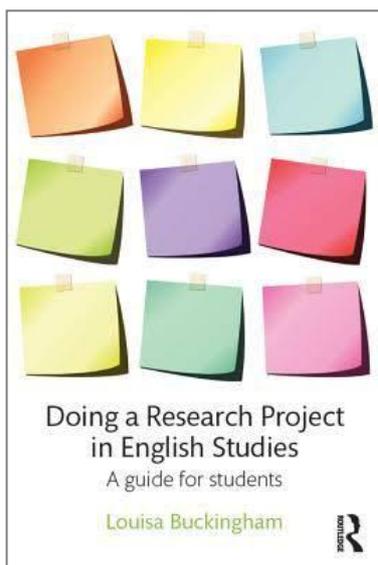


BOOK REVIEW



GUIDING STUDENTS THROUGH A RESEARCH PROJECT IN ENGLISH STUDIES

Louisa Buckingham. DOING A RESEARCH PROJECT IN ENGLISH STUDIES: A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS (2016), London and New York: Routledge. 204 pp., ISBN 9781138846937 (PB), ISBN 9781138846913 (HB).

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While there are numerous guides for students on how to write a research project, *Doing a Research Project in English Studies* by Louisa Buckingham will surely find its place as a must-have guide for English studies students, especially in non-native English speaking contexts, who are new to the process of conducting research and who lack academic writing skills. Although the book is primarily intended for student self-study, it is also greatly useful to teachers as it covers themes from choosing the topic to defending the thesis thus enabling them to lead the students through all the stages of the process of undertaking a research project and writing up a research report, i.e. their undergraduate or Master's theses. The book consists of 204 pages and in its nine chapters it addresses five main themes: "1 getting started (arriving at a topic, interacting with a supervisor); 2 finding bibliographic resources; 3 collecting data; 4 developing academic writing skills; 5 preparing for the oral defence" (p. i) therefore covering both the information on research process and academic literacy.

The book opens with the *Introduction* (pp. 1–4) which explains how the book is organized and how to navigate through it, i.e. how to make use of its full potential. Apart from emphasizing the benefits of doing a research project not only for students' academic but professional life as well, the author also provides the list of nineteen activities integral to any research project (such as choosing a topic, contacting the

supervisor, collecting data, drafting and revising one's work, etc.) for the sake of helping students "visualize the process" (p. 3).

The second chapter, *The preliminaries: getting started* (pp. 5–14), offers the guidelines on how to arrive at a topic related to one's specific academic interests and how to narrow it down. In order to select a topic, the readers are advised to contemplate issues that intrigued them during their school years and university studies and to take into account their professional experience, if any, the world around them (the media, the Internet, social contacts, etc.), and the university library. Concerning the issue of narrowing the topic, it is explained that topics should, for example, be limited to "a particular group of people, level and location or context" (p. 7) for linguistics or education majors, or to "a particular theme, period, author or work" (p. 7) for students of literature. Students of translation studies are suggested that they could, for instance, look into "how students in a particular year of study translate certain linguistic features into the target language" (p. 8). This chapter also touches upon drafting a research project proposal and project organization.

The following chapter, *Working with your supervisor* (pp. 15–28), focuses on the work with one's supervisor particularly drawing attention to establishing appropriate and productive student-supervisor (e-mail) communication. Here, Buckingham provides the reader with a detailed description of different components of such communication (greeting, main message, closing) and supports them with clear examples. She also briefly mentions the rules of e-mail etiquette as students often lack experience with a more professional writing style of e-mail communication with their supervisors.

Chapter 4, *Finding literature* (pp. 29–36), effectively explains what reliable academic sources are and where and how to look for them. In particular, it clarifies that the sources paramount to writing a good-quality academic paper are books and articles which underwent the peer review process and were published by authorities in the field. The examples are then used to illustrate how to efficiently search for relevant literature using keywords. The Internet, the university library and electronic bibliographic resources the university subscribes to are presented as useful places for looking for the needed bibliographic material. Finally, the importance of timely recording of bibliographic information is also emphasized.

Chapter 5, *Reading* (pp. 37–53), explains that academic texts are more difficult to read due to their distinctive characteristics (density of language, formality of style, use of complex noun phrases, etc.), and provides information on how to read journal articles and academic books. Buckingham advises students to be selective in their choice of works and authors they decide to read as well as in the way they read academic texts. She suggests that, rather than reading the entire journal article, students should read some sections before others, namely, they should start with the abstract, move on to the introduction and conclusion, then read methodology and results, and finish with the literature review. When reading an academic book, she suggests reading only those chapters and only those sections within them that are

relevant to the topic. Buckingham also points out the importance of note taking while reading and the need for students to reflect critically on the literature they read.

