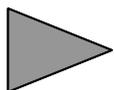


AN AID AND A STIMULUS FOR RESEARCH**Tania MĂGUREANU**

The recently published book *Metodologia cercetării științifice: elaborarea lucrărilor de licență, masterat, doctorat* (“The Methodology of scientific research: writing graduation papers, Master’s dissertations and Ph.D. theses”), 2006, Bucharest, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, by Mihaela Șt. Rădulescu¹, elaborates a series of lectures delivered to undergraduates at the Translation – Interpretation Department of the Technical University of Civil Engineering of Bucharest, embodying the author’s wide pedagogical experience and methodical study in the field. The book fills an important gap in the landscape of Romanian publications devoted to tertiary education, meeting the needs of wide categories of students and young researchers, faced with the challenging requirements imposed by the European academic environment.

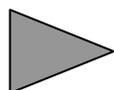
¹ Mihaela Șt. Rădulescu is a reader, Ph.D. at the Technical University of Civil Engineering of Bucharest, where she teaches French for Specific Purposes, French cultural studies, communication and translation techniques, as well as a course devoted to the methodology of research.



Aim of the book

The author's main aim in writing this book has been "to strike a balance between the theoretical and practical dimensions of scientific research" (Rădulescu, 2006: 8), by offering undergraduate and graduate students, along with a thorough theoretical background to scientific knowledge and research, a comprehensive presentation of the multitude of aspects involved in producing a diploma paper, a Master's dissertation, or a doctoral thesis.

The book springs from the author's conviction that this relation between theory and practice should be grounded not only in a deep understanding of the principles of scientific knowledge, but also in mastering the methodology of research, as "the lack of method brings about a considerable waste of time and energy" (idem: 9). It covers, therefore, these two broad areas, in a large-scale map of the subject, which acts as both an aid and a stimulus for research.



Structure of the book

The author has structured the material in five sections, which – in line with the aims of the book – basically fall into two parts. The first part (including Sections I and II), centred around the core issue of scientific knowledge, comprises both an introduction to the methodology of research and the foundation for the latter and more substantial part (Sections III – V), which deals extensively with the research carried out for a diploma paper, Master's dissertation or Ph.D. thesis and the skills and techniques needed in writing and defending them.

In a nutshell, the first part offers the reader a clear presentation of the essential concepts pertaining to the logical and epistemological bases of science and a comprehensive and informative overview of the different methods of research that have evolved over the centuries, comparing and contrasting their respective merits and limitations. In this way, this first part makes the reader aware of the conceptual



bases of scientific knowledge and research, and helps them understand and evaluate their procedures. Each chapter provides a clear and straightforward – but in no way simplistic – description of the area concerned, sustained by examples and explanations given in a language that is not so technical as to prevent comprehension, yet observing all the standards of academic writing.

In the economy of the book, the most significant part is the latter one, which carries the main weight and, in fact, gives the work its special value. The author has conceived this part in three sections (III-V), each covering one major area of producing a piece of academic writing required for the completion of each of the levels of graduate and post-graduate studies.

Section III deals with the research leading to the graduation paper, looking in detail at the different stages of the process, with special attention devoted to the selection of the topic and of the main research problem to be explored. The author highlights the main pre-requisites for a good subject, pointing out that its scope needs to be rigorously defined, “neither too vast nor too narrow”, being determined “in relation to the degree of difficulty of the discipline and with the time allotted for writing the paper” (idem: 67). A very pertinent observation refers to the merits of a paper which has a well-defined, clearly-focused subject, allowing its investigation in greater depth, in contrast to one attempting to tackle too wide a topic, which risks being perceived as superficial or incomplete.

A special chapter in Section III is devoted to the role of the supervisor, with useful criteria and suggestions to the student for choosing and approaching the right supervisor for the paper. The final chapter in this section reviews the general requirements concerning the aims and quality standards of the three types of academic papers, as well as their length and the estimated time which should be allotted to actually writing and completing them.

Section IV comprises a detailed and systematic presentation of a whole range of aspects involved in the writing of the paper: searching and selecting documentary sources; recording the data; drafting a plan and developing the paper; writing the final draft and proofreading the text, always having in mind the specificity of scientific discourse and the various norms and conventions that govern academic writing. The author gives a well-documented account of these widely accepted norms: from structuring the material into the three well-established parts – the



introduction, the main body and the conclusion – with their respective requirements in terms of content and treatment of the subject, to the division of the central part of the paper into chapters and paragraphs; from the use of one or another type of scientific discourse, in relation to the research topic and the approach adopted, to the clarity and accuracy of the language, ensuring, through the proper use of connectors, the logical sequencing of ideas and coherence of the message. Finally, the standards concerning the physical layout of the paper or thesis are described in detail.

