]. [3] Further, it has been suggested that truly malignant [reference given in the original] or semimalignant [reference given in the original] variants exist. [4]

Flow cytometry (FC) has unique advantages for examining the DNA content of tumour cells and the technique has been used for diagnostic and prognostic assessment of a wide variety of tumours [several references given in the original]. [5] However, reports of the application of FCM to salivary gland tumours are few and the number of cases studied in each report have been very limited [reference given in the original]. [6] In the present study, we examined 10 pleomorphic adenomas from major salivary glands using FCM, with normal salivary glands and chronic sialadenitis lesion as control. [7] Our purpose was to examine the DNA content and proliferative patterns in the lesions in order to detect any possible correlations between FCM analysis, diagnosis and the biological behavior of these tumours. [8]

Steps	Sentence(s)
1. Describe the problem	1
2. Establish what is already known	2–5
3. Point out the gap	6
4. Explain how the gap will be filled	7 and 8

An analysis of this Introduction shows that what the writers are doing is establishing that there is a gap in the knowledge concerning a particularly common, and frequently recurring, cancerous growth in the salivary glands. They do this by first telling their readers what has already been established by previous researchers (Sentences 1–5); then, they proceed to point out the limitations of the previous studies

(Sentence 6) in order to justify their own study, which seeks to overcome the limitations and fill the gap in knowledge by using a technique that has rarely been used in this area of dental research (Sentences 7 and 8). They have, therefore, produced an Introduction which fulfils the requirement of identifying the research gap for the reader.

TASK 1.1

Look at the following Introduction from a journal of literary semantics and see if you think this also successfully identifies the research gap. Can you identify which sentences carry out the four different steps?

[Square brackets have been added to indicate sentence numbers for ease of reference.]

1. Introduction

Over the last couple of decades, the study of literary text worlds has made considerable advances under the influence of the possible-world frameworks originally developed within modal logic and logical semantics. [1] The notion of possible worlds, which was devised by philosophers and logicians to solve a number of logical problems, has been increasingly extended to provide a theoretical base for fundamental issues within the semantics of fictionality. [2] These include the logical properties of sentences of and about works of fiction, the ontological status of fictional entities, the definition of fiction, and the nature of the worlds projected by different types of fictional and/or literary text. [3] More specifically, possible-world models have been used in order to:

- (a) describe fictional worlds as complex modal structures made up of a central domain counting as actual and a number of secondary domains counting as non-actual (such as characters' belief worlds, wish worlds, fantasy worlds, etc.) (e.g. Eco 1979, 1990; Pavel 1986, Ryan 1991a);

(b) classify text worlds on the basis of the accessibility relations (Kripke 1971) that link them to the actual world, i.e. on the basis of criteria such as logical possibility, physical possibility, and so on (e.g. Maitre 1983, Ryan 1991a). [4]

The vast majority of possible-world approaches to the study of fiction have focused on literary narratives (e.g. Dolezel 1976a, 1976b; Maitre 1983, Ryan 1991a), with the occasional reference to drama (e.g. Pavel 1986). [5] Poetry, on the other hand, has been largely neglected. [6] Although poems tend to be mentioned among the types of texts that fall within the scope of a possible-world semantics of fictionality (Dolezel 1989: 235–6; Wolterstoff 1980: 108, Maitre 1983: 10), they are rarely selected as the object of analysis (see Meneses 1991 for an exception). [7] The main reason for this neglect can be identified in the closeness of the link between possible-worlds' approaches to fiction and narrative analysis, which leads to privileged attention being devoted to texts with a strong narrative element, such as stories and novels. [8] In fact, some possible-world theorists have gone as far as arguing that, unlike prose fiction and drama, poetry does not involve the projection of fictional worlds, but rather the expression of moods, themes and atmospheres, which are not amenable to possible-world analysis. [9] In such cases it is lyric poetry in particular that is singled out as the mode of literary discourse that falls outside the boundaries of fictionality (Ryan 1991a: 83–87).¹ [10]

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the relevance of possible-world frameworks to the study of poetic text worlds. [11] My argument will proceed as follows. [12] In the first part of the paper, I will briefly discuss the development of the notion of possible worlds from logic to the semantics of fictionality, and consider the way in which a possible-world approach can be used to describe and classify fictional worlds; I will focus particularly on the framework developed by Ryan (1991a, 1991b). [13] In the second part of the paper, I will show how possible-world models, and specifically Ryan's approach, can be applied to poetry. [14] In particular, I will adopt a possible-world perspective in order to consider:

- (i) the internal structure of the world projected by a particular poem;
- (ii) the projection of deviant situations of address;
- (iii) the description of different types of poetic worlds. [15]

I will conclude with a discussion of the main weaknesses of possible-world frameworks, and with some suggestions for future developments in the study of text worlds. [16]

WRITING AN INTRODUCTION: ADDITIONAL STEPS

Outlining the Dissertation

An Introduction to a Type 1 dissertation often consists of only the four basic steps described above, before the literature review begins. However, in Type 2, 3 and 4 dissertations, one more step is essential. This is the step exemplified in Sentences 12 to 16 in the text in Task 1.1 above. These sentences give an outline of the organisation and content of the remainder of the paper. This preview of the remaining chapters prepares readers for what is to come. In a Type 1 dissertation this outline of contents comes at the end of Chapter 1, after the literature has been reviewed, rather than at the end of the Introduction. (We will return to the theme of using signals to prepare the reader in Chapter 5 on Signposting.)

