

Polishing the Thesis

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The entire description of the committee's work was a strange pattern of ordinary enough words put together in a most unordinary way, so that the explanation seemed far more complex than the thing he was trying to have explained... Parenthetic elements were unexplainably inserted inside other parenthetic elements, equally unexplainably inserted into sentences whose relevance to the preceding sentences in the reader's mind was dead and buried and decayed long before the arrival of the period.

(Pirsig, 2000, p. 348)

But most remarkable of all were the wondrous and unexplained proliferations of abstract categories that seemed freighted with special meanings that never got stated and whose content could only be guessed at; these piled one after another so fast and so close that Phaedrus knew he had no possible way of understanding what was before him, much less take issue with it.

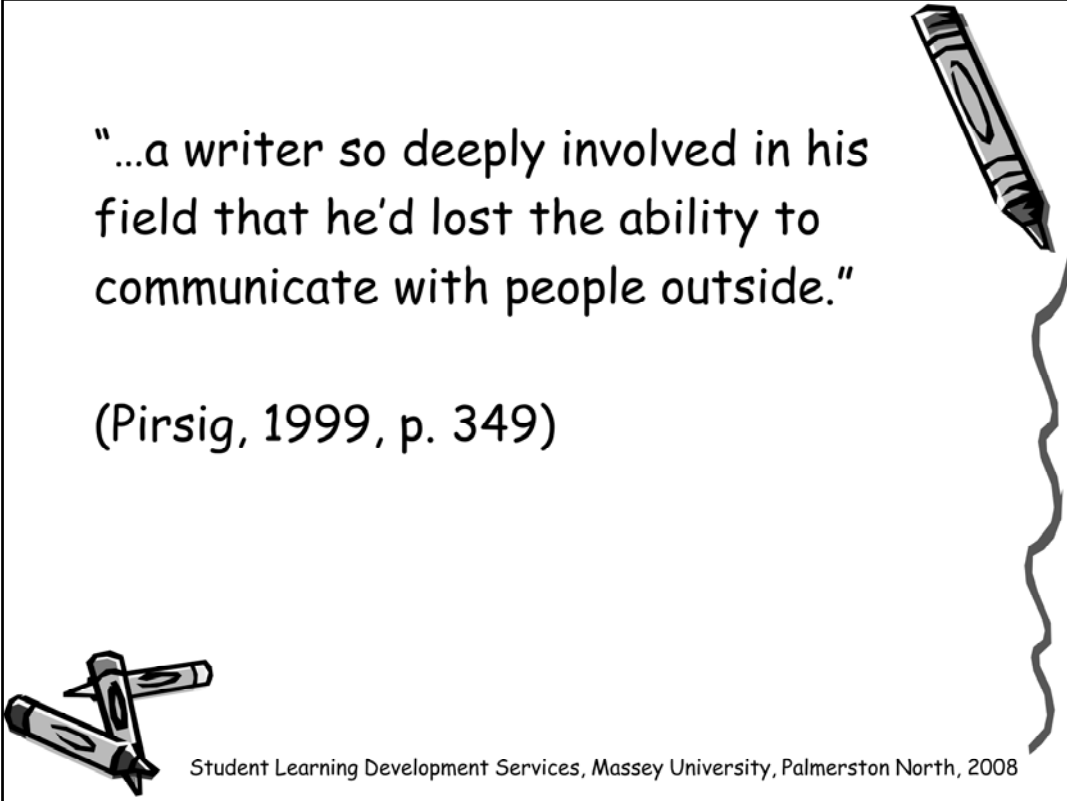
(pp. 348-349)



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Robert Pirsig offers a critique of academic writing.