Of special value in this section is the chapter dealing with the deontological obligations that devolve upon the writer of any academic paper concerning the sensitive issue of borrowing ideas from other authors. The duty of faithfully and accurately quoting the original text and mentioning the source of any borrowed idea is particularly emphasized. The author addresses systematically all the aspects related to this obligation, covering in detail the requirements – in terms of both substance and form – of quoting and paraphrasing, giving references, writing notes and listing the bibliographical sources. Considering that many students nowadays resort to sources on the Internet, and are often tempted to write mere compilations, “borrowing” at length without any reference to the source-texts used, it might have been useful, at this point, to re-emphasize the fact that it is a matter of intellectual integrity to acknowledge **all** sources of **any** type – whether from the Internet, on CD-ROM, in print, on film, etc. – and that any breach of this obligation is regarded as plagiarism.

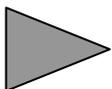
It is worthwhile mentioning that this section also includes a special chapter devoted to the self-evaluation of an academic paper, in which the author reproduces the grids proposed by Mathieu Guidère in his book *Méthodologie de la recherche. Guide du jeune chercheur en Lettres, Langues, Sciences humaines et sociales. Maîtrise, DEA, Master, Doctorat*. (2004, Paris: Éditions Ellipses). The grids comprise lists of evaluation criteria, particularly for a doctoral thesis, in point of **form** (aspects of formal arrangement and physical layout), **method** (issues concerning organisation, coherence, clarity of plan and objectives), **content** (referring to treatment of the subject, development and originality of ideas, theoretical basis and richness of data), as well as **global evaluation** (significant aspects pertaining to the scientific/ cultural/ social / practical value of the paper). Although, in my opinion, Guidère’s grids could be further improved, to consistently separate qualities that are expected of a research paper from



shortcomings or even violations of academic standards (such as plagiarism), they are certainly a very useful tool for any writer who wishes to meet all the requirements and quality standards of such a piece of work.

The final part of the book (Section V) deals with the last stage in getting an academic degree: defending the research paper before an informed and discerning audience. The author emphasizes the difficulties of converting the written text into a successful oral presentation, highlighting one important difference between the two types of discourse: the former focuses on facts, whereas the latter is centred on the speaker-audience interaction. The various aspects involved in preparing the presentation are discussed: building up a deep, as well as extensive, knowledge of the subject, writing brief support notes, designed to be expanded orally, rehearsing and carefully budgeting the available time, so as to avoid the traps either of finishing the presentation much sooner than needed and giving the impression of superficial preparation, or of rambling on and on, unable to select the essentials and give a synthetic overview of the paper.

The section looks in detail at the actual oral delivery before an academic audience, with emphasis on how to structure the content into a number of key steps and the weight each of these should be given in the economy of the presentation. Essential requirements concerning this type of oral discourse are also highlighted, from conciseness, precision and clarity of expression to the use of a professional and scientific language, which should be neither too technical or sophisticated, nor simplistic or commonplace, adapted to the audience's specialist knowledge and expectations. Last but not least, the author deals in a final chapter with the role of non-verbal communication in defending the paper, emphasizing the importance of paralinguistic elements (such as voice and intonation) and of body language (posture, eye contact, gestures, etc.) in enhancing the effectiveness of the presentation.



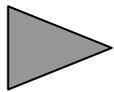
Message

The book voices the author's belief that an insight into both the theoretical and the practical dimensions of research can contribute to "turning the vast activity of writing academic papers and dissertations by undergraduates and young



researchers into an inexhaustible source of social wealth” (idem: 9), as mastering the methodology of scientific inquiry is a pre-requisite of the progress of scientific knowledge.

Readers are encouraged in their attempt to undertake scientific research and embark upon the challenging task of writing an academic paper, a process which can appear daunting to the novice, but can be facilitated by an awareness of the various aspects involved. Such awareness can play a part in the creation of truly scientific pieces of work and add to the formative value – both professionally and intellectually – of this essential stage in completing one’s academic training at undergraduate or post-graduate level, enabling students “to realise the importance of making contributions to their profession, to humanity, and to themselves” (Ștefanovici, 2001:35).

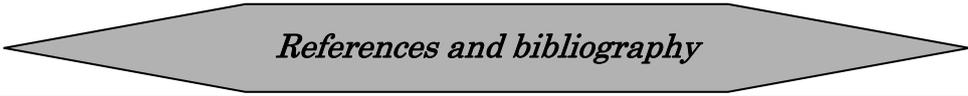


Final remarks

To conclude, the book we are examining goes far beyond being a simple practical guide to the technicalities of producing a diploma paper, dissertation or thesis, as it combines a thorough theoretical grounding with a well-documented and detailed presentation of the methodology of research. One of its major strengths is its multifarious, as well as systematic, input of information, with each section designed as a stepping stone towards attaining the overall structure, thus enhancing its pedagogical effectiveness.

Written in a reader-friendly manner, the book is in itself a model of academic writing, which I believe can serve as a very instructive and helpful instrument for undergraduates, acting as foundation for future learning, and making a contribution to the shaping up of future professionals. Furthermore, it is no less valuable as a reference book for researchers or academics engaged in research, whose writings and various contributions to scientific journals and conferences should meet all the standards of an academic piece of work.



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