

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT FOR DOCTORAL RESEARCHERS AT READING

A guide for doctoral researchers and their supervisors

Undertaking a doctorate is a challenge for everyone, and even more so if you are not writing in your first language. As an international/EU doctoral researcher at Reading, you can access a range of English language support services and resources during the course of your doctorate at no extra cost. The Graduate School, in conjunction with the University's International Study and Language Institute (ISLI), has a range of courses designed to help doctoral researchers maintain, improve and develop their academic English. This guide outlines what support is available from the Graduate School and ISLI and how you can access it.

The International Study and Language Institute (ISLI)

ISLI is located on the second floor of the Edith Morely (formerly HumSS) building and provides a range of language courses, programmes and resources including pre-sessional tuition, the chance to learn a foreign language and academic English language support to all Reading students via the Academic English Programme (AEP).

The AEP is free to all international and EU fee-paying students from all departments and at any stage of study. The AEP offers an extensive range of courses including critical writing, speaking, listening, pronunciation, academic grammar and vocabulary, and Social English. For detailed information about the AEP, please visit: <https://www.reading.ac.uk/ISLI/enhancing-studies/isli-aep.aspx>. The AEP is administered by ISLI and any enquiries should be sent to: aep@reading.ac.uk.

Thesis writing support for doctoral researchers

ISLI has put together a range of thesis writing courses exclusively for doctoral researchers, available via the Graduate School. These thesis writing courses will not focus on areas such as pronunciation and listening - if you need support with aspects of English other than thesis writing (such as listening, speaking or pronunciation) you should contact the Academic English Programme directly.

As a doctoral researcher, you are responsible for the progression of your research and for your development as a professional researcher. Your supervisor can advise and guide you through your studies and it is important you discuss what areas and skills you need to acquire or improve in order to successfully complete your doctorate. This includes any support you need with academic English. In order to complete your doctorate successfully, it is important to address any language challenges as soon as possible and access the tuition and resources that are available. It is likely that your supervisor and/or School Director for PGR Studies have supervised international doctoral researchers before and appreciate the challenges of undertaking a doctorate in another language.

The Learning Needs Analysis – which all doctoral researchers should undertake at the outset of their studies with the input of their supervisors – includes a section on English language skills and development. The template is available via the Graduate School website:

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/graduateschool/training-and-development/gs-reading-researcher-development-programme.aspx>

The next section of this guide outlines the thesis writing courses available to international/EU doctoral researchers. If you have any questions about these, please email Dr Joanna John who is the Graduate School contact for English language support: j.john@reading.ac.uk

RRDP stand-alone sessions

As part of the Graduate School's Reading Researcher Development Programme (RRDP) a number of stand-alone sessions are available. Each session will focus on a particular area of academic English used in writing a thesis. Doctoral researchers can request a place on any of these sessions via the Graduate School's booking pages on the RISIS web portal. Sessions will be delivered in the Graduate School by ISLI staff. These sessions are available to international/EU doctoral researchers from all years and subject disciplines. Each session lasts for two hours and there will be approximately 25 places available in each session. These particular sessions are lecture-style, with no opportunity to get feedback on your own work. If you want to cover similar topics and also have the chance to discuss your own work, then you may want to attend one of the longer programmes outlined below. For RRDP dates and booking see www.reading.ac.uk/graduateschool/training-and-development/gs-reading-researcher-development-programme.aspx.

Language for voice, stance and critical evaluation

In doctoral level research writing, you are expected to develop a strong authorial voice, make your stance clear (i.e. your position in academic debates and attitude towards the work of other scholars) and demonstrate high levels of 'criticality'. This workshop will examine what doing these things means in practice and how language helps you to do them. How the language of voice, stance and criticality may differ between academic disciplines will also be explored.

Language for the Literature Review

Integral to a doctoral thesis is the review and discussion of the work of other scholars and theorists in your field. This workshop will examine the language used to report, contrast, synthesise and comment on ideas and arguments from relevant literature. The workshop will also explore potential linguistic differences in how literature is written about across academic disciplines.

Language for describing methods and reporting results

This session will examine the language used to effectively communicate and justify your methodological approach, and to accurately describe research processes and data. It will be useful to international doctoral researchers in the Sciences and Social Sciences.

Language for discussion

In your doctoral thesis, the discussion of findings and results is a key point at which your ability to critically analyse, interpret and evaluate is showcased. This session will focus on the language used for these functions as well as the language used for showing how your work relates to previous research and contributes to ongoing academic debates within your field. This session will be useful to all international doctoral researchers, particularly those in the Sciences and Social Sciences (N.B. those in the Arts and Humanities will also find aspects of the session useful).

