Introduction Chapter of Doctoral Thesis

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Introduction Chapter

The introduction chapter of a doctoral thesis serves as the foundation for your research.

It aims to provide the reader with a clear understanding of your research topic, its significance, and the overall structure of the thesis.

Introduction Chapter – Table of Content

(Chad Perry, 2012)

Introduction Chapter - Overview

- Around 6% of the entire thesis.

- Around 10 pages or 3,000 words

- Written in around 3 months

(Chad Perry, 2012)

Introduction Chapter - Overview

THESIS INTRODUCTION STRUCTURE

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM
- Introduce general topic
- Indicate the issue
- Outline the debate: how have relevant academic studies treated the issue before?
- Identify gap in academic lit and why it's important to fill it
- State your research questions/s and/or your overall argument

WHAT WE KNOW

Research themes/background/relevant theory

Can be brief – enough to establish a gap and to justify the research question/s. You may be doing a longer literature review chapter after the thesis introduction.

- Literature review

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW
- Identify the gap
- State the research question/s
- State your argument/s

HOW THE THESIS WILL ADDRESS THE RESEARCH PROBLEM
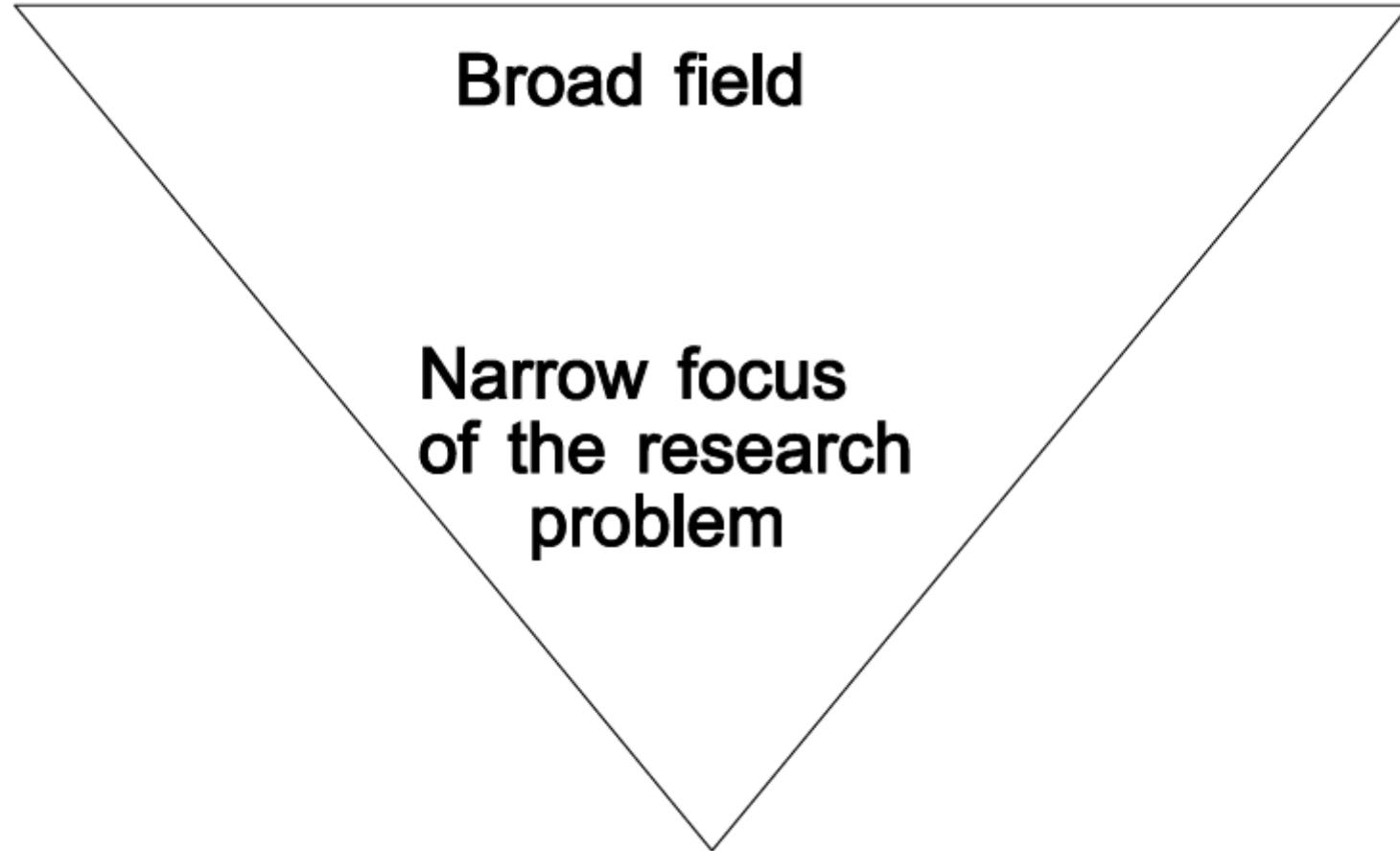- Methodology/approach/conceptual framework
- Thesis outline

(Australian National University)

Section 1.1- Background to the Research

Section 1.1 of the Introduction Chapter serves as a broad introduction to the research area, establishing its significance and framing the research problem. Unlike the concise overview found in journal articles, this section provides a foundational context for the thesis, drawing on multiple sources to demonstrate the depth of existing knowledge. While a historical review can be effective, a 'field of study' approach is generally preferred to avoid redundancy in subsequent chapters. This initial overview is intentionally brief, with more in-depth exploration reserved for later sections. By capturing the reader's interest and providing a clear direction for the research, Section 1.1 sets the stage for the more detailed examination to follow.

