## What are commercial alternatives? Have these changed since the project started?

Most electronic texts used by module and programme leaders at Edinburgh Napier University, whose students would be interested in eTIPS eTextbooks, are supplied by the library services there. Format varies, with the move across both Universities toward an 'e-first' acquisition policy that has motivated interest and education in the use of eTextbooks. The range identified here takes into account the popularity of a core group of competitive titles published across Amazon, a 'random search' there, and of the most popular titles loaned by partner institutions.
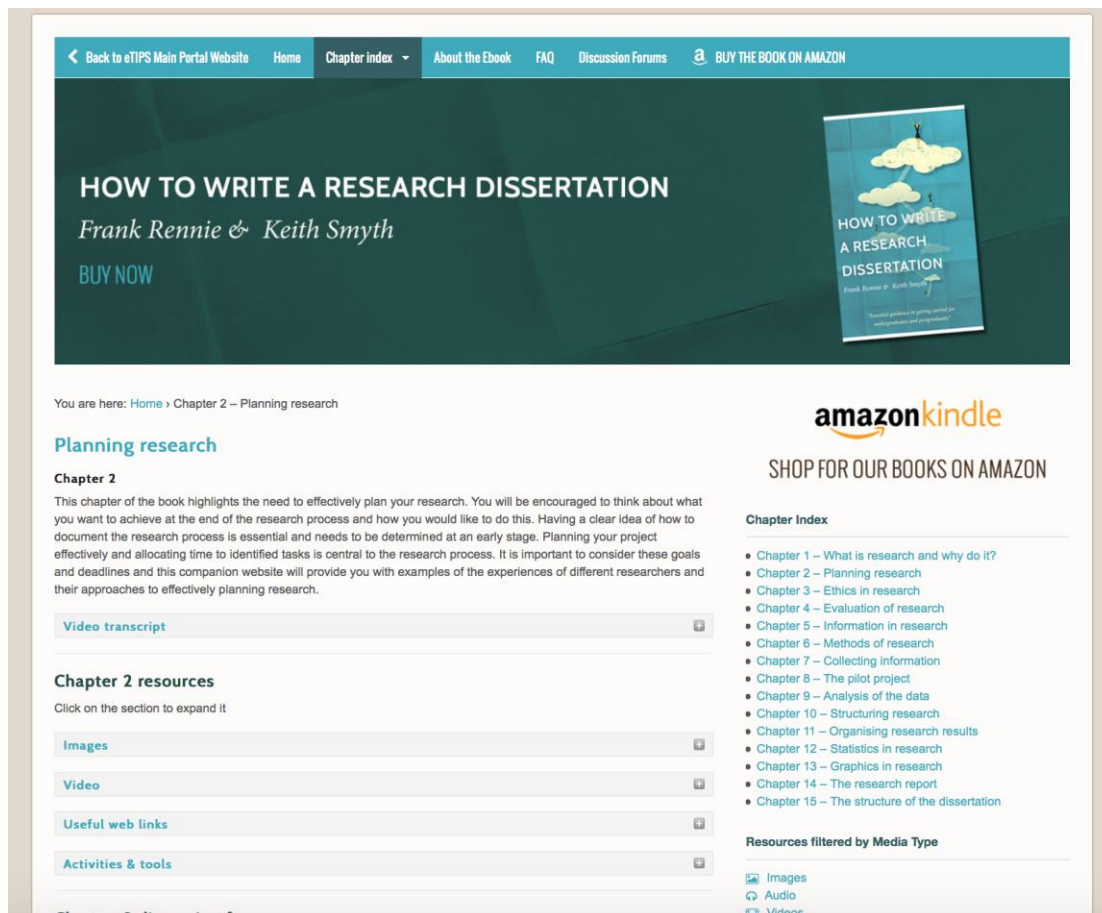


*Fig.2 Companion materials for the first eTIPS eTextbook*

The project report of 2015 identified eight titles that it felt were a direct competitor to the eTIPS publications (*Fig.3*), in being available as Kindle downloads across the AmazonUK platform. Only two are priced at around the same as eTIPS', others in the range of £8.99 to £21.99 per download. The average across the selection is £12.18.