Quotes sourced from Robert M Pirsig, who wrote 'Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance: An inquiry into values.' The book was originally written in 1974 and updated in 2000. The work is autobiographical. Pirsig (Phaedrus) approached the department of philosophy at the university of Chicago to do a PhD on how to define the concept of quality within the discipline of English composition. The thesis idea was rejected by a doctoral committee as English composition was not considered to be a substantial methodological field. He proceeds to examine the committee's background, including its statement of purpose as well as individual committee members' works because "he felt this committee was off into some entirely alien pattern of thought" (Pirsig, 2000, p. 348).



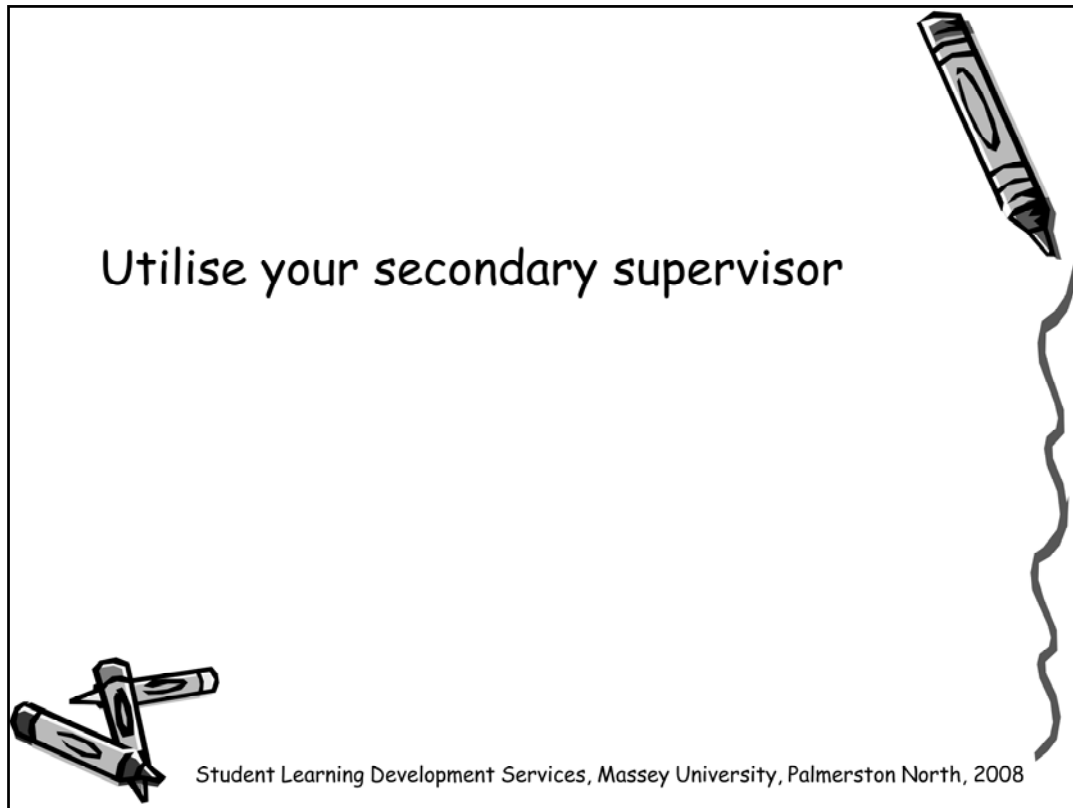
"...a writer so deeply involved in his field that he'd lost the ability to communicate with people outside."

(Pirsig, 1999, p. 349)

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Pirsig hypothesised that the committee's work was unnecessarily complex because they were too deeply connected to their work. (Perhaps this is an occupational hazard when doing a thesis, especially a PhD.)

The editing or polishing stage is about moving away from the intensity of the elements and looking back at the thesis with the audience in mind. Consequently, this is the purpose of this seminar. It is based largely on errors identified within my thesis drafting process. The thesis used a highly qualitative approach to understanding the online experiences of people with disabilities within the discipline of psychology.



