



Dissertation and PhD Proposal

Learning Development Service

26th of November 2015

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LDS Workshop Series

- Week 2 – 8th October 2015 **Independent Study & Time Management**
- Week 3 – 15th October 2015 **Literature Search**
- Week 4 – 22nd October 2015 **Essay Writing**
- Week 5 – 29th October 2015 **Referencing**
- Week 6 – 5th November 2015 **Critical Reading and Writing**
- Week 7 – 12th November 2015 **Presentation Skills**
- Week 8 – 19th November 2015 **Literature Review**
- **Week 9 – 26th November 2015 Dissertation and PhD Proposal**
- Week 10 – 3rd December 2015 **Study Skills & Exam Preparation**

Who is here for a...



Overview of this Session

1. Preparing/Planning your Proposal
 - Supervision
 - Topic
 - PhD Proposal
2. Preparing to Write your Proposal
 - Structure
 - Writing Style
3. Checklist & Quick Tips

Preparing and Planning your Proposal

1. Supervision

Choosing a Supervisor

- **Find/be assigned** to a supervisor
- Ask yourself these **questions**:
 - Do they have the **necessary expertise** in the area that will be the focus of your research i.e., theoretically, methodologically etc.?
 - Will their personal views be too **overpowering**?
 - Is their personality **compatible** with your own?
 - Will this supervisor be **available** to supervisor me when need guidance i.e., on leave, busy with own projects etc.?
- You **can change** supervisor
 - If your supervisor is difficult to work with, not providing appropriate feedback or not making themselves available to you, you can ask to change to someone else.



2. Topic Selection

The Tough First Step

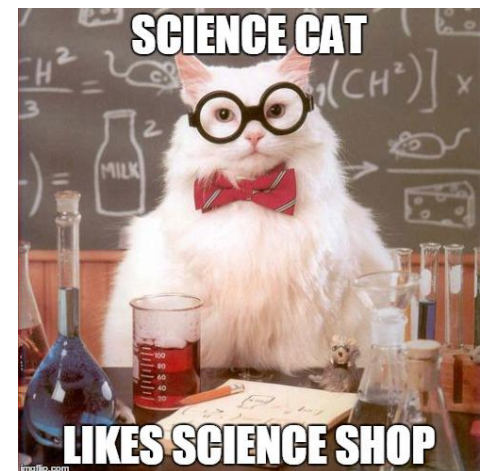
- You need to identify a **research question**
- To help you do this ask yourself:
 - What **interests** you?
 - What are your **skills**?
 - What is the speciality of the **department**?
 - What are your **future career goals**?
 - What research area, method etc. is currently **very popular**?
 - Which research area, method is **underdeveloped** or needs more investigation?

What can support this process

- **Talk to other students/friends:** Bounce ideas
- **Look at other writing:** Skim through the titles of research papers in your field
- Look through the **dissertations of previous students** in your department
- **Think about your own interests:** Which topic have you found most interesting or which topics have **not been covered** in the syllabus, but would fit with the theory or methodology you have been working with?
- **Be extra critical:** Is there something in your course so far that you have been sceptical about, or which you think needs further study?

Science Shop

- *“Carry out qualitative research with young people to examine their **experiences of crime** and whether/how they are likely to use services such as Victim Support.”* (Victim Support)
- *“**Translate and provide subtitles for Mickey B** into other languages for example Irish, Italian, Spanish, Arabic or Chinese.”* (Educational Shakespeare Company)
- *“Carry out an evaluation of a **workplace smoking cessation** service from the point of view of employers in terms of cost benefits.”* (Cancer Focus NI)



2.1. Identifying a Gap

Be Original. Find a Gap.

- Value of a study lies in its **contribution to knowledge**
- Should strive to show clearly how the previous research is **conflicting or lacking** in some way
- This lack is called a “**gap**” – your research contributes to “fill” the gap
- Gap should flow naturally and clearly from your understanding of the **literature**



The Gap. The Rationale.

