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for Digital Health CRC
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Writing your Integrated Discussion Chapter

Overview

- **Introductions**
- **What is an integrated discussion chapter?**
- **Why is it important? Why is it hard?**
- **Functions of the integrated discussion**
- **Strategies for structuring your integrated discussion**
- **Applying this to your own work**

Introductions



- **Cassily Charles**
- **Everyone, please type into the chat:**
 - **your geographical location**
 - **how far along are you in your thesis?**
 - **can you hear any birds nearby today?**

What is an integrated discussion?

- Please type into the chat something about what an integrated discussion chapter is...
- The integrated discussion is a chapter which is specific to a thesis which contains publications. It provides a 'big picture', in which all the individual papers become part of one cohesive research story, as an original contribution to knowledge
- The integrated discussion is what *makes* a whole thesis out of a bunch of papers.

USyd: *[A] research thesis is a coherent and cohesive narrative describing a body of scholarly activity that adds to knowledge. At the University [of Sydney] a collection of published papers is not a thesis, neither is a publication on its own sufficient to warrant the award of a research degree.*

<https://www.sydney.edu.au/students/hdr-research-skills/theses-including-publications.html>

Monash: *A Thesis Including Published Works [...] must reflect a sustained and cohesive theme related to a defined research project. Framing or substantial linking text is required in introducing the research and connecting the chapters/papers and/or manuscripts.*

<https://www.monash.edu/graduate-research/support-and-resources/examination/publication>

UQ: *All theses that include publications must be formatted according to the requirements outlined in the Higher Degree by Research Examination Policy [including] [...] iii. An independent and original discussion that integrates the significant findings of the thesis.*

<https://ppl.app.uq.edu.au/content/higher-degree-research-examination-guidelines>

Writing an integrated discussion is like juicing a pomegranate...



Writing an integrated discussion is like juicing a pomegranate...

- You have to both separate and combine smaller pieces
- It needs some extra steps, and it takes *time* to get it right
- If you make it work, the outcome is very good for you (if you get it right, thesis examiners find it **delicious!**)

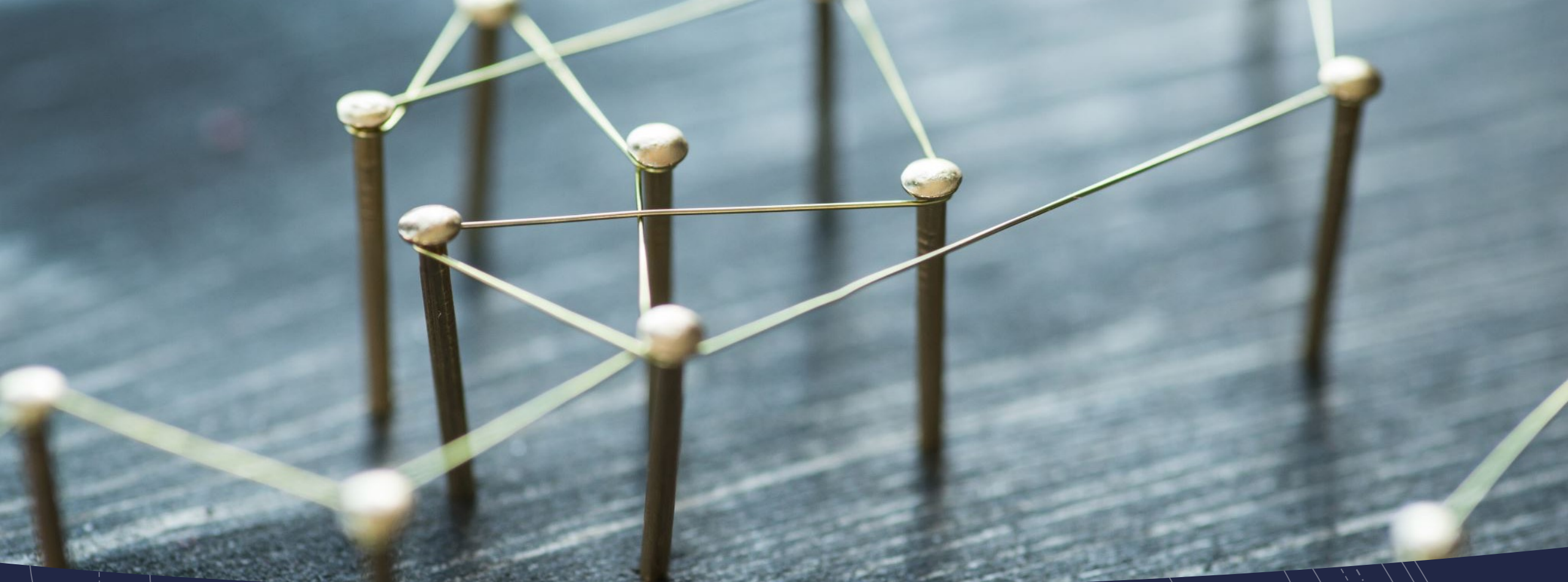
Why you need the good juice...

- Two prominent concerns of examiners in thesis by publication: 1. contribution in co-authored papers and 2. **coherence of the thesis** (Sharmini et al., 2015)
- Examiners often ask for revisions when there is not enough to show how the publications fit together as parts of one research story (Moodie & Hapgood, 2012)
- However, examiners are **swayed in favour** of the thesis, when the integration is done well:

I was particularly convinced by [...] the success with which these chapters tied the publication chapters together into a cohesive story (Moodie & Hapgood, 2012)

Challenges...

