RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR MASTER STUDENTS OF LITERATURE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR MASTER STUDENTS OF LITERATURE

Overcoming the Lure to Plagiarize with Strategies to Avoid

Fouad Mami

Research Methodology for Master Students of Literature:
Overcoming the Lure to Plagiarize with Strategies to Avoid

I dedicate this work to my wife,
Imane Tebbal

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks go to the students in my Critical Thinking and Research Methodology classes who throughout the academic years 2014 to 2019 animated my alertness to their immediate and hard-pressing concerns. As they variably struggled to start, procced or finish their dissertation projects, I learnt not a few elements in respect to how they initially envisage their projects and how they later craft, evolve and leave behind their initial misunderstandings. It is a privilege to be a part, no matter how small, in their learning experience. Special thanks go to both Bouteldja Riche from the University of Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-ouzou and Benadla Djamel from Dr. Moulay Tahar University in Saida who both read and commented on early drafts of this textbook. As such, the work would not have been possible without their kind support and wise orientations. In particular, Riche's meticulous engagement and attention to details remain forever obliging and exemplary. And for that, I know I cannot thank him enough. Likewise, I want to extend my gratitude to Jeffery Young and each member of his superb editorial team at Universal Publishers, Inc. They have been very professional in producing my manuscript, and for that, they deserve full recognition and thanks. In the end, both me (the author) and the publisher of Universal Publishers are grateful to publishers and copyright owners, those who have given permission for the use of copyright materials identified in the text.

Armstrong, Nancy. *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719–1900*. Columbia University Press, New York (2005), as it appears on pp. 21–22

Adebanwi, Wale. "The Writer as a Social Thinker", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 32, No 4, pp. 405–420. Owned by Routledge Publishers: Taylor and Francis Group as it appears on pp. 85–6

Brinda, J. Mehta. *Dissident Writings of Arab Women Voices Against Violence*. Routledge, London and New York (2013) Owned by INFORMA UK LIMITED as it appears on the second (the *Mendeley* part) of p. 86

Ghufran Khir Allah. "Veiled Muslim Women and European Identity in Spanish Press: Representation and Rearticulation of Islamic Veiling and Identity Construction" in *Identity and Migration in Europe: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Ed. MariaCaterina La Barbera, Springer (2015), pp. 229–250. Owned by Springer Nature as it appears on pp. 103–4

Abunasser, Rima. 2016. "The Deterritorialised Self in Laila Lalami's Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits." *The Journal of North African Studies*. 21:2, 182–198. Owned by Taylor and Francis Group as it appears on p. 110

Oladi, Soudeh, and John Portelli. 2017. "Traces of the Deleuzian Nomad in Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits." *The Journal of North African Studies* 22 (4): 665–678. Owned by Taylor and Francis Group as it appears on p. 112

Thomas Nail, *Being and Motion*. Oxford University Press, (2019). Owned by Oxford Publishing Limited as it appears on p. 141

PREFACE

Plagiarism has always been an endemic problem in human society, not just ethically, but economically as well. However, plagiarism is, quite understandably, the last thing many in the academic world – students, teachers or administrators – want to hear about or discuss. Nevertheless, university bodies charged with examining cases of plagiarism complain about how the phenomenon sucks the energy and reputation of the academy and keeps it rife with defamation and character assassinations. This textbook proceeds with the idea that instead of either denying plagiarism or bewailing the shame it brings the academic community, it is necessary to see the problem for what it is, and only for what it is. We, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, have a tendency to exaggerate, but here I insist on reading the instances of plagiarism correctly; there will be no downplaying and no over-reading here. Once it is free from drama, that is, from shame and tears, plagiarism can be seen as the causal offspring of missing communication and poor training. Classes on research methodology provide little more than dispiriting abstractions, fixations on citation schools, and 'moralizations' about the need for clarity of thought that cloud students' perception of research rather than clarifying it with examples. The more clouded the image is, the more students, and even professional researchers, cheat and plagiarize. Incrimination alone cannot solve the problem.