- Ask yourself:
 - **Why** is the gap you've identified important?
 - **How** important is the gap you've identified?
 - Why is it **worth** to investigate this particular gap?
 - What is the **benefit** from studying that gap respectively research area further?
- You will need to make a persuasive argument for the importance of this issue as it provides the **rational for your research**

Five Types of Gaps

- **Knowledge-based**: Most common, occurs when we don't know (enough) about a phenomenon
- **Relationship-based**: occurs when we know about certain issues or variables well, but are unsure about their relationship
- **Theory-based**: occurs when a theory or an aspect of a theory has not been investigated thoroughly, or not been tested in a particular way
- **Methodological**: occurs when a research design or methodology has not been applied to a particular phenomenon
- **Analytical**: occurs when a phenomenon has not been investigated using a particular analytical approach i.e., qualitative vs. quantitative

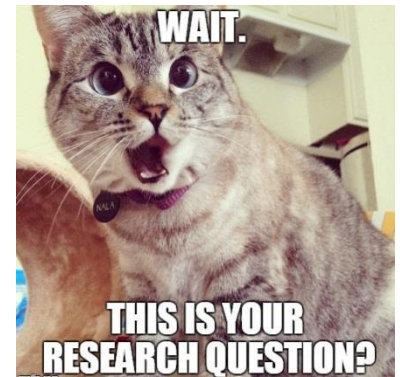
2.2. Generating Research Question and Hypotheses

Refining your Topic

- Whenever you've identified a **certain research area** you should ask yourself these questions:
 - Is there a **gap**?
 - Is the topic I am keen to investigate **manageable**?
 - What is the **rationale/value** of the research I am thinking of?
 - Can it be achieved in the **time frame**?
 - Do I have the **necessary research skills** (quantitative, qualitative methods) to conduct it?
 - What does my **supervisor** think?

Research Question: Examples

- **Definition:** What characterises X?
- **Classification:** What class does X belong to? Should X be a characteristic of Y?
- **Compare and Contrast:** Does X account for differences in Y?
- **Cause and Effect:** Does X help to shorten the length of Y?
- **Relationship:** Is there a relationship between X and Y?
- **Time:** How does X change over time?
- **Stability:** How stable is X across multiple factors?



Research Hypotheses

- Should you prefer to pose research hypotheses rather than research questions, you'll need to rewrite your question as **statement**.
 - E.g.,: Higher level of X will lead to lower levels of Y.
- You should establish your research question and hypotheses from the **literature**
- “Think first, analyse second.” – Read first and then generate your research question
- This enables you to have a reasonable understanding to come up with the **gap**, the **rational**, the **question**, the **hypotheses** and the **variables** you going to analyse

2.3. Deciding on a Research Approach

What data answers your research question?

- **Quantitative Methods:** Numbers, percentages, statistical measurements...
- **Qualitative Methods:** Reveals perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, experiences...
- **Mixed Methods:** Can combine the two
- **Purely Literature-Based:** Documents, legislation...



Data Collection vs. Data Analysis

- Data **Collection** Methods: Ways of **gathering** data
 - **Quantitative**: surveys, experiments etc.
 - **Qualitative**: interviews, case studies etc.
- Data **Analysis** Methods: Ways of **analysing** data
 - Have a look at a **subject-specific methodology** book for the whole research design procedure
 - Talk to your **supervisor** i.e., what is his/her expertise
- **Re-define** your research question again!

Ethical Considerations

- **Department Approval Process:**
 - Plan in time for **writing, submitting** and in certain cases re-submitting ethics application
- **Be aware of some of these issues:**
 - Who are your **participants** i.e., vulnerable adults, young people etc.
 - How will participants be **chosen** and invited to participate?
 - Do you think you have **access** to that specific group you want to investigate e.g., politicians?

3. PhD Proposal

Factors to consider for a PhD Proposal

- **University:** Location, research focus, impact...
- **Supervision:** Research focus, experience, willingness...
- **Topic:** Suitable, current, relevant...
- **Funding:** Available?
- **Evidence of Competence in English:** Requirements?
- **Letter of Recommendation:** Amount, background, institutional diversity...



Writing a Proposal

1. Structure

A good proposal will...

