Book review: THESIS WRITING - The T,H,E,S,I,S Approach

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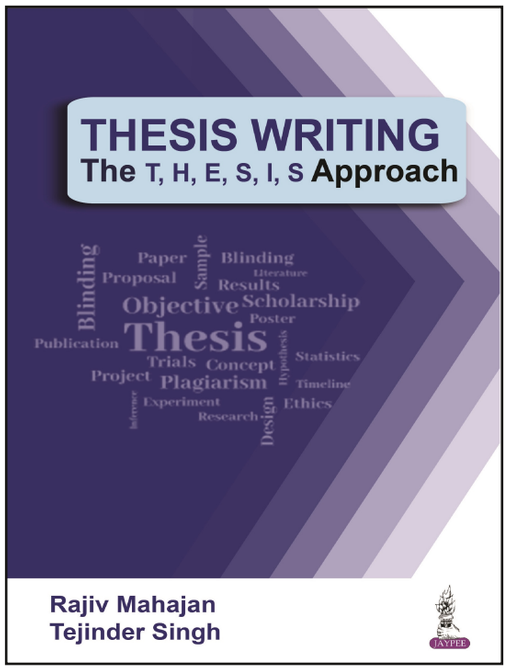
Received: 10-MAY-2022 Accepted: 14-MAY-2022 Published: 24-MAY-2022



THESIS WRITING
The T,H,E,S,I,S Approach
Editors: Rajiv Mahajan, Tejinder Singh
Publisher: Jaypee Brothers Medical Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

1 January 2022
Paperback price: INR 755/-
Pages: 368
ISBN-10: 9354651313
ISBN-13: 978-9354651311

Acquiring a spirit of inquiry and gaining basic skills in research methodology and in dissertation/thesis writing are some of the objectives of postgraduate medical courses. Most postgraduate students are inducted into “Dissertation” and “Research” during their first year of residency, having very little idea about the what, the why, and the how of research, unless (not very frequently seen) they have participated in research as medical students.

The book, *THESIS WRITING*, addresses the complexities of conducting a thesis. Its strength is that it focuses on the “How“ of research, rather than being a mere compilation of complex definitions and information. It is written in a unique style -

Cite this article as: Desai C. Book review: THESIS WRITING - The T,H,E,S,I,S Approach. RHiME. 2022;9:24-6.

T,H,E,S,I,S - with each segment being a narrative of set induction from Tickling, and Hologram, to an in-depth exposition through Expansion, Scenarios, and Improvisation, and ending with a Summary.

This handy workbook is authored by an eclectic mix of health professional educators from various disciplines, each a well-known expert in their respective fields. The authors appear to have insight into the challenges that students frequently face while planning and executing a thesis, and their chapters discuss the issues in a lucid and insightful manner. This treatment of complex topics, I find, will help students navigate the process of research with ease, without being overwhelmed with information.

The editors, who have several academic scholarships to their credit, have done a commendable job of harmonizing the topics. Although the book is a multi-author one, each author has maintained the unique style of “T, H, E, S, I, S“ and the individual chapters blend well without compromising on continuity. The reader can seamlessly and effortlessly move from one chapter to another. One can almost feel as if a mentor is guiding one through the thesis planning, execution and writing.

The authors make a generous use of tables and flowcharts (Illustrations) that makes complex content easier to comprehend. Tips and checklists well delineated in boxes provide a quick guide and self-check to students for their own work. References at the end of each chapter are provided to guide the inquisitive reader to explore the concepts and information further.

Research is not a mere collection of data; it is a much wider and a longer process. The process is logically described in a series of topics ranging from basics concepts to types of research designs, applied biostatistics, and critical components of a research project. The book goes on to suggest how to manage timelines and document and disseminate the research in the form of posters and publications.

The scenarios included in each chapter, and a generous number of contextual examples, make understanding of the concepts easier and they address the analytical skills of the reader.

Content rules and mandates as applied to the postgraduate curriculum in India have been included. These will guide the postgraduate student, and the teacher as well. Common mistakes observed around study designs and reporting guidelines are quite handy. The vital components of a thesis are discussed vividly in well delineated chapters from Aims and Objectives to Methods, Results and Inference. The chapter “research designs” delineates types of research questions with simplicity and clarity. The examples and case scenarios are contextual”. For example, the chapter “Types of research” includes examples of potential research on COVID-19, which readers will be able to relate to.

It is often observed that students fail to seek approval or waiver from Institutional Review Boards or Institutional Ethics Committees prior to executing their research. These days it is mandated by universities, therefore, the chapter dedicated to the importance and process of approvals from Institutional Ethics Committee/Institutional Review Board as required for biomedical research is bound to be useful. The chapter underlines the importance of this important step in the process of research, and helps appreciate the fact that this step is not a mere mandate, but important for safety of the study subjects. The chapter also addresses the practice of plagiarism, and how to detect and avoid it.

Literature search, a vital first step but one that is often neglected and taken for

granted as “known to all”, is dealt with in depth, including not only “How to search” but also how to analyze the collected literature for quality and suitability of scientific content.

Students often have to handle revisions when their thesis is peer reviewed, or when the thesis is returned for revision after evaluation. The chapter, “Handling revisions”, is particularly insightful as it describes the issues that may arise as well as literary errors that may occur while writing a thesis. The reader is also guided on how to handle the revisions and communicate them to the examiner. Tips to prevent rejection and revisions of thesis are provided as a quick guide.

Biostatistics is an integral component in research. Sample size estimation and basic biostatistics with tests of significance are provided and appear to be adequate for purpose without being overwhelming. For postgraduate students keen to learn how to use SPSS, a separate chapter is dedicated to this statistics software.

A logical and constructive culmination of a body of research is its dissemination as a poster or a publication (or both). More often than not, postgraduate students manage to complete the data collection and other requisites well; however, when it comes to writing up their findings for publication, they experience a “writer’s block”. The need for and the ways in which to disseminate research findings is well explained in the book. The inclusion of Tips and Must Dos will be helpful in preparing a poster that is impressive, representative, and meaningful. The book has a useful chapter - Publication of Paper - that details how to go about selecting a suitable journal, and the logistics of submission and review.

I thoroughly recommend this book, written meaningfully by health professional educators, as an excellent, handy and holistic guide for postgraduate students and also for any beginning researcher who wishes to conduct research and publish it.