GUIDELINES FOR POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREE CANDIDATES

School of Population Health
The University of Western Australia

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INTRODUCTION

These guidelines have been produced as a resource for students enrolled in the Master of Medical Science, Master of Public Health (thesis) or Doctor of Philosophy degree programs in the School of Population Health.

The Graduate Research School administers all PhD programs, Masters by research degrees and postgraduate scholarships. It has a very comprehensive website of important information on all aspects of research training at UWA. All candidates should be familiar with this Office and its website and make use of the information, support and resources available through the Office.

http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/

The Postgraduate Handbook is an especially useful resource on the administration, policies, procedures and regulations and should be the first point of inquiry for candidates and supervisors on such matters.

http://handbooks.uwa.edu.au/postgraduate

The Graduate Research School has prepared a document “Preparing to start” a postgraduate research degree. This is also a useful resource.

http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/home/current/preparing

This set of guidelines is intended to supplement the information available from the Graduate Research School. It draws attention to a number of the School’s policies pertaining to postgraduate research students. It aims to point you in the right direction at the commencement of and during your candidature and to assist in making your supervised research training in the School of Population Health a rewarding, productive and enjoyable experience.

As a senior student in the School of Population Health, you should also make it your business to learn as much as possible about the School and its academic staff. This can be achieved by viewing the School’s website (http://www.publichealth.uwa.edu.au/), reading the School’s strategic plan, attending the School’s research seminars (http://www.publichealth.uwa.edu.au/welcome/seminars/s1_2006), taking opportunities to participate in the Schools’ teaching programs, mixing with staff and other students, and finding out about their research and teaching interests. Postgraduate research students are regarded as one of its great strengths and are an integral part of the academic community within the School.
BASIC AND GENERAL MATTERS

Training Objectives of Postgraduate Research Degree Candidature

Overall, there are two major training objectives associated with postgraduate research candidature and with writing a thesis. First, you should be able to locate, read, comprehend, integrate and critically appraise the literature in your field of interest (critical appraisal implies both knowledge in the content domain and a working familiarity with research methods). Secondly, you should be competent in all phases of appropriate research methods from the statement of the problem to analysis and on to the write-up phase. In attaining these objectives, you should be developing competencies to work independently in researching a problem area and structuring a thesis.

Coursework Requirements

Graduates of the School of Population Health benefit from its reputation for excellence in research methods and, therefore, emphasis is placed on ensuring that all postgraduate research students meet the School’s minimum standards of coursework in epidemiology and biostatistics, even if their thesis is primarily dependent on the use of qualitative methods. The following is the School’s policy on minimum coursework requirements for postgraduate research degree candidates.

Students enrolled for the degrees of Master of Medical Science or Master of Public Health (research) are required to pass Epidemiology I (PUBH8750) or Biostatistics I (PUBH8753), or to demonstrate the equivalent proficiency to their primary supervisor through pre-existing qualifications or experience.

Students enrolled for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy are required to pass Epidemiology I (PUBH8750) and Biostatistics II (PUBH8769), or to demonstrate the equivalent proficiency to their primary supervisor through pre-existing qualifications or experience. If necessary, a PhD candidate may be required also to pass Biostatistics I prior to enrolling in Biostatistics II. UWA Health Science Students are not required to enrol in Epidemiology I or Biostatistics I but may be encouraged to enrol in more advanced units related to their field of proposed study.

In some instances, your primary supervisor may require you to undertake additional coursework specific to the needs of your thesis or to complement your previous academic background (e.g., Foundations of Public Health for students from other disciplines). It is also possible that you will be required to complete a short course on the use of a statistical software package. Course requirements should be completed as soon as practicable after the commencement of candidature. Ideally, all the coursework requirements should be identified at the time of admission to the degree although this is not always possible.

Applications for enrolment in coursework units must be signed by the student, the Coordinating Supervisor and the Graduate Research Coordinator. The normal process for application is via the Add a Coursework Unit form at http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/forms. The Graduate Research School will also accept such applications as part of the Research Proposal (e.g. as part of the
Confirmation of Candidature information) as long as the relevant details of the unit are included.