- Provide some **background information** on the area that you are interested in
- **Explain the rationale** behind why you want to focus on a particular aspect of this topic
- Identify the overall **aim(s)** of your research
- Specify the individual **objectives** required to help you achieve your overall research aim(s)

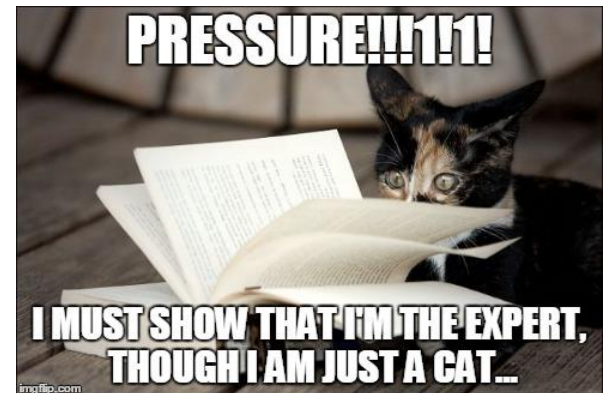
...and it will further...

- Outline how you will carry out your research (your **research methods**)
- Provide an estimate of **how long** you think you will take to complete the various parts of your dissertation
- List the **literature** that you have referred to in the course of your proposal



Background Information

- Historical, political, cultural or scholarly **context**
- **Definitions** of key words, concepts, topics etc.
- **Theoretical Foundations**
- **Related** studies, experiments or findings
- **Current** practice or issues
- **Various arguments and viewpoints** surrounding the issue



Rationale



Research Aim

- **Step 1:** Think up **one word** to identify your research area of interest
- **Step 2:** Think of **other words** to give a clearer idea of your research focus
- **Step 3:** **Connect these words** to form a sentence/sentences
- **Step 4:** Incorporate the phrase “overall aim” or “aim” to produce your **formal research aim**

Research Aim: Example

- **Step 1 Research Area:** e-Learning
- **Step 2 Other aspect(s):** Universities, academics, challenging
- **Step 3 Research Focus:** To investigate how academic staff are being prepared to cope with the challenge of e-Learning in the university environment
- **Step 4 Research Aim:** The overall research aim is to advance an understanding of the impact of e-Learning in the university environment in relation to academic staff training preparation

Research Objective

Objective = What do you need to do to **realise** your research aim?

1. **Identify the forces** driving e-Learning and the **barriers** to successful delivery of e-Learning programmes.
2. **Evaluate** critically models and frameworks relevant to supporting academic staff in coping with e-Learning.
3. Explore staff **stakeholder views** and **practices** related to e-Learning preparation, including drivers and barriers to e-Learning.
4. Formulate **recommendations** on staff preparation issues

Structuring a Proposal

1. **Introduction**: Give an introductory account of the subject you have chosen – what does your **reader need to know**?
2. **Literature Review**: Demonstrate knowledge of **work completed** on this subject in the past as well as of (the most) **recent or ongoing research** projects, conferences, articles, critical/theoretical trends
3. **Present Study**: Explain how your study **builds upon this research**
4. **Method**: Outline the **methods** and/or resources that you will need to utilise
5. **Timetable**: Proposed timetable of **completion dates**
6. **Bibliography**: Provide a bibliography of **core (essential) texts**

Timescale

- Proposal may include an estimate of **how long** each stage of your research should last
- Write down the **distinct phases** of research and writing up
- Can write down “**micro-goals**”
- Writing a timescale will help you with **time management**