Across Amazon.co.uk, further publications are now available in Kindle format, which cover similar ground to that of eTIPS'. *The Literature Review in Research and Dissertation Writing* by *Garson,* the *Dissertation Writing Guide Book series* by *Corey*, *Purple* Guides by *Horn,* and *Essential Study Skills Series* by *Horn* offer short and low-priced (around the £1.99-£3.99 mark) guidance in serial form, across specific areas of research. Premium priced, professionally published works like '*Dissertation Research and Writing for Construction Students'* by Nauoum (Routledge) and *Doing Your*

*Research Project: A Guide for First-Time Researchers, by Bell and Waters* perform well across Amazon, but no better than those at the lower end.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Writing a Research paper | Kate John | £1.99 | 73,917 |
| Writing A Doctoral Project Proposal | Paul Trowler | £2.49 | 193,722 |
| The Craft of Research | Wayne C Booth | £8.99 | 42,154 |
| Research Design | John Creswell | £14.99 | 83,127 |
| Constructing Grounded Theory | Katy Charmaz | £21.99 | 70,327 |
| Research Methods in Education | Louis Cohen | £14.99 | 185,280 |
| Doing Your Research Project | Judith Bell | £14.99 | 216,757 |
| Doing Qualitative Research | David Silverman | £16.99 | 65,811 |
| | | | |
| How To Write A Research Dissertation | eTIPS (1) | £1.99 | 86,289 |
| Understanding Your Research Project | eTIPS (2) | £1.99 | 360,072 |

*Fig.3 Performance of eTIPS eTextbooks against initial competitive titles*
*(AmazonUK rankings taken on 16/8/16)*

For the purpose of this report, then, the list of competitor titles has grown to twenty-three. This is because by entering into the Kindle market place, eTIPS' publication opens it to a new set of commercial alternatives which, when accounted, open opportunities for continuous data-rich benchmarking. We elected to test a method of benchmarking that may prove useful for future Institutions as Publishers (IAPs). These additional commercial alternatives are all titles which can be found in the Kindle market place, but not necessarily anywhere else, and were selected by how easy it is for users to find them in the Kindle store.

The new Kindle-specific data set of commercial alternatives predominately features 12 titles. Their prices range between £1.99 and £24.69 and an average price of £20.80 (not including free versions on Kindle Unlimited). Amazon track a title's performance in multiple ways. We refer to our primary point of comparison as "Rank 1" – the first ranking and sales category to be seen by the customer in a title's product details. When you take the median average of each title's Rank 1 data over eight months, UHI's title currently comes in as one of the top five performers of its Kindle benchmarked marketplace commercial alternatives.

**The methodology for benchmarking:**

"How to Write a Research Dissertation" is sold exclusively on Amazon's website, Amazon KDP. For the purposes of evaluation, it is being benchmarked against 15 unique titles. However, due to the complex nature of how amazon groups titles, the meaning of this benchmarking isn't as implicit as it would be if the same title was distributed via Waterstones or Blackwells.

The amazon market place is complex and ever shifting both in the content and organisation of content. Benchmarking titles requires a comprehensive and agreeable method of categorisation to make any act of comparison meaningful. Benchmarking titles which are distributed via amazon can prove challenging due to Amazon's fluid nature. A brick and mortar book store, traditionally deals with larger established publishers almost exclusively. As such, books from different publishers are given to sellers with guidance as to how they can be categorised, alternatively, the seller might

have a method or means of determining categories with the primary purpose of making it easier for consumers to find titles, and publishers and distributors to benchmark them against each other.

However, due to its online nature and the fact that amazon must be able to accommodate titles from any publisher (including self-publishers), Amazon is capable of categorising texts in a number of different ways simultaneously. This makes it easier to find

> Amazon Bestsellers Rank: #115,519 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store)
> #25 in Books > Science & Nature > Engineering & Technology > Engineering Skills & Design > **Technical Writing**
> #109 in Kindle Store > Books > Nonfiction > Professional & Technical > Medicine > **Nursing**
> #338 in Kindle Store > Books > Education & Reference > **Writing**

texts by providing different "paths of discovery" to them.

A single title can have multiple levels (or "ranks") and multiple dimensions of relevance to subjects, genres, and other titles, based on any number of factors - including seller/user tagging as well as data gathered by amazon on a user's purchases and web traffic. As such, categorization (and subsequently, ranking) of titles is fluid, part manual, part autonomous, and constantly updating; creating multiple contexts with which to delineate a set of comparable titles

In short, our means of benchmarking had to be reliable, but also reflect amazon's fluid nature which is based on a title's varying levels and multiple dimensions of relevance. Baring all of this in consideration, the evaluation team concluded that selecting titles to benchmark should focus on a two dimensions of relevance – the format and the needs of the user.

Using the search term "how to write a research dissertation", and specifying the "Kindle Store" Amazon's search engine returned 24-30 titles total, 15 of which were unique titles which were ranked by Amazon. These titles were then compared using the three basic forms of ranking displayed on the purchasing page i.e. the form of ranking most often seen by customers. These ranking were collected at (currently) 17 intervals over roughly 6 months, and analysed below.

