

**Research Methods for
Business & Management:
A Guide to Writing Your Dissertation**

*Firstly ... nothing exists;
secondly ... even if anything exists, it is incomprehensible by man;
thirdly .., even if anything is comprehensible, it is guaranteed to be inexpressible
and incommunicable to one's neighbour.*

Gorgias 500 BC, quoted in Aristotle, *De Melisso Xenophane Gorgia* 980a:19–20

Research Methods for Business & Management: A Guide to Writing Your Dissertation

Kevin O’Gorman and Robert MacIntosh

(G) Goodfellow Publishers Ltd

(G) Published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited,
26 Home Close, Wolvercote, Oxford OX2 8PS
<http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com>

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data: a catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: on file.

ISBN: 978-1-910158-14-2

Copyright © Kevin O’Gorman and Robert MacIntosh, 2014

All rights reserved. The text of this publication, or any part thereof, may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, storage in an information retrieval system, or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher or under licence from the Copyright Licensing Agency Limited. Further details of such licences (for reprographic reproduction) may be obtained from the Copyright Licensing Agency Limited, of Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

All trademarks used herein are the property of their respective owners. The use of trademarks or brand names in this text does not imply any affiliation with or endorsement of this book by such owners.



Design and typesetting by P.K. McBride, www.macbride.org.uk

Cover design by Cylinder

Contents

	Preface	xv
1	The Nature of Research <i>Robert MacIntosh and Nigel Caldwell</i>	1
2	Finding a Project <i>Andrew MacLaren and Emma Hill</i>	19
3	The Literature Review <i>Mike Danson and Norin Arshad</i>	37
4	Research Philosophy and Case Studies <i>Kevin O’Gorman, Sean Lochrie and Alastair Watson</i>	57
5	Finding Your Data <i>Angeliki Papachroni and Robert MacIntosh</i>	79
6	Working with Historical and Contemporary Data Sources <i>Keith Gori, Rodrigo Perz-Vega, Kevin O’Gorman</i>	93
7	Gathering Qualitative Data <i>Ross Curran, Sean Lochrie and Kevin O’Gorman</i>	113
8	Analysing Qualitative Data <i>Katherine Sang and Rafał Sitko</i>	137
9	Gathering Quantitative Data <i>Babak Taheri, Liang Lu and Nikolas Valantasis</i>	153
10	Analysing Quantitative Data <i>Babak Taheri, Liang Lu and Christian König</i>	173
11	Managing Ethics in Research Projects <i>James Richards, Lakshman Wimalasena and Gavin MacLean</i>	193
12	Managing the Research Project <i>John Sanders, Vera Tens and Robert MacIntosh</i>	211
	Index	231

Dedications

To my beautiful wife Anne and our children Euan, Eilidh and Eva. There is nothing better in life than to spend time with you. Thank you.

RMacI

To my mother for the constant and continued support, and Diana and Keith for the never ending dinners, I could not have done it without you.

KDO

Acknowledgments

The genesis of this book lay in a search for a text that could be used to guide students through the challenges of preparing a dissertation. Having failed to find something which inspired us, we were struck by the vast experience available within our own institution. This book draws upon the talents and accumulated wisdom of our colleagues in the School of Management and Languages at Herriot-Watt University. We are sincerely grateful to all those who have helped in producing the book but would draw particular attention to Tim Goodfellow whose stoic acceptance of an unreasonably short deadline helped bring the project to life. We would also like to express our thanks to Andrew MacLaren who, in Chapter 4, who helped us to conceptualise Research Philosophy using the analogy of a comfortable bed!

KDO & RMacI

Biographies

Norin Arshed is Programme Director for Leadership and Organisational Performance suite of programmes in the Department of Business Management at Heriot-Watt University and is an economist by background, with professional experience both in the public and private sectors. Her work concentrates on enterprise policy. Norin investigates the role and contribution from those closely linked to the formulation process (ministers and civil servants), whilst also examining how enterprise policy is implemented (national, regional and local economic development agencies), and how entrepreneurs/SMEs experience and utilise such policy initiatives. Institutional theory is the theoretical lens used to highlight the dynamics of the enterprise policy process in her work.