Writing a Proposal: Timescale

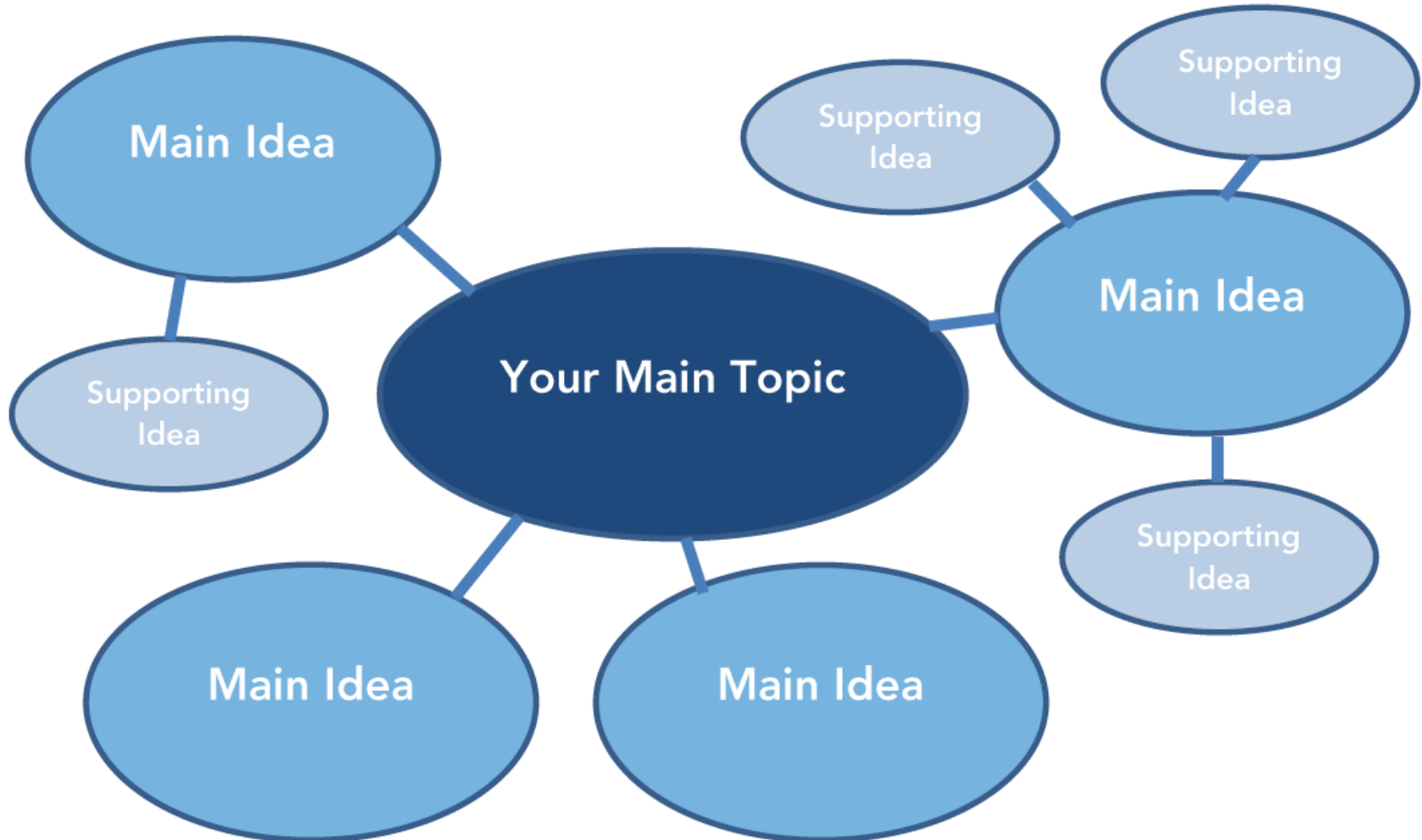
Order of writing (word count)	Duration	Deadline
Proposal		April
Chapter 1 (3,500)	3 weeks	June
Chapter 2 (3,500)	3 weeks	July
Chapter 3 (3,500)	3 weeks	August (end)
Conclusion (2,000)	5 days	1 st Sept
Introduction (2,000)	1 week	1 st Sept
Bibliography	2 days	1 st Sept
Insert title, contents, appendixes, figures, page numbers	2-3 days	1 st Sept
Binding	2 days	15 th Sept

2. Writing Style

Writing Style: Considerations

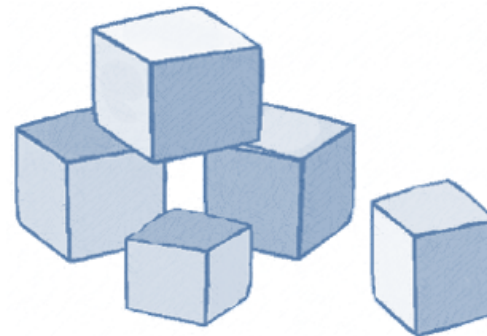
- **Academic:** Neutral, specific, objective, impersonal, generic, formal, no contractions i.e., is not / isn't,
- **Non-Discriminatory:** Think before you write
- **Non-Sexist:** Gender-neutral language
- **Coherent:** Flow, link, signpost, clearly and concisely
- **Cited:** Reference and paraphrase
- **Structured:** A good structure sells your argument
- **Tip!** Read papers in your research area and adopt their writing style!

