

## 8 Questions: That Thesis Readers Ask

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The main point of this document is to help a thesis writer understand some of the standard answers/information a thesis *reader* is expecting.

1. What is the *Problem* or *Question* the author is attempting to solve or answer?
2. Is the main Problem or Question *important* enough to warrant study?
3. What is the author's *contribution* to work on the Problem or Question?
4. Is the contribution *original*?
5. How do readers *know* that it is original? (Reference work of others.)
6. How can readers *trust* the contribution?
  - Does the author motivate and document an *appropriate method* for arriving at results? (This is what the author *did*: that is, *how* the author attempted to solve a particular problem or answer a question – and *why* the author chose the particular method(s) used.)
  - Do the *results* seem believable, significant, relevant, and well-documented? (This is *what happened* as a result of following the particular method(s).)
  - Does the author do an *appropriate analysis* of those results? (This is the author's *reasoning* about *what the results mean*.)
7. Is the contribution *discipline-appropriate*? (Example: “a history of technology adoption” is not appropriate for a physics degree.)
8. Is the contribution *important* enough to warrant a PhD?
  - Is the contribution *generally relevant* to more than just a few people? (*who* is interested in the contribution?)
  - Is the contribution an important *advance* over what was known before? (*how much* do they care about it?)

Obs! There are, of course, different opinions about some of these questions. For example, not all people believe that “originality” is an important aspect of a thesis – and there are even disciplines that question whether originality is even possible at all.

However, a thesis writer needs to a) *be aware* that at least *some* readers care about the answers, and b) *explicitly address* the issues one way or another. It is not usually acceptable for thesis authors to just “ignore” (or avoid) any of the major questions just because they “don’t believe the questions are relevant/significant.” Authors must address them, either by explicitly answering them – or by explaining why they do not answer them.