WRITING UP AND PUBLISHING

IN THE

NCVER TEMPLATE

20 PAGES TO PARADISE….

Guidelines

For

New VET Researchers

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Introduction to the Process

To be an author is challenge and a privilege – enjoy the journey.

Have the confidence that as only you have possession of the full data nobody else is in the position to challenge your interpretation.

Your job is to do the interpretation and consistently give the reader confidence in the validity of your assumptions by:

> Showing how you set up and approached the task in a logical and analytical way

> Indicating why you have come to those interpretations – what is the rationale ? Why did you see those linkages or ascribe that weight to certain evidence.

> That is not to say there would be no other way to approach it. Just that your way has a logic and was not flawed or obviously biased - your tried to understand their stories and interpret them. Others may well; have tackled it differently. That is fine - they would therefore have come out with different findings.

> Be confidence in your analysis and tell them why you have confidence, at what level that confidence is and the specific evidence that gives you that confidence.

This is advice from a researcher who has completed several projects with NCVER. If at any time you find this advice conflicts with formal advice from NCVER, your mentor's comments or your supervisor's comments – **follow their advice!**

You have a simple process to follow in order to produce your final work that should be not much more than **20 pages**. You find that this is very little space to hold the story of your year's research.

1. Complete your analysis and agree the basic findings with your mentor/supervisor.

2. Review a complete NCVER Paper and decide what your subheadings will be. All studies have unique needs.

3. Allocate a word limit to each subhead and then under each subhead write your self a guide sentence. " In this section I will…..". Try and plan each section.

4. If you have some down-time during data collection and analysis when you can focus on more mundane issues – use this time to start assembling your draft chapters and text. You can complete a draft of the early sections, as you now know what you have done!

5. Your original proposal or plan becomes the start of your final write up document as it includes what you proposed to do. Copy your proposal and planning file(s). Revisit each section, changing the tense from the future' will' to the past "I did' as a reduced summary. This provides some basic material with which to start your final report.

6. Gather together your working documents from the research, the data collection decisions and instruments, your transcriptions/tables of the data, and your basic findings and analysis ideas. Try to include why you made any changes to the study.

7. Cut and paste in the material you have already produced and start assembling each section.

8. Make the 'Introduction' as short and direct as possible.

9. Make the explanation of the research design and method brief and in plain English.

10. Make the findings section tell the story of the data to the reader.

11. Then the analysis can probe the data for significant issues and relations between issues. Say what they are and why they are important.

12. Remember to answer your research questions!

13. Then decide what implications you would suggest for your field of practice and for specific stakeholders.

14. Be careful – first think wide – then suggest the 'doable'. Place your ideas in streams or phases if necessary. Consider how the action could be resourced.

15. Most of all – **Complete the work on time** –this is a primary researcher skill – without this capability nobody will give you money again!!!

16. Researchers in TAFE, Universities, and in commercial businesses all face the same dilemma – finding legitimate time for their research. It is squeezed by the production of work and the necessities of family. Researching is a wonderful learning experience. To protect the space, gain and reinforce at work, the legitimacy of your researching activity.

17. Learn to live with the continual fears and apprehensions at each stage of your research by not worrying about what might go wrong and instead, reviewing options, recording the rationale for your decisions and moving on with contingencies in mind. Be positive.

18. Take any opportunity to present your work even to 3 or 4 people. Presenting helps you focus and condense the meaning for others. Different stakeholders need different messages.

19. Plan your next move. Use your network to get involved in the next research project. Be prepared to be mentored into the next stage.

Introduction

At the start you put down the basic reasons for doing this study – defend your time and actions! This is now your <u>introduction</u> to the study.

- What is the broad problem and local problem – the background.

- What is the purpose of research?

- Why bother doing it - justify the need?

- Justify the potential outcomes?

- Insert some of the main issues/ variables that affect this problem.

- You may link in broad references to theory here or other studies.

- **Define your key terms** – the words in the title or the question.

- Define also the limitations – what you are not going to do and why.

- Do some self-management and set out just how many words you will use for each section of the final work so your analysis and is well targeted.

Literature review

You need to find out who has been here before and what they found so you can use it as a base. Add anything else you have come across during the study to your proposal literature review.

You can use this section actively to introduce theories, frameworks and typographies, then to say where your study and case 'fits' within these concepts.

If you are reviewing several interrelating fields, you may need to tell the reader this at the start or provide a visual map of how the fields relate to each other. Tell the reader what you will cover, in what order and why.