The following chapter, Chapter 6 (*Collecting data*, pp. 54–81), opens with considerations regarding research ethics and the choice of participants since these issues must be taken care of before the actual data collection starts. It then moves on to present some of the most commonly used data collection instruments in English studies. Thus the chapter, firstly and most extensively, talks about the questionnaires, covering topics such as question types, formulation of questionnaire items, and administering the questionnaire. Secondly, it discusses how to conduct interviews, elaborating upon the types of interviews and the appropriate actions the interviewer needs to take prior to, during, and after the interview. Then, the chapter deals with observations, mentioning issues such as approaches to observations and participation of the researcher in and mitigating his/her influence on the observed phenomenon. The chapter also covers focus-group discussions explaining what they are, when it is (not) good to use them, possible (dis)advantages of this data collection instrument, and technical issues that need to be considered (group size, recording, seating arrangement, etc.). Finally, think-aloud protocols are discussed explaining when it is useful to use them and how they should be conducted. In addition, the chapter also briefly talks about piloting data collection instruments.

Chapter 7 (*Your project chapter by chapter*, pp. 82–113), gives a detailed overview of sections a research report consists of thus providing guidelines on ‘what goes where’ in a research paper. Therefore, students are told that in the Introduction they need to provide the context and justification for their study, research questions/hypotheses, definitions of important terms, and a brief description of the methods and organization of the paper. In Literature review section, it is explained, they need to “describe previous research relevant to [...] research question(s), summarize other authors’ work and compare different perspectives on the topic” (p. 89). For the Methods section, students are advised to describe “the steps undertaken at the pre-collection phase and during the data collection and the analysis stages” (p. 93). Approaches to analysing and displaying qualitative and quantitative data in the Results section are briefly discussed. Subsequently, the importance of being able to synthesize results and identify salient findings in the Discussion section is highlighted. Additionally, students are advised that, if required, in the Discussion section they should “discuss the method or approach used in the study” (p. 107) and ponder over the question “why did this study result in these findings?” (p. 107). Finally, in the Conclusion, students are advised to restate their research question(s), highlight the main findings and their significance, talk about limitations and implications of the study, and offer recommendations for future research.

Chapter 8, *Features of academic writing* (pp. 114–160) is, unsurprisingly, the longest chapter since Buckingham herself states at the very beginning that “[a]n important objective of this book is to support the development of students’ academic writing competence” (p. ix). Therefore, Chapter 8 provides students with good academic writing practice, covering such topics as the appropriate use of sources, use

of academic language, writing well-structured paragraphs, defining important terms, giving examples, and use of cautious language, all extremely important for a well written research paper. When talking about the appropriate use of sources, the author discusses plagiarism, paraphrasing, summarizing and citing. Concerning the use of academic language, issues covered are explanation of academic style and register, the use of linking words and the use of first-person pronoun. Then the chapter explains the structure of a paragraph pointing out its main parts: topic sentence, restatement of the main idea, providing examples and supporting information, etc. Thereupon, the chapter moves on to explain the possibilities of defining specific terms, exemplifying how this may be done. After that, it talks about the importance of providing examples and the need to hedge one's claims.

In the final chapter, Chapter 9 (*Research logistics: time management and revisions*, pp. 161–169), the author talks about the practicalities concerning the conducting of the research process, i.e. dealing with time pressures effectively. Also, she gives advice on the final stages of the process, namely, polishing one's paper and preparing for oral defense. Regarding polishing one's work, the author explains that revisions must be made in terms of organization and language use and regarding the oral defense, she describes how the procedure might unfold and gives practical tips on how to present one's work effectively (e.g. briefly introduce your topic, mention only the salient results, etc.).

Apart from the nine chapters, the book also includes five appendices. Appendix 1, *Introductions from published articles* (pp. 170–173), and Appendix 2, *Conclusions from published articles* (pp. 174 –177), provide examples of professional writing and are supposed to be used for exercises. Appendix 3 (pp. 178–179) and Appendix 4 (pp. 180–181), *Creating transitions in your writing* and *Reporting verbs* respectively, offer students lists of linking words and reporting verbs with advice on how appropriately to use them. Finally, Appendix 5, *Citing your sources* (pp. 182–185), gives basic information on using APA style to provide in-text citations and list of references.

One of the strengths of this book lies in the fact that each chapter contains numerous exercises and discussion tasks which enable students to exchange ideas on important issues regarding conducting research and writing it up and to work on developing the needed skills like effective reading, coding of qualitative data, and avoiding plagiarism, to name just a few. The exercises and discussion tasks are based on examples of both, student and professional writing, therefore illustrating pitfalls into which students can fall and examples of good practice. Excerpts from professional writing also serve the purpose of sharpening students' reading skills necessary for successful completion of a research project. Important to mention are also *Insights from the literature* sections of some chapters which "enable users of this book to see how findings from published research have informed the exercises and recommendations included in each chapter" (p. x). Of the note is the inclusion of an answer key at the end of the book (pp. 186–198), a feature lacking in many comparable textbooks in the market. Finally, the author provides numerous useful

tips for students in specially marked boxes concerning the topics covered in a particular chapter.

To sum up, *Doing a Research Project in English Studies* is a very useful book for all actors involved in the process of writing a student research report. Non-native English speaking students in English studies from all around the world will greatly benefit from this text as they will find it easy to read and follow since it is nicely organized and written using clear and simple language. Teachers will find in it a good course companion due to its relevant content and numerous examples of student and professional writing. Therefore, as a text which offers plenty of academic and practical advice, it promises to become a prized book for, but not limited to, students and teachers working in non-native English speaking contexts.

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