

1 Structure and Introduction

What makes qualitative research 'qualitative'?

Before we look at alternative thesis structures, let's take a step back and consider the fundamental differences between qualitative and quantitative research:

Qualitative researching is exciting and important. It is a highly rewarding activity because it engages us with things that matter, in ways that matter. Through qualitative research we can explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants, the ways that social processes, institutions, discourses or relationships work, and the significance of the meanings they generate. We can do all of this qualitatively by using methodologies that celebrate richness, depth, nuance, context, multi-dimensionality and complexity rather than being embarrassed or inconvenienced by them. Instead of editing these elements out in search of the general picture or the average, qualitative research factors them directly into its analyses and explanations. This means that it has an unrivalled capacity to constitute compelling arguments about *how things work in particular contexts*.

(Mason 2002: 1)

Task 1.1

Does Mason mention quantitative research?

What does she imply about it?

What are the 'particular contexts' you are investigating in your own research?

Given this divergence between qualitative and quantitative researchers, one would naturally expect to find differences in the way in which their research is written up. Here is one view of *qualitative writing*:

... the sense of argument develops through the whole process of data collection, analysis and organization. This makes qualitative writing in essence very different from quantitative writing. Qualitative writing becomes very much an unfolding story in which the writer gradually makes sense, not only of her data, but of the total experience of which it is an artefact. This is an interactive process in which she tries to untangle and make reflexive sense of her own presence and role in the research. The written study thus becomes a complex train of thought within which her voice and her image of others are interwoven. Therefore, 'unlike quantitative work that can carry its meaning in its tables and summaries, qualitative work carries its meaning in its entire text... its meaning is in the reading' (Richardson and St Pierre 2005: 959-60). The voice and person of the researcher as writer not only become a major ingredient of the written study, but have to be evident for the meaning to become clear.

(Holliday 2007: 122, underlining added)

Task 1.2

Why is qualitative writing *an unfolding story*?

Is that expression relevant to your own research?

Do you agree that '*the voice and person of the researcher*' have to be evident? Why?

Have your supervisors suggested how your voice should be present?

The writer's voice

Have you noticed whether it is common in your field for authors to use first-person language forms - either in the singular *I/me/my/mine*, or the plural *we/us/our/ours* ?

Below is some data on this area of academic English usage. Hyland (2002) analysed journal papers in various subject fields and counted the following instances (per 1,000 words):

discipline	first-person forms	<i>I / me / my / mine</i>	<i>We / us / our(s)</i>
Marketing	38.2	1.6	36.6
Philosophy	34.5	33.0	1.5
Sociology	29.4	11.7	17.7
Physics	17.7	0.0	17.7
Biology	15.5	0.0	15.5
Electronic Engineering	11.6	0.0	11.6

Task 1.3

What patterns do you notice there?

Can you suggest reasons for the differences between disciplines?

Task 1.4

Hyland's figures relate to journal articles. In which parts of a PhD thesis would you expect to find most frequent use of *I / me / my / mine*?

Task 1.5

Does anything strike you as *odd* in the Acknowledgment below? If so, **change the text** to make it more appropriate.

First, gratitude should be expressed to the students and teachers at... who participated as subjects in this study. Special thanks go the seven pairs of students who... An eternal debt is owed to the supervisor of this thesis.... for his devotion of time and precious advice. He was encouraging and constructive at all times. Without his help and guidance the completion of the thesis would not have been possible. Thanks are also expressed to two other committee members... who played an important role in giving valuable advice from the beginning. Additional advice on statistical analysis has come from ... and help with graphics from ... Finally, my partner is to be thanked for his love and support and his family for their concern.

Structuring your thesis

Given the different aims and approaches of qualitative and quantitative research, it is not surprising that theses written in the two traditions can also look rather different. On the next page is Adrian Holliday's 'map' for writing up qualitative research.

Task 1.6

Study Holliday's map and read the notes 1-21 carefully.

Is there anything in Holliday's notes that you do not intend to include in your thesis?

Is there anything you think Holliday has missed out?

