Graduate Research School

Thesis Writing Workshop
Science/ Applied Science

Dr Jo Edmondston
Graduate Education Officer
Graduate Education Officers

The Graduate Education Officers provide a range of academic writing support to Higher Degree by Research students at UWA, including workshops, writing spaces and writing retreats.

Read more here: [http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/resources](http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/resources)
Find writing event dates here: [http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/resources/events](http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/resources/events)

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Resources

Finding Theses

- UWA Library – How to Find Theses http://www.library.uwa.edu.au/research/theses

Academic Writing Advice

- Online Writing Lab (OWL) https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/

Doctoral Blogs

- Explorations of Style http://explorationsofstyle.com/
- Doctoral Writing Special Interest Group (SIG) https://doctoralwriting.wordpress.com/home/
- Thesis Whisperer http://thesiswhisperer.com/

Papers

- Cowden. The Conversation: A PhD by publication or how I got my doctorate and kept my sanity. http://theconversation.com/a-phd-by-publication-or-how-i-got-my-doctorate-and-kept-my-sanity-11012
- Willis. Times Higher Education: Looks good on paper... https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/looks-good-on-paper/416988.article

UWA Policies regarding Authorship

Theses Provided as Examples


Jones, Christopher. 2007. Laser scanning confocal arthroscopy in orthopaedics: examination of chondrial and connective tissues, quantification of chondrocyte morphology, investigation of matrix-induced autologous chondrocyte implantation and characterisation of osteoarthritis. University of Western Australia. School of Mechanical Engineering & School of Surgery and Pathology.


What stage of thesis writing are you at?
What discipline are you writing for?
Do you intend to format your thesis as a series of papers?


The term "thesis" comes from the Greek θέσις, meaning "something put forth", and refers to an intellectual proposition.

A thesis forms the central organising principle for the writing and drives the structure of the text - the thesis is “expression of a singular profound and embracive idea that permeates all aspects of the thesis production”. (Cantwell, 2006, p182).


What is your thesis?
2. UWA Thesis Format

At UWA: one (small) set of rules for all PhD theses and the same criteria for PhD examination.

http://handbooks.uwa.edu.au/course-rules#id-69908

Content and format of a thesis (selected rules)

39. A thesis must be in English unless the Board has approved otherwise.

41. A typescript may be structured in any of a range of ways, including, but not limited to: a monograph; a paper or series of papers suitable for publication in scholarly journals; or a combination of published and unpublished work.

Work that has been published may be presented in the format in which it was published or with the formatting adjusted for consistency with the rest of the typescript.

If any of the items submitted have been jointly authored— the work done by the student must be clearly indicated and certified as such by the co-authors; and the co-authors must certify that they agree to the inclusion in the thesis of work of which they are joint authors.

If a series of papers is presented, there must be a full explanatory introduction and a review article at the end to link the separate papers and to place them in the context of the established body of knowledge.

42. A thesis must include a summary of approximately 250 words.

44. A thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, including footnotes but excluding words in tables, maps, endnotes, bibliographies, appendices and other illustrative matter, normally must not exceed 100,000 words.
The format and style of your thesis should meet the requirements of your discipline and the needs of your examiners.

The Graduate Research School only have a small number of style and format requirements for theses. This gives you the flexibility to format your thesis to fit your discipline and project needs. To make good decisions about the appearance of your thesis, read the rules of your course, review your examination criteria, look at similar theses in the UWA Research Repository, and discuss your thesis format with your supervisors. Also aim for a thesis that is logical and easy to read. Your choice of fonts, font sizes, margins, heading styles, the amount of white space used, and the number and titles of chapters should be informed by the needs of your readers.

There are a number of thesis requirements that apply to all higher degree by research students. Details of these requirements and proformas are provided below to help you with these statements and declarations:

1. Title page
2. Thesis Declaration
3. Abstract/summary
4. Table of contents
5. Acknowledgements
6. Authorship Declaration
7. Main text
8. Bibliography or references
9. Appendices
Explore the structure of the thesis using the front pages provided. All of these theses were rated very highly by the examiners. Try not to engage too heavily with the content – start with theses that are very different to your discipline.

- How long is the introduction chapter?
- How long is the discussion chapter - & what is it called?
- How many chapters are there?
- How long is the thesis?

- Is there a separate literature review chapter?
- Is the literature review incorporated into the introduction?

- Is there a separate methods chapter?