Nigel Caldwell is a Reader at Heriot-Watt School of Management and Languages. He has worked at Bradford, Plymouth and Bath Universities. Prior to his academic career, he worked at a leading UK automotive manufacturer; gaining first-hand experience of Japanese supply techniques such as JIT, Kanban and Total Quality Management implementation. His research today explores the fields of Operations and Supply Management. Nigel publishes in journals such as *International Journal of Operations & Production Management* and *Industrial Marketing Management*. He has generated research income approaching three quarters of a million pounds from the UK Engineering and Physical Research Council.

Ross Curran is a PhD student at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, where he is an active member of the Intercultural Research Centre. His primary research interests focus on poverty alleviation strategies through tourism, and improving volunteer management practises in the third sector through both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Previous publications include *Pro-Poor Tourism in a First World Urban Setting: Case study of Glasgow Govan*.

Mike Danson is Professor of Enterprise Policy at Heriot-Watt University and has worked widely on issues about urban and regional economic development, island and rural economies and enterprises, demographic change, volunteering, Gaelic, microbreweries and poverty. He has published 13 edited books and over 200 papers. He has advised parliaments, governments, and such organisations as the OECD, European Commission, and Scottish Enterprise. Mike was recently awarded the prize for the best book in regional studies and graduated with the first DLitt from the University of the West of Scotland in 2012. He is Treasurer of the Academy of Social Sciences.

Keith Gori is a PhD Student in the School of Management and Languages at Heriot-Watt University. His PhD thesis investigates British advertising output in the period surrounding the Second World War, with a particular focus on the techniques used to reflect, and manipulate, presumed ‘realities’ of the home front. More widely he has research interests in historical advertising and marketing, particularly in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, with a focus on that relating to illicit products, and in the history of marketing thought. He teaches on global management and marketing courses in the Department of Business Management.

Emma Hill is a PhD student in the department of Languages and Intercultural Studies at Heriot-Watt University. She holds a BA(Hons) in English Studies from the University of Exeter and a MA in English Literary Studies from the University of York. Her current research is focused on the ways in which migrant peoples have themselves heard in both the public and private spheres, particularly with reference to the Somali population in Glasgow. More generally, her interests include topics concerning migration, identity, memory, place and text.

Christian König is a PhD student in the School of Management and Languages at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. He is an active member of the Logistics Research Centre and his primary research interests focus on the outsourcing strategies of focal firms and the continuous development of service providers. In his doctoral thesis, he investigates the role of systems integrators in the logistics industry using an exploratory approach. Christian received an MSc. in Logistics and Supply Chain Management with distinction from Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh in 2012.

Sean Lochrie is a PhD student at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, where he is an active member of the Intercultural Research Centre. His primary research interest focuses on the creation of custodianship behaviours within World Heritage Site management. Sean received an MRes in Business and Management (2012) and a BA Hons in Management and Tourism (2011), both from The University of Strathclyde. Previous publications include *Enterprise on the Frontier: Taverns, Inns and Economic Development in the American West, 1800 – 80*. Sean also teaches on the Business Research Methods course in the Department of Business Management at Heriot-Watt University.

Liang Lu is a lecturer in Logistics at Heriot-Watt University. As an applied researcher, he specialises in using Management Science techniques to solve real-life decision-making problems that arise in areas such as production/capacity planning, transportation, and revenue optimization. With a unique blend of research experience across multiple disciplines and in multiple

countries, not only has he published extensively in top-tier OR/MS journals, but he has also successfully delivered a number of government and industry projects. Prior to joining Heriot-Watt, he was Visiting Scholar at Robotics Institute, Carnegie Mellon University, USA, and Postdoctoral Fellow at CORE, Univerisite Catholique de Louvain, Belgium.

Robert MacIntosh is Professor of Strategy and Head of the School of Management and Languages at Heriot-Watt University. He trained as an engineer and has worked at the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde. His research on the ways in which top teams develop strategy and on organizational change has been published in a wide range of outlets. He has a long-standing interest in research methods for business and management studies and has published on the relevance of management research using methods that include ethnography and action research. He has consulted extensively with public and private sector organizations and sits on the board of the charity Turning Point Scotland.