Language for introductions and conclusions

The Introduction of your thesis contextualises and justifies your research focus, and the Conclusion highlights the contribution you have made to your field by undertaking it. This session will examine the language and organisational patterns needed to effectively achieve the purposes of these two sections.

Longer thesis writing programmes

The Graduate School and ISLI also now run three different six-week programmes that offer more intensive support than the stand-alone sessions mentioned above. These are not part of the RRDP although attendance will count towards your RRDP record as long as you attend all sessions in a programme. Programmes can only count as one RRDP in any single academic year no matter how many thesis writing programmes are taken.

For dates see www.reading.ac.uk/graduateschool/training-and-development/gs-thesiswriting.aspx. Places can be requested via the RISIS web portal in the same way that you request places on RRDP courses. Look out for courses starting 'ISLI-' in the listings.

Programme 1: Writing Language Practice and Development

This six-week course will help you to improve your writing ability by giving you tools to assess the clarity and effectiveness of the texts that you write. Students will be encouraged to share short extracts from their 'real writing' with the class. We will analyse these texts with the aim of promoting discussion and furthering understanding of key grammatical and lexical (vocabulary) features of good academic written communication in English.

Through studying key features of good academic writing and sharing and practising your writing in the classroom, you will learn how to write with more clarity, precision and effectiveness and to achieve a clear academic 'voice', always keeping your reader in mind.

Your learning will focus on the following topics:

- Identifying links between your purpose for writing and your choice of text organisation;
- Understanding how your audience influences the language choices you make when you write;
- Projecting your own voice into your writing;
- Acknowledging the contribution of other scholars in your field within your writing;
- Evaluating text flow at sentence and paragraph level;
- Deepening your understanding of the vocabulary and grammar choices that you make when you write;
- Understanding how to edit your writing.

This course is recommended for students who wish to take a practical workshop approach to improving their academic writing at doctoral level.

Programme 2 - Doctoral Thesis Writing: Structure and Language

This programme is aimed at doctoral researchers with an IELTS writing sub-score of 6.5 or above and will be useful to both students who haven't previously studied in an English language context as well as students who have completed an undergraduate or master's degree in English.

The course will look at all key components of a doctoral thesis with focus on the purpose, organisational structure and key language needed for each section.

The six weeks of the course will include the following:

- Writing your Introduction: language and organisational patterns for establishing the relevance of your research focus, identifying your research niche, and outlining the purpose and structure of your thesis.

- Writing your Literature Review: language for reporting, comparing/contrasting and synthesising the ideas of other scholars, and establishing your own stance within an ongoing academic debate.
- Writing about methods: language for explaining and justifying methodological choices and describing research tools and processes.
- Writing about results: language for describing and analysing research findings.
- Discussion in your thesis: language for interpreting and evaluating results, and language for engaging with the wider scholarly debates related to your research project.
- Writing your conclusion: language for identifying key research outcomes, and talking about implications, limitations, and potential future research (N.B. writing the Abstract will also be covered in this lesson).

Programme 3 - Editing your Thesis with Corpora

This programme is aimed at doctoral researchers who have passed their Confirmation of Registration up to those preparing to submit their thesis. Numbers are limited and priority will be given to final year doctoral researchers.

This course is intended to help you edit your written work, particularly your thesis and/or research articles. Ideally you will have passed your confirmation, but the course is also suitable for students who are at or near the confirmation stage. It is essential that you have at least one substantial draft chapter or research article that you would like to work on.

If you want to improve your editing skills, then this is a suitable course for you. You will build a corpus, which is a collection of texts that can be accessed electronically, and use it to examine the language of your field. Your corpus will consist of research articles in your own subject and you will learn how to use software to help you discover how expert writers express themselves. You will also make a corpus of your own writing and compare it to the research article corpus to see how your writing differs from published work. Throughout, the focus will be on identifying potential grammar and vocabulary problems in your own writing and using the corpus data to improve your work.

The course will cover the following topics:

- Identifying grammar and vocabulary problems in your writing
- Building a corpus of research articles in your field
- Using concordance software (AntConc) to help correct problems
- Building a corpus of your own writing
- Learning how to use individual software tools (e.g. Word lists, Collocations, Clusters) for editing purposes
- Comparing your writing to expert writing
- Using corpus data to answer grammar and vocabulary queries

Students are expected to devote time each week to building their corpora and editing their work.