Writing Your Dissertation

An EC3400 Session
28 Nov. 2001

You Will Learn

• What is a thesis statement
  – A thesis statement you might use
• What make a good organization
  – An organization you might use
• Ways to edit, reference, and make tables
  – Essential for a good impression
• Ways to convey your contributions
  – Don’t short-change yourself

Imitate a Journal Article

• Look at good articles: *American Economic Review, Journal of Political Economy*
• Imitate them
• Similar length: ca. 20 single-spaced pages
• Similar style, tables, references
• Similar sections, e.g.: introduction, literature & theories, data, analysis, conclusions

Have a Clear, Interesting Thesis

• Thesis statement; your conclusion
• Should be able to say in 1 or 2 sentences
• Not okay: “I studied gender and wages.”
• Clear but obvious: “Women are paid less than men on average.”
• Good: “Women are paid less because of pure discrimination by some employers.”

A Thesis for You

• Write a possible thesis statement now (if you haven’t already)
• Maximum 10-20 words
• Give it a clear conclusion (one that might emerge from your research)
• Make it interesting, given past research, topical debates, policy concerns

Organize to Prove the Thesis

• Sections (motivate and) prove the point
• If a section doesn’t help, take it out
• For each section, how does it help?
  – Convey how each section helps prove the point
• Sections may have to address needs:
  – Literature review
  – Data
  – Analysis
An Organization for You

• Outline a possible organization
• 3-6 sections (not chapters!)
• Briefly (1-4 words each) stated
• An organization that will serve your purpose in practice

Clear, Succinct, Correct Writing

• Find and fix flaws in your argument
• Find and fix factual errors
• Don’t be ambiguous
• Say what’s important for understanding
• Remove unnecessary sections
• Remove unnecessary words
• Fix grammatical problems

Handle References Correctly

• Cite your sources
• Cite literature correctly
• Include a correctly-formatted list of references

[In the session, examples were shown. See e.g. the American Economic Review.]

Format Statistical Tables

[In the session, an example was shown from a journal article. See for example American Economic Review, June 2001 p. 627. Don’t just use raw Stata output. Instead, format decent-looking tables.]

Convey Your Contributions

• Get across your work and new findings
• Don’t sound like you are bragging
• Just let the reader know by explaining
  – How the literature review was carried out
  – Precisely how the data were collected
  – How and why statistical analyses were done
  – How possible objections / criticisms were addressed
  – Etc. (contributions differ across dissertations)

You Have Learned

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