Andrew MacLaren is Programme Director of the MSc in International Fashion Marketing in the Department of Business Management, Heriot-Watt University. His main research interests focus on the service industry, informed by literature relevant to leadership, entrepreneurship and consumption. With diverse research links across luxury fashion, aviation and the hotel industry, his outlook is international and he works closely with industry throughout Europe, the USA, the Middle East and India. He has published widely in the field on multiple topics, contributing in the domains of theory, method and industry practice and he continues to work towards interdisciplinary collaborations that engage with multiple fields of research.

Gavin Maclean is a PhD Student in the School of Management and Languages at Heriot-Watt University. His PhD thesis examines the work of professional musicians in terms of labour process theory and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. More widely he is interested in sociological study of work and employment and 'symbolic' forms of work, particularly cultural production, public sector work and multilingualism in the workplace. He teaches on Human Resource and Critical Approaches to Management courses.

Kevin O'Gorman is Professor of Management and Business History and Head of Business Management in the School of Languages and Management in Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. He trained in Glasgow, Salamanca and Rome as a philosopher, theologian and historian. His research interests have a dual focus: Origins, history and cultural practices of hospitality, and philosophical, ethical and cultural underpinnings of contemporary management practices. Using a wide range of methodological approaches

he has published over 80 journal articles, books, chapters, and conference papers in business and management.

Angeliki Papachroni is a Research Associate in the School of Management and Languages at Heriot-Watt University. Her research focuses on issues around strategy implementation, organizational change, paradox management, innovation processes and organizational tensions. She holds a PhD on organizational ambidexterity from Warwick Business School exploring how organizations manage the conflicting demands of encouraging innovation and maintaining focus, a challenging topic with important strategic and organizational implications. Angeliki has co-authored a number of strategic teaching case studies including the case *Strategic Leadership and Innovation at Apple Inc* which won the ECCH/Case Centre overall prize for 2013.

Rodrigo Perez Vega is a PhD Student in the School of Management and Languages at Heriot-Watt University. His research aims at testing how social influence factors affect consumer online behaviours with brands. He has experience doing qualitative (i.e. interviews, content analysis) and quantitative (i.e. experiments and multivariate testing) research in online environments. Rodrigo received an MRes in Management (2011) by investigating the incidence of positive and negative electronic word-of-mouth on Twitter. He also has an MSc in Strategic Project Management (2011). Prior to his PhD, Rodrigo had marketing experience in several digital marketing and brand management roles within FMCG and service industries.

James Richards is an Associate Professor in Human Resource Management in the School of Languages and Management in Heriot-Watt University, and an Academic Member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. James has published research in human resource management journals, edited book collections and consultancy based reports. James' research interests are grounded in industrial sociology and employment relations. Early research projects looked at employee use of social media for misbehaviour and resistance. His more recent research looks at hidden disabilities in the workplace and is currently working on a range of in-work poverty projects. James is the Research Ethics Officer for the School of Management & Languages.

John Sanders is a lecturer in management in the School of Management and Languages at Heriot-Watt University. He teaches strategic management courses to both undergraduate and post-graduate students. In addition, he teaches a small business management course to final year undergraduate students. Strategic fit within a University setting was the subject of his PhD. His past research efforts have focused on Internet portals, website quality, social networks and the market reach of rural small firms in Scotland.

Katherine Sang is an Associate Professor of Management, in the School of Management and Languages at Heriot-Watt University. Using feminist theory, her research examines how gender inequality is maintained in male dominated professions, including the creative industries and academia. In addition, Kate is researching gender and in-work poverty and supervising PhDs exploring organisational culture, gender and behaviour change. She is the Postgraduate Research Coordinator for Business Management, as well as serving on the University Undergraduate Studies Committee and Equality and Diversity Advisory Group. She co-chairs the Feminist and Women's Studies Association UK & Ireland, and coordinates (along with Dr Rebecca Finkel) Scottish Feminist Academics.