In the last year of the thesis, you may have less contact with one of your supervisors, especially a secondary supervisor, as you may be working largely with one main person who reviews your work regularly. This may open up an opportunity to utilise your secondary supervisor as a peer-reviewer before final submission. Ensure that you notify your secondary supervisor of your intention to have them read over the entire thesis before you submit – work out timing, so they are not at an overseas conference or on sabbatical.

To help manage the process of editing your thesis, this seminar is designed as a tool kit for you to keep and use in the future.

Overview

- Chapter Structure
 - Chapter summaries
 - Uniting the whole
- Creating Variation
- Consistency in Phrasing
- Pitfalls to Avoid
- Tense
- APA Referencing Tips
 - Less common author citations



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Some of this is very straight forward. You may have heard it before. Some of it is information that you will also find in writing manuals and style guides.

Chapter Structure

- The importance of chapter summaries - allows reader to move from the intensity of specifics to the broader picture.
- Beginning & end
- Beginning - introduction section (structural summary); abstract that prefaces each chapter; quotation that signifies the theme of each chapter
- Be consistent across chapters.



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Have the intros and conclusions as a task to do towards the end of writing up. Because the writing of a thesis is so large, you constantly need to relocate your topic and where each part fits within your topic.

Chapter Six: Transcendence

Here, I delineate another repertoire identified in the interviews. The notion of being able to go beyond standard practices of operating in daily life formed another broad pattern generated from participants' data. This talk became defined in terms of a transcendence repertoire. Embedded within this repertoire is the idea that, online, people with disabilities can attain a great capacity for operating in the social world to the extent of transcending physical, social, perceptual, and psychological barriers surrounding disability. This offers people with disabilities a highly positive and significant transformation in subjectivity. Within the transcendence repertoire, three key resources were identified: life-altering, overcoming physical barriers, and disconnecting disability.

Abstract in the true sense of the word – summary of the whole chapter, including findings. Set out as a block text, right justified, not just left justified as it appears here. Physically marked way of beginning each chapter.

Chapter Starters...

- This chapter sets the stage for the thesis by reviewing...
- This chapter focuses on the philosophical ideas central to the way...
- This chapter outlines and debates the...
- This chapter works to demonstrate...
- This fifth chapter seeks a space to...
- In this chapter, how the...is delineated.
- In this chapter I demonstrate how...
- In the last chapter...
- Here, I delineate another...



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If you do not like the repetitive nature of these sentences, you could change the order by beginning with a verb phrase:

Setting the stage for the thesis is the purpose of this chapter.

Closing the chapter

- Summary section, or final summary paragraph
 - In conclusion, ...
 - In summary, ...
 - This review of the literature indicates that...
 - This analysis highlights...
 - Throughout this chapter, the...has demonstrated how...
 - Having identified and responded to..., it is now appropriate to summarise the central points raised in this chapter.



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Ensure the chapter conclusion is yours!

- Try not to rely on citations in your summaries, unless embedded into sentence.
 - "This review of the literature indicates that, although..., it has also been seen to...(Bayer, 1998)."



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Uniting the Whole

- Thesis is a unified piece of work, even though it is comprised of many different chapters, focusing on separate parts.
- Create links at the end of chapters
 - These outcomes, as well as the...are delineated in the following chapters.
 - Chapter Three moves on to consider...
 - The final analysis chapter follows, which looks at the...



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Creating Variation

- Be mindful of over-usage
 - "This chapter seeks a space to..."
 - Furthermore...
 - However...
 - Here are two sources for alternative words and phrases:
http://owll.massey.ac.nz/aw_essays_4.html
http://owll.massey.ac.nz/aw_using_authors_1_1_3_1.html
- Referencing
 - Vary author citation format
 - "... (Smith, 1986)."
 - "According to Smith (1986)..."; "Smith (1986) argues..."



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'But', 'yet', 'or', 'nor', 'and', 'because', and 'so' are deemed coordinating conjunctions, and as such are better used for linking clauses within the same sentence.

