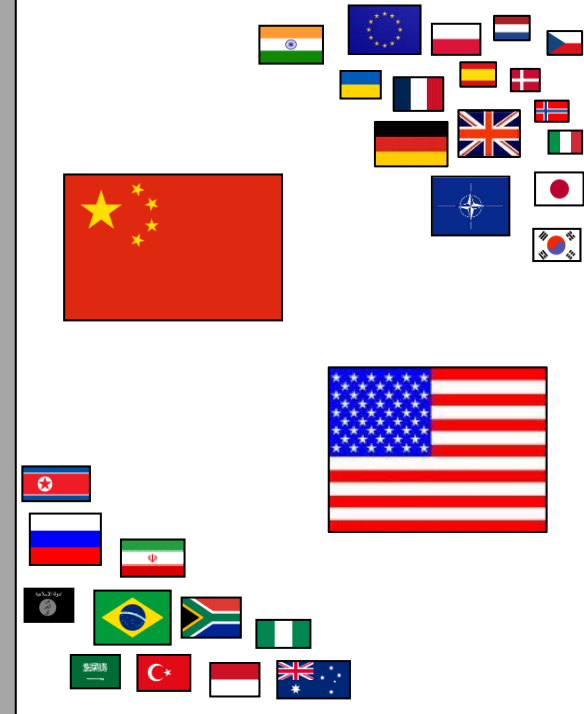


# Strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

## Introduction



Paul van Hoofft

[p.a.vanhoofft@uva.nl](mailto:p.a.vanhoofft@uva.nl)

020 525 2786

REC B. 8.22

# Writing

*What is the most important question to ask yourself before you start writing anything?*

'Who am I writing for, who is the audience?'

# Audience

*Who is the intended audience of your thesis?*

The second reader and your supervisor, first and foremost.

Then, and only then, whoever else you would like to show this to (Potential employers - ministry, research institutes, NGOs, consultancies; family and friends; etc.). For example, as a writing sample.

# Thesis is an exam

Consider the thesis a very special and specific exam, where you show that you have picked up a set of academic skills in the past 4 years:

- To be an independent and creative thinker;
- To see problems and gaps in our knowledge that need to be answered;
- Awareness of theories and how to apply them;
- Awareness of different research skills to test or explore these theories;
- The ingenuity and the commitment to collect empirical skills;
- The writing skills to clearly articulate them.

# Learning objectives (thesis manual)

Indeed, this matches how it is described in the thesis manual:

- *Independently conducting social-scientific research*
- *Research plan including, a defined research question, a clear research strategy and time planning;*
- *Using sound methodological principles and research techniques;*
- *The creative use of relevant theoretical insights;*
- *Ability to draw conclusions from one's own research;*
- *Clear, systematic and accountable reporting of the research;*
- *Translating the results into a theoretical-scientific and practical-social meaning (and relevance).*

# Thesis proposal (thesis manual)

- Working title.
- Description of the topic and the aim of the thesis including a motivation and details of the scientific and social relevance.
- (At least a preliminary) formulation of the problem.
- Theoretical framework
- Short design of the research to be executed (nature of the data to be collected, method(s) used).
- Global and well-reasoned preliminary table of contents.
- Preliminary bibliography (reference literature).
- Schedule.

# Role of the supervisor

I will – of course - help you with this 'exam'.

I will point out problems during these steps in the research (though some problems will only be apparent in later stages).

However.

I will **not** provide the solutions (though I will suggest/hint at them). I am **not** the co-author.

The goal is **not** that a good thesis is written, the goal is that **you** show whether **you** have the skills to write a good thesis.

# Process

Next six sessions we will construct the research design that covers all these elements.

We will discuss these elements in class.

You will write assignments on the different components of the research design.

In class we will discuss research design through your theses, as they develop.



# Process

The assignments are simply a way of streamlining the construction of the research design.

Think of them as building the components of your thesis. You are thinking on paper, not simply checking the boxes.

The assignments are, however, mandatory.

Failure to hand them in or attend will lead to me asking you to leave.

# Testimonials

(...), 2014-2015

“For all you procrastinators: make sure you have a full draft of your thesis (like you would submit it!) one month before the deadline. You will need that last month very badly.

It's doable, but for God's sake, start on time and follow Paul's deadlines.”

For the session of	Part of research design	Deadline
Feb 11	Assignment: Formulate research question , motivate, and identify relevant literature	Feb 09. 09:00.
Feb 25	Assignment: reformulate research question, motivate, and identify relevant literature	Feb 23. 09:00.
Mar 04	Assignment: literature review and research question	Mar 02. 09:00. 4-5 pages
Mar 11	Assignment: (a).concepts; (b). hypotheses	Mar 09. 09:00. 2-4 pages
Mar 18	Assignment: identify appropriate methods and data	Mar 16. 09:00. 2-4 pages.
Mar 25	Assignment: present research proposals for peer review	Mar 23. 09:00. 12 pages minimum
Apr 03	Assignment: present research proposals for peer review	April 1. 09.00 12 pages minimum
April 24	Chapters 1 and 2	April 19. 09.00
May 17	2 empirical chapters	May 12. 09.00
Last check	Full Draft (optional)	Week of 10 <sup>th</sup> of June.

# Research question

What is a good research question?

- One that is important;
- One that is innovative;
- One that can actually be answered (including in the negative).

# Literature review

- The crucial first step. You absolutely must build up expertise.
- Mapping the geography of the approximate topic.
  - To understand:
    - What are key theories and causal mechanisms? And how
    - What are key concepts?
    - What are key operationalisations?
    - What are key pieces of empirics?

# Literature review

- How did other people seek to answer the same or similar questions?
- What have other people who have asked the same or similar questions found?
- What are the key authors, and key arguments?
- Research should refer to ongoing debates in our field: how does our research contribute to existing theories and empirical works?

# Literature review

Helps clarify contribution through refinement of prior research:

1. **Challenge existing findings:** why do you suspect they are flawed? E.g. conceptualization, measurement, analyses, interpretation...
2. **Clarify/extend existing findings:** are they applicable to other contexts?  
Are the explanatory mechanisms correct?
  - focus on a key subpopulation
  - use a new (sub)population
  - use a different time period
  - Propose new/contextualize old explanations

# Literature review

- List at least 20 articles and/or books relevant to your topic
- Group these according to parts of the research you think are relevant – how do they help you investigate the topic?
- (Describe topic and preliminary question)
- Handed in by Monday morning, 09:00.



# Literature review

- Don't review yet.
- BUT, instead, systemically explore:
  - Abstracts, conclusions.
  - Check their literature reviews and references lists.
  - What are the key works (articles and books);
  - Who are the key authors;
  - The key arguments and concepts.