Rafał Sitko is a Ph.D. student in Business and Management at Heriot-Watt University with research interests primarily in diversity management and inclusion. His work focuses on explaining intersections of privilege and oppression in a workplace and their effects on migrants' work experience. Rafał received an MSc in International Human Resource Management and Employment Relations from Queen Mary College, University of London (2012) and a BA in Psychology and Management (2011) from the University of Bradford. During student exchange programs Rafał also studied Employment Relations at Hosei University in Tokyo (2010) and Business Administration at Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam (2009).

Babak Taheri is Programme Director for the suite of MSc Marketing Management Programmes in the School of Management and Languages, Heriot-Watt University. His main research interests are in the areas of the application of multivariate methods in management, consumer behaviour, heritage marketing management, and experiential marketing. Prior to joining Heriot-Watt University, he was a lecturer in Durham University and a teaching fellow in Strathclyde Business School. His recent work has appeared in *Tourism Management*, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *Journal of Marketing Management*, *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, and *Advances in Consumer Research*. He is also Deputy Chair of heritage marketing special interest group in the Academy of Marketing, UK.

Vera Tens is currently a PhD student in the Department of Business Management at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. She has an engineering degree from a German university specialising in wood science and technology. She worked in the German timber industry for several years before coming to Edinburgh to do an MBA at Edinburgh Napier University. Before joining Heriot-Watt's PhD programme she worked for a family-owned Scottish company, which raised the interest in doing a PhD in the field of

family firms. Her current research interest is future family generations in SMEs, using a stakeholder theory perspective.

Alastair Watson is a PhD student in the School of Management and Languages, Heriot-Watt University where his primary research interest is the commitment and motivation of staff in the UK hospitality industry, with a contextual application of Goffman's theory of Total Institutions. Alastair's work is driven by his active industry experience as a senior operational manager and recruiter for a branded organisation. Other projects include spirituality and commitment, and further understanding people's desire, as opposed to their need, to work.

Nikolaos Valantasis-Kanellos is a PhD student in the School of Management and Languages at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. His research draws upon contemporary developments in operations management, and the value creation within business networks. He currently researches the formation of ports' operations strategy in the era of servitisation with a particular focus on UK container ports and the emerging trend of Port-centric logistics. Nikolaos received an MSc in Logistics and Supply Chain Management from Heriot-Watt University (with distinction) and a BA in Economic and Regional Development from the Panteion University, Athens.

Lakshman Wimalasena is an Assistant Professor of Management, in the School of Management and Languages, Heriot-Watt University and PhD student attached to the department of Business Management. He is a graduate in human resource management (HRM) and also holds an MBA (with merit) and a postgraduate diploma in social research methods (with distinction). His main research interests are meaning of work (MoW), agential reflexivity and habitus. His doctoral study explores the MoW within a postcolonial society - Sri Lanka. This study which develops a new integrated framework to the study of MoW, also extends the applicability of realist reflexive theory and contributes to the ongoing debate "can reflexivity and habitus work in tandem".

Preface

Outside the academic community, the terms *thesis* and *dissertation* are interchangeable. At Heriot-Watt and other universities in the United Kingdom, the term thesis is usually associated with a PhD (doctoral degree), while dissertation is the more common term for a substantial project submitted as part of a taught masters degree (e.g. MSc) or an undergraduate degree (e.g. MA, BSc, BBA etc.).

Often thinking about, rather than even writing, your dissertation is the most stressful part of your degree. It does not need to be. Doing your dissertation is not unrelated to the rest of the writing you have done during your time at university. Many of the skills you already possess can be applied to the dissertation writing process. Identifying the purpose of your project, expressing originality and significance, setting appropriate goals, and maintaining strong organization will help you as you develop a high quality dissertation.

Regardless of the information given in this book, the most important advice is to engage with your supervisors! Be sure to speak with them throughout the process of writing your dissertation. Be clear about goals and deadlines. When you meet, have questions prepared and make sure you understand their directions. Be proactive about solving problems, rather than withdrawing. Take notes and use the time wisely.