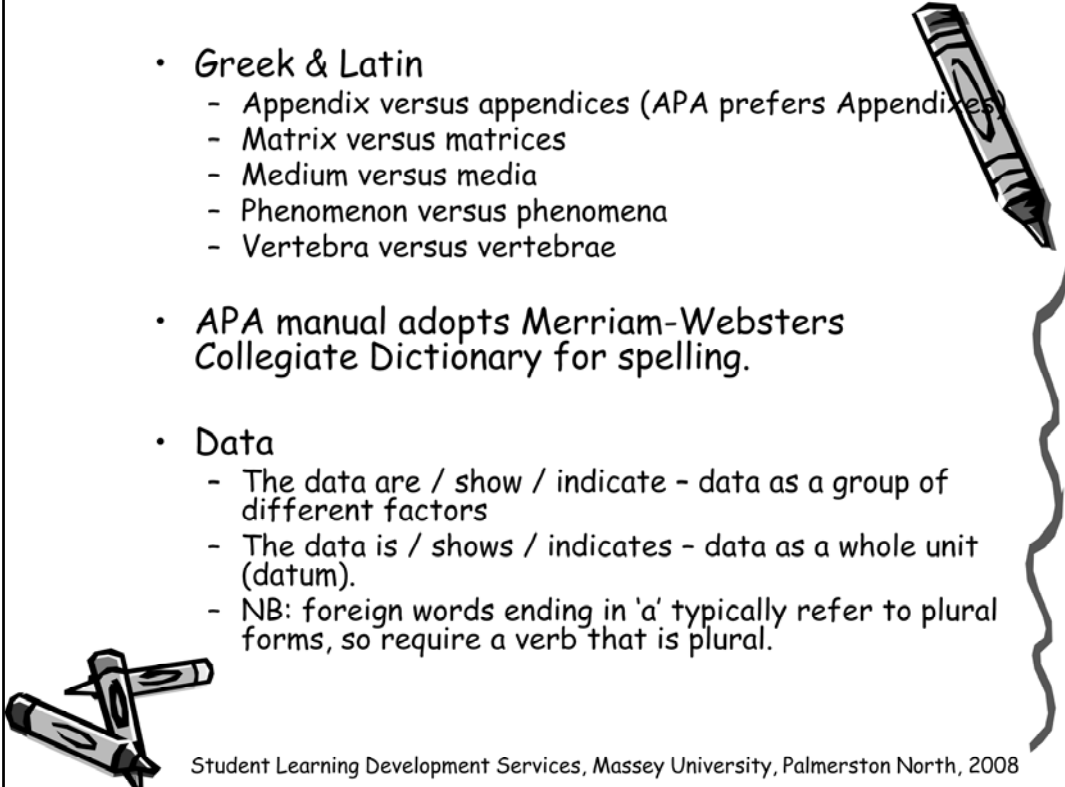
Consistency

- Plural vs singular
 - People with disabilities have traditionally occupied a stigmatised identity.
 - People with disabilities have traditionally occupied stigmatised identities.



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Best to decide on one version to use throughout the thesis.



• **Greek & Latin**

- Appendix versus appendices (APA prefers Appendixes)
- Matrix versus matrices
- Medium versus media
- Phenomenon versus phenomena
- Vertebra versus vertebrae

• **APA manual adopts Merriam-Websters Collegiate Dictionary for spelling.**

• **Data**

- The data are / show / indicate - data as a group of different factors
- The data is / shows / indicates - data as a whole unit (datum).
- NB: foreign words ending in 'a' typically refer to plural forms, so require a verb that is plural.

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Be aware of plural versus singular Greek and Latin words.



- American & British spelling
 - Labor Labour
 - Center Centre
 - Fiber Fibre
 - Organize Organise
 - Realize Realise
 - Dialog Dialogue
 - Analog Analogue
 - Traveler Traveller
 - Anesthesia Anaesthesia
 - Program Programme

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Regardless of the spelling convention you adopt, ensure consistency throughout the thesis.

