

University College Dublin

SCHOOL OF SOCIOLOGY

MSocSc

THESIS PREPARATION

Notes on the selection of a research topic, drawing up a research proposal, structuring and writing up your thesis

Contents

Choice of Topic	1
Eight desiderata for inclusion in dissertation proposals:.....	1
The type and scale of evidence/data to be collected.....	2
The sociological analysis of evidence	2
Timetable.....	3
Length and General Structure of MSocSc Dissertation	4
Literature Searches	5
Encyclopædias and Dictionaries	5
Reference Books.....	5
Library Catalogues	6
Lists of Books Currently Available from Publishers' Stocks	6
Newspapers	6
Journal Articles	7
While Research is in Progress.....	7
When Writing-Up	8
Notes on Referencing in Theses	8
A. The Harvard System	8
B. The Short-Title System	10
Citing from the Internet.....	10
Final Stages of Production	11
1. Bibliography.....	11
2. Checklist before Printing each Chapter	11
3. Prelims	12
Useful Books on Writing.....	12
Writing in Sociology.....	12
Writing in General.....	13
Getting Yourself Generally Organised	13
Correct Use of the Apostrophe	14

Choice of Topic

1. Choose in which *you* are interested, and of which you personally have some commonsense knowledge to begin from.
2. Have a *question* in mind (no matter how simplistic it may be to start with), rather than just a *topic*. Ask *why, how, when?*
3. Remember that there is a difference between a *social problem* and a *sociological problem* or a sociological question.
4. Have in mind some data source(s).
5. Be *question-driven*, not method driven.
6. Remember that the best research usually involves documentary, qualitative *and* quantitative research – it is not an either/or choice.

Eight desiderata for inclusion in dissertation proposals:

1. Title of project
2. Statement of research question/problem.
3. Preliminary review of sociological and other literature *relevant* to research question.
4. Preliminary theoretical elaboration of research question, drawing on the relevant literature reviewed in 3 above.
5. Statement of choice of methods to investigate research question, showing their appropriateness to the investigation. (A statement of methods is not necessary if you are writing a conceptual or theoretical dissertation, but you might say for instance that you are developing a critique of Elias from a Foucauldian perspective, or *vice versa*, and spell out what this entails.)
6. Preliminary, rough, timetable for each stage in the process.
7. Preliminary assessment of the limitations of the proposed research. (This will be more important in the final draft of your dissertation.)

The type and scale of evidence/data to be collected

Because of time constraints, only a limited study can be undertaken. At most, three to four weeks are available for collecting evidence. Different methods require different times. The extent of fieldwork, for example, may range from the completion of 60 short, self administered, pre-coded questionnaires, to 5 in-depth interviews/case studies with key informants. The scale of any fieldwork undertaken should be agreed with your supervisor.

Depending *inter alia* on the nature of the questions you have posed, you may decide to collect your own quantitative data from a questionnaire, to gather qualitative evidence by means of participant observation or interviewing, or to gather information from documentary sources.

We recommend that if you wish to demonstrate your quantitative skills, rather than collecting a necessarily very small amount of your own primary data – you conduct a secondary analysis of existing larger-scale data. The Irish Social Science Data Archive (ISSDA), within the Geary Institute, makes available many important Irish and international datasets on line. For example, all the data collected by the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) over two decades and in up to twenty countries – UCD's Social Science Research Centre is the ISSSP's base in Ireland – are available on CD-ROM and/or on line. For what is available, see the website: www.issda.ie.

Similarly with documentary research or content analysis: the number of texts which can be analysed will be limited by the time available and by the type and depth of the analysis proposed.

Please note that through ISSDA and numerous online sources, it is now possible to access enormous resources of information and data about the world at large today and in the past. There is no need to confine your thesis to an exclusively Irish topic. The School of Sociology encourages comparative and comparative-historical research. Comparisons with other countries may not only set an Irish situation in context, but help to suggest explanations for it. Do be careful, however, in this respect as in others already mentioned, not to bite off more than you can chew.

The sociological analysis of evidence

Even though the *extent* of the study is limited, the *depth* of the sociological analysis of the evidence collected ought not to be. This sociological analysis should include:

1. Sociological specification of the research problem.
2. Discussion of evidence with the purpose of advancing sociological knowledge of the research question.
3. Drawing sociological conclusions. The concluding section could also include:
 - a) An assessment of the appropriateness of the research methods you used.
 - b) Further elaboration of the research problem, and an indication of the most fruitful direction for further research.