<p>ABSTRACT the essential message</p>	<p>1) Summary of your basic message</p>
<p>INTRODUCTION setting the scene</p>	<p>2) Your statement of topic and focus 3) Your vision and motivation for the research, and how you locate it within broader work 4) Your choice of research setting and overall data collection strategy 5) How your thesis is structured</p>
<p>LITERATURE REVIEW</p> <p>-----</p> <p>RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</p>	<p>6) Your conceptual framework</p> <p>7) What you have learnt from previous research and how you position yourself in relation to current discussions, within which (a) your topic and (b) your methodology are located</p> <p>8) Evidence that you are well informed</p>
<p>DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH PROCEDURES</p>	<p>9) How you chose your core setting and relevant data sources 10) What we need to know about the setting 11) How you developed an appropriate research strategy 12) How you gained access and collected data 13) A catalogue of research activities and data collected 14) How you structured your analysis and arrived at your choice of themes and headings 15) Your system for presenting data (e.g. coding, anonymising)</p>
<p>DISCUSSION OF DATA</p>	<p>16) Structured using the themes and headings described above</p> <p>17) What you have learnt from the data</p> <p>18) How the data provides evidence for what you have found</p>
<p>IMPLICATIONS</p>	<p>19) A summary of what you have found during your research</p> <p>20) What you think it all means</p>
<p>CONCLUSION - summing up and recommendations</p>	<p>21) Your final comments on all the basic points in your argument</p>

Written study, structure and functions (Holliday 2007: 43)

Structuring your research story

Silverman compares the macrostructure of a thesis with telling a story and suggests there are at least three possible types: hypothesis, analysis and mystery.

The Hypothesis Story

If we consider all types of research – quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods - this is probably the commonest way of writing up research, and is what most academic journals encourage/expect from researchers submitting their papers for publication:

- You state your hypotheses
- You test them
- You discuss the implications

As a qualitative researcher, there are two reasons why you might wish **not** to use this model. In the first place, you may be proceeding inductively - developing and refining hypotheses in the course of your data analysis. Secondly, even in quantitative studies the model may not represent the actual logic of the research, but a *reconstructed logic* to match what the statistical analysis eventually showed (Alasuutari 1995). In other words, the Hypothesis story may be a neater and simpler, ‘tidied-up’ version of the study.

The Analytical Story

The Hypothesis Story tends to be written in the Passive voice. Telling the Analytical Story ‘is a more conversational way of writing’ (Silverman 2000: 243) and involves asking and answering questions such as

- *What are the key concepts that I have used in my study?*
- *How do my ‘findings’ shed light on these concepts?*
- *How do they relate to my original research problem and to the literature I consulted?*

‘Rather than hope that the reader will eventually find out these matters, telling an analytic story lays everything out on a plate at the outset’ (Silverman 2000: 243).

The Mystery Story

Some readers – though your supervisor **may not** be one of them! – prefer to be surprised. Alasuutari describes the Mystery Story approach as one that starts directly from empirical examples, develops the questions by discussing them, and gradually leads the reader to interpretations of the data collected and to more general implications of your findings (Alasuutari 1995: 183).

Two potential advantages of the Mystery Story approach: it may engage readers’ interest and attention; and it might more accurately reflect the inductive form of much qualitative research, where the intention is for findings (and possibly even the topics) evolve gradually.

After considering the three models, Silverman says,

‘In a sense, whichever story you choose can be safely left to personal choice. More important is whether you are telling some coherent story. For, despite their differences, all three models share one important feature in common: they give the study focus and point. This means that the structure of your thesis should only rarely flow from the chronological order in which you happened to find out things’.
(Silverman 2000: 243-44)

Task 1.7

Which of the three models is closest to the overall story of your thesis?

Task 1.8

"The final version of the thesis should be written, with hindsight, knowing where one has been" (Cryer 1996: 178).

In the case of your research, what do you now know is important that you didn't know when you started? Does that change in your thinking appear in your data discussion?

Outline of a qualitative thesis

Here are the components that David Silverman suggests - in the 'Writing Up' section of *Doing Qualitative Research* – are necessary in a qualitative thesis. We will be using his headings in the various units of this course:

- A The First Few Pages
- B The Literature Review chapter (but he asks 'Do you need one?')
- C The Methodology chapter
- D The Data chapters (*note the plural*)
- E The Final Chapter

Task 1.9

What are the differences between Holliday's seven boxes and Silverman's components? Can you identify Silverman's A, B, C, D and E components in the following Contents Pages from a PhD thesis?