In the present volume, I seek to dispel certain myths about plagiarism and offer nothing but common sense in return. I must announce at this early stage that readers who are already familiar with the nuances of research

methodology will probably find little new in this text. But, as any seasoned researcher will know, every piece of writing is sketched with a certain audience in mind, and the present textbook, too, has its targeted readership. The title should leave no doubt to this fact; this book is intended to serve Master's students, those newly embarking on their educational journey. Still, doctoral students and Methodology class instructors will also be able to locate moments of insight in this text. While instructors, in particular, will hopefully be inspired by the activities at the end of each section and use them to spice up their classes with more practice and less preaching.

However, the present text is not merely a restatement of the obvious, although I am aware that it may look that way from the start. We, that is, the academy, have strayed so far from the path an academic institution ought to follow to measure its scholarly efforts for so long that we tend to believe that the institution's current mediocrity is what defines it. In *Research Methodology for Master Students of Literature: Overcoming the Lure to Plagiarize with Strategies to Avoid*, I address the readers and students who are either uninformed or terribly misinformed, in the way all novice researchers tend to be. I seek to inform these students that the academy is much nobler than it might appear to them. In truth, it was not until very recently that academia began to give the impression that it turns a blind eye to the unethical practices that lead up to and include plagiarism.

Over the years, I have come to the realization that, more often than not, we researchers and instructors have developed the predilection of condemning plagiarism as immoral without developing the foresight to see it coming or at least anticipate it, in the hope of stopping it before it hits. Moreover, I want to suggest that the misdeed we invariably call plagiarism, ought to be treated as another, perhaps more elaborate, form of cheating rather than its own, unique occurrence. As such we, the academic community at large, should, like all educationists and researchers, dedicate ourselves to asking the right set of questions. What went so terribly wrong in the head of the learner that he or she premeditatedly carried on active plans for cheating despite all the warnings and disciplinary measures in place? Are we teachers of methodology doing our jobs properly and clearly showing students how to navigate through the process of extensive writing projects (that is, writing beyond the five- or six-paragraph essays usually requested in sit-in exams) rather than lecturing or sermonizing? Do we provide students the 'customized' counseling they need, no matter how little or how informal, about, say, time management, note-taking, or active reading in order to bypass the unproductive myths about inspiration and 'the perfect first draft'? Maybe the

most gruesome mistake we ever commit as instructors is to encourage rote learning. When grading, some correctors do not give a mark unless what they read in the paper accurately corresponds to what exists on their tattered and aging notes, a practice which teaches students to reproduce others' thoughts rather than come up with their own original opinions.

To me and surely to countless other practitioners, it seems obvious that while we remain unsympathetic and blind to the inhibitive effect of rote learning, the big evil we call plagiarism will continue to sabotage our efforts at nation-building and cultural renewal. The accumulative nature of the problem begs for an accurate explanation; we must trace the multiple cases of plagiarism in the courses we teach, the notes we proffer, the homework we set, and the research projects we propose. It is neither logical nor intuitive to keep teaching in centuries-old styles and then complain when students resort to the unethical appropriation of other people's intellectual efforts. It all comes down to this basic formula: rote learning instills the false but very powerful presupposition that the materials he or she is taking are insurmountable 'truths'. This old teaching practice stems from the Koranic schools in which the primary materials are processed as divine, and thus, unmatched both in importance and eloquence by any possible human endeavor. The practice of memorizing entire chapters, even, a whole book and ensuring that it never evaporates from one's head has done a disservice to modern learning and is responsible for the massive instances of plagiarism at modern institutions we call universities. Those who stay longer in Koranic schools will soon observe that their peers and elders might have learned materials other than the Divine Word by rote. The inhibitive influence on modern learning increases depending on the extent to which learners presume that these materials have some kind of intrinsic moral or practical value in themselves. Differently put, the presupposed intrinsic values result from a fantasy whose costs maintain mental laziness. Given the nature and context of the present undertaking, I am not arguing either for or against religious teaching. But the fact remains that as a culture existing at a certain space and time, we are more or less infatuated with a juvenile attachment to that which is contradictory at its core. We think that when it comes to learning and gaining insight, we should not wander too far because we only have to look at what the ancestors said to find 'truth'. Nothing can be more destructive than subscribing to the kind of fantasy that has been bequeathed to us by ancestors.