These remarks about fieldwork and writing up indicate that, although the dissertation is a report on a necessarily limited piece of research, students are nonetheless expected to demonstrate through this project their command of the field.

If you decide to write a dissertation based on library research, you should bear in mind the clear distinction between a literature review – a review of earlier work by others on your question, just as in the case of a questionnaire or interview study – and documentary research as such, which means gathering evidence from archives, books, official statistics and so on. A library-based dissertation may involve the gathering of quantitative as well as qualitative evidence. Qualitative evidence can also be quantified.

Timetable

A supervisor will be allocated to each student before the St Patrick's Day break. You may express a preference to be supervised by a specific member of staff, but we cannot guarantee that your preference will be granted. If you wish to see the research interests of members of staff, consult the School of Sociology website: <http://www.ucd.ie/sociology>.

Students are entitled to seven supervision sessions and are urged to make use of these.

The School of Sociology has recently taken a decision that it will enforce a firm deadline of **21 August 2009** for the submission of theses. You must plan your time carefully, completing your research and writing up in good time to meet this deadline.

It is unwise to submit without your supervisor having read at least an advanced draft of your dissertation, and you will probably want to have at least one meeting with your supervisor at this stage. *But please remember that members of staff are entitled to take a holiday in the summer*, and they may not be able to read your draft chapters at the drop of a hat. You must arrange with your supervisor the date when you plan to ask him/her to read your draft dissertation. You should allow two weeks from giving in the draft.

For all relevant details of how to lay out your thesis, see the recommendations directed at postgraduates at: www.ucd.ie/registry/assessment/info_stu.htm, and especially the PDF file at www.ucd.ie/registry/assessment/student_info/recsforpresoftheses.pdf.

UCD requires that you submit two hard copies of your thesis, fully bound, to the Assessment Office in the Tierney Building, and these are the copies that will go to your examiners. But the School of Sociology now *also* requires that you submit exactly the same text of your thesis on a CD-ROM, which should be delivered to Veronica Barker in the School Office (F311). The disk must be clearly labelled with the title of your thesis, your name, student number, and the date.

Length and General Structure of MSocSc Dissertation

Expected word length: approximately 20,000 words – i.e. 70 to 100 pages of text exclusive of appendices

Possible structure: adapt as appropriate

Prelims

Title page	See UCD 'Recommendations for the Presentation of Theses' for the details that should appear on this page.	1 page
Table of contents	May include principal sub-headings within each chapter	1 or at most 2 pages
Abstract	Summary (Bind one copy of the abstract in your thesis and <i>also</i> supply a loose copy.)	1 page
Chapter 1	Introduction	3–4 pages
Chapter 2	Situating the Research Question: Theoretical context and review of earlier research in the field	20–25 pages
Chapter 3	Research Methods (Notes: (1) This is a statement of what you have done and why in this particular research, <i>not</i> an essay on alternative research methods in general. (2) If the method requires little description, you may decide to tack this on as section at the end of Chapter II)	2–12 pages
Chapters 4 & 5 (or as required)	Analysis and Presentation of Research Findings	30–40 pages
Chapter 6 (or as required) – Conclusion	Discussion (drawing together of findings) and conclusions	10–20 pages

Notes:

1. Although you are required to cover the matters described in the above schema of chapters, you are encouraged to think of more imaginative titles for the chapters than 'Literature Review', 'Research Methods', 'Analysis and Presentation of Findings'.

2. The Abstract should include details of the research problem(s) you have investigated, the sociological perspectives and methods used, and the main research findings. An alternative is a very brief synopsis of each chapter. One copy of the Abstract should be bound into the thesis, and a second submitted separately to the School of Sociology to be kept on your file for future reference, for example in writing references for you.

Literature Searches

You will need to conduct a literature search to discover what sociologists or other relevant social scientists have written that is relevant to your chosen topic for research. Note, however, that:

1. There has to be constant interplay between your literature search and your formulation of your research question. If the question is not yet very clear, you may search far too widely and become bogged down in an over-extensive review of vast tracts of sociology. Be prepared to keep coming back to the literature as you focus in on your specific research question – thus, the literature review will not necessarily be cut and dried right at the beginning of your work, and you will probably do some further searching when you are writing up.
2. A literature review is conceptually quite different from documentary research. In preparing a literature review, you are investigating the state of *sociological knowledge* of an area – secondary sources. Documentary research, in contrast refers to the use of documents of all kinds as *primary research data*.