- Candidates writing a thesis by publication frequently name **thesis cohesion** as one of the challenges (Merga et al.,2020)
- Take a moment to type into the chat: some of the challenges you are facing, (or have already overcome, or expect to face), in writing your integrated discussion...
- Common issues
 - Difficult to find a 'whole story'
 - Later papers don't fit with earlier ones
 - Not sure how to avoid repetition
 - Not sure what chapter structure is possible



Functional parts of the integrated discussion

Writing your integrated discussion chapter – Cassily Charles for Digital Health CRC 2024

- **Traditional** Discussion chapter functions...
 - Interprets your data analysis – Moving beyond summary & analysis, towards making claims
 - Links claims directly to the research questions – showing you have achieved your aims
 - Shows how findings are similar or different to those in previous research, and why this might be
 - Notes limitations
- **Traditional** Conclusion chapter functions...
 - Remind the reader of the aims and questions of the thesis
 - Remind us that the Discussion has shown how these aims and questions have been addressed
 - Emphasises contribution to knowledge
 - Propose implications for future research
 - Propose implications for other contexts – e.g. industry, policy, professional practice

Often these functions are combined into one chapter – BUT **all the functions** are still needed.

Functional parts of the integrated discussion

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 - Interprets your data analysis – Moving beyond summary & analysis, towards making claims
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 - Shows how findings are similar or different to those in previous research, and why this could be
 - Notes limitations
- **Integrated discussion** chapter does all that - but has differences, because...
 - your included publications already have their own discussions, their own claims
 - however the ID chapter cannot simply summarise these claims...
 - so you need to make claims about your claims, linked to a big picture that they fit into
 - (The big picture needs to be set up in your thesis Introduction chapter)

Functional parts of the integrated discussion

- **Bits that need to go into your Integrated Discussion (not necessarily in this order!)**
 - Reminder of the 'big picture' aims and questions of your thesis
 - Show the reader how all this big picture can be broken down into the aims or research questions of the individual publications
 - Summary of the findings of your included publications (and any other non-published chapters)
 - Make some claims about how the findings, together, have addressed your 'big picture' aims

Plus, all the other traditional Discussion functions, and, if you don't have a separate Conclusion chapter, those functions will go in as well.

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Hard parts!

Functional parts of the integrated discussion

Real examples

- Look at example A in your hand-out
- Can you predict some of those structural parts in their integrated discussion?

- Look at examples B & C
- Can you see hints about any of the structural parts in these excerpts of their integrated discussion?

How to make the connections

- Some types of connections between publications...
- Papers may be related because they are **co-types** (e.g. study with clinicians, study with patients, study with carers)
- Papers may be related because they are **co-parts** (e.g. theoretical publication, methodological paper, empirical study)
- Papers may be related because they are **sequential** (e.g. scoping review, pilot study and evaluation, full design and evaluation)

How to make the connections

- Look again at the examples in the hand-out...
- What types of connection between the publications can you find?
- Look at the example that you have found from your own field. What types of connection has the author used?

This research incorporated evidence from systematic literature reviews, empirical research, behaviour change theories, and consumer perspectives, and utilised a participatory approach to develop the components of an intervention program that can be embedded within existing services for postpartum women

**How to
make the
connections
clear**

This research incorporated **evidence from systematic literature reviews, empirical research, behaviour change theories, and consumer perspectives, and utilised a participatory approach** to develop **the components of an intervention program** that can be embedded within existing services for postpartum women

How to
make the
connections
clear

Applying it to your own work

Please type into the chat...

1. Do you already know the types of connection between your publications?
2. If so, please type into the chat the types of connection you plan to use – and read what others are typing
3. If not yet, take some time to think about some possible connections, and be ready to share your ideas or struggles with the group – We may be able to help 😊

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- Show the reader how all this big picture can be broken down into the aims or research questions of the individual publications
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Hard parts!

Functional parts of the integrated discussion

- Look at text E in the hand-out
- Can you see some 'big picture' claims in this piece of their integrated discussion?
- How can you tell that this is more than just a summary of the findings or claims of one of the publications?
- What makes this a 'claim about claims'?

Big picture
claims

Applying it to your own work

Please type into the chat...

- 1. Do you already know the kinds of 'big picture' claims which you will make, on the basis of your combined publications?**
- 2. If so, please type into the chat one/some of these**
- 3. If not yet, take some time to think about your 'big aims' and what your 'big claims' may be, to fit with these. Please be ready to share your ideas or struggles with the group – We may be able to help 😊**

One of the ways that the Integrated Discussion is the same as a traditional Discussion:

- **The big picture must connect the whole thesis**
- **So the big picture needs to be set up in your Introduction chapter**
- **So you will need to write/re-write your Introduction after/while you write your Integrated Discussion (and Conclusion)**

**Big picture
claims**



Where to from here?

What are your next steps?

- What is your current priority?
- What do you need to find out next, to move forward? For example...
 - find more examples from your research area
 - discuss with your supervisor options for ways to connect your publications
 - revisit your draft and your introduction, to see if the connections are set out clearly, and if the big picture is there
 - seek help with the writing and planning from a coach or mentor
- Any questions, insights or worries to share before we wrap up this session?

Resources to follow up

- Lewis, K. B., Graham, I. D., Boland, L., & Stacey, D. (2021). Writing a compelling integrated discussion: a guide for integrated discussions in article-based theses and dissertations. *International Journal of Nursing Education Scholarship*, 18(1).
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Happy integrating! 😊