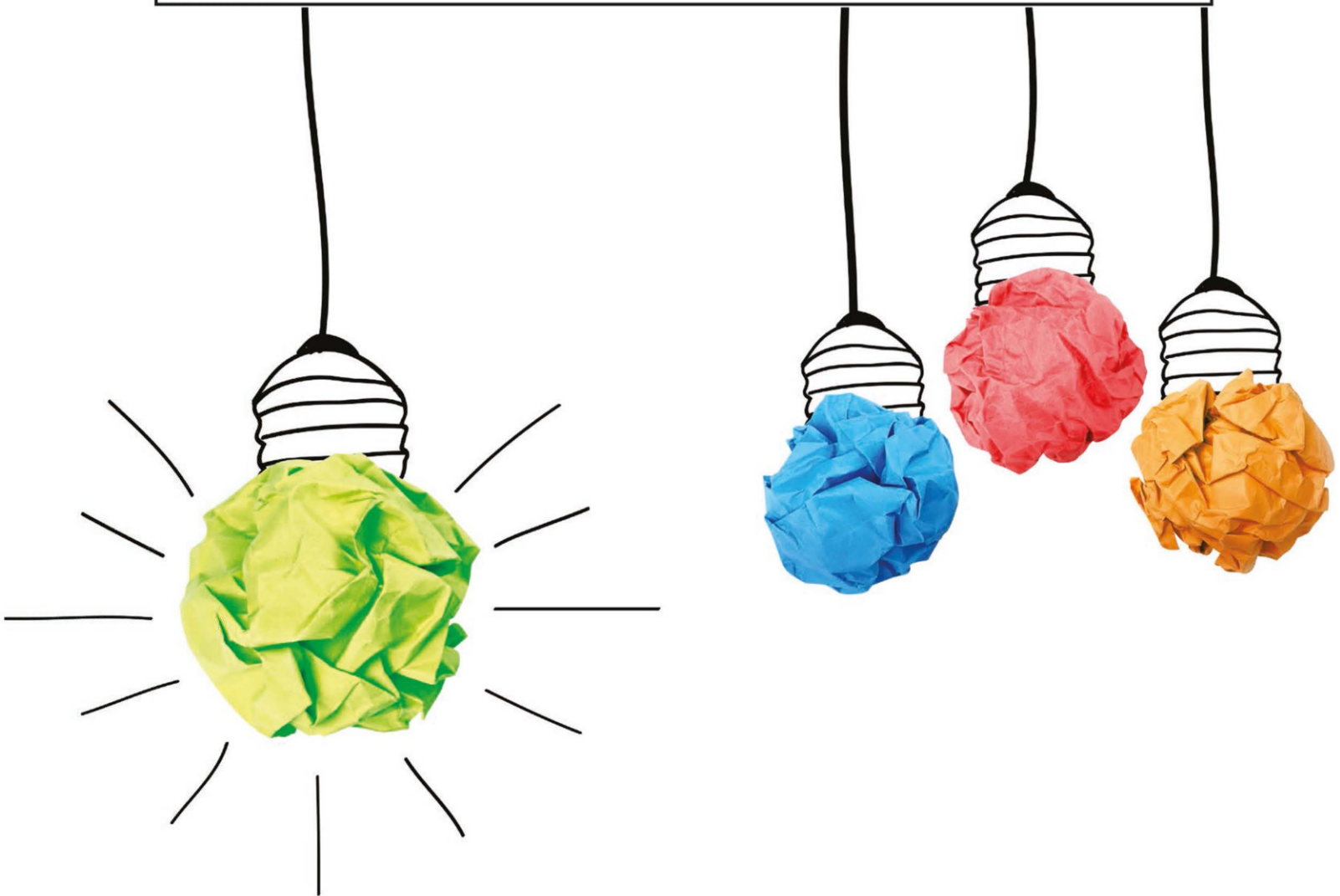


Writing a Graduate Thesis or Dissertation

Lorrie Blair



Writing a Graduate Thesis or Dissertation

TEACHING WRITING

Volume 4

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The *Teaching Writing* series publishes concise instructional writing guides. Series books each focus on a different subject area, discipline or type of writing. The books are intended to be used in undergraduate and graduate courses across the disciplines and can also be read by individual researchers or students engaged in thesis work.

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Writing a Graduate Thesis or Dissertation

Lorrie Blair

Concordia University, Canada



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PRAISE FOR *WRITING A GRADUATE THESIS OR DISSERTATION*

“Like a series of productive meetings with a trusted advisor, each chapter of this text provides practical information and sound insight, thoughtfully organized and generously shared. A uniquely inclusive consideration of the process of graduate research, this is the companion that graduate students crave. Attentive to the academic issues and personal trials that often accompany thesis writing in the arts, humanities, and sciences, Lorrie Blair offers a guide that is comprehensive and clear, sensitive to the distinctions among fields, and sympathetic to the various ways that the process can confuse and confound scholars in the making.”

– **Christine Marmé Thompson, Professor of Art Education, School of Visual Arts, Pennsylvania State University**

“Dr. Lorrie Blair provides a much-needed book for students pursuing a graduate degree. *Writing a Graduate Thesis or Dissertation* is a comprehensive guide to the stages of working through the rigors of writing and defending a graduate degree from the initial stages of choosing a thesis topic and supervisor, right through to the defense of the work. Each chapter can be consulted separately, or the whole book read to give a wide-ranging understanding of the issues most pertinent to writing and defending a thesis. This book provides something for everyone involved in that process.

