

# Advisor and Thesis Related FAQs

---

## 1 How do I go about finding an advisor?

*Advice in a nutshell:* No advisor is perfect, but they need to have at least a few strong suits. Also, the dissertation student-advisor relationship is like any other relationship. If your work style/ professional attitudes don't match, you should consider other options (the above was taken from [Grad Skool Rulz](#)).

- (1) Determine the area you would like to do your research/thesis in (perhaps based on what you have studied before, what you are particularly interested in, or related to what you would like to do in the future – or a combination of the three).
- (2) Go to our website's [faculty page](#) or the faculty page of departments within the College of Management and see which professor(s) are doing research within those areas (or get the current list from the IIMBA office of all professors within the College of Management).

**Note:** *If you are a PhD candidate, your advisor must be one within our Institute. If you find an advisor outside our Institute, it is required that you have a co-advisor from within our Institute.*

- (3) Prepare some information regarding your area of interest (general direction)
  - a. Search [Google Scholar](#) using keywords applicable to your potential direction
  - b. Find interesting titles and read their literature review sections to give you a basic understanding of the background
  - c. Find meta-analyses discussing the development of the research area over the past many years
  - d. Read the 'future directions' sections of the big articles (tip: note how many times it has been cited) to see what research areas still need to be filled
    - i. Ensure it is a more recent piece of research; if not, when you find a 'hole' that is interesting, search for it first to ensure it has not already been filled
- (4) Contact the professor(s) and set up a time to meet with him / her / them (separately) to discuss possibilities.
  - a. The meeting is to determine:
    - i. If the professor is interested in your topic – or suggests a direction/area that is different but interesting to you.
    - ii. What the advisor's expectations of you are / what your expectations of your advisor are.
    - iii. Whether or not you are a good advisor/advisee match and
      1. you want him/her as your advisor
      2. s/he is willing to take you on as an advisee

Tips: 1. Know yourself and what kind of partnership you are looking for

- a. Someone who will give you a strict schedule vs someone who will only provide guidance when you ask for it (note: if you are not careful, the 2<sup>nd</sup> one may end in you not graduating on time if you are not good at scheduling your time)
- b. Someone who will give you a topic, journal articles to read, and a methodology vs someone who does not

- i. If you are wanting to do a PhD it may be wise to consider going with ‘someone who does not’
      - ii. Some professors go in both directions depending on their advisee
    - c. Someone who is accessible and has time to meet with you
  - 2. Have lunch or coffee with the advisors’ current advisees to get their experience about it...remember though that just because they have an un/successful relationship with their advisor does not mean you will have the same
- (5) If you are meeting with a few professors, or if you are not sure if this advisor is the match for you, to not feel like you have to get the professor’s signature right away.
- (6) When you have found your match, and if the professor agrees to take you on, get the professor’s signature on the Advisor Form to seal the deal.

## 2 What if the professor I would like as my advisor does not have space to take on more students from my batch?

Look to see if any other professor is interested in the field you would like to study, or close to the field you would like to study, and set up a time to meet with him/her, and follow the rest of the above steps for choosing an advisor.

## 3 What if the professor I would like as my advisor is not within the College of Management?

You will have to find a professor in the related field of research from **within our Institute** who is willing to sign as co-advisor (you will count as half a student for both professors). *NOTE: it can sometimes be tricky to balance the requirements of two advisors.*

## 4 How do I go about selecting my thesis topic?

This will partially depend on the advisor you have found. Your advisor may:

- (1) Provide a specific topic for you to research
- (2) Ask you to find a topic and discuss it with him/her

If you must find your own topic, you can follow these steps:

- (1) Go to Google Scholar and continue to search for the terms you are interested in, i.e.:
  - a. Internal service quality
  - b. Self-service technology
  - c. HR practices and culture
  - d. Location selection
  - e. Etc
- (2) Start as broad as you need in your terms and search – it will depend on how specific your original idea is
  - a. You may need to search for one or two constructs together at first, as there may not be much research specifically related to your combination of constructs
- (3) As you find articles

- a. read the title
- b. if the title is interesting, read the abstract
- c. if the abstract is interesting, download\* and save the PDF to a specific folder (remember: save the file with the title of the article as the file name), and read or skim:
  - i. the *introduction*
    1. Gives you general overview of history and previous findings within this area
  - ii. the *discussion, conclusion, limitations and future research suggestions*
    1. Gives you ideas of where research is still needed...the 'holes' in the field you can potentially try to fill part of

Not reading the full article will save you time in this initial stage, as well as give you more knowledge within the field you are interested in.
- d. Try to train yourself not to print the articles, but rather read and highlight on the computer (using Adobe Acrobat Professional to highlight). It saves paper and makes organization and future finding-of-article-information much easier if all done electronically.
- e. Remember to download the reference citation to your EndNote library if it is conveniently accessible in the same area as the PDF download (i.e. if you are downloading from E-Resource databases), as this will save you time later
  - i. Add your own keywords and research notes to the EndNote reference so you can easily search for it later
  - ii. Remember, though you may not use the article in your thesis you are still gaining a general understanding of the field

\***NOTE:** If you are unable to access the article directly through Google Scholar, search through NCKU's E-Resources (a how-to video is **soon** available on the student council's website).

