

Book review

Thomson, P. and Kamler, B. 2016. *Detox your writing: Strategies for doctoral researchers*. London: Routledge.

ISBN: 9780415820844. Pbk. vi+220 pp.

There is a need to increase the number of doctoral graduates both in South Africa and internationally (EUA, 2010; CHE and Crest, 2009; NRF, 2008; ASSAf, 2010), but the difficulty with writing holds many researchers back, thus delaying time to completion. The authors of this book have a fine grasp of what doctoral writing entails and give a practical account of how many challenges regarding doctoral writing can be overcome. They refer to the doctoral candidate as the doctoral researcher (DR) and I also use that through this review to refer to doctoral researchers.

Chapter three opens with an introductory sentence to ‘*Many DRs dread literature work, the more they read the most confused they get*’, which explains why I read this chapter second to last as I get confused every time I read on my own research topic. It is not an easy task to create a literature review. The importance of having your own books as your personal toolkit that one would love and take pleasure in it, rather than depend on the library is emphasised here as one may need to revisit the books from time to time.

Chapter five discusses argumentation and advises readers on how to develop an argument in the thesis. The five elements of an argument are presented, namely: a claim, reason, warrant, evidence and a response. The authors further provide a guide to writing the abstract as an argument, rather than a summary.

Chapter six provides advice on performing one’s research in an authentic and scholarly way. The need for the DR to present their work at conferences as part of building a scholarly identity is stressed. I agree that we need to talk to others about our research (Motshoane, 2016), but unfortunately, this is not always possible as some DRs may feel too timid in sharing their work for peer review during the doctoral journey.

Chapter seven discusses data generation and interpretation as well as writing up the results which means that it can be used as a toolkit by DRs as they proceed with their research journeys. DRs are reminded that the interpretation of data is integral to the thinking and meaning-making that they do. The advice that resonates is to write in chunks rather than chapters, as well as to create storyboards to plot argumentative or narrative ‘moves’ within the text. However, the way in which the storyboarding is presented left me wondering if one can only use it if already has the data, or if it can be applied throughout the thesis.

Chapter eight is about the academic ‘I’. The authors argue for the agency of DRs expressed by writing in the first person as opposed to the third. Hence I have written this review in the first person. They provide systematic ways of using the academic ‘I’ and extrapolate the difference between the emotional and the academic ‘I’, warning that the use

of the academic 'I' is not easy. The authors also stress that the conclusion should be written as 'I' because this is the part of the thesis where doctoral researchers have the authority to claim their voices.

Chapter nine prepares the DR for what awaits them at the finish line when they think that all that is left is to tidy up the thesis. The authors warn against revising as opposed to editing the first draft. This is the time when many DRs feel inadequate, discouraged and hopeless as they always think that they are close to the finish line, yet are not quite there yet. The last lap any race is the most difficult.

Written as it is by authors based in the United Kingdom and Australia respectively, the book does not fully consider certain challenges in the South; for example, it is rare for the doctorate to be completed within three years in the South African context. The authors refer in chapter three to a doctorate completed in three years, which does not take into consideration those like myself who are mature students (Cloete, Mouton, and Sheppard, 2015) with a full-time job studying part-time and at a distance, where the study is often completed in four to five years. However, this does not take away the fact that the book is useful for both supervisors and their candidates as it offers a scholarly detox which will help DRs overcome their writing challenges.

Sometimes we need to have struggled with an aspect of academic writing before we can understand certain advice or feedback. I found the book advantageous as I had already faced many of the challenges that are addressed in the book and that helped me to utilise the book effectively. Ultimately, as a doctoral researcher myself, I feel that this book achieves its intended objective, which is to assist doctoral researchers to develop strategies to improve their writing. However, I would not have made sense of many of the lessons in this book had I not crossed some conceptual thresholds beforehand (McKenna, 2016).

This book addresses a number of common problems that may get in the way of writing a compelling thesis. It will appeal to both doctoral researchers as well as supervisors guiding doctoral researchers through their writing as well as the writing center practitioners.

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