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# Some critical success factors in doctoral thesis

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# Disclaimer

- These indications do not replace the [official regulations](#) on doctoral theses in the UPF Department of Communication.
- No set of recommendations substitutes the joint work of the doctoral student with his thesis supervisor

# Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge

## · Classification of Animals

- (a) belonging to the Emperor,
- (b) embalmed,
- (c) trained,
- (d) piglets,
- (e) mermaids,
- (f) fabulous,
- (g) loose dogs,
- (h) included in this classification,
- (i) they are waving like crazy,
- (j) countless,
- (k) drawn with a very fine camel hair brush,
- (l) etcetera,
- (m) they just broke the vase,
- (n) that from afar look like flies.

# Abstract

- Different components to success in a doctoral thesis in the humanities and social sciences, especially in social communication.
- Calendar and possible structure of a doctoral thesis in social communication
- General characterization of an academic research
- General structure of deliverables
- Critical factors for success in academic publications (papers)
- Structure and quality criteria in papers
- Criteria and sources for selecting magazines
- The golden rule: evidence-based research requires frequent use of CRAI/UPF Library resources
- General advices about how to conduct a doctoral thesis
- Selected references in how to do a doctoral thesis, literary reviews, case studies and how to synthesize results

# Doctoral thesis in Communication Department at UPF

- All modalities require quality evidence in the form of **evaluated external publications**.

# Firsts statements

- Don't think about the thesis as a manuscript.
- A thesis is the **report** (the memory) of a coherent and long-lasting **research** (2,5 years).
- Therefore, a thesis has two components: the **research** and the **report** (manuscript) that explains it.

# 3 Years doctoral thesis calendar

- Is no 36 months, but more appropriately **30-32 months** at maximum
- Possible distribution
  - 26-28 months > research, with regular production of deliverables
  - 4 months > compiling results, consolidating texts, and producing the thesis manuscript > external evaluation version
- Advice: initial planification, 30 months, in prevention of displacement



# Possible strategy

- Strategy example
  - Divide the thesis into 4/6 investigations
  - Complete an investigation every 4/6 months
  - Each investigation can generate 2 or more outputs (report, communication, paper)
- Total: about 8-12 outputs

# When a research is a research? (I)

- **Data acquisition**
- Guided by a **methodology**
- All under **transparency** and **traceability**

# When a research is a research? (II)

- **The case of the state of art**
  - The state of the art is equivalent to an investigation if it is carried out in a **systematic, transparent** and **replicable** way
- Systematic or *systematized* review
  - References are the **data** component
  - Systematic analysis is the **methodology** component
  - Data tables, mind maps, narrative synthesis and other forms of the synthesis are the **result**

# More complete components of a research

- Object of study
- Objectives
- Research questions
- Methodology
- Data results
- Synthesized and interpreted results
- Discussion
- References
- All the process conducted with **transparency** and **traceability**

# Main quality criteria

- Social or academic **relevance** of the object of study
- Relationship between **objectives, methodology** and **results**

# How to write a paper

- The best way to write a paper is **NOT to write a paper**
- A paper is the **report** of a research
- Without the *previous* research it is impossible to write the report, and to study is not equal to research

# Reports or “deliverables”

- Deliverables: outputs of a research
- Remember: research = data collection guided by a methodology

# Main components of a typical report o deliverable

1. **State of the art** or theoretical framework (from a literary review, systematic or traditional)
  2. **Case study** or any other coherent data collection system or method
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- Some examples:
- <https://observatoriocibermedios.upf.edu/informes>



# Academic databases

- **Central place** of academic databases in new researches
- **Scopus** and **Web of Sciences**
- Other social sciences and humanities databases. Source: <https://repositori.upf.edu/handle/10230/35705>

# Some very useful qualitative methods in Social Communication

- **Case study**
- **Comparative analysis**
- Interviews
- Participant observation

# Transformation order

- Deliverable > communication(s) > article(s) > book chapter
- One report o deliverable: 1-3 publications