This is an example of a mind map you can use as a reference when creating your own.



Paragraphing

Paragraphs give your writing structure: each paragraph should cover one idea or aspect of an idea so that every new paragraph marks a pause in the writing and signals a progression in your argument. Well-defined paragraphs that focus on a particular idea improve the flow of your essay and make the central argument clear for the reader.



Like the essay itself, paragraphs have an **internal structure** of an introduction, main body and conclusion. Paragraphs often include:

- An opening topic sentence to express your main point. It may be useful to use 'connecting words' (such as: however, furthermore) or signposting sentences (another point to consider is...); see pp. our 'Connecting Your Writing' and 'Signposting' help-sheets.
- Supporting sentences to develop and support the main point, give back up points, give examples, provide relevant quotations, comment on the evidence, show the implications, outline opposing theories etc.
- A concluding sentence to show the significance of the point made, indicating how it answers the question and possibly linking these ideas to the next paragraph.

Checklist & Quick Tips

Checklist

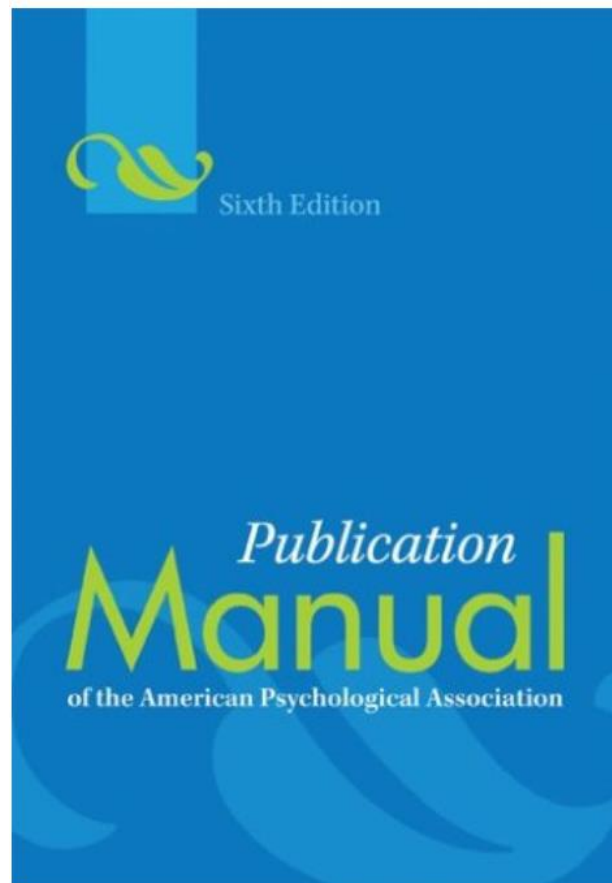
- Is there a **gap** which makes your research relevant?
- Do you have a **research question**?
- Do you have **research aims and objectives**?
- Do you propose **data collection & analysis** methods?
- Is your **proposal structure coherent** and follows logically?
- Did you follow the **style guidelines** of your department or the university you apply for?
- Is your proposal **proofread** and **edited**?