Nowadays your literature search can largely be conducted on-line. See Niall Ó Dochartaigh, *The Internet Research Handbook: A Practical Guide for Students and Researchers in the Social Sciences*. London: Sage 2001.

It may nevertheless be useful to mention some good old-fashioned library resources on which you may wish to draw:

Encyclopædias and Dictionaries

Encyclopædia Britannica

International Encyclopædia of the Social Sciences, 17 vols. 1968 (now becoming rather out of date for many purposes)

Gordon Marshall, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, 1994
and many other books with similar titles

Also note the online free Wikipedia encyclopædia: www.wikipedia.org (but be aware that this is contributed by writers *ad lib* and you should check any important facts elsewhere.

[These and similar publications will usually give you a short initial bibliography.]

Reference Books

Administration Yearbook and Diary – published annually by Institute of Public Administration, Dublin. Everything – well, nearly – that you need to know about public life in Ireland – organisations, people, names, addresses.

Whitaker's Almanack – the same and more for the UK, including a section with data on every country in the world, and a digest of the previous year's national and international events.

Statesman's Yearbook – compendium of international facts and figures.

United Nations Yearbooks

Keesing's Contemporary Archives – continuously updated and well-indexed abstract of current events.

Library Catalogues

Start with UCD, then work outwards. Note the vast array of journals and other sources now available in electronic format via the UCD Library.

Most university and specialist library catalogues internationally are now on-line, and can be accessed directly through a web-browser. Useful websites include

www.copac.ac.uk

Consolidated catalogue for the main university and copyright libraries of the UK, including the British Library, Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh and TCD.

www.bl.uk

British Library

www.loc.gov

Library of Congress

www.nypl.org

New York Public Library

www.bnf.fr

Bibliothèque Nationale de France

www.ucd.ie/~library

UCD Library

www.tcd.ie/library

TCD Library

<http://www.d-nb.de/>

Deutsche National Bibliothek

TCD's Library is a Copyright Library under UK legislation, so is entitled to receive a free copy of every book published in Britain. As a postgraduate student at UCD, you have access to the TCD Library.

Lists of Books Currently Available from Publishers' Stocks

Nowadays, most people check whether a book is available for purchase by browsing the listings of an on-line bookshop, such as Amazon (www.amazon.com; www.amazon.co.uk; www.amazon.fr; www.amazon.de, and so on)

Books that are out of print can often be bought on-line: see (again) Amazon, along with www.bookfinder.com and www.abebooks.com.

Newspapers

Some, but by no means all, good international newspapers are now available in the web, and searchable by subject. (You may have to pay a small fee to download an article from the backrun.)

Irish newspapers: there is now an excellent online archive of *The Irish Times* back to

1868: <http://www.irishtimes.com/search/archive.html>

Internationally, *The Times* (London), the *New York Times*, and the *Financial Times* have excellent indices – in the case of *The Times*, the index running back to 1790! The *FT* is notably international in content.

Journal Articles

Journal articles published since ca. 1990 are now most easily traced online. The UCD Library electronic resources (www.ucd.ie/library/electronic_resources) are now quite extensive. Normally, you are now able to access them through your Connect account. You can also track things down through *Web of Science*, *Social Science Citation Index*, or *Sociofile* (the online version of *Sociological Abstracts*). If you need an article by a particular author, it may be worth searching for their webpage: sometimes people put up the full texts of work in progress or recent articles they have published.

Printed indices include:

British Humanities Index, 1915–
Social Sciences Index, 1952– (USA)
Social Sciences Citation Index, 1974–
Sociological Abstracts, 1966–
Historical Abstracts

International Bibliography of Sociology
International Bibliography of Social and Cultural Anthropology
International Bibliography of Political Science
International Bibliography of Economics

– the last four published since early 1950s under UNESCO umbrella; no abstracts.

