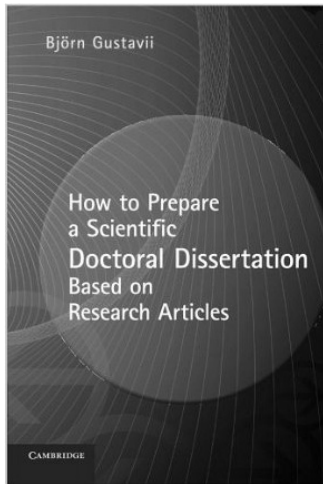


Book reviews

How to Prepare a Scientific Doctoral Dissertation Based on Research Articles by Björn Gustavii. Cambridge University Press 2012. 101 pages, 14.99 GBP, ISBN 978-1-107-66904-8 (Paperback)



This book is based on the author's survey of a couple of thousand dissertations written in article-based format. Such compilation theses are becoming increasingly common, especially in the physical and biological sciences, and will eventually replace the traditional monograph altogether. Two types of compilation works are discussed: the so-called Scandinavian model – an overall summary followed

by research papers bound together in a single volume – and the more commonly used sandwich format, in which articles appear as chapters between the general introduction and the general discussion. The sandwich model has the advantage that the chapters are standardised to fit the thesis, which makes the compilation look like a book.

This book deals with diverse aspects of the thesis manuscript that are often dealt with at the very last moment, viz., the front cover illustration, the composition of the title, the build-up of the abstract, and the risky use of quotations of famous people. Other chapters in this guide deal with abbreviations, credits, the list of publications, the contributors, the popularised summary (the summary of the thesis for the non-specialist), acknowledgments, the general introduction, the general discussion, and the reprint permissions and copyrights.

The author puts strong emphasis on the function of graphics in scientific communication, ie, not only on the graphical quality of diagrams, but also on the role of appropriate pictures and images in places such as title page and divider pages at the beginning of a chapter or as part of the thesis book. The book itself is a vivid example of this principle: the 85 pages of text are adorned with 40 graphical illustrations, and good as well as bad examples of graphs are given.

One of the most important chapters in the book is about the contributors, ie the co-authors that contributed to each individual chapter. Many a PhD student discovers too late that a multi-authored compilation work should also offer a summary of exactly what the author of the thesis has contributed in terms of research and analysis, but also in terms of the writing of each chapter.

This book is intended in the first place for the PhD candidate because it shows how to prepare a thesis in such a format – although much of the advice on writing a thesis can be directly applied to the writing of the individual research papers that are included in the compilation. This guide should also be within reach of every supervisor, and certainly be available in every academic library. In particular Appendix A, written for the authorities at those universities contemplating introducing article-based theses, is a useful summary dealing with the number and quality of papers required, the review status of the papers and the question of authorship.

Christiaan Sterken
University of Brussels
csterken@vub.ac.be

Eloquent Science: A Practical Guide to Becoming a Better Writer, Speaker, & Atmospheric Scientist, by David M. Schultz, AMS Books, 2009. C.£30.00. ISBN 978-1878220912 (Paperback)

Eloquent Science is a fairly hefty book for a very niche market. Originating from a short course, the stated aim of the book is to “provide a practical guide to becoming a better writer, speaker and atmospheric scientist”. I am not sure that anyone will become a better atmospheric scientist from reading the book, but it does mean that all advice about writing and speaking is tailored for this particular market. The book provides chapters on how to write articles, how to select effective words and phrases, and how to prepare good figures and tables. It also considers authorship, ethics and guidance for writing in English as a second language. With regard to presentations it provides (in 7 chapters) general guides to constructing and delivering oral presentations. The content is comprehensive and helpful, and the coverage good. The consideration of authorship, for example, is well-balanced, although the author does ignore the “credit

rating” that goes with being first or corresponding author in several countries and explains the increasing requests for joint-first-authorship. The author's words are interspersed with “ask the expert” columns providing advice from specialists, and these provide a welcome change from the main text. To supplement this detailed book there is also a website (www.eloquentscience.com) which provides a blog feed, commentary and additional resources for any authors in this and other scientific areas. In summary, this is a useful book, but very much aimed at a particular market – which will be great for them, but not so good for the rest of us.

Pippa Smart
Research Communication and Publishing Consultant
PSP Consulting
pippa.smart@gmail.com