Explaining the Reason for the Gap

Sentences 8 to 10 in the text in Task 1.1 explain the reason for the existing gap. This is not a common step in Introductions, but a writer may think that it is useful to give an explanation for why other researchers have not already examined the area that is to be explored, as such an explanation may help to justify the research which is to be undertaken. This step can be included in the Introduction to any type of dissertation and will come immediately after the gap has been identified.

3

Stating Facts, Interpreting Data and Making Claims

Although the organisation of your dissertation will depend largely on the type of research you are conducting, the rhetorical moves you will need to make and the language you use to make them will generally be very similar across disciplines. In all dissertations you will need to state facts, interpret data and make claims. This chapter focuses on how this is done.

Typically, in experimental research the methods and results sections of the dissertation are associated with the statement of facts. In the methods section you tell your readers what you did and how you did it, while in the results section you tell them what you found. It is only after you have provided this information that you can move on to account for your findings and suggest what the implications of those findings may be. The subsequent discussion, therefore, moves from statements of fact, about which there can be no argument, to your interpretations, which will always be subject to dispute/disagreement.

In non-experimental research it is unlikely that you will have separate methods, results and discussion sections/chapters, but you will still need to make the same moves from fact to interpretation. If, for example, your research aims to investigate ‘The development of the film industry in the West since the tragedy of September 11th’, you will first have to inform your readers about the events of 11 September 2001 and of the relevant developments in the film industry subsequent to the tragedy. These statements of fact will be followed by any conclusions you draw about the relationship between the two; the conclusions are

your interpretations only and you will need to make that clear to your readers through the language you use.

Understanding how we distinguish fact from interpretation is very important, particularly at this level of writing. In the task that follows we look at how this is achieved.

TASK 3.1

Look at the following statements, some of which have been extracted from the results section and some from the discussion section of a medical journal article on skin cancer in children. Decide which statements come from which section and think about how the language used is different in the two sections.

1. Our finding of a low melanocytic naevi in redheads is unlikely to be due to small sample size ...
2. Children who had been sunburnt were twice as likely as children who had never been sunburnt to have very high numbers of melanocytic naevi ...
3. If the relation between melanocytic naevi frequency and melanoma risk is the same for children as for adults, then the pattern of risk seems to be established very early in life in Queensland children in the tropics.
4. Children who averaged more than 4 hours per day in the sun were three times as likely to have high numbers of melanocytic naevi than were children who spent 1 hour or less per day ...
5. It seems that living in Townsville is, in itself, sufficient for children to acquire large numbers of melanocytic naevi early in life ...
6. Children who had at least one episode of sunburn had more than twice as many melanocytic naevi compared with children who had never been sunburnt.
7. Melanocytic naevi also increased with the total number of hours spent in the sun in the year before examination ...

8. Our results suggest that this may be explained by sun-avoidance in the most sunsensitive group ...
9. Significantly more melanocytic naevi were associated with light neutral skin colour compared with other skin types ... and with darker hair colour – 28 for red/auburn hair, 30.5 for blonde/fair hair, and 43 for dark hair ($p=0.0001$).

STATING FACTS

The following statements from Task 3.1 above are from the results section of the article.

2. Children who had been sunburnt were twice as likely as children who had never been sunburnt to have very high numbers of melanocytic naevi ...
4. Children who averaged more than 4 hours per day in the sun were three times as likely to have high numbers of melanocytic naevi than were children who spent 1 hour or less per day ...
6. Children who had at least one episode of sunburn had more than twice as many melanocytic naevi compared with children who had never been sunburnt.
7. Melanocytic naevi also increased with the total number of hours spent in the sun in the year before examination ...
9. Significantly more melanocytic naevi were associated with light neutral skin colour compared with other skin types ... and with darker hair colour – 28 for red/auburn hair, 30.5 for blonde/fair hair, and 43 for dark hair ($p=0.0001$).

We know this because they state facts, i.e. they convey information that is not open to argument. It is the function of the results or findings section/chapter to report the facts that have been uncovered during the research, just as it is the function of the methods section/chapter to report the facts on how the research was conducted. The following

examples further illustrate writing from the methods and results sections of journals and dissertations. Example 3.1 is extracted from a paper in a linguistics journal and Example 3.2 from a paper in a physics journal.

EXAMPLE 3.1

A pre-test was administered and informal conversations followed each of the pre-test sessions. Ten subjects were then selected. Three native English speakers, all Cambridge University students, were used for checking the suitability of the test for the study.

