

Conceptual frameworks in Masters and Doctoral writing

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Terms

“Conceptual framework” is a catch-all term for:

Theoretical framework

Model

Theory

Theorist

Framework

Typologies/Classification schemes, Etc

- ☼ It's the perspective that frames your study.
- ☼ It's what connects your study to larger ideas beyond the particulars of the study.
- ☼ It's the system of assumptions, beliefs, theories and concepts that supports and informs your research.

Metaphors for the conceptual framework

Blueprint

Framework

Foundation

Guide

Bridge

Map

Compass

Ecosystem

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What is a conceptual frameworks in a thesis?

- The framework that shapes your entire project
- The assumptions that underpin your perspective
- Provides the rationale for the core concepts and the analysis of relationships between them
- Guides and directs the study
- Helps make sense of the study

What do theories/conceptual frameworks do?

Theories/conceptual frameworks are formulated to:

- *explain
 - *predict
 - *understand phenomena
 - *perhaps challenge
 - *but always to extend existing knowledge
- *They help us to understand our data

Difficult to describe generically

- ⦿ Conceptual frameworks need to be explained within disciplinary settings and with examples
- ⦿ You will need to ask your supervisor, other faculty, other students in your field.
- ⦿ Read finished dissertations to see how the conceptual framework was developed.
- ⦿ Analyse the published papers you are reading to identify conceptual frameworks.

Tacit theories vs conceptual frameworks

Tacit theories

Beliefs that we develop from our cultural, social, religious upbringing.

Tied to what we value about life, people, our environment.

These are our personal beliefs.

Formal theories

Representation of reality whose purpose is to describe, explain, and predict phenomena of interest.

Drawn from others.

Sometimes these tacit theories and formal theories align and sometimes they don't which can cause contradictions in a thesis.

Example

Tacit theories

I believe that some people are born writers. Others are not born with this talent so writing is always hard for them. I wasn't born creative and can't write

or

I believe that one can learn to write well, we just need to pay attention to writing and work at it. Over time, I can be an excellent writer.

Formal theories

Writing research shows that there are beliefs about **fixed** writing traits and **malleable** writing traits. Students who believe writing traits are fixed have lower self-efficacy in writing tasks. There is a link between writing beliefs and writing performance (Limpo & Alves, 2017).

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