CUR Book Review

How to Write a Research Dissertation: Essential Guidance in Getting Started for Undergraduates and Postgraduates

By Frank Rennie and Keith Smyth

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Frunk Rennie and Keith Smyth have provided a practical and accessible guide for undergraduates and graduates writing research theses and dissertations. While

their volume *How to Write a Research Dissertation: Essential Guidance in Getting Started for Undergraduates and Postgraduates* is an eminently valuable text for a number of reasons delineated below, what is especially significant about this book is that as a university copyrighted and published book, it is only available as an affordable etext. The book is one of the first being rolled out as part of the eTIPS (eTextbook Institutional Publishing Service) project, in which the academic institution is the e-textbook publisher.

This is a Jisc Collections funded project exploring ways to make higher education and textbooks more affordable and more sustainable. It involves five universities in the UK. The Rennie and Smyth volume is one of the first eight books in this innovative publishing project. It is fitting that while Smyth is a professor of pedagogy, co-author Rennie is a professor of sustainable rural development.

This eminently helpful etext provides complete and quick direction for the various aspects of the research and report process. Geared toward students in a wide range of disciplinary fields, the volume begins with a discussion of the importance of conducting research in the first place. Thereafter, the text covers a full range of information, including the crucial areas of ethics, research stages (planning, methods, collection, piloting, and data analysis), and the report (organization of results, statistics, graphics, and report structure).

Rennie and Smyth make it clear that any research project, whether conducted by faculty or students, must be relevant, meaningful, clear, and achievable. Additionally, they point out that regardless of field, research is “the search for answers and solutions as yet unknown” (n.p.). While noting the different types and forms of research (e.g., pure or basic, descriptive, applied, market, problem-based, etc.), they state that “research can be considered as a structured investigation into a subject, the aim of which is to add knowledge to that subject

and/or illuminate the subject from a different perspective” (n.p.). This is important for it explains to students why they should take their research projects seriously.

Rennie and Smyth remind the reader why the research process and its written report matter. In this way, they help their readers to “buy in” to the research process as a deeply meaningful and achievable activity of value to themselves and others. They point to the final research report as the primary means of effectively communicating the research (its methods, data, and findings) to others. They not only note that the report presents what the student has done and has found, but also that the report is as crucial a part of the project as is the hands-on researching. The research would be meaningless if not communicated to others for their learning, use, and development, they say.

The areas in which the research process can go awry are addressed, with the authors providing helpful guidance, such as their emphasis that the process is always incremental, aggregative, and rarely linear. Readers are reminded that questions, problems, and findings will invariably lead to new questions, problems, and findings. Accordingly, the authors emphasize the importance of strong time management at the outset in order to accomplish what is possible within the set time constraints. Concrete examples from a diversity of disciplinary and interdisciplinary areas of study are provided, ranging from the arts and sciences to professional fields such as engineering, business, and health science. Even in such a small etext, research statement proposals/interests and thesis titles are provided in fairly comprehensive listings. Additionally, each chapter of the etext includes optional activities and recommended background reading.

This ebook is designed to be encouraging. Students are guided to appreciate that undergraduate and graduate research does matter and that it contributes to solving focused thesis questions, which then become part of the larger unfolding process of research in related areas. *How to Write a Research Dissertation* provides a clear step-by-step presentation of the research process, from generating the initial idea, through the methodology and conduct of the actual research, to the eventual presentation of the research report. This book, both in its content and in its groundbreaking presentation should be of great value for any student and class in virtually any discipline. There is also a companion website with audio/video presentations by the authors, links to additional online resources, and a discussion board that invites students to engage each other about their research experiences.

This small ebook is digitally robust, remarkably affordable, and thus readily available to users around the world—a great little companion for virtually any class.

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