EXAMPLE 3.2

The n-GaN films used in this study were epitaxially grown by hydride vapour phase epitaxy on (0001) sapphire substrates. The thickness of the active layer was 20 μm . The nominal carrier concentration, deduced from Hall measurements, was $1.5 \times 10^{17} \text{ cm}^{-3}$, and the electron mobility was $600 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ V}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$. The GaN films were cleaned in organic solvents, etched in 1:1 HCl:DI water, rinsed in DI water and dried in N_2 gas. The samples were immediately transferred to a vacuum chamber for the deposition of ohmic contacts. ...

Example 3.3 is from the *results* section of a health care journal, while Example 3.4 is from the *findings* section of a paper in a surgery journal.

EXAMPLE 3.3

Overall locus of controlled scores was higher in the homebound sample ($p=.001$). Further analysis of the locus of control-rating scale scores showed homebound persons' internal beliefs in expected control to be higher than those of nursing home residents ($p=.001$) and that there was a similar trend noted ($p=0.086$) between groups in desired control. Both samples showed differences within each group between desired and expected control (see Table 2). There was no difference in life satisfaction scores between the two groups.

EXAMPLE 3.4

In group A, the 3 patients had no detectable immunoglobulins, C3, or fibrin within the granulomas. In group B, fluorescent antisera did detect trace amounts of IgG and C3 complement associated with large quantities of fibrin in the capsule of one clinically intact prosthesis. The contralateral capsule on this patient stained for fibrin but not for immunoglobulins or C3 complement. One other capsule biopsy stained positive for fibrin. Gel droplets surrounded by a foreign-body response were seen in most of the capsular biopsies in group B. In group C biopsies, all antisera studies were negative except for one specimen positive for C3. The amount of gel in the capsules was generally greater in this group. The foreign-body response was more intense and proportional to the amount of gel present.

STATING FACTS: LANGUAGE FEATURES**Describing Actions*****Tense***

It is important to note that when reporting on what you did or what you found in your studies or experiments, it is most common to use the **simple past tense** as the examples above show. Remember that there is no difference between describing what you did in your research and describing what you did on your holidays last year; you are describing actions which are completed at the time of writing.

This choice of tense allows you, the writer, to easily distinguish between what you did and the standard procedure that is generally used when this type of study is conducted. It may be especially important for you to stress this if you altered some part of the procedure. If we change the text in Example 3.2 above into the **simple present tense** (as shown in 3.2.2 below), then it would change from being a description of what was done in a particular study to a description of what is usually done as a matter of course when carrying out such studies.

Example 3.2.1	Example 3.2.2
<p>The n-GaN films used in this study <i>were</i> epitaxially grown by hydride vapour phase epitaxy on (0001) sapphire substrates. The thickness of the active layer <i>was</i> 20µm. The nominal carrier concentration, deduced from Hall measurements, <i>was</i> $1.5 \times 10^{17} \text{ cm}^{-3}$, and the electron mobility <i>was</i> $600 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ V}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$. The GaN films <i>were cleaned</i> in organic solvents, <i>etched</i> in 1:1 HCl:DI water, <i>rinsed</i> in DI water and <i>dried</i> in N₂ gas. The samples <i>were</i> immediately transferred to a vacuum chamber for the deposition of ohmic contacts. ...</p>	<p>The n - G a N f i l m s u s e d <i>are</i> epitaxially grown by hydride vapour phase epitaxy on (0001) sapphire substrates. The thickness of the active layer <i>is</i> 20µm. The nominal carrier concentration, deduced from Hall measurements, <i>is</i> $1.5 \times 10^{17} \text{ cm}^{-3}$, and the electron mobility <i>is</i> $600 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ V}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$. The GaN films <i>are cleaned</i> in organic solvents, <i>etched</i> in 1:1 HCl:DI water, <i>rinsed</i> in DI water and <i>dried</i> in N₂ gas. The samples <i>are</i> immediately transferred to a vacuum chamber for the deposition of ohmic contacts. ...</p>

Note:

In some disciplines it may be the convention, where the standard procedure was the one used in that particular research, to specifically note this before describing that procedure in the **past simple**, as in Example 3.5.

EXAMPLE 3.5

The standard procedure was used in my research. ES cells (10–15) with mutated Col10a-1 allele were injected into the blastocel cavities of C57BL/6J blastocysts at 3.5 days post coitum. After injection, the blastocysts were then surgically transferred to the uteri of pseudopregnant recipient mice at 2.5 days post coitum. Pups were born 17 days after transfer and identified visually as chimeric on the basis of coat colour.

Voice

Notice that the verbs which have been italicised in the extracts below are all in the passive voice. This is generally the practice when writing the methods section/chapter and is quite common when reporting the results.

EXAMPLE 3.6

A pre-test *was administered* and informal conversations followed each of the pre-test sessions. Ten subjects *were* then *selected*. Three native English speakers, all Cambridge University students, were used for checking the suitability of the test for the study.

EXAMPLE 3.7

The GaN films *were cleaned* in organic solvents, *etched* in 1:1 HCl:DI water, *rinsed* in DI water and *dried* in N₂ gas. The samples *were* immediately *transferred* to a vacuum chamber for the deposition of ohmic contacts. ...