While Research is in Progress

Commonplace Book: For recording *ideas* in no particular order; strictly for own eyes only

Bibliographical Search: a continuing process

Record-keeping:

- Card Index: Author(s), Title, Place, Publisher, Date; Journal, Volume, Part, Page Nos.; Call number at library(ies); Photocopy in file?; Notes in file?
- Files of Notes
- Reference Manager or Endnote

Note-taking

- Full references (again!)
- Page numbers in margin
- Page breaks marked in text of direct quotations.

When Writing-Up

1. Order of Chapters

2. Organisation of Material and *Argument* within Chapters

- Classify your Notes
- Graded Headings
- Think before you write

3. Writing:

- Draft and re-draft
- Vary your style and sentence length
- Write clearly and accurately
- Don't waffle
- *But* do develop your thoughts adequately; don't write as if the reader already knows what you are talking about
- Don't take sociologists (with rare exceptions) as your stylistic model

Notes on Referencing in Theses

Two systems of referencing are in common use in the academic world today: the 'Harvard' (or 'in-text', 'Royal Society' or 'author/date') system, and the 'short-title' (or 'footnote') system. Decide *at an early stage* which one is appropriate to your thesis.

The Harvard system is in almost universal use in the natural and social sciences, and is making some inroads in history and the humanities. On the whole, however, historians and literary scholars still prefer to use the short-title system, because the Harvard system is poorly adapted to the citation of such sources as newspapers, unpublished documents and archival material.

The School of Sociology on the whole prefers you to use the 'in text' (or 'Harvard') system of referencing rather than the short-title system because it is easier for both readers and writers. The reader sees immediately what your source of information is, and you are saved the trouble of fitting footnotes at the bottom of each page (though that has become far simpler in the last ten years with the advent of more sophisticated word-processing programs). If you are undertaking a thesis of historical character, or are principally using unpublished documentary sources of evidence, however, you might consider using the short-title system.

A. The Harvard System

Citations in the Text: You will find minor variations in the style of referencing. Find a style you are comfortable with, provided it resembles these examples, and use it consistently.

Here are some examples of how to give references in the text:

Brown (1991) suggests that it is important to recognise the influence of social class upon

attitudes to appropriate behaviour for boys and girls.

When you refer to a particular research finding you must give the page number so that the reader can check the accuracy of your statement:

According to Brown (1971: 37), parents expect higher achievements of sons than daughters.

When you give a verbatim quotation you must give the page number and use quotation marks:

According to Brown, when parents talk about their children 'daughters are spoken of in more passive terms than are sons' (1971: 63).

When quotations are longer than three lines you should indent the quotation, not use quotation marks:

According to Brown,
Middle class parents generally express views that they treat their children in the same way, regardless of sex. However, an analysis of the words used by parents when talking about their children shows that daughters are spoken of in more passive terms than are sons (1971: 63).

List of References

At the end of your essay you must attach an alphabetically ordered list of the references you have used, headed 'References'. Do not include books and articles you have not referred to in the text. The examples here show you how to provide full bibliographical details for different kinds of publications. Note that the *titles* of books are italicised or underlined; the titles of articles, on the other hand, are placed in quotation marks and it is the title of the journal in which they appeared that is italicised or underlined.

Inglis, Tom 1998 *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*. Dublin: UCD Press.

Cleary, Anne & Margaret P. Treacy (eds) 1997 *The Sociology of Health and Illness in Ireland*. Dublin: UCD Press.

Mennell, Stephen 1990a 'The Sociological Study of History: Institutions and Social Development' in C.G.A. Bryant and H.A. Becker (eds,) *What Has Sociology Achieved?* London: Macmillan, pp. 54–68.

Mennell, Stephen 1990b 'Decivilising Processes: Theoretical Significance and Some Lines for Research', *International Sociology* 5 (2) 1990: 205–23.

When you use a chapter in an edited book, do not refer to the editors of the book. Refer to the author of that particular chapter. Note the example of Mennell (1990a) above.

When citing journal articles, it is important to state the volume number, the issue number and page numbers. In the example of Mennell (1990b) above, 5 refers to the volume number and (2) means that the article appeared in the second issue published that year. (NB: When taking notes from books or articles, you should not only note all these details at the head of your notes, but also carefully indicate in the margin the exact page from which any direct quotations come, including the point in a sentence where the text goes over from one page to the next – this will save you untold hours when you are about to submit your thesis.)