You may decide to not to have a separate section for literature but to integrate it where appropriate in your study method/analysis and recommendations. Using other people's work to support your decisions and approaches.

- What research studies have been done <u>that are close</u> to your study – VOCED and dissertation abstracts may help. Search for your <u>industry, culture and VET focus.</u>

- What theory is there that may help you see relations in your field? Learning and change theories are most relevant.

- What are new ideas being thrown about in the literature and professional journals about your focus area?

- Be critical about these sources and their relevance. Say what they tell you and how relevant you feel they are. They form your platform for analysis.

- Start by indicating how these sources fit together or relate to your study.

- Summarise each one indicating the relevance to your study.

- Finally, at the end summarise what they tell you/us and how your study will explore further. You may need to draw a model of how they relate and inform your study. This may lead you to state the 'gap' your study is exploring.

- Most researchers find that they learn and read as a the study progresses and changes and have to return to enhance, change, and expand their literature review. Remember, in NCVER occasional papers, this is often a very short input.

Conceptual framework

You **may** wish to review your study and draw a diagram of the main relations that you are focusing on in your study. Use a framework from the literature that you can utilise to drive your analysis of the VET issue, if you wish.

What are the main issues and relations in your organisation?

What the **variables** that you are exploring and what are their possible **relations**?

You might wish to make a model of how you (and other authors) 'see' the variables and relations in this situation. You are declaring here your assumptions about your study.

- What are the inputs to the area you are looking at ?

- What are the outcomes ?

- What are the driving forces ?

- What are the moderating forces ?

- What are the mediating forces ?

- How do they connect ?

Change Management Relational Framework.

Based on Leman 1994 & Barratt-Pugh 2004
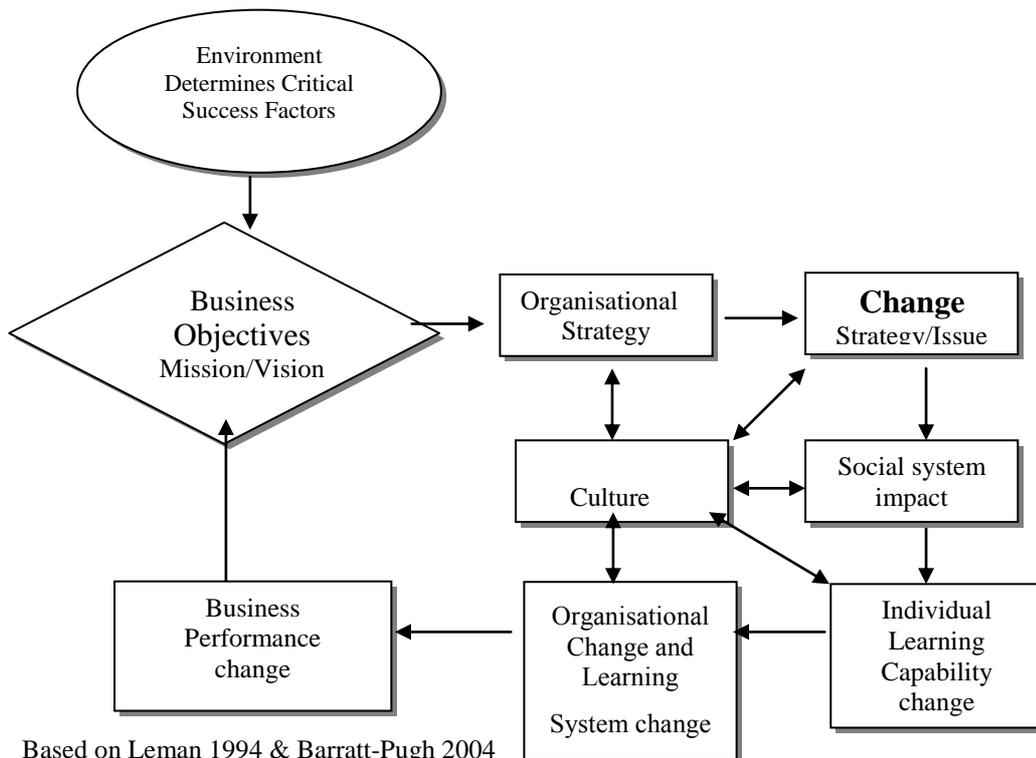
Research questions

You already have a broad title or research focus. Recheck your research questions against the way your study developed – can you simplify or clarify them?

- Try and do a table that shows the clear link between the focus/purpose of your study – the research questions for your study and the questions you asked participants.

You will find as always that questions always create further questions and that there is a **'hierarchy'** of questions involved in any investigation – whether we are just exploring for our own knowledge or formally exploring organisations.