In Chapter 1 we pointed out that the use of ‘I’ is acceptable nowadays, but the first person pronoun should not be overused. It would be very annoying for the reader if all the sentences in this section of your dissertation started with ‘I’, and using the passive voice here allows you to avoid such a problem.

Referring to Tables and Figures

Verb tense

It is common in the results section to present tables and figures to illustrate the findings. When referring to these tables and figures you are no longer reporting on what you found, but reporting on what can be seen in the piece of writing which the reader is looking at. For this reason, the **simple present tense**, either active or passive as appropriate, is generally used, as can be seen in the statements given in Example 3.8.

EXAMPLE 3.8

1. Based on this logic, *Table 2 shows* the findings of the three models.
2. The following *two tables* (Tables 5.1 & 5.2) *show* the minimum,

maximum and mean length of interactions, range, and standard deviation for each group.

3. *In Fig. 7* a small deviation between the measured data and the calculated curve *is seen* for large values of B_2 .
4. The areas of the 34 'grasses' were able to be estimated in this way, and the results *are presented in Table 2* within the six size classes.

Sentence construction

It is not possible in English to refer to a figure or table in the following ways:

- (a) In Figure 3, it shows ... (X)
- (b) From Table 5, it illustrates ... (X)

Very occasionally in conversational English it may be possible to follow a noun immediately by a pronoun referring to that noun, but in formal, written English this is grammatically incorrect. If you begin an opening phrase with a preposition, you can either use the passive in the following clause, as in Example 3.9 below, or you can begin the clause with a personal pronoun, as in Example 3.10.

EXAMPLE 3.9

In Figure 3, it can be seen that ...

EXAMPLE 3.10

From Table 5, we can observe that ...

It is much more straightforward, however, to omit the preposition and the pronoun as in Example 3.11.

EXAMPLE 3.11

Figure 3 shows ...

Table 5 illustrates ...

4

Drawing to a Close

The final chapter of your dissertation draws together everything you have said earlier and completes the picture for your readers. At one level it should prove relatively easy to write as you will have finished all your research and will be totally familiar with your findings: by the time you come to write the conclusion you will be the expert in the particular area you chose to investigate. At another level, however, it may prove a challenge as you will need to link everything you have said earlier with the ideas you present in your conclusion, ensuring that you address all the issues and/or questions you raised in your introduction. This chapter begins by looking at what steps you need to take to produce a conclusion that is communicatively successful.

WRITING A CONCLUSION: MAIN STEPS

To a large extent, the content and organisation of your final chapter will be determined by the purpose of your study and what has come before in your dissertation. However, the overall purpose of any conclusion is the same: to show how the researcher has attempted to fill the gap in knowledge that was identified at the outset of the research and to clarify to what extent the study has been successful. If we return to the analogy of the building renovation that we introduced in Chapter 1, we can see how a dissertation's conclusion can be viewed in the same way as the end of a renovation process. We noted earlier that the

introduction to your dissertation can be seen as an explanation of the changes you intend to make to improve a building that is in need of renovation. Before you explain the changes, you need first of all to describe your building at the outset of your project and point out its deficiencies. The main body of the dissertation consists of a detailed description of the renovations carried out. When the renovations are completed, you need to consult the list of problems that you initially noted to ensure that you have dealt with them all, in so far as you were able to. In the same way, in the conclusion to your dissertation you need to remind the readers of the initial state of the building by revisiting its deficiencies and then to summarise the information on the renovations you have carried out so that the readers can see the building in its finished state. To be entirely honest, you will also point out along the way any problems that you were not able to solve or mistakes that you made. But the story does not end there. Being an ambitious builder, you will also be planning an extension to your building, or even a new building that will be better than the finished one! And you will certainly want to tell your readers of your ideas for this future work.

We can see from the above that there are four aspects to consider when looking at the completed renovation:

1. look back at the original state of the building and explain the renovations carried out;
2. stress how many of the problems have been dealt with and how the building has improved;
3. acknowledge any problems still remaining or mistakes made;
4. plan for the future.

If we consider these four aspects from the point of view of the conclusion to your dissertation, we can look at them as four basic steps that need to be taken in your writing. (Compare these with the four steps you take in introducing your dissertation.) We call these steps the '4S' model; this is one of the most common models for a conclusion.

Table 4.1 Four basic steps to take in writing a conclusion (the '4S' model)

Step 1: Summarise your research
Step 2: Spell out your contribution
Step 3: State the limitations of your study
Step 4: Suggest potential areas of further research

The following conclusion from a journal article on real estate research shows how the writers conclude their paper by following through these four steps.