Unless we leave aside this romantic notion of what learning is supposed to be, we risk staying enmeshed in a vicious cycle that produces plagiarism. We are in love with being active participants in, not just witnesses to, a

contradiction, a logical impossibility, confusing the means and practices of a religious institution with the means and ways of modern learning such as the one that should be carried on at university. To me, plagiarism indicates a pressing urgency to fight towards setting our priorities for modern learning clearly.

Unlike the old version, modern learning stipulates revisions in the face of rising imperfections. The university tolerates no credulity before learned authorities nor the would-be authorities, at least not in the form we have freely indulged in for a long time, authority worship. With the increasingly rapid pace of contemporary life (just think how portable phones have moved from the first generation to the latest smartphones within less than a decade), the discovery of new evidence calls almost automatically for the revision of recent conclusions and the constant enhancements of already made syntheses to prevent them from becoming outdated. Inventors and contributors are rarely offended to learn that their devices or insights have been surpassed. As creative people, these inventors know that time-as-duration defines their achievements and that sooner or later that prized contribution will inevitably become obsolete; such is the logic that drives not only modern times but reality itself. It is both enthralling and depressing to register this fact.

Nevertheless, when it comes to the academy, mainly the humanities, our impulsive reaction in the MENA region is to praise the old authorities to the point of credulity. In the present textbook, I set the stage to shake up this belief in the so-called timeless and insurmountable authorities, hopefully to its core. As a literary scholar, I have observed that the ways in which authorities in the field of literary research are cited by certain students (both at the Master's and doctoral levels) remains rife with what we might call the cult of credulity. For example, in almost any piece that considers Edward Said's idea of Orientalism, the reader will find him or herself struck by the ways in which the researcher decontextualizes Said's central thesis and render it a timeless testimony for this or that argument. As will come into view over the course of this textbook, instead of citing an authority in order to engage in an argument and construct a more or less palatable thesis that only approximates reality and does not necessarily explain its totality, I should highlight that many researchers tend to cite in order to silence the argument and bring a discussion that has barely started to an untimely conclusion. Plagiarism starts from this unhealthy attitude towards former findings and research. With age, we falsely presume that the old findings become more enforced and further encroached on understanding. They certainly do, but only through our active laziness and complicity. The reverse should be

the case for, with age, more sources becoming more available. And there is ALWAYS a niche to view differently; that is, to adjust or refine, no matter how small or seemingly established a 'truth' might be.

All in all, inside this volume, you will find an attempt to recover the common sense that has been lost in research on the humanities, mainly literature. I now think of that lost common sense as a lost innocence, since veteran researchers tend at times to abuse research by forcing students to take roads that should not be taken. In this textbook, I will explain how we sometimes inadvertently bombard students with the heritage of the past, ask them to reproduce the authorities' findings in exams and terms papers, and then blame them when they 'reproduce' and 'unthink' in their dissertations. If you retain only one thing from this textbook, let it be my firm conviction that plagiarism does not just happen. Likewise, we know that plagiarism is no accident or misfortune that hits where it does and then evaporates with no trace. Rather, it is a complex and corrosive act nursed throughout years of training in educational institutions stretching all the way back to elementary school. Such training corrupts and sabotages our collective future because it stifles intelligence and creativity, and creates nations that are mentally broken, swimming in a sea of lethargy, and irresponsibly relying on means of subsistence that are outside their control: the state, the oil revenues, the global market, etc. The happy news is that no matter how endemic it might be, plagiarism is reversible. In the rest of the volume, you will find out how.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The present volume is the kind of textbook I wanted to read when I was in graduate school at the University of Algiers, but that I could not locate anywhere on the shelves back then. It had to be written first. And here I am, hopefully filling that gap. Towards this objective, although a decade and a half has passed since I was a student, it is not unusual to be asked the same set of questions by my students that I used to raise when I was in their position. This similarity across time illustrates the extent to which students are still distracted because they are confused. Distraction speaks of the troubled mind that desires to grapple with the teaching load, but because of the less than constructive ways teachers handle that load, learners' resistance arises, and plagiarism occurs. Lip service or ceremonial attempts designed to shift responsibility from instructors and place it on students further stigmatize students and lead them to take refuge in plagiarism.