Primary Research questions - that drive the whole study

Secondary Research questions - that frame the data collection

Field Research questions - that are used to collect the data.
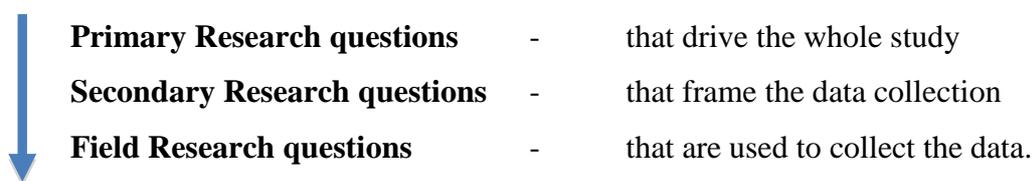
Primary Research Purpose

'This study is exploring the effectiveness of the relations between training interaction and …...at……..'

Secondary Research Questions

1 – What activity is occurring at….?

2 – What is the impact of ……..?

3 – What could the effectiveness be improved?

Field **Interview Questions**

- What activity have you been involved in ?
- How has it changed your practice?
- What have been the greatest influences upon your own development?
- What are the main changes in this area
- How is the organisational; culture changing?
- What three changes would you make if you had the power?

Research Design

You are investigating a real situation – inform the reader of how you did it.

Your design is a statement about the direction that frames your study – what kind of study is this? Make it clear to a reader what you were attempting to do, and why the approach you chose was the best option in the circumstances, given existing relations and finite resources.

For most new researchers, stating that you are doing a case study or using surveys and explaining the approach you are using is sufficient. Keep the description brief and direct. Use plain English. If you are using a mixed method approach, explain why it is appropriate. For higher degrees you will have to be more detailed about the research paradigm and rationale for your approach.

The following phrases are 'technical research expressions' you will find in the literature, but they have an *explanation in plain English* next to them. Choose those you feel that are appropriate for your study. They are only a guide to the kind of explanations you may give to your readers. NCVER will want you to use words that will give a detailed picture to VET practitioners.

- Repeat the need for this study in broad terms – **the purpose and research questions**.
- The study is based on a **relativist perspective**, in a **critical and constructivist paradigm** that focuses upon **relations in practice**. That is – building a map from what others tell you.
- Primarily this is an **inductive** naturalistic **field study** investigating the **practice** within organisation X. That is - exploring what is happening within an organisation.
- The study is based upon an a priori **framework,** but focuses on building a **grounded** model of practice. You have a basic model but are using it to explore the reality of the organisation.
- It is a **one shot embedded case study.** In – collect – out.
- The study is **qualitatively** based to collect multiple participant impressions.
- It will use a **sole researcher** where the interaction is designed to be minimal.
- The study will search for **local variables** and attempt to map relational patterns.
- Repeat your research purpose and research questions.
- Indicate the **unit of analysis** as the organisation and the individuals.
- Indicate that the **clusters** of interviewees will **triangulate** the data collected.
- Indicate that the analysis will consist of **narrative summary** of the data followed by **thematic analysis** and **a modelling of key relations**.
- Indicate the intention to provide a range of possible actions and **specific recommendations** for this case.
- State the **ethical** considerations and **limitations** of the design.

Method

This section is about what you did - how you **sampled data** and what **instruments** you used and now about how you changed them – and what you gathered. The job is to indicate **what** you collected from **whom, how, when and where**. You should plan this **as a table** perhaps. The following statements are ideas about what you might say.

Indicate how you used **Interviews/Questionnaires/Scanning Documents/ Observations, and** what happened in the data collection process. What role was each collection playing and how did they help achieve your research process?

- Justify your choice of organisation and **clusters** of interviewees
- Consider the **stratification** of your data collection – Industry type/ size/location and participant gender/ level and age.
- What did you consider or use to put your survey instruments together.
- List the interview questions and how they link to your research questions.
- What techniques have you used to help younger people respond, like the use of pictures?
- Did you do face to face interviews/telephone interviews or email discussion?
- Remember that you can collect information that is tapping different perspectives of the organisation – what people believe, what they intend. Their:
  - Assumptions
  - Values
  - Behaviours
- Be very clear in having a format to take notes that distinguishes between what people say, what you see, and what impressions you have.
- Did you collect hard copy data on the culture – or supposed culture?
- Did you use recording devices and why did you make this decision?
- What consideration for the participants did you put into practice and how?
- How did you approach and put your interviews at ease and gain trust?
- What affected your rates of returns on survey data?
- Tabulate your data collection as a time line.
- How did you generate and maintain relations with your data collection sites?
- How did you engage the participants in the study?
- Did the participants play a role in checking the data you gathered?
- How were the participants related within your VET organisation – can you cross check (triangulate) responses?
- How do you know that your data that is valid and reliable? How did you check?
- Make sure you copy your data and keep it in two places – it is irreplaceable
- Keep a record of your trials and tribulations so you can then say what you intended and what happened. Summarise your data collection.