- (4) Try to find a hole in the previous research that you can take a small part and fill – do not try to take on too much! Focused, specific, and narrow is all you need for a master's thesis.
- (5) You can also search previous theses (either by an E-Thesys search on the library website, through the PDFs provided by our institute listing all the previous theses in our program (up until 2009), or physically going through theses in our IIMBA office) – it can give you an idea of the types and breadth of topics a Master's thesis should have.
- (6) Once you have a more specific idea, discuss it with your advisor.

## 5 What is a literature review and how do I conduct it?

[Information here was taken from <http://info.emeraldinsight.com/research/guides/literature2.htm> - the research guides hold a lot of other interesting and basic information regarding how to conduct research.]

Writing a good literature review demands a lot of work. First comes the slog through the databases and the trawl through articles. After initial impressions are formed, there is the process of selection: what is relevant? And how can I sum up and synthesize?

The most important task of any review which relates to original research, is always to consider not only, "how does it relate to my research?", but also, "how does it create space for my research?" It is only by familiarizing oneself with the literature that one can discover the important questions which remain to be

asked, and hence one's own contribution to the field [*editor's note: this is related to determining your thesis topic*].

## 5.1 The purpose of the literature review

All literature reviews should be more than a mere description of the current state of knowledge of an area, and should critically evaluate the theoretical positions and research studies, drawing attention to major debates. This is particularly true for a research dissertation or paper, which should go one step further by using the review to situate the author's own contribution to knowledge.

The literature review has been described as a "report of primary scholarship" (Cooper, 1988) and "an interpretation and synthesis of published work" (Merriam, 1988, quoted by Murray, 2002). The two key words here are **scholarship** and **synthesis**: a literature review relates particular research to a wider field.

There are two main purposes of a literature review:

1. **To show awareness of the present state of knowledge of a particular field.** Not just who has written what, but the main empirical research, theoretical positions, controversies, and breakthroughs as well as links with other related areas of knowledge.
2. **To provide a foundation for the author's research.** The process of reviewing the literature should provide, according to Steane (2004: p. 124), a rationale for the choice of problem to be investigated and the methodology selected. It should help the researcher define a hypothesis or a research question, and show how answering the question will contribute to the body of knowledge. Analysis of the literature can also help provide a particular theoretical lens, support the argument, or identify gaps.

## 5.2 How to approach the literature review: organization

The author of an undergraduate essay may work from a reading list supplied by the relevant faculty member; the research student needs to cast his or her net far wider, over the whole field of literature relevant to the study. This is clearly a major task and requires organization.

### 5.2.1 Stages of writing a literature review

There are essentially four main stages of writing a literature review:

1. Defining the topic area of investigation.
2. Locating the key literature – this is the literature search.
3. Analyzing the literature.
4. Structuring and writing the literature review.

The last three items will be dealt with separately; here are a few points on general approach and organization.

### 5.2.2 General approach and organization

Carrying out a literature review should be both serendipitous and systematic.

Serendipitous because the process is rarely linear. Steane (2004) uses the analogy of a river trip with expeditions down tributaries and creeks. Searching a database may throw up a list of citations and the temptation is to look through them methodically. However, you may find that a particular article throws up interesting-looking references, so you are off on a tributary.

Systematic because whether you follow a list of database references, or jump directly to the citations of a particular article, you need a system of keeping records. These should in the first instance be bibliographic (author, date, title of article/chapter, publication, volume and issue number, edition, etc.). However, you should also keep a record of notes on the content; many suggest providing a brief analysis (we will review structures for this in the next section) as opposed to free-style notes [editor's note: this organization is strongly encouraged to be all be done in EndNote].

### How old/recent?

While there are special circumstances for using old sources, for example in a historical study, the accepted practice is to use literature that is as recent as possible. This is because scholarship is cumulative, building on previous work.

It is also a common complaint of journal editors that papers submitted often contain references which are "woefully out of date".

The exception is work which is seminal; for example, all work which uses grounded theory will refer to the 1967 work of Glaser and Strauss.

### *5.2.3 Analyzing and synthesizing the literature*

Stearns (2004) suggests that there should be two stages to the literature review:

1. when you trawl through, and analyze, the articles you have identified
2. when you actually write up the literature review

While both processes of review should be critical, the former will deal with items on an individual basis, whereas the latter will compare and contrast: in other words, synthesize.

The following are appropriate headings for evaluation (although Moustaghfir's criteria quoted above could also be applied). You should not be afraid to criticize any shortcomings.

- Aims and objectives.
- Central thesis.
- Outcomes.
- Theoretical framework.
- Context and background.
- Research design and method.
- Findings.
- Contribution to the field.

Note that many supervisors encourage students to start writing early in order to get into practice and avoid later writer's block. To do a short piece of writing based on the above criteria for each paper can be a useful exercise [editor's note: and can be done in 'research notes' within EndNote].

Between the first and second stages, there should be a process of selection: not everything you read will go into your final literature review. You should only include that which is relevant to your research topic. It may be tempting to have a very long list of references, but examiners will only get annoyed by a lengthy literature review which includes citations of little relevance.

