

DISSERTATION NEWSLETTER

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Strategic Curiosity: Some Common Ground Between Psychotherapy and Research

By Dr. Rae Johnson

Credible, relevant, and compelling research is essential to advancing our collective knowledge of depth psychology, but Pacifica doctoral students may struggle with seeing themselves as researchers, at least to start. For many of you, this will be the first piece of formal research you're involved with, and it can take some time to build confidence and skill so that you feel truly comfortable wearing your "researcher" hat.

Fortunately, many students at Pacifica already have experience with some form of psychotherapy (as either a client or therapist, or both) and a number of the capacities we work so hard to cultivate in psychotherapy are easily adaptable to research. A therapy session and a research study contain a number of common elements, and the role of the therapist is often not that much different from that of the researcher. In one case, researchers design a study, and in the other, clinicians shape the contours of a therapy session.

For example, both processes start with a question or problem, and in the case of many newer forms of research, the problem may also be generated out of the lived experience of the participant (rather than being generated by the researcher). Once the question has been formed, both processes involve some exploration of what is already known about the issue being investigated. In the case of a research study, this is called the literature review. In the case of a session of psychotherapy, perhaps this exploration begins by asking the client what stories they tell themselves about their experience, or what memories or images come up when they focus on the particular issue being investigated.

At this stage, both therapists and researchers are engaged in collecting data. As they review the data, they notice gaps and incongruities, track themes, and focus on what resonates most for the client/participant. Both then engage in a process of trying to make meaning of the data they and their clients/participants have collected. The degree to which the client/participant actively participates in that meaning-making process varies, but both therapists and researchers will check back with their clients/participants to see if the conclusions truly fit with their experience. Lastly, both a therapy session and a research study conclude with

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some discussion of implications – what the discoveries mean, what next steps to take, and how to implement the changes they suggest.

So if you've experienced psychotherapy, you already know what it feels like to be strategically curious about a problem or question. Research is not really so very different, and can often be just as transformative. Enjoy the process. You've got this.

—Rae Johnson, PhD, RSMT, Program Chair and Research Coordinator of the Depth Psychology, Somatic Studies Specialization



Preparation for the Defense

Prepare an outline and notes for your speech.

Generally, you will have to explain what you did, why you did it, how it was done, what you discovered, and what's the meaning and the use of the results.

Focus on your audience.

If you know your audience, you understand how to organize your speech better. Try to use simple and concise language that will be clear for everybody, even if they are not specialized in your field.

Your presentation slides shouldn't be overloaded with information.

Instead of placing too much text on your presentation slides, give information in visual form like graphs, tables, diagrams, and explain it orally in addition.

Practice in advance.

It's a good idea to have several rehearsals of your speech because they will make you more confident. Make sure that you present your thesis in a smooth manner, with proper logical links between the parts. Stay open-minded and ready for the unexpected questions. You can't predict everything but you can ensure managing your material well.

Test the equipment before your presentation.

As there are a lot of reasons for getting nervous on that day don't create additional ones. Test all equipment you will use during your speech beforehand and make sure it works properly and won't give you any unpleasant surprises.

Shaya, C. (n.d.). Decent advice on how to get ready for a thesis oral defense [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://www.carloshaya.net>

Content of the Literature Review

The Literature Review must be well structured, and your ideas must flow logically from one point to the next. Ensure sources and references are current and relevant, cited appropriately according to your discipline. Present terminology and viewpoints on the topic in an unbiased and comprehensive manner.

Include the following content in your Literature Review:

- Provide an overview of the subject, issue, or theory under consideration.
- Divide outside works into categories and concepts (in support or against a particular position).
- Connect the works to what has come before your work and ideas.
- Provide conclusions about those works that make the greatest contribution to the understanding and development of your subject.

Consider the following when assessing whether to include each work in your review of literature:

- **Qualifications:** What are the author's credentials to make the judgments he or she has made?
- **Neutrality:** Is the author's perspective even-handed or biased?
- **Credibility:** Which of the author's theses are convincing and why?
- **Worth:** Do the author's conclusions add to the value of your own?

Your transitions between ideas analyze, synthesize, and assess these outside perspectives, and do not simply summarize or translate them.

The way you present the evidence or material in the Literature Review needs to show that you are:

- Selecting and quoting only the most relevant material for your subject and argument.
- Making sense of the quotation within the context of your argument.

Focusing on the language of quotations in the interpretations.

Through citations, situate your research in a larger narrative. The conscientious use of citations reflects your decisions to give greater emphasis to either the reported author or the reported message. . . .

Your ideas should be at the center of your writing, but your work has to be embedded in what has come before to demonstrate its relevance and importance to the subject. The Literature Review connects your ideas to the ideas in your field.

Academic Coaching & Writing. (2017). *Writing a literature review*.

Retrieved from <https://www.academiccoachingandwriting.org>



Ganesh wearing a lei on the Lambert Road Campus.
Photo by Robyn Cass.

Examples of the <u>Three Voices in Writing</u>	
1. Active Voice	"You ate six donuts."
2. Passive Voice	"Six donuts were eaten by you."
3. Passive-Aggressive Voice	"You ate six donuts and I didn't get any. Don't worry, it's cool. I can see donuts are very important to you."

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Fountain on Pacifica's Lambert Road Campus.

Photo by Rachel Reeve.