Students of literature want to know how to respond in writing to texts they have read. Often, the ill-articulated question amounts to some version of the following: how can I write on a theme of my choice? How do I know that the given theme or subject-matter I want to pursue is scholarly enough? Where should I start? How can I write extensively and move beyond the usual five-paragraph essay? Students, the theory goes, are confused from the start because they are inattentive and easily distracted. But what if the reverse is true? The confusion stems from the inadequacy of certain teaching practices which breed distraction. The beauty of the features and the simplicity of the

content on *Facebook* and other social media platforms have arguably reduced students' capacity to focus on and follow an argument unless teachers make the effort to present it in an equally engaging way. It becomes interesting, therefore, to consider what would happen if methodology teachers were to turn their classes into engaging and congenial environments and involve content like that found on *Facebook*?

A situation where plagiarism thrives is by no means a simple phenomenon. In fact, it recalls what the political philosopher Hannah Arendt notes as the triumph of the social. There is no need to remind the reader that technologies and social media are largely responsible for lowering individuals' active engagement with reading. The indictment, no matter how reflective it might be, has become a cliché; its drawbacks pertain to the moralizing tone instructors and supervisors easily adopt. Students are demonized while instructors abuse their authority and escape responsibility. We seek to implement a more balanced position in the present textbook: theory is important but never forget to spice up one's learning with absorbing practice. A royal restaurant dinner creates a balance between the principal dish and the side ones, turning the meal into a pleasant, satiating totality. I am not of the opinion that we should discriminate against technology in consequence of the deficits it might cause in students. It is not for nothing that educationists push for the integration of technology in the classroom. Key features like note-insertion, processing, and highlighting in apps like *Zotero* or *Mendeley* help motivate students and provide solid applications of the theories they learn. Sections two and three of CHAPTER THREE address possible ways to stimulate students' thinking via technology.

A second complication in the plagiarism situation is the monopoly exercised by a single and monotonous culture. People of the so-called Arabo-Muslim culture often think and act under the naïve and arrogant belief that the world rotates only around people like them. Let us admit that we in the contemporary MENA region live in a culture where research in practically every discipline, not just in literature, is devalued. People tend to think that research efforts should be invested in archeology or, better still, in chemistry, biology or any other discipline where value and output can be measured and translated to tangible gains rather than in literature where such translation is not visible, at least not yet. Research funds are variably allocated based on this logic, which I do not hesitate to qualify as sick. Still, the tendency is that what is conceived as literary and what is thought of as research just do not, and indeed cannot, meet. Literature itself is often devaluated or thought to

be a deviation, if not a perversion, from the norm.[1] Hence, because of the stigma placed on the arts in general and poetry, in particular, any reference in research to them is judged as a perversion twice removed from normal and proper conduct. The stigma manifests in the absence of an approximative equivalent to the word 'drama' in Arabic. In times like these, a little dose of Immanuel Kant's third critique, *The Critique of Judgment* (1790), might be useful. The Enlightenment philosopher clearly stipulates that aesthetics and the cultivation of the beautiful must not be looked at as a luxury or unnecessary waste of time. In fact, in the famous third moment, Kant outlines what he calls "the purposiveness of purpose" or where the seeming purposelessness of the arts starts to be viewed as an illusion since the nurturing of beauty in man stays constitutional to what he or she is as a human (being).

I am aware that this is not the space to elaborate extensively, but since my objective in this textbook is to bust the inhibitive myths that if left unattended result in plagiarism, I find it useful to note that we of the MENA region, live at a point in history where the cultivation of the beautiful has been twice removed. Our culture has, for a long time, had solely one book of value. But what can probably be worse is that people seriously believe that there must only ever be one book. That is, MENA culture proffers that not only must you be happy and thankful to live under the auspices of that one book, but you are also obligated to vehemently refuse to consider any other books. Other books are seriously thought to be perverse because they contain narratives in which life is organized differently from the way people think, or to put it in better terms, ought to be thinking it should. As such, books other than 'the one' are perceived to stand in the way of mankind's ultimate happiness both in this life and the hereafter! According to this logic, plagiarizing to get a degree should end in nothing more serious than a scolding, as it is seen as a practical way of bypassing the 'daunting formalities' of the academy, of this present – that is, ephemeral life. Hence, how our sometimes questionable value system implicitly continues to encourage plagiarism.[2] It manages these mental gymnastics by applying labels that do not scandalize the practice.

