

FACULTY OF LAW DISSERTATION WRITING WORKSHOP

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Your Journey in summary

1. Identifying a Research area
2. Developing the research topic and questions
3. Finding a supervisor
4. Developing a research proposal
5. Researching and drafting the thesis/dissertation under supervisor's guidance
6. Submitting the final draft of the dissertation
7. Examination and result

IDENTIFYING A RESEARCH AREA AND TOPIC

- ❖ What are you passionate about?
- ❖ What do you want to be known for?
- ❖ What are the broad areas of law that you would like to research and write about?



- ✓ the broad areas of research (e.g. public participation in constitution making, socio economic rights)

IDENTIFYING A RESEARCH AREA AND TOPIC...CONT

Within the broad area of research which you have identified , what are the specific issues that interest you?

For Example

Broad Area of Research: Public participation in constitution making

Specific issue of interest: The Relationship between public participation in constitution making processes and the notion of a democratic constitution

Broad area of Research: Socio-economic rights in Zimbabwe

Specific issue of interest: How the right to adequate housing can be enforced in Zimbabwe.

DEVELOPING THE RESEARCH TOPIC & QUESTIONS

The best way to develop a topic is to ask yourself these questions:

- ❖ What are the key question (s) which I would like to inquire on within the specific area of research that I have identified?
- ❖ What are the gaps in the current/existing literature?
- ❖ What are some of the scholarly views which you would like to dispute/challenge?
- ❖ What are some of the policy related challenges in your area of research which you may want to inquire on and recommend solutions?
- ❖ The answer(s) to any of these questions may help you identify a specific topic to research on.

DEVELOPING THE RESEARCH TOPIC & QUESTIONS

- ❖ After developing the topic, you must articulate the objective for your research.
- ❖ From there you must develop specific research question(s)
- ❖ Research Question (s) are questions which will guide you to conduct your research.
- ❖ Research Questions must enable you to achieve your research goal/objective [Refer to Annexure 1]
- ❖ If more than one, research questions must logically flow from each other
- ❖ They must be specific, realistic, precise and easy to understand.

FINDING A SUPERVISOR

- Potentially from amongst your current lecturers?
- Ask for the UCT Law Faculty Booklet that has list of staff members and their descriptions?
- Identify a few lecturers and approach them with your topic, research objective and research question(s).

DEVELOPING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Simply put, a research proposal is a road map which:

- ❖ Indicates your area of research
- ❖ Your intended objective or goal for conducting the research
- ❖ The significance of the planned research
- ❖ The questions you would like to answer through your research
- ❖ The theoretical framework upon which your research will be based
- ❖ How you plan to carry out the research
- ❖ The envisaged structure of your dissertation/thesis
- ❖ Identifies some of the leading authorities on your subject of research

DEVELOPING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL....CONT

The following are the essential elements of the proposal

- ❖ Introduction
- ❖ Research goal/Objective
- ❖ Research Question(s)
- ❖ Justification for the research
- ❖ Theoretical concepts for the research
- ❖ Methodology
- ❖ Envisaged structure of the Dissertation/Thesis
- ❖ Bibliography

RESEARCHING & DRAFTING THE THESIS/DISSERTATION: THE ESSENTIAL TIPS

Essential Tip 1

1. To identify the relevant literature:

- Read widely but you must always be guided by your research questions and your research objective to avoid being a wanderer.
- Identify a journal article/book to use as the starting point for your research. This will lead you to other relevant sources
- As you read along, consider making notes on the key questions/issues

Essential Tip 2

You must ensure diversity of literature sources by making reference to:

- Relevant legislative /constitutional provisions
- Relevant case law
- Relevant scholarly views expressed in journal articles and textbooks

Essential Tip 3

- ❖ Every claim/argument that you make must be clear and referenced or based on literature. No general claims that have no literature backing!!!

Essential Tip 4

- ❖ Do not just look for scholarly views which support your arguments. Avoid being one dimensional by acknowledge dissenting voices and engage with them in your writing.

Essential Tip 5

- ❖ Write clearly and with precision. Few words, shorter sentences the better!

Essential Tip 6

In order to ensure coherence across the dissertation.

- ❖ Make sure that your chapters are arranged in such a way that they “tell a continuous story”. Just like a good driver of a vehicle with a manual gear system, there must be a smooth transition from one gear to the next i.e from one chapter to the next. [Annexure 5]

In order to ensure coherence within the chapter (internal coherence)

- ❖ Start with an introduction which explains what you intend to achieve/address in the particular chapter and the arrangement of sections within that chapter [Annexure 2]
- ❖ Begin your paragraphs by clearly stating your argument, then discuss the basis of your argument by indicating the literature sources
- ❖ Conclude by summing up your argument, without necessarily repeating what you have said earlier

Essential Tip 7

It is an essential requirement that you must not just describe but critique concepts and scholar views. This is why you must find your own voice in the dissertation/thesis. To do this:

- ❖ Indicate the different views expressed by scholars on the subject you are writing on. After that, state what your own view is. Your own view may be that you agree with a certain scholar's view and you need to precisely explain why you agree so that it becomes your own voice
- ❖ Acknowledge dissenting views and indicate why you think those dissenting views are “wrong”. By providing a critique of such voices, you are not only showing that you have read widely but you are also giving your voice. [Annexure 4]

Essential Tip 8

Proper and adequate referencing is a pre-requisite. It is an academic crime not to do so! Things you need to know:

- ❖ Referencing is a systematic way of indicating the literature sources from where you are deriving your ideas/claims/arguments.

Referencing can be in the form of:

- ❖ footnotes (if you are making a direct quote and or you have taken a specific idea/argument. There are different style guides for footnotes but all of them require that you must indicate the exact page number (journals/books) or paragraph number (court judgements or statutory provisions)
- ❖ Bibliography: This is a list of sources which you have consulted in your research and which have shaped the arguments made in your dissertation.
- ❖ The Faculty has a style guide which you can consider using for referencing [Annexure 3]

Essential Tip 9

- ❖ You must always and seriously consider the advice given by your supervisor
- ❖ You should consider peer review from your colleagues
- ❖ Writing a dissertation/thesis can be exhausting! Establish a work routine, striking a balance between working and resting. It is not a sprint but a marathon
- ❖ Be economic with words because you have length limitations. Its often better to add words that to remove them!

The End

Happy Writing and All the best!!!