Because this search term is very similar to the title of the UHI's e-tips book, you might expect that this would skew the returns in favour of it. However, it should be noted that

> a)    This search term was chosen independently of the title.
> b)    Other titles returned often performed better across all rankings.
> c)    The Amazon Benchmark Group is highly diverse in the manner and quality of their production.
> d)    The titles and the number of titles returned is virtually unchanged in the months we've been recording.

In order to analyse the performance rankings as a group, we first had look at the average rankings of each title over time. This is because each title can change ranking dramatically on a week-to-week basis. This often meant that a single title's weekly average performance could easily be skewed by a dramatic rise or fall of its rank. As a result, we calculated each title's weekly performance based on the median average ranking. As expected, this resulted in each title having a weekly

average performance that was more representative (as pictured here in this condensed table of our benchmark titles.

| | A | AJ | AK | AL | AM | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Kindle Store "how to write a research dissertation" titles returned ▼ | nk 1 /05 ▼ | Rank 1 13/05 ▼ | Rank 1 27/05 ▼ | Median Rankin g 1 ▼↑ | N A F |
| 13 | How to Write a Successful Dissertation | 29 | 42 | 17 | 28 | 2 |
| 14 | How To Write A Thesis: The complete guide to | 52 | 54 | 58 | 50.5 | · |
| 16 | How to Write a Master's Thesis | 265 | 4 | 133 | 237.5 | 2 |
| 17 | How to Write a Better Thesis | 263 | 285 | 132 | 238.5 | |
| 18 | **How to write a research** | 1077 | 535 | 1141 | 259.5 | : |
| 19 | How to Write an Exceptional Thesis or | 291 | 289 | 288 | 269.5 | : |
| 20 | How to Channel Your Dissertation: Get a PhD or | 378 | 368 | 248 | 313.5 | 2 |
| 21 | Dissertations made Manageable. How to | 420 | 412 | 408 | 340 | : |
| 22 | How to Design, Write, and Present a | 261 | 279 | 338 | 340.5 | 3 |
| 23 | A Research Dissertation: How to write and structure | 548 | 555 | 552 | 492 | · |
| 24 | How to Research & Write a Successful PhD | 563 | 612 | 672 | 670.5 | I |
| 25 | How to Channel Your Dissertation: Get a PhD or | 455 | 510 | 691 | 968 | : |
| 27 | Seven Steps to an A+ Research Paper | 5560 | 5582 | 5625 | 5146.5 | |
| 28 | | | | | | |

What we did not expect was how that would affect the distribution of performance amongst the titles across the benchmarck group. Currently…

a)	The median average of weekly performance for each titles ranges between #28 - #5146.
b)	Among the benchmark group, 7 out of 15 titles have an average performance ranking that falls within 100 places of each other, between 234-374.
c)	These 7 titles fall within the middle of the benchmark group, leading us to believe that our benchmark group is representative of comparative titles (at least in terms of performance)

With this information, we believe our dataset is reliable enough begin looking for anything that might be statistically significant. In the upcoming year, the evaluation team will determine the best model for producing a meaningful statistical analysis of weekly Amazon rankings.

The Benchmarking Data Set can be viewed on the following two pages, first in raw data and then in graphical representation.