You can always put more in the appendix….

Findings

This section is to give the reader an overview of what happened and what you saw. Let us assume that the data is responses to questions from various interviewees and some hard copy details about the organisation and processes.

The initial stage is to sort the data into a well-sequenced series of components. Usually this means condensing tapes and hard copy into a collection of electronic documents.

Manual analysis relies on the use of colours and underlining to highlight key issues and move them to new cards representing key issues/phenomena/or things[1]. You may also have used statistical analysis or NVivo.

Put simply: you read what you have got - and make notes to REDUCE the data.

Give it to the reader as a story – Let your experiences flow onto the page

Let the voices and numbers speak and use their weight to make decisions about how you will present them on the pages and which are most important.

- First we just report the study **findings**. Read it all, scan the figures and tabulations and make some notes of what pops up in your mind. You may do this according to the instruments you used, the interview questions or the different kinds of participants. Which order will you tell the story, chronologically, geographically, or layered?

- Include the documents you have reviewed as well – what are the key issues you note?

- Accumulate the data and show where the significant issues lie. You will find one of four things on each issue.
    - **Everyone agrees with it**
    - **Everyone disagrees with it**
    - **People are spread over a continuum**
    - **People are polarised over the issue**

- Gather the **quotes** that represent the key issues together in small batches. Then condense what people have said as a narrative review – a story – either by each question or by each person. Use '*quotes*' to illustrate each key point in the data. To this point it is just their words in a summary – not your interpretation. Look at the NCVER samples to get the idea about how others have done this.

- Use more than one quote if you need to demonstrate the diversity of comment on an issue.

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[1] Electronic data-bases like Nudist and NVivo are available from the library and allow you to do the same sorting and sifting with the power of instant retrieval and interrogation of your data base – but – it takes more input time.

- Use pseudonyms for your participants – Jack for John etc. and an indication of their role.

  They all said that they were happy with what I was doing. Jack - Trainee.

- Make it clear if you have added anything to the quotes to help the reader with the meaning.

  They (the other trainees) all said that they were happy with what I was doing.
  Jack - Trainee.

Tell the story to walk your reader into the data collection.

Explain your tables of data – what are they showing – where is the weight – what are the relations – and what are the 'significant' findings?

Analysis

So the first part of the analysis was about giving your reader a summary of what you found. Now we move on <u>interpret</u> what the data tells us. Hopefully to illuminate **key tensions** in the organisational change process or to illuminate **specific relations** that appear important.

You have indicated - what has been happening and what people think about it. Consider the contrasting perspectives of different stakeholders.

Now you evaluate this process.

This section is where you point to the key learning that can be gained from analysing this case and indicate some recommendations for change.

Your overview of the data in the findings will have given you a list of events and 'things' that are happening or not happening.

Now we start to form relations between those events, people and things.

In simple terms, aim to critique what happened: critique events, actions, communications and link them to specific reactions within the organisations, negative and positive.

- So now we start the **interpretation** – what are the key relational issues and why?
    - Which are the most vocalised
    - Which are the most popular
    - Which are being hidden – and not said!
    - Where are the key relationships
    - Who are the key people

- You must now choose which are those for specific attention – why choose these – why do they stand out?
  Can you describe them better using a diagram, table or graph ?

- o You may wish to table the issues ranking them according to their relative organisational weight, location, temporal position, strategic importance, or popularity.
- o You may wish to draw a map of the relations between some of them.
- o You may wish to take certain issues and indicate a typography for them – how they are viewed differently within the organisation.
- o Feel free to borrow any form of representing what is happening in the workplace that you have come across all the previous VET and research based texts you have studied (Maslow's triangle, Hertzberg's 2 sets of factors, Johari's window etc.

Give some ethical consideration to how the conclusions you are drawing will effect the various stakeholders.

Answer the Research Questions that you set for the study!

- Then comes the politics of what to do next. Here we leave the logic of the data collection and start to forecast possible organisational interventions of the future. **First, provide as many options as possible** for 'potential solutions' to the key issues emerging fro the study.