**Higher Degree by Research Preliminary Course**

Students who seek to enroll in a higher degree without first class honors or equivalent, may be required to enroll in a Higher Degree Preliminary Course (90490). This is a supervised course of advanced study and/or research administered by the Faculty of Dentistry and Medicine. The aim of the preliminary course is to ensure students have sufficient research training to undertake a higher degree by research and to assess their capacity for independent research. Thus, students without prior adequate research training will be required to enrol in a 24 point Research Preliminary Program (90490) made up as follows (or by negotiation):

- Biostatistics 1 (PUBH8753)
- Epidemiology 1 (PUBH8750)
- 6 point Special Topic 1 (PUBH8784)
- 6 point Special Topic 2 (PUBH8784)

Course requirements for the special topic units are designed to assist in preparation for the proposed Masters/PhD program. Enrolment in these units is designed to enable the student to demonstrate his/her research abilities. Through negotiation, the work for the units might include: (1) a literature review for proposed thesis; (2) the proposal for the research; (3) or pilot work for the main study. This work to be undertaken for the Special Topics is to be negotiated between the Coordinating Supervisor, Graduate Research Coordinator and the student, and assessed by the proposed supervisor.

The requirement to undertake a preliminary program is administered flexibly taking into account candidates’ research experience, but just their academic qualifications (e.g., research staff without honours). In circumstances where prospective students have extensive experience, but insufficient academic training, the supervisor will be required a write a letter of support to the Graduate Research Co-ordinator who would forward this letter together with his or her comments to the Graduate Research School.

**What is a thesis?**

Given that the principal goal of a postgraduate degree candidate is to write a thesis, it is helpful to begin by understanding what is a thesis and what significance does it hold.

The preparation of a thesis requires the mastery of the theory and practice of some area, the identification of a program of research that will contribute to the advancement of knowledge in that area of study as appreciated by scholars in the field, and conducting and reporting the research in the appropriate scholarly style.

Master’s and PhD candidates undertake an approved program of supervised research and advanced study for a prescribed period. At the conclusion of the program a thesis is submitted. A Master’s thesis 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 the ability of expression in clear and concise language. A PhD thesis must be a substantial and original contribution to scholarship, for example through the discovery of knowledge, the formulation of theories, or the innovative re-interpretation of known data and established ideas. The submitted thesis will show the candidate’s ability to document, to interpret, to formulate theories and to discuss results in the light of the current literature to a standard of elegance and competence required in published materials.


However, postgraduate research experience at UWA is more than preparing a thesis. The University expects that students develop a set of generic skills. These skills are outlined on the Graduate Research School website: [http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/home/current/generic_skills](http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/home/current/generic_skills).

**Meeting the challenge**

There must be a reason why students forego so many of life's immediate pleasures and embark on a higher degree by research thesis. We also need to ask why the University still insists on the thesis as the epitome of success for the postgraduate research student. It is an initiation into a process of scholarship that has endured over time, and it is possibly the most optimal procedure for advancing knowledge. There are rewards for the student learning to undertake a research program independently, including enhanced prestige, material rewards of faster promotion for recognition of demonstrated competence, and enhanced opportunities for promotion.

If you find that research, intellectual inquiry and rigour are not to your liking and that you do not have the imagination, flexibility and persistence to work on what can be a lonely, frustrating but rewarding task, the task of research will be a negative experience. On the other hand, if you enjoy the challenge of striving for and achieving difficult goals, you are disciplined in your work habits yet creative in your approach to problem-solving and, most important of all, you genuinely believe in the value of your research training, the experience will be one of the most rewarding that life has to offer.

If a major objective of postgraduate research studies is to learn the competencies of research, then why is it that some students who complete a Master's or Doctoral thesis, never go on to undertake further research? Many postgraduate research degree graduates in public/population health do pursue research careers but a significant number also pursue careers in high level policy or managerial positions in which their knowledge and experience of research still finds constant application in their work.

Why is it that some students who begin a degree involving a thesis, never complete it? Research has shown that drop out rates can be as high as 30% and that 30% of candidates take longer than the expected time to complete their thesis. Failure to complete a postgraduate research degree in the School of Population Health is rare but some students have taken longer than expected. It is worth considering from the outset
the many potential problems that must be overcome so as to achieve a satisfactory outcome for the student and the School.