## 9.3 Weekly Amazon Rankings for Benchmark Titles

Kindle Store "how to write a research dissertation" titles returned

| Title | Author | Publisher | Price | Kindle Unlimited | Rank 1 3009 | Rank 1 0610 | Rank 1 1610 | Rank 1 2310 | Rank 1 3010 | Rank 1 0711 | Rank 1 1311 | Rank 1 0412 | Rank 1 1812 | Rank 1 1901 | Rank 1 1501 | Rank 1 2201 | Rank 1 2901 | Rank 1 0502 | Rank 1 1205 | Rank 1 2202 | Rank 1 1003 | Rank 1 1903 | Rank 1 2903 | Rank 1 0104 | Rank 1 0804 | Rank 1 1504 | Rank 1 2204 | Rank 1 0905 | Rank 1 1305 | Rank 1 2705 | Median Ranking 1 | Mean Average Rank 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How to Write a Successful Dissertation. | Dimitra Hartas | n/a | 2.27 | y | 7 | 31 | 17 | 20 | 49 | 5 | 25 | 25 | 2 | 39 | 46 | 42 | 9 | 33 | 47 | 23 | 17 | 27 | 48 | 47 | 52 | 23 | 47 | 29 | 42 | 17 | 28 | 29.576923 |
| How To Write A Thesis: The complete guide to | Peter T Jackson | n/a | 3.32 | y | 43 | 46 | 48 | 50 | 53 | 54 | 56 | 28 | 39 | 48 | 49 | 51 | 52 | 56 | 59 | 60 | 16 | 25 | 33 | 39 | 48 | 53 | 52 | 52 | 54 | 58 | 50.5 | 46.96538 |
| How to Write a Master's Thesis | Yvonne N. bui | SAGE Publications, | 22.22 | | 173 | 203 | 217 | 15 | 102 | 153 | 174 | 258 | 214 | 261 | 271 | 280 | 281 | 268 | 276 | 286 | 288 | 267 | 283 | 283 | 78 | 148 | 207 | 265 | 4 | 133 | 237.5 | 207.23077 |
| How to Write a Better Thesis | David Evans and Paul Gruba | Springer | 16.24 | n | 160 | 265 | 140 | 238 | 276 | 328 | 376 | 311 | 186 | 198 | 157 | 239 | 295 | 341 | 176 | 295 | 167 | 132 | 261 | 85 | 209 | 264 | 149 | 263 | 285 | 132 | 238.5 | 228 |
| How to write a research | Frank Rennie and Keith Smyth | eTIPS | 1.99 | | 1414 | 155 | 43 | 356 | 19 | 2 | 1 | 51 | 51 | 336 | 88 | 119 | 315 | 70 | 525 | 141 | 214 | 582 | 240 | 1088 | 372 | 279 | 324 | 1077 | 535 | 1141 | 259.5 | 366.84615 |
| How to Write an Exceptional Thesis or How to Channel Your... | J.S. Graustein | n/a | 19.4 | n | 245 | 252 | 255 | 262 | 277 | 31 | 82 | 191 | 225 | 245 | 259 | 261 | 263 | 268 | 271 | 279 | 283 | 285 | 292 | 291 | 288 | 282 | 290 | 291 | 289 | 288 | 269.5 | 251.73077 |
| Dissertation: Get a PhD or Dissertations made | Marcus T Anthony | MindFutures | 3.16 | y | 396 | 402 | 413 | 412 | 419 | 435 | 412 | 35 | 196 | 75 | 33 | 182 | 152 | 229 | 287 | 340 | 311 | 85 | 280 | 294 | 316 | 320 | 320 | 378 | 368 | 248 | 313.5 | 282.23077 |
| Manageable: How to | conrad Jones | The Thriller Factory | 2.75 | y | 405 | 139 | 265 | 303 | 354 | 172 | 249 | 415 | 432 | 461 | 23 | 198 | 273 | 326 | 374 | 426 | 82 | 211 | 297 | 317 | 363 | 393 | 413 | 420 | 412 | 408 | 340 | 312.73077 |
| How to Design, Write, and Present a | Elizabeth Wentz | SAGE Publications, | 20.51 | | 281 | 282 | 285 | 285 | 296 | 296 | 301 | 359 | 325 | 343 | 351 | 363 | 369 | 369 | 382 | 391 | 414 | 408 | 401 | 397 | 395 | 55 | 148 | 261 | 279 | 338 | 340.5 | 322.07692 |
| A Research Dissertation: How to write and structure | Tim Kupar | n/a | 2.38 | y | 192 | 108 | 279 | 300 | 388 | 146 | 220 | 371 | 415 | 467 | 474 | 489 | 489 | 495 | 506 | 517 | 527 | 511 | 507 | 508 | 526 | 529 | 533 | 548 | 555 | 552 | 492 | 425.84615 |
| How to Research & Write a Successful PhD | Kathleen McMillan and Jonathan Weyers | Pearson | 10.99 | n | 372 | 433 | 518 | 570 | 620 | 658 | 669 | 806 | 629 | 717 | 724 | 733 | 735 | 726 | 739 | 731 | 755 | 747 | 760 | 766 | 162 | 292 | 367 | 563 | 612 | 672 | 670.5 | 618.30769 |
| How to Channel Your... Dissertation: Get a PhD or | Marcus T Anthony | MindFutures | 3.07 | y | 827 | 830 | 849 | 854 | 871 | 873 | 884 | 1052 | 947 | 991 | 991 | 993 | 989 | 1000 | 1003 | 1015 | 1024 | 1034 | 1036 | 1037 | 1046 | 101 | 246 | 455 | 510 | 631 | 968 | 85188462 |
| Seven Steps to an A+ Research Paper | Heather Mae Russell | Swallowtail Ink | 2.17 | y | 4374 | 4415 | 4497 | 4520 | 4570 | 4631 | 4624 | 5585 | 5585 | 5005 | 5055 | 5088 | 5073 | 5111 | 5172 | 5121 | 5360 | 5396 | 5395 | 5397 | 5434 | 5454 | 5476 | 5560 | 5582 | 5625 | 5146.5 | 5119.4231 |