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A GUIDE TO WRITING YOUR PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

This piece is designed to identify the guidelines and ways by which students at the tertiary level can write their project with ease. Project work or thesis or dissertation at the Tertiary institutions across the globe is compulsory for all students. Most students find this aspect of their studies challenging and tedious. It is for this reason I came out with this piece of guide to assist tertiary students write their project with ease. The paper seeks to demystify the belief of many students that project work is very tedious as if it is something one must go to heaven to pluck it. Students who will take their time to read through this paper which is self explanatory would come to appreciate the fact that research work is not difficult and tedious as they perceive it to be. This guide happens to be made in the simplest and easiest form such that the average reader understands what it entails. I must again reiterate that, research is a ‘must study’ course at the tertiary level and thus encourages all potential tertiary students and tertiary students to make good use of this epistle.

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

There should be 2 short paragraphs: the first introduces the entire project (better written after the entire research is completed), and the second summarizes the contents in chapter 1.

1.2 Background to the Study

This section is meant to win the reader's attention and interest in the topic under study.

Going from broad to specific (the whole world has this problem, but here's how it is where I live, and here's why we can't ignore it), the background section tends to use a lot of references, but few quotes, as it documents facts in what is usually very much like a persuasive essay. As you go from the general situation to the specific case at hand, the topic narrows to the research under study. This needs to happen before the end of the second page.

The research topic should be shown to grow naturally out of the events stated in the first part of the background, i.e., because you have just, for example, documented how many young people are unemployed, it is clear we need to study how to get them employed. For that reason, this study will examine ways of getting young people employed.

The background is VERY FOCUSED. Nothing that can be saved for later should appear here.

The situation needs to be painted clearly, and the link needs to be made between the state of affairs and the proposed research. Basically, you must convince your reader why this study is important to do and at this time. That is, what is the NEED to research this topic now?

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The background section naturally flows into the problem statement and the research questions. It is a sort of recap of what has been stated in the background, showing the state of affairs that has convinced you of the need to do this study, and what you will do to attempt to resolve the problem. If you are writing a project, do not skip the actual intervention as you describe what you will do, even though your description should be brief.

There are three major parts to the problem statement.

1. The first part is the intention, what should be, or what is optimum.
2. The second part is the barrier. The barrier is what is blocking the accomplishment of the intention.
3. The third part shows what you will do about this problem in this study (purpose).

The problem statement is usually 3-4 sentences. The research questions (below) operationalize the purpose statement and break it down into specifics, but the purpose statement needs to show the complete overview of where the study is going.

Example 1 (Classroom Technology)

Intention: Increase the use of technology in teaching among lecturers in universities in the Upper East Region.

Barrier: Lack of know-how and inappropriate use for the ones who know

Purpose: Because university students use technology continually, they might be better taught by lecturers if the lecturers made better use of technology in presentations, communication, and contacts. Lecturers who do not use technology might even be looked down upon. The lecturers in universities in the UER would like to

enhance their teaching efforts through the use of technology, but they lack knowledge and skills. The purpose of this study is to explore potential solutions to increase the use of technology in teaching university students.

Example 2 (Security Studies)

Intention: Ninety-five percent (95%) assault preparedness and management during terror attacks at Bongo Police Station (BPS)

Barrier: Increase of terror attacks

Purpose: Bongo Police Station, a divisional headquarters in the UER, has a goal of 95 percent preparedness during the management of a national terror. Recently, following the terrorist attack in Yorogo, Bongo, it was revealed that the station was only 50% prepared.

The purpose of this study is to develop strategies to assist BPS in improving its assault management preparedness.

Example 3

Intention: Ninety percent of our accounting students pass the Professional Exams

Barrier: The Institutes have raised the standard

Purpose: The School of Business has a goal of 95 percent of its students passing the Professional exams. Just recently the Professional Institutes have raised the standard and only 75% of our students are passing the exam. The purpose of this paper is to explore potential reasons for the low scores, and to propose ways of raising them.