---

[1] Just recall the reception of Kamel Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation* (2014). Note also the plethora of condemnations and name-calling that went with that reception, mainly by Islamists. Daoud deplores how recently the discussion regressed from what lies in the fictional work (images, characters, symbols etc.) to what is fiction after all.

[2] Think of all those cybercafés that mushroomed a few years ago. They used to advertise that they 'do' school research and assignments on their shop windows. The services they offered were nothing short of plagiarism, but students and parents used to swarm such locales and literally buy ready-made, downloadable work made by other people and attributed to the customers for a fee! Now, with the democratization of internet and printing machines at home, all are spared the need to confront plagiarism for what it is. But indeed parents, teachers and pupils are all fine with the practice, and hence how the lifting of the puzzle starts.

Allow me to remind you, readers, that this textbook embarks on the task of ending the 'epidemic of plagiarism'. One way of bringing a satisfactory end to plagiarism, in my humble opinion, is to undo the devaluation of the arts in general and literature in particular. Among the ideas that keep popping up in this textbook, one is that plagiarism results from the initial confusion between what ought to be there with what should not be there. By 'there' I mean that which is common in the public discussion since the academy is partly a reflection of the public's estimation and values. To many outside the academic sphere, the exact function and purpose of academic work are unclear, and thus the public's impulse reaction leads them to appropriate other scholars' works as their own. They lack the awareness that literary commentary is an engagement with the world and a discussion of the ways the world should be arranged and organized for mankind's earthly happiness. This profound misconception of what work in the arts is, to me, responsible for the public's animosity or apathy for literary works.

Furthermore, I do not think that we should be shy in pointing out the implications of the commodification of education. Not a small number of students enroll at universities and eventually write dissertations only to fulfill the requirement of earning a degree, any degree. One does not have to be Karl Marx to note how the commodification of education exacerbates students' connection with literary research by adding insult to injury with reference to the earlier enduring endemic. Alienated from the possibility of gaining power through meaningful research, students enroll in academic programs largely to ensure that they can find employment, entering into a system that they begrudge and hold responsible for their misery, in order to subsist. Students of English, who are transfixed by teaching positions in secondary and middle schools rarely, if ever, see the point of critically considering literary texts. Hence, their mantra sounds something like, "Why bother? Why should I read critically when everybody else is learning by rote or copy-pasting and faring well?" But sooner rather than later, the system will no longer be able to absorb all the graduates it produces, and students will have to compete in the ever-shrinking job market and face the music of their choices.

Thus, this textbook's *raison d'être* is to remind students that there has always been an alternative, and that their dreams should not be ruled either by fear of unemployment, frustrations about the economy, or alienation from the capitalist culture. In other words, it is often serviceable to look, read, and respond critically to things and issues of larger significance. Recall from your literary theory classes, the renowned post-Marxist Eric Fromm's *Escape from*

Freedom (1941). Fromm, a clinical psychologist by training, suggests that, contrary to the widely disseminated belief, not all people cherish freedom or find it truly important. Rather the opposite can be the case. People know that freedom comes at the cost, or even the burden, of personal and public responsibility. And, thus, some choose to forsake it. Thinking critically will put you in position to note possible ulterior motives and hidden assumptions. A reconciliation with literature and the arts is a requirement towards that end. More importantly, a reconciliation with literary research allows the filtering of narratives and presents empowering examples upon which we can model our collective fantasies and dreams.