Some of the many challenges to be faced in successfully completing a thesis on time are:

- maintaining a realistic expectation of what you can achieve/contribute
- avoiding taking too long in preparation
- keeping your enthusiasm focused and avoiding studying too many diverse topics
- fitting (full-time of part-time) study into your life and lifestyle over a number of years
- finishing before taking up another major challenge
- being dedicated and disciplined over a long period

Acceptance of a student into a post-graduate research degree program is an indicator of potential, that is, this student can complete independent research and has mastered a research domain. The regulations set the limits, but other realities may intervene: The realities of human issues such as sickness, changed family and work situations, financial concerns, and so on. If such issues arise you should discuss them as early as possible with your supervisor(s) and necessary, the Manager of the Graduate Research School. If they are likely to affect your progress and/or your terms of candidature need to be varied. Supervisors know about such problems because they have them too. The Graduate Education Officer (http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/home/international/current/resources) and other staff in Student Support Services (http://www.studentservices.uwa.edu.au) are also available to help you with personal difficulties.

**The nature of research and research training in population health**

Public/population health, as a multidisciplinary field, is characterised by considerable diversity. Research in population health attempts to analyse, develop and promote understanding of this diversity as well as to develop effective population health policies and programs. All research in population health is either implicitly or explicitly conducted within a framework of theoretical assumptions. One important aim of research in population health is to clarify and develop theoretical frameworks which lend elegance to design, rigour to method, purpose to community programs, and substance to views of teaching, learning and curriculum.

Training of population health researchers is not simply a matter of teaching a specific set of skills concerned with the collection of data. Research in population health can use a variety of methodological tools, which have been adapted from disciplines as diverse as epidemiology, health economics, behavioural science and sociology, as well as disciplines developed within the health sciences such as environmental health, health promotion and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases.

This diversity, however, does not imply an open-ended form of methodological pluralism. Good research in population health has to be theoretically informed; it has to be linked to and cohere with broader medical, social, economic and cultural theories; and it has to be relevant and meaningful to the conduct of population health practice.
Whatever methods it employs it must be relevant, rigorous and coherent. Generally, you will want to associate mainly with one or two research method disciplines and one or two content disciplines.

There are many different types of research and the choice of type is usually dictated by the content area and the argument you wish to defend. Within empirical research, for example, you can choose between: qualitative and quantitative methods; experimental and non-experimental designs; cohort, dynamic and cross-sectional populations; retrospective and prospective collection of data; and many other possibilities.

Some research studies in population health involve qualitative research methods, either as a component of an overall research strategy (e.g., the use of focus groups to inform the design of survey instruments or community interventions) or as the principal method of research. Qualitative research seeks to answer the ‘what’ question rather than the ‘how often’ question and brings together a number of particular specialised methods. These methods include participant observation, in-depth interviewing, ethnography, case studies, ethnomethodology, grounded theory studies, phenomenology, life histories and conversational analysis.

**Ethics and approvals**

Of paramount importance in any research project are the ethics of research. Ethics are of great importance in any research project involving human subjects: to the supervisor, to the student and to the subjects. We have a fundamental concern for the rights of individuals. If one commandment of research is ‘fearlessly to defend the freedom of inquiry’ then sometimes you have to balance this with costs such as anxiety, shame, affronts to dignity, embarrassment, self-doubts, loss of trust, lowered self-esteem. There is a cost to other researchers by any poorly conceived study and ethical digressions.

The National Health and Medical Research Council has established principles for the conduct of research with human subjects, and has specific guidelines for epidemiologic research. You should consult your supervisor about these guidelines and implications and about the procedures for obtaining ethical approval of your research by the University’s Human Research Ethics Committee. Use of data from the WA Department of Health also requires the approval of the Confidentiality of Health Information Committee.

**University library**

Most of the information and resources you will require will be obtained via the on-line services (ie through the university library website) or from the Medical Library. The University library staff are very keen to help you use their invaluable resources. Arrange with the Medical Librarian to show you the resources. An amazing array of information and searching facilities are available such as Medline, Current Contents and Web of Science. Also, the library subscribes to many journals on-line and you can download many published articles from your computer in the School.
THE STUDENT AND THE SUPERVISOR

As an enrolled candidate you should already have a nominated supervisor and possibly co-supervisor. The choice may have been obvious as they are the only suitable staff member for your area. Alternatively, you may have studied the list of potential supervisors within the School, talked with a few of them, and established a research agenda of mutual interest. However, if there is still some uncertainty or concern you should discuss the matter with the School’s Graduate Research Coordinator.

