

AUDITING AND DEFENDING YOUR THESIS

Knowing that you have produced a 'good' thesis is more than being happy with 'how it looks'. You have to be confident that your thesis contains all the features and characteristics that examiners, and others, expect to see in its text. Since a doctoral thesis is the result of engaging in serious research it is essential that readers recognize how this is displayed.

Producing a doctoral thesis is a prelude to you defending it at your viva. The confidence that you will have when you submit your thesis will be reassuring during your viva as you discuss it with your examiners. No doubt you have 'checked' your thesis many times as text was drafted, chapters were constructed and it was proof read (again) before submission. However, the process of auditing and defending your doctoral thesis can be combined to provide a one-page practical summary of your thesis ~ irrespective of its length, topic or complexity.

The accompanying model portrays the interdependence of generic features in doctoral research. These linkages need to be explicit in order to explain how and why your research is coherent. Readers of serious research note how it has been '*put together*'. Helping examiners to appreciate the '*putting together*' avoids misunderstanding the why or how of your research. Thus, examiners will enjoy reading your thesis and you will respond to their questions with justified confidence.

The model can be used in two ways: it offers a framework for you to audit the textual coherence of your thesis, and it provides a single-page summary of your entire thesis for use in your viva.

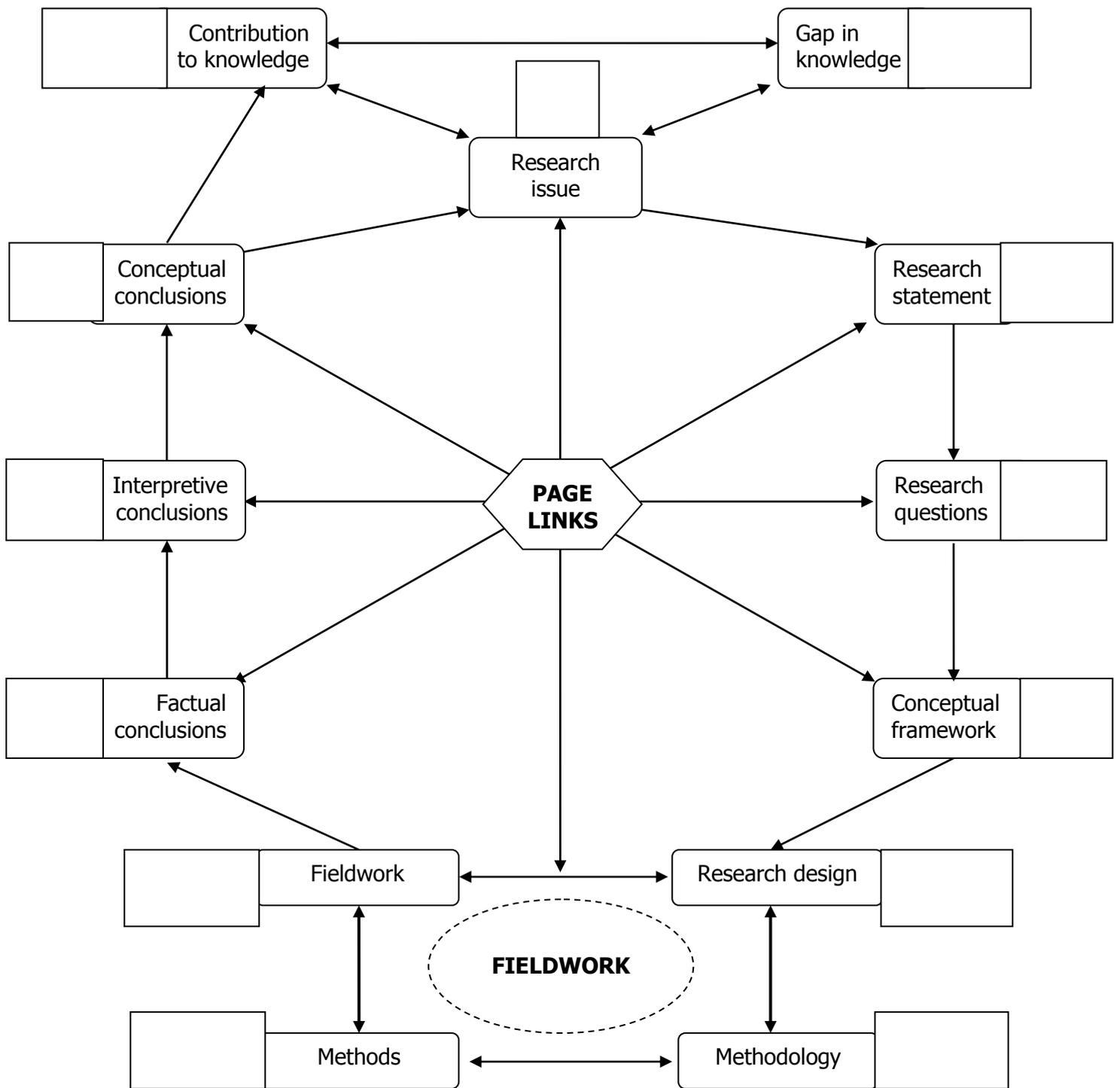
Firstly, check how the links between the essential research components are explained explicitly in your thesis. The significance of lines that join two components of the research process require textual explanation. Auditing in this way ensures that your explanation and justification of the research process is coherent in your text. As you read through the thesis, check that you have provided an explanation that is explicit and adequate. Correct the text if this is not provided.

Secondly, use the model to create an 'aide memoire' for use in your viva. This task involves you reading your thesis ~ again ~ to provide a single-page map showing where significant research-based arguments appear in your text. Adjacent to each named component is a blank box. In each box insert the chapter numbers where each (adjacent) component is explained. Some boxes will contain more chapter numbers than others. Next, onto lines connecting two components, insert the significant page number(s) that explain the component's role in the research process. Use the line's length to locate page numbers and so to distinguish between appearing in respective chapters. This page is for your use and not for your examiners or anyone else. If you use multiple colours it may look untidy but this does not matter because you will understand what it conveys!!

Having this page beside your thesis throughout your viva will help you by:

- being confident that you know your way around your thesis and the arguments it contains;
- knowing exactly where generic and significant research components appear in your thesis;
- quickly locating the page(s) from which questions are posed before responding;
- checking the context of questions and knowing the pages where related issues appear;
- referring examiners to more appropriate pages on which you have dealt with the question;
- locating and reading related text in preparation for a reply ~ without disclosing the page;
- suggesting a page or pages for examiners to peruse and then waiting while that happens;
- identifying and providing a cluster of pages to assist examiners in appreciating;
- knowing that you can identify and justify the research quality in the text of your thesis.

This single page is easily useable by you and visibly more reassuring for examiners to see being used than noting a pile of unread notes.



This model appears as Chapter 10: The Magic Circle: Putting it all together, in Trafford, V.N. and Leshem, S. 2008: 156-179. Stepping stones to achieving your doctorate. Maidenhead: McGraw Hill, Open University Press.

**It would be nice to know how you used this model ~
vntrafford@gmail.com. Thanks, Vernon**