The allocation of *a*, *b*, *c* and so on to indicate different works by the same author(s) published in the same year is *your* task – do not take these over from the bibliography of some previously published book or article.

In the Bibliography, *all* the authors of a co-authored work must be listed. In the text you may cite a work with *at least three authors* as ‘Clancy *et al.*, 1986’. If there are only *two* authors, you must *always* cite them both in the text, for example as ‘Mennell and Goudsblom (1997)’.

When you use a chapter in an edited book, do not refer to the editors of the book. Refer to the author of that particular chapter. Note the example of Mennell (1990a) above.

B. The Short-Title System

This is the modern version of the system where sources were cited in footnotes using an elaborate repertoire of terms like *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*, and *idem.*¹ *Do NOT use those terms.* The old system was very confusing, because it sent the reader chasing back – perhaps through many pages – to find details of the work now being cited again.

The modern short-title system is much simpler. The first time *in each chapter* that a source is cited, one cites it in full in a footnote; subsequent citations are by surname and short title, thus:

1. Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*. Dublin: UCD Press, 1998, p. 5.
2. Inglis, *Moral Monopoly*, p. 150.

Note that the first citation is almost identical to the way you would cite this book in the Bibliography when using the Harvard system. The only differences are that the author's forename or initials *precede* the surname, and that the date of publication comes at the end, after the name of the publisher instead of after the author's name.

If you do decide to use the short-title system, a full Bibliography in alphabetical order of authors' names must still be provided at the end of the thesis, and it differs from the layout of a bibliography under the Harvard system only in that the date comes at the end instead of after the author's name. If you are using documentary sources which are difficult to cite by author, you may include a separate list under a heading such as *Primary Sources Consulted* or *Newspapers Consulted*.

Citing from the Internet

You will of course want to search the Internet for ideas and information relevant to your thesis, and anything that you use must be cited with the same care and precision as if it were from a book or article that you found in a library. It can be a problem, however, that websites change

¹ For the sake of your general education, you ought to know what these mean:

‘*ibid.*, p. 3’ refers to page 3 of the source cited in the *immediately preceding* footnote;

idem refers to the same item and place as in the previous reference.

‘Mennell, *op. cit.* p. 3’ refers to page 3 of the work by Mennell cited earlier, but not in the immediately preceding note. (If more than one work by Mennell has been previously cited, then you have to mention the short title of the particular work in any case.)

‘*loc. cit.*’ refers to the place (i.e. the same page) previously cited; thus one could cite page 3 of Mennell as ‘Mennell, *loc. cit.*’ (even if there have been several intervening notes).

all the time; a document that is available one day may no longer be on its website the next. Partly for that reason, the conventions about citation are not as yet quite so standardised as for hard-copy sources. But, at the minimum, you *must* state the URL at which you found the material, and the date on which you downloaded it. We suggest your citation take the following form:

Author, *Title*, www.anyURL.com, downloaded [insert date]

For example:

Section 1 – Population, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2003*.
<http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/03statab/pop.pdf>, downloaded 5 August 2004.

Because of the ephemeral character of the web, however, it is preferable wherever possible to cite a conventional source where the same information may be found. In this example, the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* is downloaded in the form of a PDF file, which is a page-image copy of the hard copy, with page numbers exactly coinciding. So you could better include it in your bibliography as:

Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2003. Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census, 2004.

And that would mean that someone who read your essay fifty years from now could still go to a library, find the 2003 *Statistical Abstract* on the shelves, and check whether your statistics were correctly quoted or your interpretation of them valid. Obviously, though, not everything on the web is also published in the conventional way – so fifty years from now there may no longer be any way of checking up on you!

Final Stages of Production

Final production will take *much* longer than you think. Allow *at least* two weeks for your supervisor to read the final draft, and time after that for you to make final corrections and checks.

1. Bibliography

- Check against final text for omissions (and to exclude sources *not* cited in the text)
- Insert missing details. If you have followed the instructions on note taking, you will need only to go back to your notes; you should *not* need to go back to the library at this stage.

2. Checklist before Printing each Chapter

[Note: Normally it is good practice to keep each chapter as a separate file. When finally printing a short minor thesis, you may wish to combine them into one file in order to simplify the insertion of page numbers and the contents page (see below), but major theses become too cumbersome to be handled in a single file.]