The relationship

A successful supervisor-student relationship depends on mutual respect and trust, and the ability of both parties to acknowledge and respond to the needs of the other. The student relies on the supervisor, and especially the primary supervisor, for academic guidance, technical advice, encouragement, the provision of a role model, advocacy within the School, the creation of research training and career opportunities, career counselling and later for references and professional support. The supervisor relies on the student for research productivity, co-authorship of grant applications and papers, intellectual challenge, exposure to fresh perspectives and ideas, the satisfaction of nurturing the younger generation of researchers in his/her field, and for enhancing the reputation of the supervisor within the University and outside. Such a working relationship is capable of becoming a great source of inspiration and energy, and both sides stand to gain enormous benefits. It is not surprising, therefore, that some supervisor-student relationships have evolved into long-term productive collaborations and even lifelong friendships. Research supervision, when performed at a high level of effectiveness, is a form of mentoring or ‘development relationship at work’. The significance of such relationships to professional and personal development, and to enhancement of career prospects, cannot be overemphasised.

Not all supervisors/students have the same style and modus operandi. It is important to work out a mutually acceptable style and process. Many supervisors advocate regular meetings (e.g., fortnightly or monthly), others plan meetings around the submission of completed tasks, and others prefer to read written material prior to meetings. Some supervisor(s) are reluctant to meet students unless they come with their questions written. This provides a demonstration that the student can write, allows practice in writing ideas succinctly by making the student determine the questions rather than pass the problem to the supervisor to work out the question, and most important, makes the student responsible for the session. There are many methods of supervision and it is important that you discuss the timing and purposes of meetings from the outset.

Primary and co-supervisors and other experts

The University has some expectations about selection of supervisors (http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/home/supervisors/requirements). Potential supervisors would normally:

1. hold a qualification at least equivalent to the level of qualification being supervised and/or have an appropriate record of scholarly publications;
2. be experienced in research and/or successful in the supervision of research at a
higher degree level;

3. have extensive knowledge of and expertise in the general field of research
nominated by the Candidates; and

4. have sufficient time and access to adequate resources.

Potential supervisors should be able to demonstrate that they have adequate research
training (at least equivalent to the level of the degree being supervised) and provide
evidence of continuing and active involvement in research programmes. Sole
supervision of a candidate by a staff member who has not supervised a candidate to
successful completion is not permitted.

A member of staff who is also a research higher degree candidate enrolled at this
University may not supervise another candidate at the same level. It is recommended
that supervisors who are enrolled candidates in a PhD and are supervising candidates for
the degree of master by thesis do not undertake sole supervision of these candidates.

See also the University's Code of Good Practice in Graduate Research and Supervision.
The Graduate Research School has also compiled some Guidelines for Graduate
Research Supervisors.

Given the multidisciplinary nature of population health, the School encourages shared
co-supervision, both within the School and with other relevant academic Schools. This
has many advantages: it allows others to contribute ideas to the thesis; it ensures that
you are not solely dependent on one person; it allows continuity if one member of the
team leaves (e.g., on study leave); it means that at least two academics have read the
thesis before the examiners read it; it allows you to be involved in the process of
discussions among colleagues; it may protect the student if one supervisor wants to
impose unrealistic expectations; and it is more typical of what is involved in academic
life in population health - the give and take of research collaboration.

A possible disadvantage of multiple supervisors is that you will get conflicting advice.
Receiving conflicting advice is typical in academic research work and needs to be dealt
with at an early stage and certainly not at the examination stage. You need to acquire
competence in making decisions and communicating these decisions about conflicting
advice. A good strategy is for you to arrange joint meetings with your co-supervisors
(to discuss your reactions to the conflicting advice), to ensure that all co-supervisors
receive drafts of relevant material and that you discuss these with all and attend to all
comments (even if this means you have to address conflicting feedback), and keep all
informed of progress, difficulties and successes. If you ask for a joint meeting between
you and your co-supervisors only when there are serious troubles, then the arrangement
is unlikely to work.

