Guideline for dissertation writing

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I have been working as a supervisor for more than half a decade. I have strongly felt that the students do not have a clear idea about different processes and issues relating to writing dissertation. While guidelines for thesis have been drafted by many departments of sociology/anthropology, I feel that each supervisor has unique set of procedures and expectations regarding the dissertation writing. In this brief document, I will be describing some issues in three broad areas: Think before you start, stages of dissertation writing and relationship with supervisor.

A. Think Before you start

1. Dissertation is perfect opportunity for you to apply the theoretical knowledge you gained during 2 years of course work study for your Masters. You need to start to see dissertation as an opportunity to learn rather than just a "burden" to get over with to get your Certificate.

2. There has been increasing case of copied thesis in Tribhuvan University. You may argue that why should I work harder if I can buy it, let me tell you what I think about this. Dissertation is knowledge. Knowledge is not a product. It can neither be bought nor sold. It can only be earned, learned through hard work and dedication. So, you need to be prepared for this.

3. Remember, Rome was not built in a day. Dissertation does not complete overnight. Every day counts. Every hour counts. But just reading and writing is not enough. You need time for reflection, you need to think, you need to analyze, you need to make the fullest use of your brain and sometimes even heart if your subject concerns around sensitive issues. When you start the journey of writing dissertation, make a plan for everyday. Think what you are going to study, write and reflect about every day. Do not panic, as long as you work every day, even fewest hours when times get busy, let me assure you: the day will come when you will be able to submit that hard bound completed theses in the department with a proud smile in your face.
4. Beware of Plagiarism. What do you call a person who enters into somebody's house and takes away a valuable object without any permission? Of course, he/she is a thief. When you reproduce somebody else’s idea, copy other people's perspective without due acknowledgement, one becomes a thief too. This kind of academic theft is called plagiarism which is the worst crime that anyone engaged in academia could commit. You need to have very clear idea about reference and citation before you start dissertation. There are lots of resources available in the internet that will help you to understand how to avoid plagiarism. You can also discuss with your supervisor if you are confused. So, think BEFORE doing "copy" and "paste" straight from the internet when you read the article. I suggest you to print it, if not at least download it, read it and then only write about it with required citation and reference.

5. Do not spend all your time in your laptop, searching electronic articles. This is a growing problem among students who are writing thesis in English. All valuable resources are not online, yes, some of them are. Visit University libraries, visit NGO/INGO libraries, visit book stores.

6. READ, READ, READ. Reading is important. Many students just write, but do not read much. You need to read a lot before you can form an opinion on the subject matter you are researching about. Let the reading inform your writing.

7. Supervisor is there do support you and guide you. But they do not write the thesis for you. It is you who has to do the work. Look at it this way, you are the one to walk the road and reach the destination. Supervisor helps you to decide which road to take, how faster you ought to walk, what kind of sights you need to see on the way.

8. Take full ownership of your work. Seeking help from friends and relatives for proof reading and designing is okay but you cannot ask them to write the thesis for you.

9. Do not use "excuses" for not working hard. Try your best. Make the fullest use of your capacity. Supervisors hate excuses that go on like this:
   - I could not do well because I have a job
   - I could not do well because I got married
   - I could not do well because I had baby
   - I could not do well because of family crisis
Everybody has problems. Trying to write dissertation along with these challenges is hard. But do not turn them into "excuses" for submission of bad work. Try giving more time to work, meet your supervisor few weeks late, but you have to fulfill all criteria's required for submission.

10. Do not request viva-voce examination before your dissertation is in final stage of submission as approved by your supervisor. Do not use these excuses either:

- I need to do viva-voce early because I got visa to America/Australia/UK.....
- I need to do viva-voce early because I am getting married/having baby
- I need to do viva-voce early because I need to apply for a job

You need to plan to complete thesis early, if you have these above stated plans/situations. But do not use these situations as a "privilege" to grant you early viva-voce examination.

11. Communicate about your expectation of NUMBER for dissertation to your supervisors early. Your supervisors will try his/her best to guide you in suitable manner in such a way that you DESERVE to get that marks. But remember, it depends on you not on the supervisor. You need to earn your NUMBER; your dissertation should have required level of quality in order to meet your expectation of number. It is impossible to get your desired number simply based on your explanation that "I will get first division, if I get 90". Plan ahead and work harder in such a way that you deserve to get 90.