- 40mm left margin (this must be done before checking page breaks)
- Fonts
- Consistency of punctuation: e.g. single *vs.* double, and straight *vs.* curly,

- quotation marks
- Consistency of styles for graded headings
- Do *not* indent the first line of the first paragraph after any heading, but *do* indent the first line of subsequent paragraphs.
- Widows and orphans – especially headings: at all costs avoid having a heading stranded at the foot of a page with the following text on the next page.
- Consistency of indentation and spacing of quotations
- Page numbers (top right hand) must be inserted *last*, immediately before printing each chapter. Take care to make page numbers consecutive from chapter to chapter.

3. Prelims

- Print these *last*. (Prelims can be numbered in small Roman numerals)
- Title Page
- Contents: Include main sub-headings within each chapter (checked against final text for discrepancies); include page numbers for start of each chapter only. [Note: In MS-Word, you can use the Styles menu to achieve consistent heading grades (Heading 1, 2, 3, etc.). If your thesis is short enough to fit in one file, you can then use the Insert menu to insert a Contents list automatically. A PhD or MLitt thesis, however, would normally be too long to fit on one file without becoming cumbersome. In this case, the Contents page must be done manually, taking great care to ensure that the wording of headings there corresponds *exactly* with what appears in the body of each chapter.
- Abstract

Useful Books on Writing

Writing in Sociology

- | | |
|--|---|
| W.A. Johnson, R.P.
Rettig, G.M. Scott, S.M.
Garrison | <i>The Sociology Student Writer's Manual</i> . Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice-hall, 2004. |
| L. Cuba & J. Cocking | <i>How to Write about the Social Sciences</i> . London, HarperCollins, 1994. [American book by Cuba, Europeanised by Cocking.] |
| Vincent R. Ruggiero | <i>A Guide to Sociological Thinking</i> . London, Sage, 1995. |
| C. Wright Mills | <i>The Sociological Imagination</i> . New York, Oxford University Press, 1959. [Still an inspiration; see especially the famous Appendix: On Intellectual Craftsmanship.] |

Writing in General

- **Robert Mohr** *How to Write: Tools for the Craft*. Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 1998.
- H.W. Fowler *Modern English Usage*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, numerous editions since 1926. [Classic work of reference.]
- Sir Ernest Gowers *The Complete Plain Words*. 2nd ed., London, HMSO, 1973. [Another classic: the official British antidote to Civil Service circumlocution.]
- Eric Partridge *Usage and Abusage*. 2nd ed., Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969.
- Kate L. Turabian *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 5th ed., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- P. Creme & M.R. Lea *Writing at University: A Guide for Students*. Buckingham, Open University Press, 1997.
- George Davidson *Chambers Guide to Grammar and Usage*. Edinburgh: Chambers, 1996
- A.J. Thomson and A.V. Martinet *A Practical English Grammar*. 4th ed., Oxford University Press 1986.

Getting Yourself Generally Organised

- **Aidan P. Moran** *Managing Your Own Learning at University*. Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 1997

**** It is strongly recommended that you buy these books**

Correct Use of the Apostrophe

1. Possessives require apostrophes, plurals do not:

the books = more than one book
the book's = belonging to the book

2. However, in the case of possessives, the position of the apostrophe depends on whether the noun is singular or plural:

the book's = belonging to the book
the books' = belonging to more than one book

3. There are two complications to rule 2 above:

(a) In relation to irregular plurals (those that do not end in the usual s). Thus:

a woman's role = the role of one woman
women's role = the role of many women
children's play = the play of children in the plural

(b) In relation to proper names ending in s. You will sometimes see: Giddens', or Elias'. This is wrong. One actually pronounces it *Giddens's* and *Elias's*, so that should remind you. (There are some exceptions, such as classical names, thus: *Claudius'* – but this is not so essential to know.)

4. the apostrophe is also used to indicate an abbreviation:

hasn't = has not
there'd be = there would be

however, this becomes a source of confusion when the apostrophe is used in abbreviating "is", thus:

the book's black = the book is black (no problem)
it's black = it is black (huge problem for 90% of undergraduates)

Remember that in the case of its and it's, the rule is the opposite of what you might expect, because there the apostrophe is an abbreviation for "is". Thus:

its = belonging to it
it's = it is

And by extension:

who's = who is
whose = belonging to whom