1	INTRODUCTION	
1.1	The complexity of classroom discourse	2
1.2	Background to the study	4
1.3	Exploratory observations	7
1.4	Research questions	10
2	SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOM RESEARCH	
2.1	Method comparison studies	13
2.2	Systematic observation schedules	16
2.3	Influences and diversification	19
2.4	A linguistic orientation	23
2.5	A sociological orientation	39
2.6	Relating research to teachers and learners	45
2.7	Discussion	49
3	CLASSROOM DISCOURSE RESEARCH	
3.1	Classroom discourse studies	53
3.2	Multi-layered classroom discourse	68
4	RESEARCH METHODS	
4.1	Research questions and analysis overview	87
4.2	Discourse, context and qualitative research	88
4.3	The study design	97
4.4	The data collection process	104
4.5	Approaches to data analysis	113

5	CLASSROOM DISCOURSE WORLDS	
5.1	Introduction and chapter overview	121
5.2	Outside world and language learning world discourse	122
5.3	Analysis of lesson 9 Island Silks	125
5.4	Lesson 6: Highland Wool	141
5.5	Outside world topics and ESP discourse	155
5.6	Conclusions	175
6	NEGOTIATING CLASSROOM PROCESS	
6.1	Views of classroom process	179
6.2	The pre-plenary phase	184
6.3	The plenary phase	189
6.4	Instructions and pre-groupwork	201
6.5	Groupwork	208
6.6	Summary	212
7	PARTICIPANT PERCEPTIONS OF RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES	
7.1	Class room diversity and uniqueness	219
7.2	The interview data	221
7.3	The individual and the group	223
7.4	Summary	246
8	CONCLUSIONS	
8.1	Research questions and main findings of the study	251
8.2	Relationship to previous research	260
8.3	Limitations of the study	261

Task 1.10

Below are three more examples of PhD thesis contents. In each case, do you think the research was qualitative, quantitative or mixed?

Abstract

1. INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE
2. LITERATURE REVIEW
3. METHODOLOGY
4. FINDINGS 1: WHAT IMPACT DOES THIS COURSE HAVE?
5. FINDINGS 2: PRE-COURSE FACTORS AND IMPACT
6. FINDINGS 3: PEOPLE AND LEARNING PROCESSES - THEIR RELEVANCE TO IMPACT
7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Abstract

1. Introduction
2. Overviews of 'listening', 'strategy' and 'interaction'
3. Comprehension and interpretation in listening
4. Second language strategies
5. Conversational adjustments
6. The teachability of strategies
7. Task design for spoken interaction
8. Interactional listening strategies: a study
9. Results and discussion: two analyses
10. Conclusions

Abstract

1. Introduction
2. The institutional and distance contexts of front desk talk
3. Research methodology and method
4. Transactional patterns in front desk talk
5. Relational patterns in front desk talk
6. The discourse roles of receptionists and patients
7. Three problem-solving encounters
8. Review of the research and implications for receptionist training

Task 1.11

Which do you think are the Data chapters in that third thesis?

Writing the Introduction

A fundamental question is: How long should the Introduction be?

Guidance from qualitative researchers varies quite widely on the issue of length. For example, Silverman (2000: 224) took the view that “there is no reason why your introduction should be any longer than two or three pages, particularly if your ‘methods’ chapter covers the natural history of your research”. On the other hand, the student whose thesis contents page we saw on pages 5-6 wrote an Introduction of 12 pages; the students whose thesis structures are outlined on pages 6-7 wrote 8, 2 and 10 pages, respectively.

The length will depend on precisely what an Introduction covers. You should ask your supervisors’ advice on the specific requirements of your Introduction.

Task 1.12

Compare the authors’ views quoted below. How many different elements can you find?

