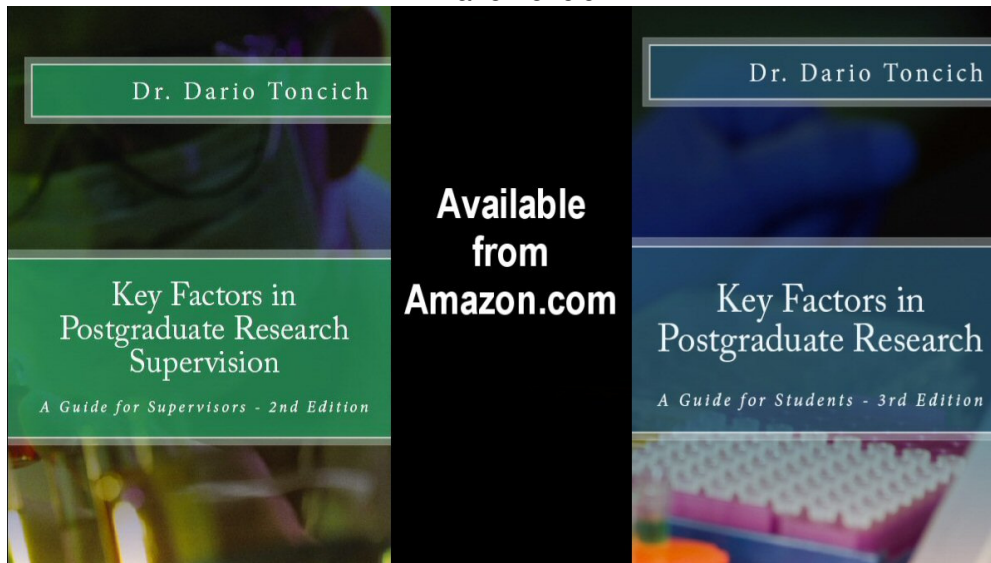


10 Fundamental Thesis Preparation Tips

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Tip Number 1 – Make it Simple

A common error in graduate thesis preparation is that students try to impress an examiner by making the research and writing more complicated than it needs to be. In reality there is no better way to demonstrate mastery of an area of research than by being able to express things in a simple, clear and concise way.

Graduate researchers might assume that an examiner – because he/she is an expert in a given field – is able to come into synchronism with the student's own perspective. This is rarely a valid assumption. It is the role of the thesis writer to bridge the gap between the student's view of the universe and the examiner's view.

The critical starting point is the development of a clearly-worded **central research theme**. The **central research theme** is the key reference point for every element in the thesis – things which are relevant to the theme are included in the thesis – things which are not relevant to the theme are excluded. This includes sentences, ideas, diagrams, flow-charts, software, mathematical/chemical formulae, statistics, reviewed literature and conclusions.

A research student who has difficulty in articulating the central theme of his/her thesis has little prospect of creating a cohesive document with a consistent message throughout. For this reason, considerable effort needs to be put into creating a **central research theme** which is simple, concise, descriptive, but free from mathematical/chemical formulae, acronyms, technical jargon, software code or other distractions. Consider the following example for a thesis:

"The objective of this Doctoral research program was to determine if a relationship existed between A and B."

The central research theme should be able to be clearly understood by a lay-person, and the thesis writer needs to refer to it again and again to ensure that every inclusion/exclusion is assessed against relevance to it.

Importantly, a **central research theme** should not predispose the research to a particular outcome, in the form of a closed hypothesis. For example, the following theme tends to predispose the research to particular outcomes and suggests that the research is deemed to have failed if the criteria are not met:

"The objective of this Doctoral research program was to establish a relationship between A and B."