Paltridge, B. & Starfield, S.


A book that may interest those supervising research postgraduates for whom English is a second (or third) language is *Thesis and dissertation writing in a second language: A handbook for supervisors* (Routledge, 2007). It was written by Professor Brian Paltridge, of the University of Sydney’s Faculty of Education, and Dr Sue Starfield, Director of the Learning Centre at the University of New South Wales and a Visiting Fellow in their Department of Linguistics—each of whom has had considerable experience working with multilingual students writing research in their second or third language.

The first few chapters provide a general overview of some important issues that may need explicit unpacking, such as disciplinary differences. To help students learn to identify typical versus atypical aspects of a thesis in their disciplinary area, for example, it is suggested that supervisors ask their students to use library or online searching to locate three different theses in their area and three outside their area, to examine the table of contents from each, and to analyse the similarities and differences between them.

Other issues discussed in the introductory chapters include distinctions between conserving, critiquing and extending knowledge, ways of increasing one’s cross-cultural sensitivity, and short writing tasks to get students started—such as having them complete these sentences in 25 words: ‘Debate centres on the issue of …’ and ‘There is still work to be done on …’ (p. 48, quoting Murray, 2002, p. 98).

The chapter on research proposals outlines the purpose and key sections that need to be addressed, and the chapter on overall structure draws on Paltridge’s prior research to delineate common organisational patterns at both thesis and chapter level.

The remaining chapters each address a particular section of a thesis—namely, introduction, background, methodology, results, discussions and conclusions, and abstract and acknowledgements. Short extracts from digitally archived PhDs are annotated to illustrate key points from the literature; for example, the chapter on writing introductions shows how an overview section manages to establish a research territory, indicate a gap, extend previous knowledge, and so on (citing Swales & Feak, 1994, and others), while the chapter on methodology lists typical examiner comments on that section, such as the methodology used in a thesis not being sufficiently linked to methodological literature (citing King, 1996).

The final chapter comprises an annotated bibliography of online and in-print resources that can provide additional guidance to supervisors and their students.

Drawing on scholarly literature from applied linguistics (especially English for Academic Purposes) and from research education and development, this book clearly and succinctly outlines key concepts, common pitfalls, and practical activities that may generate helpful supervisor-student discussions about the sorts of issues that students writing research in a second language often find challenging.

With internationalisation, more and more supervisors are likely to be working with second-language writers, so this book will remain a useful resource.

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**Notes**

(These references are cited as they appear in the book.)