- Are publications included in the thesis?
  - What types of publications are included?
  - What is the publication status of papers?
  - Is there one paper per chapter?
  - Are the papers sole author or multi-author?
  - Is the student’s contribution clearly indicated in the thesis declaration?
  - Have the publications been reformatted?
  - Have the publications been adapted in any way – text added or deleted? Is there a preface to the papers, or linking text, or additional chapters that are not published?

- Is there a consolidated reference list?

- What is included in the appendices?

Discuss with your group the features you like, the features you don’t like, and the features you were not expecting.
3. Thesis Components

Front page proformas are provided to assist you with the text required in the front pages of your thesis. The proformas also provide a high resolution copy of the UWA logo.

http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/thesis/style

You should choose one of the three proformas according to whether your thesis:

1. Does not contain any published work (ThesisFront_NoPublications)
2. Contains only sole-authored work (ThesisFront_SoleAuthor)
3. Contains one of more co-authored publications (ThesisFront_CoAuthor)

Title Page
See http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/thesis/style

Your title should be a condensed summary of your thesis that incorporates your key words (important for search engine algorithms). Try to:

- accurately summarise your thesis.
- Remove any non-contributing words and spell out any acronyms or abbreviations.
- Consider if you can or should move from being descriptive to analytical?


Thesis Declaration
As per thesis front page proforma – found at:
http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/thesis/style#authorship

Abstract (400-700 words)
Summary of entire thesis - why you did the work, how you did the work, your main findings/ results, your principal conclusions.

Once upon a time researchers believed that ……………………….. (literature review).
But then I thought that maybe ………………………………………………… (aims),
so, what I did was ………………………………………………………….. (method),
and I've discovered that ……………………………………………………. (findings),
which changed the way we ……………………………………………………… (contribution to knowledge).

What is your thesis story?

Contents Page(s)
Order: Table of contents, List of Figures, List of Tables, Abbreviations

Acknowledgements
Typical structure - formal to the least formal thanks: supervisors, other academics, colleagues, family, supportive friends.

Important to acknowledge any person/institution that has contributed funding to the project, other researchers who have been involved in the research, and/or institutions that have contributed to the research in some way.

Should also acknowledge proofreaders and editors.
Writing the acknowledgments: the etiquette of thanking https://doctoralwriting.wordpress.com/2013/04/18/writing-the-acknowledgments-the-ettiquette-of-thanking/
Authorship Declarations
Allows examiner to assess your contribution to the thesis.

In the declaration, include only the published work included in the thesis = other published work can be noted / included in the appendix.

If co-authored work is included in your thesis, you need to ensure your co-authors are aware of, and approve of, inclusion of the work in your thesis and your statement of contribution to this work.

Bibliography / References
Aim for consistency in referencing style where possible.

Appendix / Appendices
An appendix provides supplementary material related to the research but not directly relevant to the argument of the thesis. Text in appendices do not count towards total word count of the thesis.

General advice
• Ask your supervisor’s advice on thesis format & style
• Examine other theses in your discipline area for format & style
• Read a concise style guide
• Develop your own style & structure – prepare your own style guide to establish & document the rules you will follow in your thesis (and if your supervisor suggests something – add it to this guide)

Linking Your Thesis through Metadiscourse

Doctoral writing SIG. Where is this going? Metadiscourse for readers and writers
https://doctoralwriting.wordpress.com/2014/11/15/wheres-this-going-metadiscourse-for-readers-and-writers/

Explorations of Style. Signposting and metadiscourse.
3. Thesis Examination at UWA

In Australia, higher research degrees (PhD and MPhil) are usually awarded purely on the basis of the written thesis – examination is independent of the supervisory team (and the university).

At UWA, examiners provide a quantitative report (ranking of 1-6 for 6 areas), a qualitative report (average 100 lines or 2-3 pages) and an overall recommendation for classification.

From Jan 2018, all PhD candidates at UWA are also required to complete an oral examination known as the Viva Voce.

Learn more about the UWA Viva Voce here: [http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/oral-examination](http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/oral-examination)

What Do Examiners Expect


Consider how examiners’ examine when writing your thesis. They report:

- Reading a thesis over period of 2-3 weeks, often at night or on weekends.
- First reading the abstract, then the introduction and discussion, and then going back over the thesis from cover to cover.
- First impressions are important – ‘sloppiness’ with regard to typographical errors, calculations, referencing is often seen as indicative of ‘sloppy’ research.
- Being reluctant to fail a thesis.