- Why are you focussing on these key issues – why are you suggesting certain actions above others. Justify why you perceive from the evidence of the study certain options - **where would you put your money**. You may **phase or stream your advice** for action rather than just list them. What should be done first, what follows, what differing paths of action can be tackled together? What is there to learn here about how to do things better. These statements may take the form of 'implications" and be related to specific stakeholders.

- Your confidence here will be directed by the depth and width of your data. Limited data should only produce simple statements. As you delve into and segregate your data you will find there is only so far you can go before there is insufficient data in each comparative sample from which to draw conclusions.

- Be clear about what you have learned and what we can learn from your study and analysis. **State the key implications from your study for <u>managers</u> in VET, for policy makers, for participants, for teachers, and for <u>researchers</u> exploring VET issues.**

- If there is a key theme emerging from your study, tell us what it means in the broader terms for those who are interested in improving VET practice – what should we take away as a concept to look for in the next case?

- In your VET projects, focus first on making relational comments about what was happening in your field of practice locally and how it might be improved. Think about messages for different stakeholders.

- Then, work with your supervisor or mentor to develop these statements to suggest any broader conceptual statements that relate to the wider Australian VET field. What can other practitioners learn from your study and how could it help them?

- You might at that point also consider how your study confirms, extends, modifies or contests the findings and models in the literature you reviewed. How does your local knowledge making add to the stock of knowledge?

Conclusion

There should be **nothing new here**. This is a final review to confirm and underline in the reader's mind what you have found.

- Re-indicate the purpose of this study
- Review the stages of the research process – what was done like a final summary abstract.
- Indicate clearly what has been found, what are the implications, and what has been learned.
- Say what use it is to your data field, VET practitioners and researchers.
- End with the key issue in a personal statement of some sort about the heart of the study to complete your work or show how it relates back to the original literature and theory.
- Give your text to anyone who can read so they can give you feedback on readability – make the text accessible.

Finally, make sure that you thank your funding bodies, organisation and participants, without whom you would have lost for words.

Using the NCVER template

If you have not used a template in 'Word' before download the template and copy it and do some trial work with the copy template to get the hang of how it works.

Review the sample NCVER papers you have been given to see what the complete result should look like. Use the NCVER reference guide, Authoring guide and Presentations guide.

The template will do two three important things for you.

First, it will polish the document in NCVER style.

Second it is arranged with embedded instructions so that your text, titles, tables and diagrams will automatically be the right font.

Third, and most magically, it is constructed so that it will gather all of your subheads, automatically, into a contents page / figures page / tables page ready with page numbers.

Before using the template be clear on the following.

List down your main chapter headings.

Then, list down any subheading – at level two and level three.

Make sure you have selected the formatting toolbar in word.

Using the template is just like normal word processing except, when you write or paste in text you select the appropriate style from the box at the far left of your formatting tool bar next to the font type.

As you select the style from the toolbar the word processor will automatically select the right font, size, spacing margins etc for that style. This means each type of heading you use and text will be unique and visually different, and in the NCVER House style.

You may prefer to write your text before using the template. If so, you must then transfer in each subhead, and each section of text separately. Click on the text you transfer each time and select the appropriate style.

If you treat each part of your text - subhead, sections, tables, diagrams – as separate components, then the template does all the hard work for you. Because you have told it what style each part of the text is, it can continually create automatically a contents page for you

Keep saving your precious work! Try and get most of the template working and if needed call on an expert of the last 2% of issues.

Note: NCVER write the About the Research: key messages – at the start of the template.

Reacting to Feedback

Your final work will be reviewed internally by NCVER. You should be aware that there is often a longer period than we would like between completing our drafts and the final publication.

NCVER will give you feedback or changes required, just like for a book chapter or a refereed paper.

Read it, put it down, and wait for two days. Then approach the critique with the positive perspective that if you can make these changes the work is done and you will be published.

Respond to the critique. Set out a two column, multiple row table and put each critical comment into a row in the first column. Then write in the second column how you are going to respond to that issue and put any changes you will make to the text in italics to illustrate the changes.

Then copy your paper and inert the changes and additions in red font so that there is a clear audit trail of the changes.

Reviewers comments	Response to comments
The explanation of the questionnaire distribution needs to be clarified.	An additional sentence has been placed in the section describing the research method. *'The questionnaire was distributed by the researcher to the 65 student in the certificate classes.'*

In all cases to should seek to address the comments positively. Where you believe the text is very clear on an issue it may be politic to seek a way to improve it rather than assert your beliefs!

Thank your reviewer(s).