There should also be a stage when you look at the overlap between studies, when you compare and contrast and recognize patterns. This will help you towards your synthesis of literature: you know what you are going to include and why, and can now write your overview.

This overview should:

- identify the key contributions in the field,
- recognize the main debates and theoretical positions,
- categorize studies by their assumptions and approaches,
- point out gaps in knowledge and weaknesses in theoretical or empirical positions, and
- above all state the ways in which your own contribution fits into the picture.

### 5.3 How long should you search for?

While you are still finding divergent views and new information, your search should continue. If on the other hand you are not finding anything new, then this will be the time to stop.

### 5.4 The structure of the literature review

There are a number of ways of structuring the discussion of the literature. Steane (2004) recommends a dialectical approach, in which different views and theoretical debates are compared and contrasted. This may work if your area is one where there are strongly divergent views, and you should always show awareness of different perspectives.

Another possible approach is to use the aims and objectives in your introduction, or a pilot study you have done as early research, to provide topics. Type of research may provide another option, for example academic versus practitioner.

As with any piece of writing, make sure that your structure is clear by explaining what you are going to do, and using appropriate headings.

Always make sure you relate your discussion to your own piece of research, and in particular to your own research question, which may well have come about through a gap you have identified in the research.

### 5.5 Writing a literature review

Your writing style should be objective, balanced and dispassionate. The word "critical" may lead some to believe that they can be negative. Others, however, and particularly those from cultures which promote deference to the teacher, may feel intimidated by the thought of being critical [editor's note: being critical can be done in a factual way, noting shortcomings or disagreements in different pieces of research].

Editor's note: When organizing your literature review, you can start by creating an outline, and copy in information directly from the articles – using EndNote to cite and including page numbers – as you do your reading. Then once you have your outline filled, you can easily summarize, re-organize, and condense the information into a nicely flowing literature review.

## 6 How do I determine my hypotheses (if I have a model) or research questions (if I do not have a model)?

After determining your specific research topic (see above), you should determine your specific hypotheses or research questions.

- (1) As you do your reading on the topic, ideas will develop – this is an ongoing process, but the earlier you can start to narrow down your research questions the better.
- (2) Try to find a previous study (from a strong journal) that has done something similar to what you would like to do - but that was done within a different context (culture, industry, etc) than you are planning; you can then follow their model and/or methods **as a baseline**.
- (3) Once you have your basic model, and adjusted it (added and perhaps removed some items and relationships), you can easily create your hypotheses from it.
- (4) If you do not have a model, and are using research questions instead
  - a. Try to formulate exactly, specifically, what you would like to determine, in the form of questions that just address a single item/point each.
  - b. Try to make sure they flow logically, and are all related or build off of each other, ensuring your topic is not too broad.
  - c. If formulating yes/no questions, make sure that whether the result is yes or no, it will still be meaningful.

## 7 How do I determine my methodology?

After determining your topic and research questions/hypotheses, you can determine what methodology is best.

- (1) Discuss with your advisor (!)
- (2) Ideally you will find an article from a well respected journal that has done a study similar to yours, so you can follow their methodology.
- (3) You may have to find a couple articles if just one does not cover all your research questions.
- (4) Again, look at previous theses to see the different types of research methodologies that have been used. The most common ones are (and you will use a combination of them and/or others):
  - Quantitative (BRM):
    - Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)
    - Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)
    - One-way ANOVA analysis
    - Canonical analysis
    - Conjoint analysis
    - Structural equation modeling (SEM)
    - Linear/multiple regression analysis
    - Analytical hierarchy process (AHP)
    - Fuzzy methods
  - Qualitative (QRM)
    - Case study
    - Content analysis (i.e.: critical incident technique)
    - Focus groups

- A good source with information on most of the above methods (and **many** more):  
<http://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/garson/PA765/statnote.htm>
  - If you use content from here, make sure you cite it correctly! See the top of its page for the correct citing method.

## 8 A note on what should be an iterative process

When you write your literature review and methodology, you should not complete one before the other.

- (1) Gain an understanding of your model or research questions
  - a. Begin your literature review
- (2) Gain an understanding for how to actually complete research analysis to achieve your goals (methodology)
- (3) If/when you determine that it is perhaps not possible to conduct the research exactly as your model/research questions are stated, go back and rework your model/research questions

And then the cycle begins again.

## 9 Last words

Most importantly, ensure you conduct your research ethically, and adhere to strong research practices to ensure a quality output. Do not let yourself be tempted to adjust numbers to fit your desired outcome – an unsupported hypothesis can often be of as much value as a supported one, if discussed correctly.

Also ensure you do not – under any circumstance – plagiarize. Doing so can lead to dismissal from the institute, and even revoking of your master’s degree in the future if – even 10 years or more later – you have been found to have plagiarized content of your thesis.

---

### *Disclaimer:*

What I did not source above, I gathered from fellow scholars experiences, my advisor and other valued professors, and of course my own experiences. However, there are many gems of advice that have not been included. You are encouraged to gain these through discussing the process with your advisor/professors, seniors-to-you, and others going through the process.