Tips for Writing a Thesis

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0. 3 Main Purposes of Writing a Thesis

- To improve your innovativeness and creativity.

    - For any job, innovativeness and creativity are the most important. In your thesis, your innovativeness can be related to research questions or theoretical or empirical methodologies. Therefore, you should spend a lot of time (at least several months) to come up with a new idea on your own.

- To improve your analytical capability (including capability to collect information).

    - This is of course important for any job. Collecting data and analyzing them for academic theses may not be the same as for business. However, once you learn rigorous methods in academics, you can definitely apply them to your job.

- To improve your capability to explain your conclusion convincingly (including writing and oral presentations).

    - Getting a good result is not the end of the story. You have to convince people that your result is reliable and useful.

1. How to Get a Thesis Topic

- Your thesis should contain your innovation, creativity and/or originality.

- Your thesis should deal with one and only one research question (plus some related small questions).

- Think wide first (what are you interested in anyway?), and narrow it down to a specific research question which can be expressed in one sentence.

- After (or sometimes before) you find a research question, read existing studies on the related topic. Use Google Scholar to find existing studies (mostly available on the web). Read only papers that are cited a lot (at least 20 times). Read at least 50 papers. You do not need to follow all equations or all regression results in each paper (although you have to do so in some seminal papers). Try to get the main message of the paper, its contribution to the literature (what's new in the paper?), and advantages and disadvantages of the theoretical or empirical methods.

- To Japanese students: Do not read Japanese books or papers, except for reading some for a survey at the beginning. Important academic outcomes are almost always written in English.

- Clarify what have been found and what have not on the issue. Think about how you can contribute to the literature.

- Search for data to answer your research question.

- Your own field work is encouraged. Talk to me if you need financial support (Prepare a lot to convince me the importance and feasibility of the field work before the meeting.).

2. Tips for Writing a Master's Thesis or a Chapter of a Ph.D. Dissertation

- Do NOT make it long. 30-40 pages including figures and tables are often enough. Students often think the longer the better, but this is completely opposite: the shorter the better, if the argument of the thesis is convincing.

- Do not start writing before you get key conclusions.

- However, while you write, you often find shortcomings of your methods and interpretations of the results, so do not hesitate to change your conclusions even after you start writing.

- More importantly, you should expect that you need a lot of time (usually, 1-2 months) to complete your first draft after you start writing.

- Further, you need some more time (2-3 weeks) to make the first draft readable. To do so, you should read your thesis repeatedly (at least 10 times) to revise it. When you read it, you have to pretend to be a reader without any knowledge on this topic. Also, let your friends read it and ask for frank comments.
- Write the introduction last (except for the literature-review part).
- Keep a pyramid structure:

  In each paper, the first section should be the summary of the paper.

  In each section, the first paragraph should state the summary or what you are going to do in the section.

  In each paragraph, the first sentence should state the summary or what you are going to do in the paragraph. (Sometimes, it is difficult to keep this rule. But, try to keep it as much as possible.)

3. Typical Structure of an Empirical Thesis
- Abstract (not more than 200 words)
- Section 1: Introduction
  - Motivation (Why is this topic important?)
  - Purpose (Clearly state your research question.)
  - Literature review (If this is long, i.e., more than one page, make a separate section after the introduction.)
  - Summary (data, methods, and findings: Yes, your main findings should be clearly stated in Introduction. You should be aware that 95% of your readers will read only the introduction.)
  - Contribution (New data, methods, findings…)
  - A thesis or an academic paper should be divided by "sections" (節), not by "chapters" (章). "Chapters" should be applied to books and Ph.D. dissertations.
- Section 2: Methods
  - Theoretical (conceptual) consideration behind the empirics (ideally, a theoretical model)
  - Empirical hypothesis
  - Methods to prove the hypothesis empirically (regression equations if you use econometrics)
- Section 3: Data
  - Data sources (If you did a field survey, describe the details.)
  - Description of key variables (In particular, if you create new variables from raw data, explain how in detail.)
  - Summary statistics (means and standard deviations, differences across years, firms, individuals…)
- Section 4: Results and discussion
  - Key results
  - Robustness of the results (Use different methods and/or data and check if you get the same conclusion.)
  - Extended analysis beyond the key results
  - Interpretation of the results and policy implications
- Section 5: Conclusions
  - Summary (can be similar to the abstract)
  - Caveats and possible extension in the future
- References
  - List of references that are cited in the paper. Do NOT include any reference if you do not cite it in the paper, even though you want to show that you read many papers.
  - The style of references should be consistent throughout the list. I suggest to use the style used in *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, one of the best journals in development economics, available at

http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/page/edcc/instruct.html .