Research Questions

This section is part of the Problem Statement. The research questions are specifically what will be answered by your study. Usually 3-5 questions are enough. Each question needs to be specifically answered by data or your intervention—nothing in a primary study is completely “answered” by the literature review. Write these questions VERY carefully, as they summarize your entire study, and will guide you in what literature to read, what statistics to use, what design and methods to use, and even what data to collect. Frequently, the data analysis is organized around these questions, as you evaluate the answers and respond to each. Even the conclusion of your study will return to these questions and discuss the answers that your study has found for the questions that were asked.

Example 1 of Research Questions:

- What are the roles of rural banks in rural communities?
- Are the rural banks changing their role in rural communities?
- Why are rural banks changing their role in rural communities?
- What are the effects of the changing role of rural banks on rural communities?

Example 2 of Research Questions:

- What are the core values adopted by organisations in Tema?
- How do companies live out their adopted values?
- What are the factors that impede the operationalisation of firms’ core values?
- What are the impacts of organisational values on corporate performance?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

Here, just state the main purpose of your study and formulate your objectives using the same words in each of your research questions stated above.

Example 1 of Research Objectives:

The main objective of the study was to investigate the impact of organisational values on corporate performance. The specific objectives were to:

- identify the core values adopted by organisations in Tema.
- evaluate how companies live out their adopted values.
- examine the factors that impede the operationalisation of the firms' core values.
- examine the impact of organisational values on corporate performance.

Example 2 of Research Objectives:

- To find out the role of rural banks in rural communities.
- To find out whether rural banks are changing their role in rural communities.
- To determine why are rural banks changing their role in rural communities.
- To assess the effects of the changing role of rural banks on rural communities.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

Topical scope: Essentially a restatement of your topic.

Geographical scope: Area of your study and you chose that area.

Limitations: This section should be written after the study is completed. Limitations are factors that affected the study that likely have negative effects on the results. You must also state the kind of effects and how you did things to minimize the effects.

1.6 Definition of Terms

The technical terms in your research must be defined according to the meanings you intend them to have in your document. Note that these are not necessarily dictionary meanings.

1.7 Organization of Study

In a paragraph, just repeat the chapter outlines in meaningful sentences from Chapter 1 to 5.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review is an analysis of the past to prepare for the future. As a researcher, you must have a robust knowledge of what earlier researchers have done on your topic or area to help.

- ✓ identify critical knowledge gaps and thus motivate you and other researchers to close this breach. That is, writing a review not only requires an examination of past research, but means making a chart for future research
- ✓ motivate the research topic and explain your work's own contributions
- ✓ avoid repetition of work done by others (if that's not intended). Extending current theories or developing new theories will create directions for future research.
- ✓ describe the key concepts
- ✓ delineate the boundaries of your research
- ✓ review relevant prior literature in your area and related areas
- ✓ develop a model to guide your research
- ✓ justify propositions by presenting theoretical explanations, past empirical findings, and practical examples
- ✓ present concluding implications for researchers, managers and other stakeholders (Webster & Watson, 2002).

Research Already Done and Gaps

Your Literature Review should be filled with references, but **NOT QUOTES**. Show what has been learned already. These studies will serve as a foundation for what you intend to study.

You must paraphrase almost everything, yet the source **MUST** be acknowledged. The few direct quotes (more than 40 words in a quote not allowed) must be in quotation marks, showing author(s), year and page number(s).

Proper research is about finding out something that is not yet known, not just something YOU did not yet know. The gap in the literature is what has not yet been studied. As you read, you need to find out what is **ALREADY KNOWN** and what is **NOT YET KNOWN** about your topic. This will help you understand what contribution your study will make to the knowledge pool. In order for your work to be accepted, you need to convince your advisors what contribution this study will make toward learning something that we as a society did not know before.

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Conceptual Framework:

Definitions, meanings, explanations, ideas, thoughts, notions, characteristics, features, types, kinds, advantages, merits, disadvantages, demerits, etc., etc. people have written to throw light on the key words or phrases in your topic. Develop a model (chart(s), mathematical formula(e)) to present a roadmap and a summary to your research to end this section of the literature review.

2.3 Theoretical Framework:

Write short notes on theories that relate to your topic and indicate how each of them has something to do with your topic. One of the theories must be identified as the one that is most related to your research and why. Then your study must be situated in that.