In order for such a reconciliation to happen, however, we must first make a mental leap. Indeed, the framework of predominant thinking at the present is heading towards disempowerment. As active citizens, students should refuse degree programs which deny critical thinking and in which plagiarism is rampant. Deriding literary texts and belittling literary research, students should know, works to their disadvantage and ultimately contributes to their alienation and disempowerment. The stark reality of the MENA region indicates that a form of training where plagiarism is tolerated or has become the norm, cannot be counted on to create the entrepreneurial activity that demands constant critical thinking, synthesis, and complex decision-making. Not only does our present training not tolerate such thinking, it actually runs against the road to economic independence and, dare I say, true political agency. The mindset nurtured within the old training system leads, despite itself, automatically to dead ends, such as government positions that no longer exist or that will become accessible to only a tiny minority. Still, the mindset we seek to instill in this textbook will slowly but surely inculcate a mindset that will lead to entrepreneurial enterprise and allow for endurance in the marketplace. In other words, instead of applying for jobs and bearing the humiliation of rejections, following the research tips outlined in the upcoming chapters will make you more mentally adept and allow you to start and run your own startup.

However, while I firmly believe that plagiarism stands in the way of our collective happiness and literally bares the achievement of our economic and cultural independence, let us not precipitate events too much. By 'our' I mean simply the post-colonial political arrangement and the bare existence of post-colonial life. In addition to serving or disserving the powers that be, plagiarism robs both the individual involved and the community at large. It robs us of the chance to chart an alternative present and plan a promising future. Hence, how plagiarism-free research can remind us all that

our futures lie in no one's hands but our own. It is a story that allows us to reclaim our collective fate and refuse the coercion hiding in the pathological comfort of being a victim. The chapters inside this textbook are structured as an intellectual encounter. From the earliest stages, I will hit on an idea and follow its logical path until its ultimate execution and successful presentation to and reception by peers.

First, in 'CHAPTER ONE: From Reading to Writing', I discuss how my purpose in readying alienated minds and busting destructive myths is more than lip service to be mentioned in passing through a general introduction. Some readers may find the extensive annotations in this chapter a little meaningless or boring, but that is not how they are intended. My interactions with students have made it crystal clear that many indeed miss these basic and commonsensical notions that those with experienced backgrounds may see as a self-evident restatement of the obvious. The first section will elaborate on the state of mind that marks a researcher, no matter how elementary his or her research is. The second section defines evidence. Towards evidence-based research, I find it necessary that students can distinguish real evidence from that which merely looks like evidence or goes by the name. The third section examines what an academic argument is and how it differs from other types of arguments. Mainly, I will address Karl Popper's principle of falsifiability.

'CHAPTER TWO: The Craft of Research Writing' begins with section four in which I seek to re-center the role of reading in carrying out a smooth research experience. While observation and a clear sense of purpose are assets, they will not create a smooth experience by themselves. One must read, and read extensively. I will elaborate on why researchers must read other researchers' research and publications. Refining the research problematic cannot occur through mere intuition or hindsight. Rather, researchers refine their problematics by comparing their ideas with the volume of literature (previous research) that is out there. Section five readies students for an expert form of reading, teaching them to read the way expert researchers read. Proven techniques of reading-for-research do exist, and it will be to the student's advantage to adopt these techniques. Adopting the interrogative mode is one such technique for generating interesting responses and combinations. Section six extends the inquisitive mindset via aggregating and uplifting the resulting questions into a pattern or category. Uplifting in particular will help students note a common denominator or trend in their research which will, in turn, facilitate the nuanced articulation of the thesis or what the French expertly call '*la problématique*'. Regardless of how little difference there may seem to

be from the original research question, the thesis at this stage is steadily progressing from the one stated in the research proposal.

In the seventh section in 'CHAPTER THREE: Meaningful Reading,' I illustrate how a literature review further refines the thesis. Students have a tendency to think of this stage as a mere formality and do not realize that a good review of literature creates further thesis reformulations. Section eight outlines how reading other researchers' output, that is, published peer-reviewed articles and books, exacts an awareness of the multiple facets of a research piece. No matter how misleading and self-defeating the practice might be, students continue to read a research piece from cover to cover, demotivating themselves in the process. Section nine lays out the one proven method of reading-for-research purposes, namely creating an 'annotated bibliography' to each reading material deemed central.