- For acronyms, check that they were mentioned in full upon 1st usage.
 - Computer-mediated communication (CMC)
- Make the most of the find & search tool.



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Pitfalls to Avoid in your Writing

- Being apologetic
- Being over-the-top
- Being minimalist



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Being Apologetic

"With respect to chapters four to six, discussion of the repertoires in relation to the available literature is carried out in chapter ten, as these repertoires share points of commonality. Discussion of chapter nine's findings is also placed in the final chapter because it offers a convenient contrast with the outcomes of chapters four to six. However, in the case of chapters seven and eight, the work of integrating the analysis with the available literature is contained within each chapter, as some of the issues raised are only relevant for these repertoires."



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However, in the case ofsome of the issues raised are only relevant for these repertoires" – Identifying elements that don't need to be explicitly stated. Basically highlighting the inconsistency. Don't draw unnecessary attention to the negative.



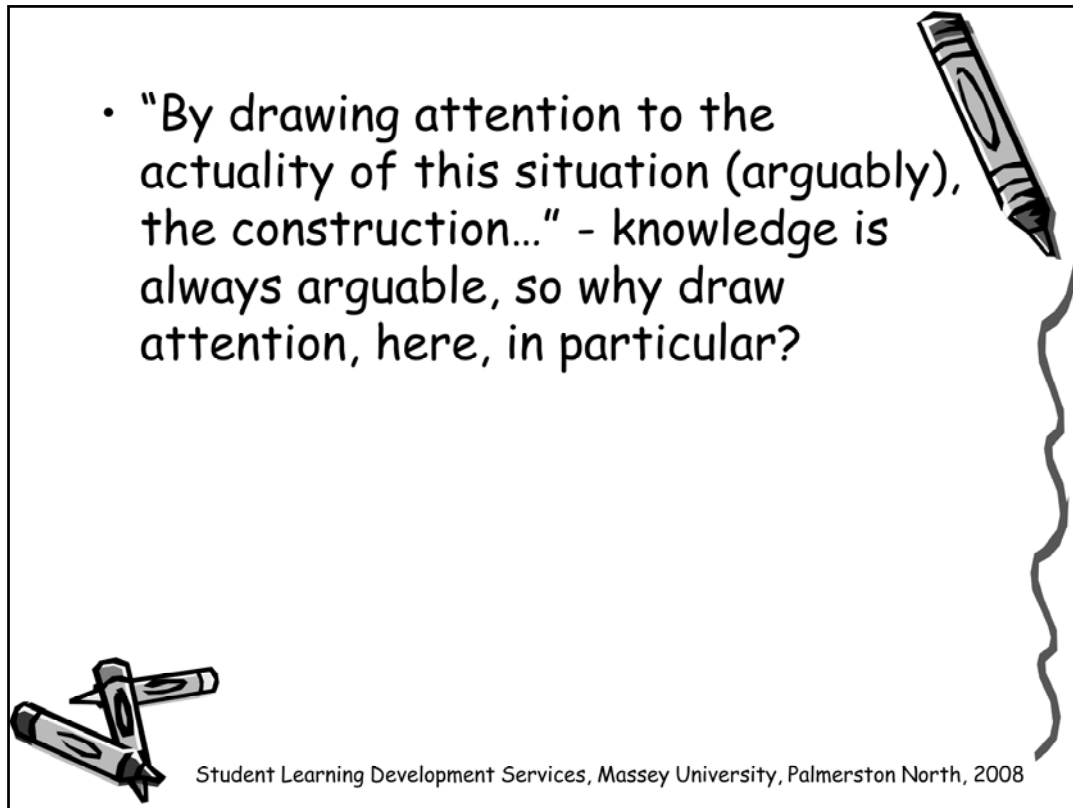
In the thesis each chapter is introduced with an abstract that provides a summary of the central issues to follow. Each of the analysis chapters also closes with a summary of the central features generated from the interview data. *In addition to the summary, a discussion of the analysis in relation to the available literature is incorporated in Chapter Eight. For other analysis chapters a general discussion of findings is carried out in the final thesis chapter.*



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Instead, here is a small paragraph about the overall design of each chapter in the Preface.