EXAMPLE 4.1

This study investigates whether houses located on rear-entry alleyways should sell for less than otherwise identical properties with traditional front-entry driveways. [1] The regression results suggest that the alleyway subdivision design discounts sale prices by 5% all else held equal. [2] Why? Because alleyways can attract criminal activities and greatly reduce the size of the homeowner's backyard. [3] As well, they are often poorly maintained, unsightly, cluttered with debris and inconvenient, so many residents park their vehicles on the street, thereby creating traffic congestion. [4]

While the findings of the research suggest that there are diseconomies associated with the rear-entry alleyway design, one element in the New Urbanism contemporary neighborhood design is, in fact, the alleyway that emphasizes compactness and a return to traditional neighborhood values. [5] New Urbanists believe that it helps overcome urban sprawl and encourages less reliance on automobiles, while critics counter that New Urbanism attempts to alter human behavior through design, it creates more traffic problems than it solves, its densities are too low to support public transportation and it does not offer consumers enough housing choices. [6] These findings hopefully will influence New Urbanism subdivision designers to reconsider alleyways in favor of traditional suburban parking. [7]

The results of this study may be, in part, a function of this sample, but the implications are clear for appraisers, developers, New

Urbanists and other real estate participants. [8] Subdivision design contributes to overall value. [9] Additional subdivision design research is recommended, both to confirm the findings of this investigation and to determine whether other elements of design (e.g., sidewalks, culverts vs. curb-and gutter drainage) affect value as well. [10]

Steps	Sentence(s)
1. Summary of the main findings of the research	1–6
2. Spelling out of the contribution	7, 8 (final part) and 9
3. Statement of limitations	8 (initial part)
4. Suggestions for further research	10

In Example 4.1 all four steps are apparent, but we should note that Step 3 (limitations) is not clearly separated from Step 2; it is almost as though the writer stepped up to Step 3 and then back down again. It is, in fact, important to note that there is considerable variation in the order in which these steps are taken. Many conclusions in journal articles do not follow the order suggested in Table 4.1, although in dissertations the order tends to be much more standard. Example 4.2 below, from a journal article in language teaching research, shows another conclusion which follows the ‘4S’ model in terms of the number of steps, but the order is not that suggested in Table 4.1.

EXAMPLE 4.2

The present study is one in a series that has probed the nature of task-based performance. It has shown that the conditions under which tasks are completed can have a marked effect on the resultant nature of the performance. [1] The study has confirmed the generally beneficial effects of pre-task preparation, particularly planning. [2] Encouragingly, from the pedagogic point of view, there seems to be a clear role for the teacher in the way such pre-tasks are carried out – it does not have to be with learners always operating independently. [3] The results obtained suggest that teacher-based planning is as effective as solitary planning, but that both of these conditions are

superior to group-based planning – at least, as that was implemented in the present study. [4]

But the present study has only explored the effects of immediate task-linked manipulations. [5] If the wider pedagogic goal is the sustained and balanced development of learners' interlanguage systems, it is important to be able to discuss how the effects of particular tasks might connect to longer term development. [6] In this respect, if balanced progress means higher levels of complexity, accuracy and fluency, it may be speculated that teachers need, as part of their armoury of pedagogic decision-making, information such as which conditions and which tasks may bring about such sustained balanced development. [7] It is to be hoped that the present research has made a contribution in that regard, although it is clear that, having established some of the influences on immediate performance, a priority in future research will be to explore what happens to interlanguage development during more extended pedagogic interventions. [8]

Steps	Sentence(s)
1. Summary of the main findings of the research	1–4
2. Spelling out of the contribution	7 and 8 (first part)
3. Statement of limitations	5–6
4. Suggestions for further research	8 (final part)

Other Models

The two examples we have seen above are illustrations of the '4S' model of conclusions, but '3S' and '2S' models are also frequently found. The '3S' model omits any reference to limitations. This is a possible variation in a dissertation which has already dealt with the limitations of the study at some length in the discussion chapter. The '2S' model is quite common in dissertations reporting on non-experimental research in which you analyse a text or philosophical stand. Such a dissertation might have only the first two steps from the '4S' model, where you summarise your

research and highlight your contribution towards the end. You may not consider explicitly the limitations of your study or make suggestions for future research. An illustration of this is seen in Example 4.3 which is the Table of Contents for the final chapter of a philosophy PhD.

EXAMPLE 4.3

- Chapter 8. Conclusion
 - 8.1 The Problem
 - 8.2 Overview of the Background Theory
 - 8.3 The Two Ideals

The first section of this chapter (8.1) reiterates the problem addressed in the study, while section 8.2 contextualises this problem in light of the theory that has been discussed earlier in the dissertation. These two sections form Step 1 (summary of the research) and the final section (8.3) forms Step 2 (spelling out of the contribution). The final section actually starts with a restatement of the research questions and then goes on as follows:

On the basis of the interpretive theory presented in the preceding chapters, I can now suggest a series of answers to these questions.

The author then explains how his conclusions concerning the problem addressed contribute a new understanding to the field. By restating the research questions and explicitly signalling that answers to the questions are to follow, the author clearly links the introduction and conclusion of the dissertation together.

Note:

Some dissertations, particularly those in the humanities, do not devote an entire chapter to the conclusion. The conclusion may be the last section of the final chapter. This section, which may or may not be signalled by a subheading, still needs to draw the work to a close, summarising the findings and highlighting the contribution.

TASK 4.1

Read through the following conclusion from an article on the history of interior architecture and identify the four different steps.

