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Conclusions

Introduction

The conclusions section of any publication of this type is largely to provide a summary of what has gone before. So, the Conclusions chapter of your dissertation is there to provide a summary of your previous chapters. In particular it is meant to summarise your primary research in terms of the results, and analysis of these results. However it is also meant to provide a summary of the key literature to which you have referred. Your primary research findings are intended to be summarised in relation to these key pieces of literature. In this way you can indicate where you have ‘filled the gap’ in the literature and made your ‘contribution to knowledge’.

Contents of the Conclusions chapter in your dissertation

The Conclusions chapter in a dissertation is intended to provide a summary of your findings, but also do more than this. The summary certainly needs to be there, but although it is a summary, it does not have to be mere repetition of what has gone before. This would be very boring reading and, more importantly, a missed opportunity to inform your reader of the importance of your findings. One way to do this is to restate your aims and objectives near the beginning of the chapter, indicate the key pieces of literature that influenced you in your primary research, state briefly how you went about conducting your research, in terms of overall methodology and specific techniques and allow this to lead into the summary of the main findings of your primary research.

However, a key difference between what you write in this final chapter and what you have included before in the ‘Results’ or ‘Analysis

of Results' chapters is that you will have had time to reflect on your findings and particularly the relationship between your aims and objectives, methodology and techniques, primary research results and analysis and the literature that contributed to your dissertation topic. This reflection should enable you to discern the more important findings and the less important findings. It should also enable you to see the advantages and disadvantages of your chosen methodology and techniques. It should allow you to reflect on whether you would modify your overall approach and techniques, if you were to do the research again. It should also enable you to consider whether it is important or necessary to make recommendations based on your research.

The Conclusions chapter should have other sections, in addition to the summary. An important section should deal with the limitations of your research. Inevitably, your primary research will have been small scale. Although you may be under the impression that sending out two hundred and fifty questionnaires, processing and analysing the one hundred and ten that were returned, was a major task for you. However, it is most likely that your sample, by definition, will have been small and hence your findings will not even be at the scale and significance of most published articles in academic journals. Therefore, it is not wise to over-claim for the importance of your results. A section of this chapter in which you outline the limitations is important, as you will be able to communicate to your supervisor and examiner that you are aware that you need to include reference to limitations, as well as actually indicating what the limitations are!

One other section that appears in the Conclusions chapter of many dissertations is titled: 'Recommendations'. This section is meant to include reference to possible future actions. These should be based on the research you have conducted and not 'guesswork' or thoughts you had, perhaps even prior to conducting the research for your dissertation. So the evidence from your research should be used to create these recommendations. However recommendations may not be necessary – the only one that may be required is that if you were to do the research again, you would change it in some specific way(s).