In addition to high quality research, examiners are looking for a:

- Coherent & well-structured thesis
- Indication of your understanding of the field
- Clearly articulated and reasoned description of your research choices, and
- Expression of the collective importance of your research.

If your thesis is:

- Disjointed – add text to link papers to generate coherent document
- Incomplete – add text to compensate for inadequacies in background, methods, data shown, discussion
- Repetitive – delete or consolidate text to reduce redundancy in introduction and/or methods
UWA Graduate Research School Board considers all examiner’s reports then classifies the thesis.

GRS Seminar Slides: Thesis Examination at UWA.  

2012 UWA Study of Thesis Examination Outcomes

Holbrook, Bourke & Lovat.  
Centre for the Study of Research Training & Impact. The University of Newcastle.  
804 Australian PhD candidates & 2121 examiner reports.
The (PhD) thesis shall be a substantial and original contribution to scholarship, for example through the discovery of new knowledge, the formulation of theories or the innovative re-interpretation of known data and established ideas.

| STUDENT: | REF: |
| EXAMINER: |

**RECOMMENDATION FOR CLASSIFICATION**

- Please mark one box only and refer Page 2 for the required Merit Criteria Scores –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PASS</th>
<th>The thesis be <strong>PASSED</strong> with no requirement for correction or amendments and the student be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The thesis be <strong>PASSED, SUBJECT TO MINOR REVISION</strong> as indicated in my report to the satisfaction of the Board.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|  | The thesis be **PASSED, SUBJECT TO SUBSTANTIVE AMENDMENTS** along the lines indicated in my report.  
* The student will normally be instructed to submit a detailed report to the Board of the Graduate Research School outlining the amendments to the thesis. The Board will consider the report and the revisions in determining the final classification, without further reference to the examiners. |

OR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RE-SUBMIT</th>
<th>The thesis be <strong>RE-SUBMITTED</strong> for examination after completing the required extra work and revision indicated in my report. (A thesis which must be re-submitted requires alterations of such scale, complexity and/or conceptual significance that their adequacy should be appraised again by an external expert(s)).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

OR

| AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER | The thesis **NOT** be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy but be **PASSED** for the appropriate degree of MASTER. (The (Masters) degree must be a substantial work generally based on independent research which shows a sound knowledge of the subject of the research, evidence of the exercise of some independence of thought and ability of expression in clear and concise language). |

OR

| FAIL | The thesis be **FAILED** and the student **NOT** be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy OR the degree of master and NOT be permitted to resubmit the thesis in a revised form. |
Please complete the following Merit Criteria Scores for this thesis with respect to the six criteria for award of a Doctor of Philosophy from The University of Western Australia. Please indicate your scores next to each criterion. (Refer Merit Criteria Scores Key)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCORE</th>
<th>CRITERIA FOR THE AWARD OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY - THESIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The thesis as a whole is a substantial and original contribution to knowledge of the subject with which it deals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The student shows familiarity with, and understanding of, the relevant literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The thesis provides a sufficiently comprehensive study of the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The techniques adopted are appropriate to the subject matter and are properly applied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The results are suitably set out, and accompanied by adequate exposition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The quality of English and general presentation are of a standard for publication.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCORE</th>
<th>CRITERION FOR ANY ADDITIONAL EXAMINABLE COMPONENT/S FOR AWARD OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY –(IF APPLICABLE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any additional examinable components demonstrate technical accomplishment and imaginative resource and/or advanced technical and interpretative accomplishment (as appropriate)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Merit Criteria Scores Key

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCORE</th>
<th>MERIT CRITERIA</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Exceptional</td>
<td>Of the highest merit, at the forefront of international PhDs in the field. Fewer than 5% of students worldwide would fall in this band.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Strongly competitive at international levels. Fewer than 20% of students would fall in this band.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>An interesting, sound and compelling thesis. Approximately 30% of students would fall in this band.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>A sound thesis, but lacks a compelling element in some respect. Approximately 30% of students would fall in this band.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>The thesis has potential, but requires major revisions. Approximately 20% of students would score in this band.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Flawed</td>
<td>The thesis does not meet the required standard for this criterion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please attach your report (minimum length – 1 page).

☐ I confirm that there is no actual or perceived conflict of interest arising from my examination of this thesis.