4. Tips for English Writing and Presentations

- Must-do's
  - ○ Run a spell checker whenever you write any English.
  - ○ Check whether a particular noun is countable or uncountable, whenever you are not 100% sure. When you use MS Word, hit Shift+F7 to open the "Research" window and check the dictionary.
  - ○ Also, use the dictionary in MS Word to find appropriate prepositions, adverbs, and verbs associated with a particular word.
  - ○ If you are not sure whether a particular phrase is appropriate, Google the phrase using quotation marks (e.g., "this is the phrase"). If you find many hits, the phrase is fine. If you find some hits but mostly in web sites in Japanese, Korean, or Chinese, the phrase may not be appropriate to native speakers.
- References
  - ○ Korner, Ann M., 『日本人研究者が間違えやすい英語科学論文の正しい書き方』, 羊土社.
  - ○ Korner, Ann M., *Guide to Publishing a Scientific Paper*. Taylor & Francis Group.
  - ○ 崎村耕二, 『英語論文によく使う表現』, 創元社.
  - ○ ロバート・アンホルト, 『理系のための口頭発表術』, 講談社ブルーバックス.
  - ○ ウィリアム・トムソン, 『経済論文の書き方』, 東洋経済新報社.
  - ○ Thomson, William, *A Guide for the Young Economist*, the MIT Press.

5. To Ph.D. Students
- While you are in the Ph.D. program, you should complete three papers, each of which should be an independent article (i.e., each should analyze one research question). These 3 papers should be closely related with each other.
- You SHOULD submit all the 3 papers to international journals as soon as they are done. Be aware that it takes so much time for a paper to be accepted by a journal: In the case of economics journals, the average period for evaluation is 1-2 years.
- Recommended journals in development economics and development studies (impact factors after colons, from the highest IF)

  See http://ideas.repec.org/top/top.journals.simple.html for ranking of economics journals.
  - ○ Journal of Development Economics (JDE): 2.129
  - ○ World Development: 1.537
  - ○ American Journal of Agricultural Economics: 1.169
  - ○ Economic Development and Cultural Change (EDCC): 0.98
  - ○ Asian Development Review: 0.92
  - ○ Journal of International Development (JID): 0.878
  - ○ Journal of Development Studies (JDS): 0.794
  - ○ Agricultural Economics: 0.769
  - ○ Review of Development Economics (RDE): 0.689
  - ○ Environment and Development Economics: 0.671
  - ○ Journal of Asian Economics: 0.61 (informal)
  - ○ Oxford Development Studies: 0.60 (informal)
  - ○ Journal of African Economies: 0.574

- ○ African Development Review: 0.397
- ○ Asian Economic Journal: 0.297
- ○ Journal of International Trade and Economic Development: 0.17 (informal)
- ○ Developing Economies: 0.152
- Other journals
  - ○ Energy Policy: 2.723
  - ○ Research Policy: 2.520
  - ○ Environmental Management: 1.744
  - ○ International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability: 1.696
  - ○ Journal of Industrial Economics: 1.04
  - ○ 国際開発研究
- Electronic journals (quick response)
  - ○ B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis and Policy: 0.550
  - ○ Economics Bulletin: 0.14 (informal)
- To receive a Ph.D., at least 2 of the 3 papers for which you are the first or corresponding author should be accepted by international journals. The other 1 paper should be either submitted to an international journal or accepted by a Japanese journal.
- I encourage you to give presentation of your papers at international conferences. If you need financial support, talk to me. For some conferences, proceedings can be considered as refereed papers.
- To search for conferences, refer to:
  - ○ Conference Alerts: http://www.conferencealerts.com/index
  - ○ INOMICS: http://www.inomics.com/
  - ○ Resource for Economists Conference Listings: http://www.aeaweb.org/rfe/conferences.php
- Recommended conferences
  - ○ Center for African Economic Studies Annual Conference: March (deadline in November)
  - ○ International Convention of East Asian Economic Association: October in even-number years (deadline in June)
  - ○ Regional (Asia, Africa, China, ...) Meetings of the Econometric Society: http://www.econometricsociety.org/
  - ○ 国際開発学会 The Japan Society for International Development：全国大会 11〜12 月（締切 3 月〜4 月），春季大会 6 月
- Some conferences and journals are "fake": Their organizers and publishers just try to make money from low-quality conferences and journals. Refer to the following web sites for the fake conferences and journals.
  - ○ http://scholarlyoa.com/individual-journals/
- After completing 3 papers, write one chapter for introduction, one for literature review, and one for summary and policy implications. So, a Ph.D. dissertation usually consists of 6 chapters.