Instead of making the whole paragraph about the inconsistency in relation to where a discussion of the findings is located, it's about extra features embedded in one paragraph, with the last feature about the inclusion of a discussion in Chapter Eight.



- “By drawing attention to the actuality of this situation (arguably), the construction...” - knowledge is always arguable, so why draw attention, here, in particular?

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Why mention ‘arguably’ if you are arguing the point anyway.

Being Over-The-Top

- "...is **victoriously** overcome...";
- "is a **victorious** solution...";
- "...redressing **all** the inequities...";
- "...solutions to **all** her limitations...";
- "...**completely** transforming...";
- "Its **unlimited and boundless** capacity...";
- "...a **deeply** profound...";
- "This **total** reorientation..."



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Many of these words are tautological in that they repeat an idea unnecessarily.

Being Minimalist


- "...(*cf.* normality resource in the choice to disclose repertoire demonstrated in chapter four)."
- This "choice" construction overlaps with the *normality* resource embedded in the *choice to disclose* repertoire, where having the choice to withhold disclosure of a disabled identity allows people to operate within a 'normal' subjectivity.
- "This has parallels with..."



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It is important to limit the amount of work required by your reader. In the case of the first example, the "*cf.*" refers to the need to compare or confer with a previous chapter. Rather than requiring your reader to do the work, it is better if you explain the connection for comparison.

In the latter example, it is necessary to explain the parallels.

- 
- "At this point, it is important to elaborate on the concept of subject positioning."
 - It is important to elaborate on the concept of subject positioning, otherwise termed positioning, which has been touched on in various ways throughout this chapter. Subject positioning is central to the way I analyse participants' data. Positioning theory leads to the carrying out of agency discursively.



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Why it is important to elaborate on the concept? This needs some explanation because it is as the heart of the analytical approach chosen.

The Question of Tense - to be, to have or to have had...



- Published findings have gone through a rigorous process of peer review, enabling validation.
- The work of published authors is presented in the present tense.
 - *V. bacterius* reduces its growth at 10 C (Smith, 2000).
- If your own work has been published prior to submission of your thesis, you can refer to these results in the present tense.
 - *S. bacterius* reduces its growth at 15 C (Anderson & Donaldson, 2007).



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Distinguishing between Actions and Knowledge

- If you are reporting on research that was carried out, you can position the actual investigative action in the past tense (or present perfect tense: "have investigated") and the knowledge gained in the present tense.
 - *V. bacterius* reduces its growth at 10 C (Smith, 2000).
 - Smith (2000) investigated the growth rate of *V. bacterius*. She found that its growth rate reduces at 10 C.
 - Smith (2000) investigated the growth rate of *V. bacterius*, identifying a reduction at 10 C.
 - Smith (2000) has found that *V. bacterius* reduces its growth at 10 C.

Surpassed Knowledge

- If findings are no longer valid and have been proven false, such findings should be referred to in the past tense.
 - Smith (2000) found that growth rate reduced at 10C. However, Anderson (2007) has since identified errors in the measures used by Smith, demonstrating growth rate reduction at 15C instead.
- This is distinct from highlighting different results in the literature.
 - Smith's (2000) findings identify growth rate reductions at 10C. In contrast, Anderson (2007) has found that growth rate reduces at 15C.

- When reporting on what you did, this happened in the past.
 - Participants ranged in age from 15 to 59 years...
 - Each participant used the online medium...
 - Once participants had read the information sheet, they were then required to...
 - The interview schedule comprised six sections...



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Abstract

- Use the past tense for describing your own work.

- Abstract

- "The effect of streptomycin on *S. everycolor* grown in various media was tested. Growth of *S. everycolor*, measured in terms of optical density, was inhibited in all media tested. Inhibition was most pronounced at high pH levels."