Both graduate students and their supervisors will find this a refreshing and thorough collection that addresses the topic across a wide range of disciplines. I wish this book had been available during my 30 years as a University Professor. With almost 100 graduate students supervised, I know that there are particular topics like plagiarism, how to conduct a literature review and ethical issues that are important for students to really understand as they begin their research and writing. The chapters on research methodology are clear and written to give access to a number of questions that students ask when trying to decide on how to conduct their research and strategies to help make their thesis a reality. This book is a highly readable, informative and welcome addition to academic literature.”

– **Kit Grauer, Professor Emerita, Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, The University of British Columbia**

“Dr. Lorrie Blair’s complex, yet thoughtful and accessible account of the graduate research experience and thesis/dissertation writing process resonated strongly with my recent experience as a Ph.D. student. This book provides a detailed, well-structured, pragmatic guide to navigating the thresholds of graduate work, which reflects the author’s many years as an extremely well respected professor, teacher, mentor and graduate supervisor. More than simply comprehensive, this work

includes information and considerations that are rarely addressed in other guides, including information related to selecting supervisors and alternative forms of research methodologies and format styles. Throughout this book, Blair weaves in a discussion of relevant contemporary challenges and affordances of academic life and professional expectations of graduate students. She discusses potential political land mines to avoid and suggests practical and insightful considerations for all levels of the thesis/dissertation process. In short, this book is a must for graduate students at any stage in their graduate career.”

– **Adrienne Boulton-Funke, Assistant Professor, Art and Design, Missouri State University**

“Dr. Blair’s writing is up-to-date, clear, and practical without being dogmatic. Her thoughtful analyses of a wide range of traditional and alternative processes prepare readers to make their own informed decisions. I highly recommend it for graduate students as well as faculty advisors.”

– **E. Louis Lankford, Des Lee Foundation Endowed Professor in Art Education, University of Missouri-Saint Louis**

“Dr. Blair’s book provides a much needed map for graduate students through the many complexities of a Ph.D. program. The chapters on supervisors are especially helpful for providing perspective on a crucial and sometimes difficult to navigate relationship. In my role providing teaching support for Teaching Assistants, I often talk to graduate students looking for perspective or help negotiating their relationship with their supervisor. I am glad I now have this book to suggest as an additional resource in these conversations.”

– **Shaya Golparian, Educational Developer: TA Development Programs, Centre for Teaching and Learning Development, The University of British Columbia**

“When I received this book, I expected a useful generic handbook that I could refer to my graduate students. However, what I read was so much more!

Dr. Blair has produced a rich and detailed map to orient graduate students to the (oftentimes) mysterious process of successfully navigating a thesis and supervisory relationship. Her work is grounded in current knowledge about the issues dogging graduate students today, the building blocks for producing a quality thesis, and the practices and pitfalls of becoming a scholar.

But this work is also infused by the hallmark of a good supervisor. Her understanding of and caring for graduate students shines through. Her subtle wit balances out her sage advice. And most importantly, she surfaces the tacit, unspoken dimensions of graduate education: supervisors to avoid, the order of authorship, and dealing with problems in the supervisory relationship, to name just a few.

To paraphrase the Wizard of Oz: Pay attention to this woman behind the curtain.”

– **Rosemary C. Reilly, Associate Professor and Graduate Program Director, Applied Human Science, Concordia University**

“Dr. Lorrie Blair’s book is a valuable resource for every graduate student who needs to write a thesis. Filled with practical advice, this book covers the basics including differentiating between the various thesis formats, preparing the proposal, writing the literature review, choosing a methodology, collecting and analyzing data, and defending the thesis. The book also deals with the many interpersonal issues important to graduate students, including finding the right supervisor and dealing with problems that might arise between students and supervisors. The book presents sound advice regarding how to establish an academic track record by presenting research at conferences and publishing journal articles. Finally, the book is an excellent resource on the important issues of academic integrity and research ethics. For graduate students, it’s common to feel overwhelmed when writing a thesis. This short volume, written in accessible language, provides graduate students with the formula for writing a successful thesis by following a series of clearly-defined steps. This will become a ‘must-have’ volume for every graduate student’s book shelf, with advice for every step of the thesis journey.”

– **Anne Lavack, Professor of Marketing, School of Business and Economics, Thompson Rivers University**

“*Writing a Graduate Thesis or Dissertation* provides a needed guide to writing a thesis or dissertation in a highly readable format. The content includes many tacit issues such as considerations for choosing a supervisor, insights into faculty rank and what they may mean for working with a supervisor, different thesis formats, the autonomy involved in writing a thesis vs. writing a class paper, and various potential roadblocks students may encounter. Readers will find this an excellent guide; I plan to incorporate it into my next graduate research course.”

– **Elizabeth Garber, Professor, School of Art, The University of Arizona**

“Approaching the writing of a graduate thesis or dissertation can be a daunting task. Dr. Blair offers clearly articulated direction and nuanced detail that will assist both graduate students and their supervisors. She removes the mystique that surrounds the process, advancing ideas about how to approach decision-making and moving the research and writing forward – the right supervisor, proposal, literature review, methodology, data collection and analysis, along with building academic credentials. Questions are addressed that often graduate students fear to ask about student-supervisor problems. Enjoyment in the process is encouraged in sharp contrast to enduring a heavily straining task. The book is certainly one that I will recommend to my graduate students. Bravo for giving us a well crafted text that graduate students can use for direction and detail in the same way they utilize academic style manuals.”

– **Mary Leigh Morbey, Associate Professor of Culture and Technology, Faculty of Education, York University**

*This book is dedicated to Dr. Terry Barrett, my thesis supervisor,
mentor, role model, and friend*

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