At all times, you are a student of the School and the University, and you thus have a
reasonable level of access to all of the academic resources that the School and
University have to offer. No matter who your supervisor(s) may be, you can call on the
expertise of any staff member of the School at any stage of your thesis, and, if
necessary, your supervisor(s) can help introduce you to other sources of expertise across the campus and outside, such as at the WA Department of Health. But please keep in mind the importance of a considerate and courteous approach to obtaining additional expert advice. In general, you should make an appointment in advance to meet with the staff member or outside expert, giving notice, by use of a memorandum, letter of introduction or by telephone, of the issues that you wish to discuss. It is generally considered discourteous and inconsiderate to expect experts to give you advice without an appointment. You should also let your supervisor know, preferably in advance, that you are consulting another expert.

**Responsibilities of the Supervisor**

Officially the supervisor should ensure that the candidate is working on an appropriate topic which might reasonably be expected to allow the student to demonstrate the appropriate level of competence; and for the task to be completed in such time that it does not greatly exceed the minimum time period. The supervisor should assist the student to develop appropriate standards of achievement. This involves assisting with planning, meeting the student regularly, detailed comments on and constructive criticism of drafts, and final attestation that the thesis is ready for examination. This does not mean that the supervisor is stating that the thesis will pass the examination, as this would be impossible, unrealistic and improper to expect. A supervisor can never claim that the thesis will pass. No one can predict the exact outcome of the examination process.

The School has approved the following code of practice for staff who supervise postgraduate research degree students.

_The supervisor will:_

- provide academic guidance;
- meet regularly with the student;
- provide advice on ethical matters pertaining to the student’s research;
- advise on the preparation of the research proposal, financial plan and annual operational plans;
- respond to the work given to read within a reasonable time;
- provide consistent advice;
- avoid constant additional requirements once parameters are already agreed;
- advise the student of their deficiencies in necessary knowledge or skills, and recommend coursework units, short courses or other means of rectification;
- give the candidate feedback on satisfactory and unsatisfactory progress;
- expose the student to a variety of persons and ideas across the academic community;
- have a reasonable level of expectation regarding what a student can and should accomplish in a thesis at the appropriate degree level;
- uphold the academic standards of the School;
- protect the student from unreasonable demands;
- assist the student at those times when the voice of a staff member advocate is needed;
- keep the student informed about relevant regulations and administrative processes in the School and University, and refer the student to appropriate guidelines;
- inform the student of impediments that might adversely affect their progress, such as the supervisor taking imminent study leave, retirement plans or an anticipated change in the supervisor’s own research program;
- generally aid the student in pursuing the thesis project and maintain sufficiently close contact with the student’s work;
- maintain an interest in the topic;
- maintain an interest in the student as a person and be interested in the student’s welfare, both as a person undertaking academic study and as a scholar;
- where possible, provide opportunities for the student’s professional development;
- offer the student a role model of academic and scholarly endeavour; and
- have personal integrity and view supervising as an important responsibility, deserving of his or her attention and time.

This School code of practice falls within the more general guidelines published by the University as the Code for Good Practice for Postgraduate Student Research Supervision (http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/policies/supervisor_guidelines.)

Responsibilities of the Student

From a supervisor’s viewpoint, there is an ideal student. He or she will complete a good thesis; shows initiative but accepts guidance; is not a ‘You tell me what is required for a thesis and I’ll do it’ - minimum competency student; has personal integrity and meets commitments; is able to write; is enthusiastic; is keen to communicate the results; is able to think; and keeps in regular contact.

The School has approved the following code of practice for postgraduate research degree students:

The student will:
- become aware of academic regulations and administrative requirements of the degree.
- develop a detailed research proposal and financial plan;
- develop an annual operational plan with deadlines;
- accomplish tasks in the operational plan on time, or explain why this is not possible;
- be enthusiastic about his/her work;
- be open to suggestions and to advice, but also show independence and initiative;
- develop independent scholarly thought and inquiry;
- have integrity and diligence in research and writing;
- arrange meetings with the supervisor, preferably at regular intervals, and keep in regular communication;
- prepare legible documents for comment;
- follow a method of presentation which makes best use of the supervisor’s time;
- be honest when reporting on progress and results;
- be reasonable in making demands on the time of the supervisor and other experts;
- maintain an interest in the supervisor as a teacher and scholar;
- be responsive to opportunities offered by the supervisor and School that will assist in the student’s professional development;
- participate in the academic life of the School;
- be willing to share, at an appropriate level, in the administrative and caretaking workload of the School;
- uphold the academic standards and good reputation of the supervisor(s) and the School;