This study set out to consider the extent to which developments in the medieval lifestyle affected the interiors of the time. [1] The findings indicated that both political developments and modifications in the mode of warfare brought about numerous changes in the lifestyle of the people and corresponding changes to the interiors of castles, which were the main residential establishments of the day. [2] Amongst the most important changes were the relocation of the fireplace from the centre of the room to a side wall, the introduction of heavier more permanent furniture, the establishment of specific rooms in the home for different activities and larger windows. [3]

One of the most significant results from this study is the identification of the growth and subsequent collapse of the feudal system as the source of many of the internal changes in castles. [4] The communal living encouraged by the interdependence of different social classes during the feudal period began to disappear as feudalism gave way to nationalism. [5] By the twelfth century, the power of the nobles was beginning to give way to that of the kings as a sense of nationhood grew in Europe. [6] The lords, who had earlier spent considerable time and resources on expanding their territories and establishing their command, had moved into a period when consolidating their position as masters of their existing territory was essential. [7] They began, therefore, to add more storeys to their existing castles rather than to acquire new land and build new castles. [8] The height of a castle came to be seen as a symbol of power, dominating the countryside around. [9] These additional storeys led to a greater physical separation of the lord's family from the workers and the whole style of living began to change. [10]

Another significant finding relates to the change created in the interiors of castles by the introduction of the use of gunpowder as a means of warfare. [11] The use of gunpowder revolutionised the

whole style of warfare and left castles much less impregnable to attack. [12] With this change, the castle, in fact, lost its role as a defensive unit. [13] Thus, the requirement for small slit windows was obviated and daylight could finally enter the lives of the castle's inhabitants. [14] Glass then became much more commonplace in windows to keep out the draughts and window seats became popular as they afforded those within, particularly the women of the castles, ample opportunities to watch the world go by. [15] The castle had finally ceased to function as primarily a fortified residence, but was more properly a home where the lord's families lived a settled and relatively comfortable life. [16]

This study has focused only on the changes that developments in lifestyle brought to the castles of medieval times. [17] Studies need now to be extended to consider how the interiors of public buildings and churches were affected. [18] It would be interesting to discover whether or not the increasing amount of daylight that could enter people's homes and social life was also evident in administrative and religious life; perhaps the increasing daylight was a suitable physical enlightenment to symbolise the coming of the Renaissance that was soon to light up the spirit of Europe. [19]

WRITING A CONCLUSION: ADDITIONAL STEPS

Considering the Implications of Your Study

As indicated in the opening of this chapter, the content of your conclusion will largely be determined by the overall purpose of your research. Your research may have important implications which you will want to articulate. If these implications are extensive, you may have a separate chapter between the Discussion and Conclusion chapters. However, if the implications are too few to warrant a chapter on their own, you will normally address the implications of your study in the

conclusion, immediately after highlighting your contribution, although some authors prefer to deal with the limitations first, before addressing the implications. In Example 4.4 taken from a clinical physiology journal article on exercise, we can see how the clinical implications of the study are presented.

EXAMPLE 4.4

Clinical Implications

The results from the present study show that in sedentary, overweight adults, a 9-month exercise training program with a relatively large weekly exercise dose resulted in a significant and prolonged improvement in fasting plasma glucose. [1] The decrease in FPG was maintained after 1 month of detraining. [2] Whether this was related to the prolonged improvement in insulin sensitivity, which was still 24% above pretraining level at this time point, or to some insulin-independent mechanism(s), is not clear. [3] These data provide evidence that both acute and chronic improvements in carbohydrate metabolism result from long-term exercise training. [4] Concurrent with these changes were significant improvements in blood lipids and aerobic capacity. [5] These findings have clinical significance for the role of regular exercise in preventing the development of insulin resistance and glucose intolerance in individuals at risk for diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. [6]

The above paragraph, the final one of the journal article, can be analysed as follows:

Steps	Sentences
1. Summary of findings	1–3
2. Spelling out of the contribution	4–5
3. Statement of clinical implications	6

We should notice that this is a ‘3S’ conclusion, where no limitations are considered, as they have been discussed in the previous section of the paper, and suggestions for future research are replaced by a statement of clinical implications.

6

The Final Touches

As you are writing your dissertation, you will need to keep proofreading and editing your text to ensure that it is easy to follow and error-free. You will also need to read it through one final time before you submit your dissertation. We should at this point distinguish between proofreading and editing. The former refers to the process of reading a text to detect surface errors, such as spelling mistakes or missing plurals. These errors, although they are extremely irritating to a reader and give an impression of carelessness, do not generally impede understanding of the text, unless they are overly abundant. Editing, on the other hand, involves careful reading to ensure that the text runs smoothly enough to be readily understood by a reader without undue effort and with no possible ambiguities of meaning. Editing a text may involve quite substantial rewriting, unlike the quick additions and deletions you make while proofreading. This last chapter of the book will now look at certain features of text that you should consider when editing your writing as they will make your work easier to read.

