

## Writing a watertight thesis: a guide to successful structure and defence

by Mike Bottery and Nigel Wright, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2019, 185 + vii pp., £21.99 (pbk), ISBN 978135004694

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Writing a watertight thesis: a guide to successful structure and defence**, by Mike Bottery and Nigel Wright, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2019, 185 + vii pp., £21.99 (pbk), ISBN 978135004694

This book's goal is to assist research students in writing a thesis which will have a 'watertight' argument. That is, one which does not have holes and gaps, one which does not 'leak'. In addition, for those early into their journey, it provides a clear description of the stages of the journey and key issues therein.

Bottery and Wright have decades of supervision and examination experience, some 50 years between them. This comes through in the content of the book. The book has a logical structure which reflects the doctoral journey. It is divided into three sections. First, 'Moving in' addresses the start of the journey, covering the need to have a 'watertight' thesis, creating a strong proposal and structuring the thesis clearly and logically. Second, 'Moving through' focuses on the researching and writing of the thesis. Particular attention is paid here to having a clear main research question and research sub-questions which structure the thesis and which the thesis is written to answer. The final section, 'Moving out', addresses the examination and post-doctoral time periods. In here the student is exhorted to be aware of the examiner in their writing. Also discussed is the *viva*, with some helpful suggestions on how to prepare for it. The section finishes with advice on how to take a completed thesis to the stage of publishing peer-reviewed journal articles.

The book is aimed at doctoral students and addresses the needs of this audience well. It recognises the variability of the journey and its iterative nature. It states what is needed, but more importantly, why they have taken the stance they have. Though focussing on doctoral students, it could also be of use to research master's students. While the journey of a master's research student is not the same as that of a doctoral student, the discussion of research questions and the shape of a thesis can be directly applied.

Those with limited supervision experience may find it useful in broadening the knowledge they have gained from their own doctoral journey. It can help raise issues they may not have encountered or considered. For example, it can describe issues arising from a different type of thesis to that which they may have written (e.g. empirical versus literature-based approaches). Even experienced supervisors could find it useful as a tool. Its information and exercises can be used to structure early supervision sessions with candidates.

A wide range of thesis types are allowed for, both empirical and literature-based works. The authors also recognise and allow for differences in academic processes around the globe, for example that some countries may not have a *viva* as part of the doctoral journey. Examples are used from a range of fields throughout, adding to the clarity of explanation and breadth of appeal. Students will benefit from the liberal use of exercises, whereby the issues discussed can be applied to their own work. These exercises are presented logically and sequentially, to build the student's skills. Supervisors can use these questions as prompts in a meeting or as exercises the student completes before a meeting, which can then be used as starting points for discussion.

A measure of the quality of this book is that I have already recommended it to one of my new candidates and will be putting it on the recommended reading list for students. I will

also be recommending it to students further into their journey. Available in hard copy and as an e-book, it is highly recommended.

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