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Results

- Traditionally, use the past tense:
 - "Growth of *S. everycolor* was inhibited by streptomycin at all concentrations tested (Table 2) and at all pH levels (Table 3). Maximum inhibition occurred at pH 8.2; inhibition was slight[ly] below pH 7."
- Other types of research may require present tense.
 - The following extract provides an example of the *identity* resource, which shows how...



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- 
- APA advocates *present* tense to explain results and highlight conclusions.
 - Therefore, the language patterns, identified in participants' data, confirm...
 - Findings indicate that a relationship exists between gender and age.
 - In reflecting upon other aspects of the research process, I also acknowledge...
 - The research highlights important implications for...
 - In conclusion, the research demonstrates...



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Tense

- "Abruptness may result from sudden, shifts in verb tense within the same paragraph or in adjacent paragraphs. By being consistent in the use of verb tenses, you can help ensure smooth expression" (Publication Manual of APA, 2001, p. 33).
- Present perfect tense can ease the transition from past to present and vice versa.
 - have investigated
 - has reported



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Overall, a key point to follow is smooth transitions from one tense to the next. While specific tenses are appropriate for specific chapters, It is difficult to pin down the use of one tense for the entirety of a chapter. Rather you may adopt one tense for the majority of sentences and paragraphs in a chapter, but will need to move into other tenses as required.

APA Referencing Tips

- When using 6 or more authored publications, use et al. in first instance.
 - According to Elliot et al. (2000), ...
- Then cite the first six authors in the reference list, and use et al., if there are any remaining.
 - Elliot, J., Butcher, G.A., Adams, I., Hall, E., McGregor, T., Wilson, M., et al. (2000)...



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- 
- Order authors alphabetically in text
 - (Arnold & Miller, 2000; Chandler, 1998; Miller, 1995; Turkle, 1995; Walker, 2000).
 - Mention the author's year once in each new paragraph.
 - Poster (1997) holds that... . In contrast, Kapor (1993) argues. Nevertheless, Poster mentions...
 - Use square brackets for abbreviating organisational authors
 - (Disabled People's Assembly [DPA], 1999).



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- The 1st letter in a quotation, and the end of sentence punctuation can be altered to suit sentence structure.


- "Non-parametric tests have some benefits" (Smith, 1999, p. 3).
- According to Smith (1999, p. 3), "non-parametric tests have some benefits."

- When quoting from online docs, use paragraph number, if no page number.

- Gabor (2005, para. 8) argues "..."



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- 
- Insert additional words into quote in square brackets.
 - "EBP [evidence-based practice] has been deployed in the social sciences since the 70s."
 - Indicate errors in quote with [*sic*].
 - "Many authors agrees [*sic*] on the point of variability."
 - Indicate added emphasis of your own to a quote in square brackets.
 - "Organisations work *with* [italics added] clients."



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Extracts from PhD reports

- The sentence "This is cherished" as a final sentence is overused. (pp. 116;129; 205)
- What is the genus that the 'generic ideas' in Chapter 7 belong to?
- The headings in Chapter 5 move into third person singular present tense verbs, which invite me to search for a (missing) subject.
- Data is a plural word. There are corrections needed on pages 76 and 78.
- P. 30, sentence beginning is unwieldy: "Moreover, Sampson highlights that..."



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Some of these are subjective.

Some Useful Resources



American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Day, R.A. (1998). *How to write and publish a scientific paper* (5th ed.). Phoenix, AZ: The Oryx Press. (808.0665 Day)

Evans, D.G. (2000). *How to write a better thesis*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press. (808.02 Eva.)

Rountree, K. (1996). *Writing by degrees. A practical guide to writing theses and research papers*. Auckland: Longman. (808.02 Rou)

Becker, H.S., & P. Richards. (1986). *Writing for social scientists. How to start and finish your thesis, book or article*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. (808.0663 Bec)



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For more information...

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