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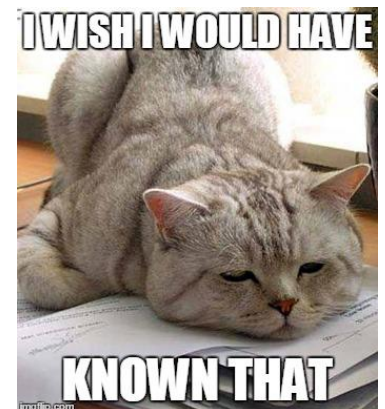
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Writing Style “Bible”



Personal Recommendation

- You need to know the **field** and the **main authors**
- **Contact** the supervisor / department before you propose a topic
- **Familiarise** yourself with the research of your supervisor
- The proposal is a proposal – your research will most likely **change**
- For a PhD: Spend time to write a strong **Cover Letter** where you explain yourself



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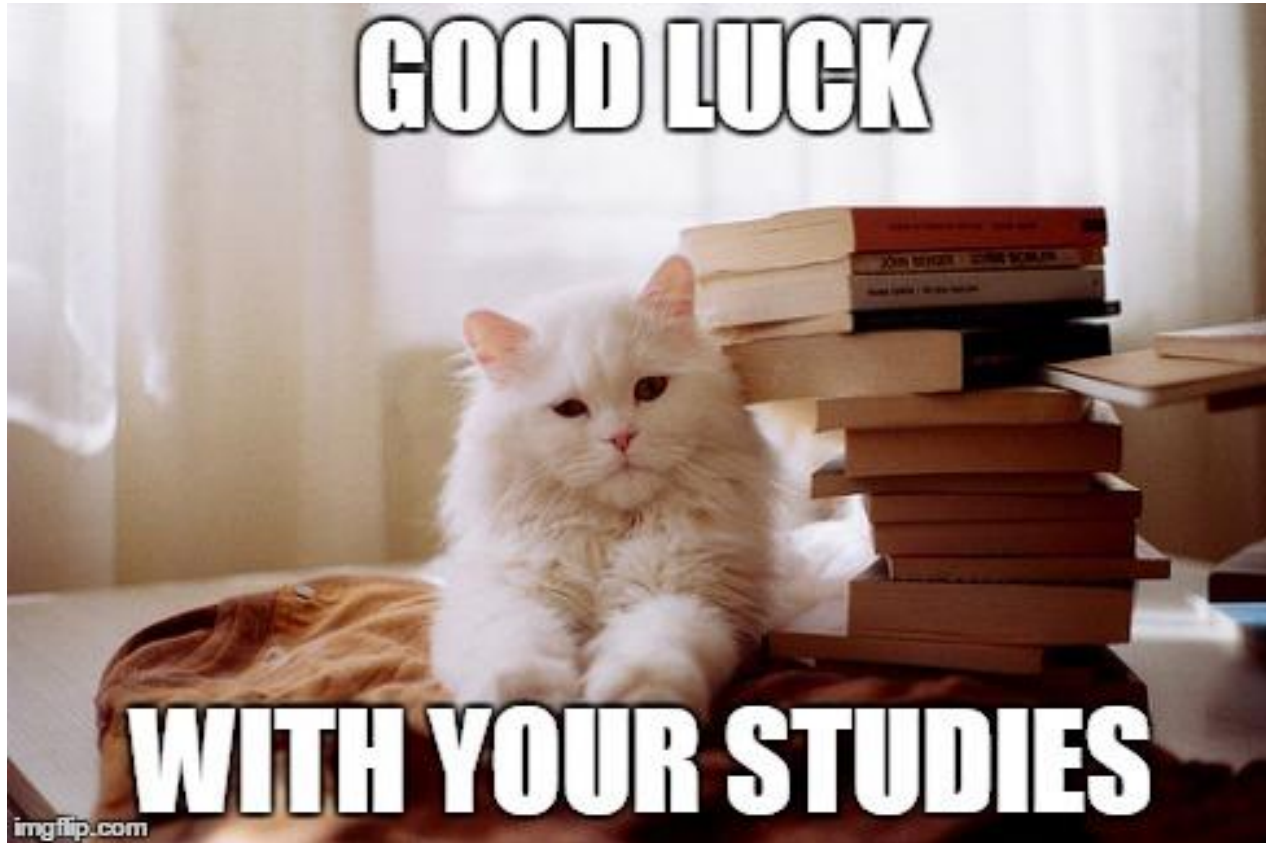


Questions?

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We can help you develop your academic skills.

Workshops / Resources

Contact us:

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www.qub.ac.uk/lds

References

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