Dissertations have always played a significant role in the awarding of a degree. Originally universities were established with advanced degrees being offered in the vocations of medicine, law, and theology. Over time, the universities have adapted to accommodate changing economic and social structures and demand for skills. Indeed, Whitehead (1932, p. 138f) in an essay welcoming the opening of the Harvard Business School observed,

“The universities are schools of education and schools of research. But the primary reason for their existence is not to be found either in the mere knowledge conveyed to the students or in the mere opportunities for research afforded to the members of the faculty... The justification for a university is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest for life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning...”

When the Harvard Business School began, the university was the learning environment and some compromise had been reached between the idealist liberal vision and what Newman (1907, p. 156) called “the disciples of a low utilitarianism”. John Paul II (2000, p. 3) elaborates the mission of a university and states that it is the duty of academics and researchers to make “universities ‘cultural laboratories’ in which theology, philosophy, human sciences and natural sciences may engage in constructive dialogue” and observes that in universities “there is an increased tendency to reduce the horizon of knowledge to what can be measured and to ignore any question touching on the ultimate meaning of reality.” There is considerable scope within a university business school for a genuine plurality of views and disagreement leading to constructive dialogue and contributing to the enhancement of scholarship.

Once, science, engineering and technology, medicine, the law, and divinity were firmly established and a balance between the vocational and the liberal was pursued. Today, some courses may need to recapture some of the values and characteristics of the traditional higher vocations, however, unfortunately, this is not always possible, so often contract trumps covenant in a wide range of contemporary occupations. Far from the demise of the middle class career predicted by some, professionalism and flexibility are highly desirable general features of *graduateness*; learning to learn and the formation of capacities in general should take precedence over the acquisition of specific content. Imagination and creativeness must complement flexibility and cold hard knowledge as preparation for a world of rapid and continuous change; it’s a question of balance.

In many sectors of our society, science is seen as being little short of infallible; anything else must be dismissed as fancy. Even in business journals there is the tendency to trust the so-called hard facts of statistically analysed quantitative data rather than the interpretive results that qualitative analysis tends to produce. However, the physicist Richard Feynman warned his students that when they did research, and before publishing their results, they should think of every possible way in which they might be wrong; whilst another physicist, Alan Lightman, explains the vital importance of this self-questioning approach: “In science, as in other activities, there is a tendency to find what we’re looking for” (Lightman, 1996, p. 104. Feynman’s comment is found on p106).

The ability to take an imaginative leap, beyond accepted scientific dogma and the entrenched views of academic colleagues, disciplinary boundaries, or even apparent common sense, has been at the heart of a significant number of scientific or technological advances in the last few hundred years. For example, throughout most of the 20th century, in medical circles the conventional wisdom was gastric juice caused ulcers, until a pioneering doctor infected himself with a bacterium thus proving that conventional wisdom was incorrect and winning the Nobel Prize for medicine (Van Der Weyden, Armstrong, & Gregory, 2005). In universities today, ethical approval processes might challenge the wisdom, or at least the legal probity, of infecting yourself or indeed others. Nevertheless, the undercurrent in any study of research methods is the slow realisation that everything that we “know”, even in domains that appear to be based on objective fact or cold hard logic can be questioned, as the physicist Max Planck said, “New ideas are not generated by deduction, but by an artistically creative imagination ... Science, like the humanities, like literature, is an affair of the imagination” (McFague, 1982, p. 72).

Kevin O’Gorman and Robert MacIntosh

References

- John Paul II. (2000). Jubilee of University Professors: Address Of John Paul II to University Professors of All Nations. Retrieved 06/07/14, from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20000909_jubilteachers_en.html
- Lightman, A. (1996). *Dance for Two*. London: Bloomsbury.
- McFague, S. (1982). *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*. London: SCM Press.
- Van Der Weyden, M. B., Armstrong, R. M., & Gregory, A. T. (2005). The 2005 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. *Medical Journal of Australia*, **183**(11/12), 612-614.
- Whitehead, A. N. (1932). *Aims of Education and Other Essays*. London: Williams & Norgate.