The point of the introduction is to answer the question: What is this thesis about? You answer that question in four ways, by explaining

1. Why you have chosen this topic rather than any other, e.g. because it has been neglected or because it is much discussed but not properly or fully
 2. Why this topic interests you
 3. The kinds of research approach or academic discipline you will use
 4. Your research questions or problems
- (Murcott 1997: 1)

Introductions are for

- a. Explaining why and how
 - b. Establishing key terminology
 - c. Contextualising the research
 - d. Telling the reader what each chapter is about
- (Holliday 2007: 44-47)

The Introduction ought to do a number of things:

- Provide preliminary background information to place your study in context
 - Clarify the focus of your study
 - Specify your overall research aim and individual objectives
 - Point out the value of your research
- (Biggam 2011: 52)

Although (as it happens), all of those three authors mentioned four aspects of Introductions, they were not the same four aspects in each case. If you want a more complete list of what may go into an Introduction, the analysis provided in the next box should be helpful.

Stage 1: ORIENTATION

- 1a - **General statements** (especially on the importance of the topic)
- 1b - **Background information**
- 1c - **Reference to previous studies**

Stage 2: JUSTIFICATION

- 2a - **Indicating a gap**
- 2b - **Questions/problems**
- 2c - **Value of further investigation (by you) of the topic**

Stage 3: FOCUS ON YOUR RESEARCH

- 3a - **Content: aims/thesis**
- 3b - **Structure**
- 3c - **Limitations**
- 3d - **Means (method)**
- 3e - **Evaluation**

Stages of the Introduction to a project or dissertation (adapted from Anderson 1993)

N.B. This is not a 'model' of how you *must* write an Introduction. Anderson's list shows *the range of options* available to you when you are deciding what to include in your particular Introduction.

One key feature of academic work reported in a dissertation or thesis is that you are expected to place your work in the context of related work and to explain why you thought it necessary to do the research you have done. In other words, you justify your contribution to the field.

Task 1.13

The extract below is from a journal article, so the Introduction was relatively short. Read it and decide whether the writer justifies his choice of an individual case-study approach

Both theoretical and practical publications on listening comprehension emphasise that two-way listening is not only common in real-life communication but also a useful way to improve foreign language knowledge and skills, and recommend that the skills of listening and speaking should be integrated in the classroom. In one of the most detailed discussions of such integration, Oprandy (1994) coined the term 'listening/speaking' to draw attention to the close interrelationship between the two skills. However, it is noticeable that Oprandy - among others - adopted a teaching perspective,

rather than a learning perspective; for him, integration was in terms of activities, materials and curriculum - a matter of pedagogic procedure.

Researchers have paid much less attention to the learner. In particular, it is not clear how an individual learner's experiences in one-way listening might help them to perform better on two-way listening tasks, and vice versa. Do gains in one listening mode transfer to the other? It could be argued that, if performance in the two listening modes is linked, it is through the listener's gains in foreign language knowledge, rather than in procedural skill. For example, increased vocabulary (gained through contextual guessing in one-way listening, or through negotiation of meaning in two-way listening) could arguably assist subsequent performance in the other mode of listening. As far as I am aware, this issue of an individual learner's transfer of skill or knowledge from one-way to two-way listening has not been investigated, which is what led me to this exploratory study of one intermediate-level learner's progress, or lack of it, during an English for Academic Purposes course, and to see how he coped with the demands of listening and listening/speaking in the classroom context.

Task 1.14

Apart from **Indicating a Gap**, which other elements of Anderson's Stages 1 and 2 can you identify in that extract? Circle YES or NO against the items in the list below:

ORIENTATION

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 1a - General statements (especially on the importance of the topic) | YES | NO |
| 1b - Background information | YES | NO |
| 1c - Reference to previous studies | YES | NO |

JUSTIFICATION

- | | | |
|---|-------|----|
| 2a - Indicating a gap | (YES) | |
| 2b - Questions/problems | YES | NO |
| 2c - Value of further investigation (by you) of the topic | YES | NO |

The language of Introductions

In this course we will be focusing on English expressions typically found in different parts of a thesis, for you to apply in your own writing. On the next two pages are Language Boxes for the three stages of an Introduction, followed by this week's **Writing task**.

Language Box: Introduction stage 1 - Orientation

1a - General statements

Hunger striking has a long ... history in Ireland.
The sceptical paradox is well known:...
There has been much interest recently in the concept of... and its relevance
Research and speculation on ... have been growing at a rapid rate...
In recent years the study of ... has focused on ...