In 'CHAPTER FOUR: Writing with a Purpose,' I address the business of writing and how to successfully navigate this phase. Section ten begins with the need to inculcate a rationale or a statement that explains why the study you are conducting is important and why other researchers should bother to consider not only its findings but its questions as well. Remaining focused on the rationale gives the student/researcher a governing principle, even a roadmap, for action. It enables him or her to carry on towards successful completion. As it is common to be dispirited or loss track, particularly when attending to the multitude of equally important tasks in the thesis writing process while also trying to lead a life, it is often necessary to visualize the why(s) of the project.[3] Section eleven builds on section ten by drawing students' attention to the fact that a clear and careful rationale facilitates readability. It does so by reminding the audience that the preoccupations addressed by the project serve certain material implications for everyday life. Section twelve lifts the illusion that reading encyclopedias, textbooks, and introductory series books can cast doubt about the student's status as a researcher. Gaining familiarity with a topic and compensating for a poor acquaintance obliges a recourse to this type of reading.

'CHAPTER FIVE: Writing Relentlessly' addresses the hows at a micro level. It begins with section thirteen, 'Outlining and Re-outlining' in which I highlight the necessity to distinguish between research as an evolving process and research as a final product. The classical format of presentation – introduction, several chapters, and a conclusion – has an inhibitive effect when

---

[3]Nietzsche expertly stated: "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how." Friedrich Nietzsche, "Maxims and Arrows" in *Twilights of the Idols* (1888).

the student applies this format to his or her working plan. I then provide an alternative format which eases both the conception and progression of research. Section fourteen probes the English rhetorical tradition and its differences from say, Arabic or French traditions. For example, I have noticed that the conception of the paragraph with the topic sentence at its center does not automatically register with non-native English users. The cost of this error is not negligible; long sentences, convoluted writing, and multiple topic sentences competing within the same paragraph are among the major reasons explaining the dwindling of students' morale. Section fifteen highlights the way many of us think, and opens avenues for exploring how to plan paragraphs, sections, and even entire chapters or dissertations in images and diagrams. Laying out plans by either hand drawing or the many features available in *MS Word* or other apps can be a valuable asset in planning and carrying on research. Planning through images saves time as it enables students to self-critique and slowly gain them autonomy from supervisors.

Now, a final note on how this book should be read. Obviously, I do not recommend that everyone must read it in a linear fashion. Reading from cover to cover will possibly kill your passion entirely, for, even as a novice researcher, you will certainly excel at some of the foundational elements addressed here, say, sketching research questions, drawing plans or inserting notes in *Zotero*, but find yourself lacking in others: how to hunt down and strategize types of evidence, or neutralize competing topic sentences and save them for a future paragraph. Thus, I advise starting with the sections you find yourself lacking in. You will find some help there. And, if you become fed up with what might feel like endless moralizations, the activities sections will provide you with some challenging respite that will save you abstractions and stimulate your interest by engaging you with what you likely stand in dire need of. Therefore, it is useful not to underestimate the activities sections and seek them out for more comprehensive engagement with methodology.

THE ABCs OF LITERARY RESEARCH

1.1 On Being Critical and Being a Researcher

Novice researchers, often materializing in the form of Master's or doctoral students, constantly hear their instructor's praise for the virtues of critical thinking. Yet, no matter how much instructors earnestly seek to nurse such qualities, the lesson rarely registers. I mean that the wording of the lesson rarely, if at all, manages to grab the novice researchers' attention given the anesthesia caused by rote learning. To put it a different way, singing the praises of 'critical thinking' within the classroom is one thing, whereas practicing 'critical thinking', while formulating a thesis, reading an important reference, performing a literature review, or posing guiding research sub-questions, is a TOTALLY different undertaking. The student's passive, receptive role in traditionally conceived classroom settings (the instructor staying the only active player) makes him or her largely unconscious of the discrepancy between the targeted outcome (what is expected of him or her) on the one hand, and the emptiness of his or her situation (the inability to act out or practice the desired skills) on the other. I qualify the discrepancy between these two states of mind as conflicting because sitting passively while receiving the so-called knowledge from an authority needs to be clearly distinguished from the many tasks that involve active engagement similar to the one expected when practicing 'critical thinking' skills. Indeed, an unacknowledged gap (often a large one) exists between the theoretical instructions students receive in the classroom and the real task of composing knowledge and carrying out research.