# Conferences

- Very good **quality indicators** in any doctoral thesis modality
- Not as **difficult** to accept as a paper
- Admitted components in thesis by compendium
- Good opportunity in **online Conferences**

# Criteria to choose a conference

- Academic character
- Theme
- Calendar
- Publication policy
- Costs
- Online or presential


# Papers

- Main quality indicator of quality of a research
- Main component in thesis by compendium
- Relatively difficult
- Main obstacle: editorial acceptance

# How to write a paper · Canonical structure

- Introduction
- **M**ethodology
- **R**esults and
- **D**iscussion
- **IMRaD**

# How to write a paper· Expected structure

- Title
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Review ← 
- Methodology
- Results and
- Discussion
- Conclusions
- References



# 10 tips for writing a truly terrible journal article

- 1 Refuse to read the previous literature published in your field
- 2 Take the lazy route and plagiarize
- 3 Omit key article components
- 4 Disrespect previous publications
- 5 Overestimate your contribution
- 6 Excel in ambiguity and inconsistency
- 7 Apply incorrect referencing of statements
- 8 Prefer subjective over objective statements
- 9 Give little care to grammar, spelling, figures and tables
- 10 Ignore editor and reviewer comments

# How to write a paper· Expected properties

- Fluency
- Logic
- Connection
- Necessity
- Balance

# How to write a paper· Persuasion

- Background
- Logic
- Connectivity
- Tables
- Graphics

# Co authored papers · Reasons

- Modern way of doing science
- Result of teamwork (e.g. author / thesis supervisor)
- Correlates with success: more acceptance, more citations

# Co authored papers · Signature order

- **SDC approach** (sequence determines credit): the order indicates the importance of the contribution. First author, most important; last author, less important.
- **FLAE approach** (first/last author emphasis): first and last author, same importance. Central authors, in order of contribution.
- **Alphabetical order**: all authors same importance.
- **OPTION EXCLUDED BY ETHICAL RULES**: appearance or order by hierarchical position or importance of CV.

# Choice of journal · Criteria

- Content and editorial policy
- Periodicity
- Indexing: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIH, MIAR; in general: repertoires accepted by evaluation agencies
- Open access
- APC
- Impact factor Scopus or WoS (Q1-Q3)
- ... but avoid impact factor idolatry: **topic** es more important than impact

# Choice of journal · Sources

- SJ&CR
- Scopus
- WoS
- MIAR
- **GRECOS**
- **Main links to 5 sources**

# The golden rule: evidence based research

- True science is a cumulative effort
- Be a frequent user of CRAI / UPF Library resources:
  - [Main page & search](#)
  - [Academic databases](#)
  - [Topic guides · Communication](#)
  - [E-Repository](#)



# Success in academic publishing (I)

- **To avoid editorial rejection**

- IMRaD structure
- Include literary review
- Cover letter
- Obsessively follow the instructions for authors

- **To manage peer review process**

- Not necessarily accept all comments
- But, respond to **all** comments
- Use the answer table system to demonstrate transparency and efficiency

# Success in academic publishing (II)

- **In case of rejection**

- Incorporate all improvements of previews reviews
- Insist with another journal
- In general: publishing on the second or third attempt is completely normal

- **Ethics**

- Never send the same manuscript to two journals at the same time

# By last

- Structure the thesis research by results or deliverables
- Structure the calendar based on 30 months, not 3 years
- Read a lot: reading good research in our field changes our minds
- Practice deep reading: reading by taking notes and summarizing
- Periodically produce results: never accumulate data without producing a report
- Never procrastinate: it is a death trap for a PhD student
- Work regularly on the thesis, at least 3 days a week, at least 4-5 hours each day, every week
- Never try to publish alone at the first intents
- Be a frequent user of the CRAI / UPF Library
- Consult Scopus and WoS frequently, better yet, design alerts on your research topic
- Make a schedule of meetings with your director: at least two meetings every month, for at least the first months; then at least one per month.
- Science is **“is ten percent inspiration and ninety percent perspiration”** (T.A.E.)

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