2.4 Empirical Framework:

The most important and longest part of the literature review. This section should contain actual primary research studies on your topic, not just a discussion of related ideas or theories. Almost all your literature here **MUST** come from peer reviewed academic journals. State the author(s) and publication year, what they studied, and their findings. End each with a personal comment.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

After having a good reading of the over 120 scholarly articles suggested above you would most likely be educated on the most appropriate methods to use and how to scientifically employ them for a topic like yours.

Under the methodology chapter, the student is expected to answer the following three questions under each subheading:

- a) WHAT did you do?
- b) WHY did you do it?
- c) HOW scientifically did you do it? (Note: Don't write these questions in your work)

For example, what was your sample? Why did you choose that sample? How exactly did you choose the sample using your sampling technique(s)?

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Type of Research

It is your research design that should determine the type of research you are undertaking.

Your type of research can be descriptive, correlational, quasi-experimental, experimental, review, meta-analytic, descriptive-longitudinal, etc. The design must also drive the research problem, research questions/hypotheses, variables, data collection and analysis methods, etc.

As a student researcher, it is your duty to know and understand the type of research you want to undertake and how best to do it scientifically.

3.3 Population

This should cover the size and elements making up the population for the study and/or the target population or sampling frame.

3.4 Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample should clearly state the size, sampling units and sampling elements. The sample should be representative enough considering the population.

Your sampling technique(s) must cover the method(s) used in selecting the sample size, sampling units and sampling elements. Among the techniques are purposive, convenient, snowball, simple random sampling, quota, census, etc.

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 Source of Data Collection

Your data sources are primary or secondary or both. They can never be qualitative or quantitative.

3.5.2 Instrument of Data Collection

You must indicate how you have structured the instrument, indicating the various sections of the instrument and how each section is going to contribute to the achievement of your research objectives or questions. The student must unambiguously describe how instrument validity and reliability were done using statistical methods/tools. It is advisable that before you design your instrument, you consult a statistician with your problem statement, objectives, and research questions and/or hypotheses.

3.5.3 Procedure of Data Collection

Here, the student must indicate in detail how the sampling technique(s) mentioned by the student was/were employed to collect data from the sampling units for the research. This section must also include ethical issues considered in the research.

3.6 Method of Data Analysis

This section describes how data collected were analyzed. Here, students must know that raw percentages and frequencies will NOT be accepted as method of data analysis. The student must be able to at least use some of the commonest and simple methods such as regression, t-test, qi-square, ANOVA, cross tabulations, kurtosis, plots, etc. Note that SPSS nor Excel nor any other computer software can be said to be your method of data analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Profiles on Sampled Firm(s)

Write up to a page each about the organizations you studied and acknowledge the source of the information about them. You may have to modify or rewrite the information the organizations give you to suit the context and make them professional. This is not the place for advertising the organizations.

4.3 Data Presentation and Analysis

Data Presentation Tables

Preferably, present your results in tables, each table for each objective or research question and/or hypothesis. As much as possible, present the data in the form presented in the questionnaire, showing frequencies and percentages under each option. Introduce each table with a sentence or two. Each table must have a name (NB: a name is different from a sentence). The name of a table should be on top, e.g., Table 4.1 (Table numbers are preceded by the chapter number). Every table must be single-spaced. The source and year of the contents in the table must be indicated at the bottom; e.g., Source: Field data, 2017. Tables must not extend beyond the approved margins. They are better when extended to the width of the sentences on the page. As much as possible, do not break tables; each table should be accommodated on a page (Very long tables are better placed in appendixes at the end of the work). Each table inside the main write-up should be followed with an analysis or comments. You may better present your data in some order to make them more meaningful. E.g., Rearrange the variables under an objective with the ones with the highest frequencies/percentages coming first and the least coming last.

Data Presentation Figures or Charts

Names should be at the bottom, citing the source. Figures or charts may have the same name with a table if they serve the same purpose. Figures or charts must be well labeled and avoid duplications.