(Chad Perry 2012)

Section 1.1- Background to the Research

Broad field

Narrow focus
of the research
problem

(Chad Perry 2012)

Section 1.2- Research problem, propositions/research issues and contributions

The research problem section is the cornerstone of a thesis, outlining the central inquiry that drives the investigation. A well-defined problem is complex and non-trivial, necessitating a comprehensive research endeavour. For doctoral level work, the problem should challenge existing knowledge, grounded in a robust theoretical framework.

It is essential to carefully delimit the research scope, ensuring its relevance and manageability while justifying these boundaries. The problem statement emerges through an iterative process, guiding subsequent literature reviews and research activities. Following the problem's articulation, a concise overview of the thesis's approach to addressing it should be provided, setting clear expectations for the reader.

(Chad Perry 2012)

Section 1.3- Justification for the Research

Section 1.3 must convincingly articulate the theoretical and practical significance of the research problem. Merely identifying knowledge gaps is insufficient; these gaps must be demonstrated as crucial of the research. For instance, a thesis focused on small businesses can substantiate its research problem through clearly establish the under-exploration of the specific research problem in existing literature, with detailed elaboration in Literature Review Chapter. Underscore the significance of small businesses or the particular area under investigation, providing robust support through statistical data and authoritative perspectives. Highlight the scarcity of relevant research methodologies employed by previous studies, with a comprehensive justification for the chosen approach in Methodology Chapter. Articulate the potential real-world applications of the research findings based on preliminary assumptions. These elements can be adapted to justify research problems in diverse fields, with each point expanded within Section 1.3.

(Chad Perry 2012)

Section 1.4 – Methodology of the Research

Section 1.4 should provide a concise overview of the research methodology to satisfy initial reader interest. This preliminary section should offer a high-level description of data collection and analysis methods, including a brief outline of key statistical techniques. However, in-depth justifications and methodological details should be reserved for Literature Review Chapters 2 and Methodology Chapter. While it may be tempting to include preliminary findings in this section, it is generally preferable to maintain a clear distinction between methodology and results. Ultimately, Section 1.4 should be brief and to the point, serving as a bridge to the more comprehensive methodological discussions in subsequent chapters.

(Chad Perry 2012)

Section 1.5 – Outline of the Research

Each chapter of the research is briefly described in this section.

- Chapter 1 Introduction

- Chapter 2 Literature Review

- Chapter 3 Methodology

- Chapter 4 Data Analysis

- Chapter 5 Conclusions

(Chad Perry 2012)

Section 1.6 – Definition of the Research

Section 1.6 should provide clear and consistent definitions for key terms and constructs to establish the research framework. Definitions should align with the research's underlying assumptions and be grounded in authoritative sources whenever possible. While some terms may require in-depth discussion in Literature Review Chapter, this section should present core definitions and briefly explain their rationale. It is essential to balance the need for precise terminology with the broader goal of generalisation. By carefully defining key concepts, researchers can strengthen the research's theoretical foundation and enhance its credibility.

(Chad Perry 2012)

Section 1.7 – Delimitations of scope and key assumptions, with their justifications

Section 1.7 should explicitly define the research boundaries, distinguishing between limitations and delimitations. Limitations are inherent constraints beyond the researcher's control, while delimitations are consciously imposed boundaries to focus the study. The section should clearly articulate the target population for which findings will be generated, justifying the inclusion and exclusion criteria. By acknowledging the study's scope and limitations upfront, researchers can strengthen the study's credibility and prevent misunderstandings. The unit of analysis of the research should also be specified to clarify the level at which data will be collected and analysed.

(Chad Perry 2012)

Section 1.8 – Conclusion of Introduction Chapter

Example of Conclusion Section:

This chapter laid the foundations for the thesis. It introduced the research problem and research issues. Then the research was justified, definitions were presented, the methodology was briefly described and justified, the thesis was outlined, and the limitations were given. On these foundations, the thesis can proceed with a detailed description of the research.

(Chad Perry 2012)

Common Mistakes in Introduction Chapter

- Not providing sufficient context for the study

- Not presenting a strong justification for the research topic

- Having a research topic that's too broad

- Having poorly defined research aims, objectives and research questions

- Having misaligned research aims, objectives and research questions

- Not having well-defined and/or justified scope

- Not providing a clear structural outline of the document

(Writing A Dissertation Introduction - 7 Common (But Costly) Mistakes To Avoid
by David Phair and Alexandra Shaeffer, March 2022)

References

- A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO PRESENTING THESES: NOTES FOR STUDENTS AND THEIR SUPERVISORS by Chad Perry (revised up to 20 May 2012)

- Research writing of the Introduction Chapter by Australian National University

- Writing A Dissertation Introduction - 7 Common (But Costly) Mistakes To Avoid by David Phair and Alexandra Shaeffer, March 2022

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Thank You

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