CREATING COHESIVE TEXT

If, on rereading your text yourself, you find that your message seems unclear, or if you receive feedback from your supervisor saying that certain parts are difficult to follow, you may need to consider how cohesive your text is. The cohesion of a text, that is to say, the way the

sentences in the text are tied together and follow on smoothly from each other, is achieved to some extent by grammatical accuracy, such as the use of the correct tense. This is one aspect of your writing that you may need to improve and we have discussed the appropriate tense to use at several points throughout the book, but it is beyond our scope to cover general grammar constructions in detail. Cohesion is also achieved, however, by the order in which the information given in each sentence is presented and by the correct use of vocabulary and pronoun reference. It is these three aspects of cohesion that we will consider in the following sections.

COHESIVE TEXT: INFORMATION STRUCTURE

When we talk of information structure in a language, this is referring to the order in which the information given in each sentence is presented. The order of presentation has a great impact on the readability of a text, that is to say, the ease with which a text can be understood. To see how information structure works in English, we can study the different ways the statements given below can be combined into continuous text as an example.

Statements

Here are 23 statements of facts or ideas about language teaching which can be used to form the introductory paragraph(s) to a textbook for teachers.

1. There is a pendulum effect in language teaching.
2. Overcoming the pendulum effect is an important task.
3. Applied linguists confront this task.
4. Teachers who are concerned with foreign language learning confront this task.
5. Teachers who are concerned with second language learning confront this task.
6. The pendulum effect is most evident in the area of methodology.

7. In the area of methodology, fads and fashions come and go.
8. Fads and fashions come and go with monotonous regularity.
9. Fads and fashions are like theories of grammar in this regard.
10. There is a way to overcome the pendulum effect.
11. The way to overcome the pendulum effect is to derive effective classroom practices from empirical evidence.
12. The empirical evidence should relate to the nature of language learning.
13. The empirical evidence should relate to the nature of language use.
14. Effective classroom practices should also be derived from insights into what makes learners tick.
15. This book has a major purpose.
16. The major purpose is to introduce teachers to an empirically based approach to language teaching methodology.
17. The book also aims to introduce teachers in preparation to an empirically based approach to language teaching methodology.
18. An empirically based approach integrates theory and research with insights.
19. The theory and research relate to the nature of language learning and use.
20. The insights are derived from observation of what actually goes on in classrooms.
21. The insights are also derived from analysis of what actually goes on in classrooms.
22. What actually goes on in classrooms is often opposed to what some say should go on.
23. An empirically based approach uses the knowledge gained from the classroom to inform the issues that are raised and the points that are made.

These statements could be combined in a variety of ways to make a continuous text. The first step in combining the ideas is to consider which ideas are so closely connected that they could be grouped together into each sentence of a text. If we do this with the 23 statements above, we find that the following combinations are strongly indicated:

Statements	1–5
Statements	6–9
Statements	10–14
Statements	15–17
Statements	18–23

Below are two possible versions of a paragraph combining the ideas from each group of statements.

Complete paragraph: Version A

Overcoming the pendulum effect in language teaching is an important task confronting applied linguists and teachers concerned with second and foreign language learning. [1] Methodology is the area where the pendulum effect is most evident because it is in methodology that fads and fashions, like theories of grammar, come and go with monotonous regularity. [2] Deriving appropriate classroom practices from empirical evidence on the nature of language learning and use and from insights into what makes learners tick is the way to overcome the pendulum effect. [3] To introduce teachers and teachers in preparation to an empirically based approach to language teaching methodology is the major purpose of this book. [4] The knowledge gained from integrating theory and research into the nature of language learning and use with insights derived from the observation and analysis of what actually goes on in classrooms (as opposed to what some say should go on) is used to inform the issues raised and points made. [5]

Complete paragraph: Version B

An important task confronting applied linguists and teachers concerned with second and foreign language learning is to overcome the pendulum effect in language teaching. [1] This effect is most evident in the area of methodology where fads and fashions, like theories of grammar, come and go with monotonous regularity. [2] The way to overcome the pendulum effect is to derive appropriate

classroom practices from empirical evidence on the nature of language learning and use and from insights into what makes learners tick. [3] Language teaching methodology is the focus of this book, the major purpose of which is to introduce teachers and teachers in preparation to an empirically based approach to methodology. [4] Such an approach integrates theory and research into the nature of language learning and use, with insights derived from the observation and analysis of what actually goes on in classrooms (as opposed to what some say should go on), and uses this knowledge to inform the issues raised and points made. [5]

Both paragraphs are equally coherent, that is to say, the message in each can be understood, but Version B is more cohesive; it is easier for a reader to follow. Given that each sentence contains the same information, we need to look at how the order in which the information is presented affects the ease of understanding the text. What we can notice is that each sentence in **Version A**, after the first one, begins with a new term that has not previously been mentioned in the text:

Sentence 2 *Methodology*

Sentence 3 *Deriving appropriate classroom practices from empirical evidence*

Sentence 4 *To introduce teachers and teachers in preparation*

Sentence 5 *The knowledge gained from integrating theory and research*

However in **Version B**, each sentence, after the first one, begins with a reference to an aspect that has been mentioned earlier in the text, although not necessarily in the immediately preceding sentence.