1b - Background information

Stage 1b sometimes contains essential **facts** about the subject-matter which the reader has to know in order to understand the text - for example **definitions**, or other basic information.

1c - Reference to previous studies

Parkinson (2012) has developed an elaborate framework to show that
There is now a considerable body of research which suggests
Most researchers in the field agree that
Recent studies have shown that
Much recent work ... has indicated that ...
Jenkins (2009) found ... that ...

Language Box: Introduction stage 2 - Justification

Stage 2a - Indicating a gap

Surprisingly, only one extensive article has been published.
This aspect of ... has not been given much attention.
The limitation of all these interpretations is that....
Studies of ... are rare

Negative expressions (*few, little, not much, hardly, etc.*) are very common here.

the literature on ... has concentrated principally on ...
Most of the data on ... which can be found in the literature pertain to ...
Most existing research on ... has been based on relatively small samples ...
which has made it impossible to carry out satisfactory studies ...

Stage 2b - Indicating questions/problems

Either direct or indirect questions:

Would an analysis of ... bear out their claims?
...requires clarification. Is it ..., or is it ...?
But the question remains whether ...

Stage 2c - Importance of the topic

Highlight the positive value or advantage of the topic:

His elegant model merits testing as a macrosociological theory. ..
The article well deserves careful analysis...

Language Box: Introduction stage 3 - Focus on my research

3a - Content: aims / central idea

My primary purpose is to...

I will discuss ...

In ... I shall argue that

In this thesis I will claim...

In this thesis I present results of a pilot study

The aim of this study is to demonstrate that ...

This study investigates/describes ...

The object of this thesis is to look critically at

This study attempted to explore ...

3b - Structure

This thesis will first ..., and then ...

Having analysed ..., I will go on to

First, brief definitions of ... will be offered; second, ... the language data and the analysis will be presented; third, an attempt will be made...; finally, ...

3c - Limitations

Since ... is beyond the scope of this study

It is not the purpose of this study to ..., but rather to ...

I will not attempt here to Rather than focus upon ..., my intention is

I do not attempt to describe or compare ... Instead, I seek to ...

Only the data from ... are considered here

3d - Means (method)

My approach is characterised by two assumptions

I have based my study on

The data on which the discussion will be based comprises

This study uses and extends those concepts and is based on ...

3e - Evaluation

... offers a possible explanation for

This study offers new proposals ...

There is some evidence to suggest that the... should be widely applicable, although the problem of ... is likely to limit their use.

Writing up your thesis

You have now reached the end of the Tasks for this unit on the Introduction. You can now apply the ideas and language from this unit to drafting or revising the Introduction chapter for your thesis.

You may also find it helpful to visit this website for further examples of written academic English relevant for the Introduction:

<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/introductions.htm>

Appendix to Unit 1

Skeleton of a thesis Introduction (original length 10 pages)

I thought it would be helpful for you to see an example of a strong Introduction to a qualitative thesis, so here are the 'bare bones' of a British student's opening chapter. Most of the content has been removed, as shown by the dots (...).

The **names** of the authors she cited have been changed to **letters**.

Where she included a long quotation, that is shown by **QUOTATION**. (Notice she used relatively few direct quotations; mostly she summarised what Authors had researched and found).

I have highlighted **in bold** her references to overall theories and specific concepts, to give you an idea of how, and how often, she mentioned the background ideas in the chapter.

As you read the skeleton, try to focus on the student's **overall argument** and the **language she uses** to develop it.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This is a study of Unlike earlier work in..., here the focus is exclusively on... Using audio data recorded at ..., I first explore the ..., describing recurrent patterns and variations; second, I examine the different roles and identities which are co-constructed by ...; and third, I consider how. In this introductory chapter, I explain how my interest in... developed; describe the institutional context of...; and give a brief outline of the analytical frameworks which I draw on.

1.1 Background

An episode of talk between ... is a form of service encounter, a genre which Author A (1976: 321) describes as "**QUOTATION**". My own interest in... was first stimulated by the work of Author B (2000), who looks at ..., and Author C & Author D (2000), who discuss the routine sequences of... In order to explore these features further, using a framework which was informed by Author E's (1987) mapping of ... as well as by the two papers mentioned above, I investigated encounters between...(Myself 2001a). I found that.... More precisely,....