**B. Steps of dissertation writing**

It is hard to say exactly how long it will take you to write a dissertation. It depends on your subject matter, your working style and the amount of time you devote for fieldwork and writing. Even if you work full time on your thesis, it would at least couple of weeks to finalize your proposal and research tools. The time of fieldwork varies but it would take at least couple of weeks to complete it. Analyzing data would take another few weeks. Writing several drafts of thesis would take few more weeks. In order to help you to understand different stages, I want to share how different tasks within the dissertation can be organized.
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<th>Activity</th>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; month</th>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; month</th>
<th>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; month</th>
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**Note: the timeline depends on each student but this one is made on assumption that student is working full time on dissertation.**

Here is a brief overview of plan for meeting supervisors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Meeting with supervisor</th>
<th>What you submit</th>
<th>Nature of feedback/support from supervisor</th>
<th>Preparation for next meeting</th>
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</table>
| 1\textsuperscript{st}             | Fully developed proposal including literature review and methodology | • Reviewing Proposal  
• Giving ideas for literature review (theoretical and empirical) | Develop at least 10 page literature review with necessary reference and citation |
| 2\textsuperscript{nd}             | Complete literature review | • Feedback on literature review  
• Discussion to modify research questions, objectives and methodology | • Modified research proposal  
• Modified Literature review |
| 3\textsuperscript{rd}             | • Modified research proposal  
• Modified literature review | • Further feedback on proposal and literature review  
• Discussion on objective and research methodology and field work site and process  
• Ideas about developing research tools | • Development of research tools (questionnaire, interview-schedule, checklist for observation)  
• Modified research methodology with informed decisions about fieldwork site, sampling method, fieldwork process and rapport building |
| 4\textsuperscript{th}             | Research tools | • Feedback on research tools  
• Further discussion on fieldwork site and process | • Modified Research tools |
### Guideline for dissertation writing

#### C. Relationship with supervisor

| 5th | Modified research tools | • Feedback on research tools | • Field testing of research tools  
|     |                          |  
| 6th | Modified research tools | Feedback on finalization of research tools | Develop final version of research tools  
| 7th | Final version of research tools | Further feedback on research tools and discussion on fieldwork process | Starting of fieldwork (it is not necessary for you to meet supervisor during field work, but in case of confusion you can call him/her or write to her with prior permission)  
| 8th | Showing the data analysis and discussion of fieldwork process | • Feedback on missing data  
| 9th | First draft | • Comments on first draft  
| 10th | Second draft | • Comments on second draft  
| 11th | Third draft | • Comments on third draft  
| 12th | Fourth draft | • Comments on fourth draft  
| 13th | Final draft | Approval for viva-voce examination  
| 14th | Draft for submission incorporating comments from external supervisor | Approval for final submission if all comments from external supervisor is met | CONGRATULATIONS  

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C. Relationship with supervisor

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Supervisor is the most important person to support you in process of writing your dissertation. In Nepal, there is very little discussion about right etiquette on maintaining good relationship with supervisors. Here are some discussions for you to understand some basic dos and don’ts.

1. Supervisor is not your enemy. Try to see his/her role as a supporter who always thinks how to make your dissertation better. Try to learn to see his/her comments and feedback as a way to make your knowledge on research better.

2. You and your supervisor should have clear understanding about the nature and source of communication for arranging meetings. Though, email is easiest way to seek appointment with supervisors, it may not always be convenient for both of you. In case of my students, I prefer them to send me text messages via mobile phone requesting the appointment. Then, I get back to them about suitable time and date for meeting. Supervisors may not always pick up their mobile phone as they may be busy in meetings, classrooms and seminars. Also try to avoid lengthy conversations over the mobile phone. It is better to talk about necessary issues during face to face meetings.

3. Do not call your supervisors during weekends, after office hours and public holidays. They have family commitments and social commitments beyond university. Do not expect them to meet you during weekends, after office hours, public holidays and university holidays.

4. Only in case of emergency, supervisors can provide long distance support. So, do not expect supervisors to provide feedback and comment in your work via email or facebook. It is important that you meet your supervisor face to face and regularly. If something is preventing you from meeting, it is better to inform your supervisor about your progress either via email or text messages. Do not disappear for six months and expect your supervisor to remember everything about your dissertation.

5. Do not ever be late for the appointment with your supervisors. Supervisors also need to be careful to communicate to students if they are running late. But remember that supervisor may not always be able to wait up for you if you are late for appointments.

6. Always have pain and notebook ready during the meeting with your supervisor. What your supervisor tells you during meeting is important to note down. It is
disrespectful if you forget the feedback and repeat the same mistake over and over again.

7. Always ask, if you do not understand something that your supervisor is telling you. It is better to ask question rather than pretend to understand. It will help you to avoid making the same mistake that your supervisor was telling you about.

8. Before you request for a new meeting, try to make sure about these things. Ask for appointment only if you can answer YES to all these questions.
   a. Have you incorporated all suggestions and comments provided by your supervisor?
   b. Have you made the list of things you need to discuss with your supervisor during the meeting?
   c. Have you completed the task that your supervisor had assigned to you during last meeting?

9. If you need recommendation letter from your supervisor, inform him or her as early as you can. Do not request in pressure of deadline which will be hard for supervisors to provide you recommendation on a short notice.

10. Do not hesitate to keep in touch with your supervisors. They care about your progress and future. Write an occasional email or two and let them know how you are doing. They will be happy to hear from you.