Data Analysis

This is just saying the things in the table in words and percentages. Analysis expressly follows a table or figure. Don't say things the respondents did not say. Avoid long sentences.

Don't begin sentences with digits but in words. Write the word "percent" and use % only in parentheses. Always refer to a table by its name; i.e., Table 4.3, instead of "the table above" and "the table below". Write in past tense; e.g., "Eighty-three percent disagreed that"

Beware of the use of the word majority when the percentage is not over 50. Avoid using frequencies in the analysis; use only the percentage figures.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

At this point, your data analysis must have revealed your study's major findings. Relate each of them to specific findings by others in the literature review—tell us whether your own findings agree or disagree with theirs and why you think there was that agreement or disagreement, using academic words such as probably, it seems, it appears, maybe, perhaps, etc. The discussion must be done under each objective or research question.

In any case, don't personalise things; take yourself out of the picture.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This is an opinion chapter. It can be otherwise called Conclusions or “What judgments I have formed as a result of what I found out.” In this chapter, the following are tested of the student:

- originality of thought
- maturity of understanding
- careful thought.

For each finding, the student should ask and answer **So** what?

For the research question and each objective, the student should ask and answer **To** what extent has it been achieved?

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Summary

This is the summing up of the essential parts of the entire research work, highlighting the essential findings. Summarize the entire work, not the findings: objective, scope, methodology (research type, population, sample, sampling techniques, data collection instrument, and analysis method. End this section with a list of the major findings.

5.3 Conclusion

This is where the student has to shine. Much originality of thought is needed here. This is where **So what?** must be answered.

Conclusions are interpretations of the findings; inferences drawn from the findings.

Conclusions are not research findings or research analysis. It is important to note that, at least, one conclusion is provided for each finding. The conclusions must be based on data related to the study (Fisher et al., 2007).

Research conclusions summarize the researcher’s understanding of the processes and dynamics of the subject researched. They provide the explanations that answer the research questions. Conclusions are the link between understanding and action.

5.4 Recommendations

Recommendations are practical steps that need to be taken to implement the conclusions.

They are ideas for corrective actions, supported by the findings. The researcher may recommend further research initiatives that broaden or test the understandings of a subject area. Ensure that recommendations that address the conclusions are first made before other general recommendations are made.

At the end of the day, the pertinent questions that must be answered are: Have the research questions been answered clearly? Have the research objectives been achieved, and to what extent? How well these questions are answered in the work determines whether or not a topic is well researched.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Research

It is time for you too to suggest gaps for further research in the future on the topic for others and yourself.

SAMPLE REFERENCES (Using APA Style, 6th ed.)

- [1]. Cooper, D. R., & Schindler, P. S. (2006). *Business research methods* (9th ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill/Irwin.
- [2]. Fisher, C. (2007). *Researching and writing a dissertation: A guidebook for business students* (2nd ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
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- [4]. Onuoha, L.N., & Amponsah, E.B. (2012). Bank reconciliation as a due process imperative for effective financial management. *Canadian Social Science Journal*,8(3),54-58.
- [5]. Onuoha, L.N., & Amponsah, E.B. (2012).Other people's money: How CEOs create value for shareholders during good times or bad. *Canadian Social Science Journal*,8(4), 8 14.
- [6]. Amponsah, E. B., Enahoro, J. A., & Ali-Nakyea, A.(2012). Issues of taxation in the oil and gas sector in selected countries: Lessons for Ghana. *International Business Management*, 5(2), 167-174. DOI:10.3968/j.ibm.1923842820120502.1085
- [7]. Onuoha, L.N., Onuoha, U. D., &Amponsah, E.B. (2013). Financial information needs of various university stakeholders and the transparency implications.*International Journal of Accounting and Taxation*, 1(1), 83-97. Retrieved from www.acascipub.com

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

Outlined below are some of the commonest mistakes students make as regards typesetting, technicalities, and writing, among others:

- Spacing in tables: This is to be done using single-line spacing.
- Tables, graphs and pictorials must be extended to the right and left margins. The data presentation and analysis chapter must also conform to the prescribed margins for the entire work.
- Tables, graphs and pictorials must not be bloated