Sentence 2 *This effect* (referring back to *the pendulum effect*)

Sentence 3 *The way to overcome the pendulum effect* (referring back to *the pendulum effect*)

Sentence 4 *Language teaching methodology* (referring back to *methodology*, Sentence 2)

Sentence 5 *Such an approach* (referring back to *an empirically based approach*, Sentence 4)

It is this aspect of continuous text in academic English that helps to create cohesion. Each sentence begins with a backward reference, rather than a new term. This type of organisation is referred to as ‘given-new’ information structure. It complies with the convention in English of sentences having ‘end focus’; that is to say, the main point of a sentence comes towards the end, or to be more precise, after the main verb, while the first part of the sentence, before the main verb, acts as a connection to the earlier text. Of course not all text is constructed so precisely; literary works often do not follow these conventions closely at all. However, as this type of sentence organisation is common in academic writing because it leads to greater clarity and makes text more easily readable, it is one feature of your text that you should look at if the message you are trying to convey is not clear.

TASK 6.1

Read the following text, which is the opening paragraph to an article in a geography journal, and consider if the sentences follow a given-new information structure. For each sentence that follows this structure, decide what aspect of the preceding text is being referred to and by which reference item.

Coming into the 1990s, the environment of investment in China has changed from the 80s when a large amount of small export-oriented joint ventures (JV) mainly invested by Newly Industrialized Economies (NIES) prevailed and were geographically concentrated in coastal regions. [1] Under the new environment, foreign investors are encouraged by a variety of incentive measures to diversify their investments in space and toward some “bottlenecked” industries and sectors of the economy. [2] Such a change, as to be argued by this paper, is attributed mainly to three parallel processes. [3] The first process is the changing degree of openness for foreign investments in space and by sectors deliberately and gradually set by the central government. [4] The second process is a decentralization of power, which has allowed local governments

and enterprises to be more independent in introducing foreign investment as well as in organizing their economy. [5] Industrial restructuring is the third process, which has been reshaping China's industry in two major ways. [6] One way is to build up a mix of ownership with more and more collective and private firms in place of a structure of state-ownership domination. [7] The other way is to formulate a more market-oriented institutional structure, linking the ministries, provincial governments, and enterprises in a flexible, multi-channel manner so that individual enterprises as well as the government at the lower level may respond faster to the market needs. [8] As a consequence of such restructuring, the firms are becoming more competitive while less likely to follow the central planning commands positively when interests conflict. [9] The new institutional structure is also reforming the channels of financial and material flows among the parties involved. [10] In between the central government and enterprises, local governments may behave differently in responding to many foreign investment issues. [11]

COHESIVE TEXT: VOCABULARY CHOICE

The cohesion of a text is also achieved to some extent by your vocabulary choices. The words you choose and where you place them contribute considerably to the readability of your writing. To see how this works, let us study the text below, which is an extract from an MPhil dissertation in dentistry, reporting on how photographs of front teeth could be used in forensic odontology.

EXAMPLE 6.1

For the first time in legal history, in the case of the *Crown v Lam* (High Court of Hong Kong 1983) – the so-called Jar Murders – identification of the victims by photographic superimposition was acceptable. [1] In one instance, the separation between the cusps of the upper canine teeth of a postmortem dentition was used to

establish the enlargement of the antemortem photographs in which these teeth were visible. [2] When life-sized transparencies of the skull and the antemortem photographs were superimposed, an accurate correspondence between the features of the anterior dentition seen in them was established. [3] Three murder victims, none of whom had useful dental records, were identified in this way. [4] A legal precedent was created in the High Court of Hong Kong when the identification of these victims was accepted not only by the Coroner, but also by both the prosecution and defence counsels.

Because this text is combining three themes, **the law, photography and dentistry**, we can, naturally, expect to find vocabulary related to these three word families. It is important to note, however, how the words related to these three families are distributed. If we look at Table 6.1 below,

Table 6.1 Vocabulary ties

	LAW	PHOTOGRAPHY	DENTISTRY
Sentence 1	legal case Crown High Court Murders victims	photographic	
Sentence 2		photographs	cusps canine teeth dentition
Sentence 3		photographs	dentition
Sentence 4	murder victims		dental
Sentence 5	legal High Court victims Coroner prosecution defence counsels		

we can see that each sentence, apart from the concluding one of the paragraph, which does not need to connect with a following sentence, deals with two of the three themes.

This use of related vocabulary across sentence boundaries helps to tie text together. We do not have a series of separate sentences, each one dealing with one of the themes. This use of vocabulary complies with the use of given-new information structure, where each sentence refers back to part of the text that has gone before.

We should also notice that vocabulary other than that connected to the themes of the text plays a role in tying the text together. There are a number of word roots (not connected to the law, photography and dentistry) which are repeated throughout the paragraph. These are shown in Table 6.2 below:

Table 6.2 Using word roots for cohesion

VOCABULARY ITEM	SENTENCE
identification identified	1 & 5 4
superimposition superimposed	1 3
acceptable accepted	1 5
establish established	2 3
antemortem postmortem	2 & 3 2
used useful	2 4

The repetition of the root of a word, *across*, rather than *within* sentences is one device whereby the cohesion of a text is enhanced as the repetition of a root causes the reader's mind to refer back to the last time that root was used.

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