The role of... is similar to that of As my next step I therefore made a contrastive study (Myself 2001b) of the discourse of ... Although the encounters were longer than those in ..., the generic structure of these encounters was broadly similar to ...

Knowing that there was already a substantial body of work not only on... but also on ..., I wished to explore this discourse type further in a context which would satisfy my preference for research which might eventually be of practical value. I became aware that X had become important for... In addition, it had recently been proposed that...

Despite the recognition of the importance of..., it appeared that.... was neglected. There was limited uptake of...A review of the relevant literature revealed that the need to provide... better training was also seen as pressing because, like the... described by Author F (1998), many were... Author G (2004), for instance, argues that "it is of paramount importance that the **QUOTATION**".

In sum, although the training of Y... has developed over the last thirty years, the training of Z has remained a low priority, confirming Author H's (1999a: 217) view that "**QUOTATION**". It also emerged

that, despite the growing interest in... with the notable exception of the work of Author H (1999, 2000/1), who... , there had been no specific studies of...

In the light of all these points, it seemed to me that here was a context in which my own initial findings about...might be of some value.

(1.2 Description of context for her study)

1.3 Analytical framework

As already mentioned, my intention at the outset of this research was, firstly, to identify the norms and practices of...; secondly, to examine how ... enact their respective social roles and identities; thirdly, to investigate the extent to which these linguistic norms and practices are implicated in the construction of and orientation to...; and fourthly to develop a means of using my findings to inform training programmes, in particular by raising awareness of ways in which the...

On this basis, four research questions were formulated:

1. What are the typical patterns of staging and sequencing in the routines used by...
2. What variations are there in the enactment of these patterns?
3. What do such variations reveal about the participants' construction and understanding of...
4. How can the findings be used to improve... training?

In order to answer these four questions it was necessary first to record and transcribe examples of... This process is described in detail in Chapter 3.

A principle of organisation also had to be found for the ensuing analysis. Each of the four research questions demanded a slightly different analytical focus. For the first two steps, in which episodes of ... were categorised and organised, and different transactional stages identified, I drew both on **Theory 1**, particularly as it has been applied to service encounters (see e.g. Author G 1987; Author B 2000), and Author J's (1988) idea of activity types... while, for the next step, in which... were examined in greater detail, I used techniques derived from **Theory 2** (see e.g. Author K 1976, 1980) and the Birmingham school of... (see Author L and Author M 1975, Author N 1994). My analysis of relational patterns is based on the ideas of Author O: his notion of..., which resurfaces in **Theory 3** (e.g. Authors P and Q 1987; Author R 2000; Author S 2003), and his ideas on... **Concept 1** (1974, 1981), which have been used to develop theories relating to roles and participation... (e.g. Authors T and U 1982; Author P 1988; Author V 1993). The discussion of roles and identities is also informed by **Concept 2** (Author W, Authors X and Y 1997) and, specifically, by Author Z's (1998) proposal that...

Finally, for training models I looked to the work of Authors AA and AB (2002) and their collaborators in the field of..., Author AC (2000) for her work with... and Authors AD and AE (1997, 2000) for the general principles involved in the use of... Underpinning the whole study, there are also the extensive literatures of **Fields 1, 2 and 3**, to which I will turn in the next chapter.

1.4 Outline of thesis

In this chapter I have

- introduced the theoretical framework on which the study is based;
- outlined the development of my interest in..., particularly...;
- provided background information about... in Scotland;
- indicated what I set out to achieve in this study, and how.

The remaining chapters are organised as follows. Chapter 2 contextualises the study in the relevant literature. Chapter 3 is an account of the research methodology and method. In Chapter 4 regularities and variations in... are described, while in Chapter 5 the... patterns are reviewed, with particular emphasis on... In Chapter 6, there is analysis of the construction of... through variations in... and topic and, in Chapter 7, detailed discussion of identity construction... Finally, in Chapter 8, the implications for ... training are considered in the context of a review of this study and a consideration of the social meanings which are constructed through...