

## **Business and Management Research: How to Complete Your Research Project Successfully**

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What is the positioning of this book? Who is it for? The positioning of this book in its author's words is: "While there is no shortage of textbooks and monographs dealing with all aspects of research...experience in preparing students for project research work has highlighted that few offer a comprehensive overview of the issues and options facing the student embarking on [a major research project] for the first time." Thus, the book is designed for self-study by students who are embarking on a research project. It is not limited to traditional research theses, such as Honours, MPhil/MSc, or PhD, but also covers coursework degree research projects such as MBA projects. However, it is not intended as a textbook for a conventional undergraduate or postgraduate Market Research course.

In terms of research students (as in Honours, Masters, and PhD theses), one of Michael Baker's strong qualifications for this topic is that he has supervised over 50 doctoral candidates to successful completion (!). Additionally, he has been an examiner for many doctoral theses, a journal editor, a head of department, etc. (there is not enough space here to go through his long CV of achievements!). Baker is also a frequent visitor to Australasia as a visiting professor. He not only researches marketing, but also practices marketing as an author/editor of over 30 books, each with its own target audience, such as this one.

The content of the book serves to introduce students to how to do a research project, with an annotated set of Recommendations for Further Reading for pursuing specific topics in more depth. The book's coverage is indicated in its 15 chapters:

1. The Role of Research Projects in Business and Management Studies
2. Philosophical Issues and the Conduct of Research
3. Writing a Research Proposal

4. Writing a Literature Review
5. Using the Internet to Find Information
6. Selecting a Research Methodology
7. Qualitative Research Methods
8. Sampling
9. Questionnaire Design
10. Data Collection – Interviewing
11. Questionnaire Completion
12. Conducting Primary Research Online
13. Data Interpretation
14. Writing Up and Getting Published
15. Making a Presentation

It does not set out to take away from the specific requirements of your institution: "the Golden Rule must be to *get a copy of the [local] requirements and regulations.*"

As Baker notes, there are many books on research methods, so what is distinctive about this book? What I think is particularly distinctive for research students are Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 14. These are not common in research methods textbooks. The other, research methods type chapters are somewhat distinctive also in that they are targeted more to scholarly research projects as opposed to managerial applied research (what Baker calls "Academic Discipline Research" as opposed to "Professional Discipline Research"). For example, the qualitative research methods chapter spends three pages discussing Grounded Theory, which would be unusual for a market research textbook. This is useful for the research project student.

Many of our research students in Australasia are surprisingly unprepared for undertaking a major research

thesis. We argue in the article “Doctoral Coursework is Needed in Australasia” (Alpert and Kamins, 2004) that doctoral coursework with seminars that involve reading and critiquing scholarly articles (possibly with a practice research proposal as a major paper) would help doctoral students internalise as “tacit knowledge” the nature and structure of a scholarly research project. Furthermore, a doctoral level research methods course would assist with understanding the nature and range of research methods. Research students at all levels not benefiting from both such coursework would welcome Baker’s book as an introduction and summary of these points.

Let’s look more closely at a few of the chapters, to get a feel for the book. Chapter 3 Writing a Research Proposal starts off defining “What is a ‘research project’?” in order to know what must go into a research proposal, and then lists seven basic steps in the process of developing the proposal: Formative thinking, Developing a pool of topics, Reflection and screening, First draft proposal, Find a supervisor, Agree the proposal, and Implement. It then goes through these steps, providing advice. For example, for First draft of the proposal a seven part structure for the proposal is suggested: Title, Outline, Overview, Objectives, Research Methods, Research Plan, Bibliography. Advice follows on each part. For Find a supervisor, the classic Phillips and Pugh (1994) statement of what supervisors expect from their students, and of what students expect from their supervisor, is provided.

Chapter 4 Writing a Literature Review starts with the purposes of a literature review. (Which, by the way, is not simply to summarise a thousand articles, which bores the heck out of examiners.) The purpose is to “distinguish what has been done from what needs to be done” on your topic, and to obtain a better answer by building on the best of what is already known. Next is Citation, why and how to do it. Then Getting Started on the literature review, selecting sources, taking notes, and organising your material. Writing Up involves clearly addressing: *description* of what is known; *investigation* or analysis of this work; and *explanation* of what you believe this means. Baker recommends Hart’s (1996) book *Doing a Literature Review* as essential reading.

Chapter 14 Writing Up and Getting Published starts with advice on Getting Started on writing a research project report. “The message is clear – start writing at the earliest opportunity.” It then goes step by step through Outline Structure and Content. The book presents the 5 chapter structure: Introduction, The literature review,

Research methodology, Data analysis and findings, Conclusions and recommendations. Baker provides advice and details on each of the 5 chapters. Here may I point out that in our region it was recognised that many research students would find useful some guidelines for when they were beginning to think about how to structure their thesis, so two guidelines were proposed in a 1998 issue of the *Australasian Marketing Journal*. The article by Perry (1998) proposed a structure similar to the one in this book, except the second chapter is labelled “Research Issues” instead of “Literature Review”. The article states “...literature review is not an end in itself, but is a means to the end of identifying the worthy research issues” and identifying and building on relevant prior knowledge. Uncles (1998) proposed that rather than the thesis reading as a “murder mystery”, where the findings and conclusions are not revealed until towards the closing stages, it should read as research report presenting the main findings at an early stage (Chapter 2 Summary Findings) and then presenting the full details and justification.

Chapter 14 continues with Baker presenting a “Checklist for Evaluating Dissertations.” This, from the University of Otago, presents a useful set of 28 analytical questions the student can use to evaluate how good the work is in its present form, e.g., “Was the problem clearly stated and defined?”. Assuming the content has now been successfully outlined, Baker has suggestions for Fleshing Out the Outline, such as of course be clear but also don’t be afraid to be unconventional if it communicates the point more strongly. Writing for a Purpose includes being aware of the audience, which means examiners but also journal reviewers (see next). He provides some (qualified) encouragement by noting “It is important to remember that, in general, examiners wish candidates to succeed.” Some tips on Getting Published are presented, including describing the “Action Learning Set Review” whereby your colleagues help with feedback before the paper is submitted for publication. Finally, Baker explains what is Peer Reviewing and gives tips for success. Similar sentiments to those expressed by Polonsky et al. (1998) are presented here.

I especially liked the annotations on the recommended readings at the end of each chapter, which give the reader an expert’s evaluation of those sources.

What would be nice to be added for a second edition of Baker’s book? In my view, perhaps a bit whimsically, it would be great to see a FAQ for research students. Who better to provide answers than someone as experienced

as Baker? The FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions, a section commonly seen on websites) might cover questions like: “How do I know when my topic is the right size, not too big and not too small?”, “If I feel strongly about making a research choice different from that recommended by my supervisor, what should I do?”, and “How many research questions/hypotheses should I have?”

In sum, the book provides a good beginning for research students at the very start of their program, especially for coursework program students undertaking their first and perhaps only research project.

### **References**

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