Management of conflict and changing supervisors

At the commencement of your postgraduate studies and throughout your studies, students and supervisors are encouraged to review expectations of the graduate research experience by both completing and comparing results from the Student Perception of Research Supervisor questionnaire (SPORS): The primary objective of this
questionnaire is to facilitate discussion between supervisors and their students. In addition, the Centre for Advancement of Teaching and Learning uses the results to develop a more general understanding of research supervision practice at UWA. See the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning website for further details. http://www.catl.uwa.edu.au/evaluation_of_teaching_unit/spors/instructions

It is possible that you may come into conflict with your supervisor(s), even if it only a friendly disagreement. Fortunately, conflicts over academic theory or the content of the thesis are unusual. The most common conflicts usually involve misunderstanding or disagreement about the other’s expectations with respect to supervision or satisfactory progress. In these instances you and your supervisor(s) should make every effort to understand the point at issue and to work towards a solution that is mutually acceptable.

If despite a concerted and genuine attempt, you reach the situation where a conflict cannot be resolved through negotiation, and the lack of resolution is detrimental to your progress, you should discuss the matter with the School’s Graduate Research Coordinator (or Head of School if your supervisor is the Coordinator). It is expected that the Graduate Research Coordinator/Head of School will rarely become involved in the management of conflict between a student and supervisor(s), and that in the vast majority of instances it will be possible for the parties to resolve the matter themselves.

The University has a Postgraduate Grievance Reconciliation Process (see http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/policies/grievances) for situations in which grievances cannot be satisfactorily resolved within the School. See the website or contact Graduate Research School for details.

Changing a supervisor is not always easy or possible, and can be a sensitive matter. All the more reason to take care in choosing your supervisor. There may not be another supervisor in your area or your research project may be funded from your existing supervisor’s research grants or the supervisor has joint ownership of the intellectual property in the project. Nevertheless, it matters cannot be resolved, it may be possible to change your supervisor and you should be aware of the procedure for a change. Arrange to discuss the matter with the Graduate Research Coordinator/Head of School. A major advantage of co-supervision is that you have someone else who is also aware of your work and progress.

THE EARLY STAGES

Choosing your topic and thesis

Very often students commence their candidature with a topic in mind, but as we have seen, this is not a thesis. So how do you decide upon a thesis (remember that a thesis is an academic argument). There is probably no better beginning than a substantial review of the literature on the topic. Becoming conversant with this literature is a task that has to be undertaken sooner or later, and the better time is sooner. It is critical to place your argument in a context of previous work. Unless your argument is worth defending against the background of pre-existing knowledge, even if you wish to argue that the previous state of knowledge was incorrect, you are probably saying little of value. The
stronger the alternatives, the greater likelihood there is of a good thesis. For example, what is the evidence that this particular factor is a causal or protective agent for a disease; what is the evidence that this particular form of intervention is cost-effective, and so on.

With the help of the literature review and guidance from your supervisor(s) it should be possible for you to refine your thinking to the point where you can identify one or more specific research questions on which, together with your own research, you will be able to formulate a thesis.

A question that sometimes arises, especially in the area of population health, is the extent to which you should lean towards a topic of major population health significance, regardless of the nature of the thesis. For the academic purist the topic does not matter if the thesis is very sound. For example, you might throw significant new light on a methodological issue using data collected on a disease that is of little consequence in terms of population health. However, it is important to bear in mind that the ability to attract public resources to a research project is, among other considerations, affected by the size of the problem that is to be addressed. So choose a topic that is capable of attracting sufficient resources and a thesis that can provide the necessary contribute to knowledge.

**Knowing your cognate area and having the relevant research competencies**

The cognate area of interest (i.e., the subject matter or content area of your topic, such as 'provision of domiciliary care', 'cardiovascular disease control' or 'physical exercise behaviour') is of paramount importance in preparing for your research. You also need the requisite competency in research methods. You should consult with your supervisor(s) about what else you require to be adequately prepared. You do not want to be in the situation whereby you embark on your thesis and then find that you do not have the prerequisite knowledge and skill.

It is very important to be academically prepared before you embark on any part of the thesis. This may mean completing one or more coursework units prior to commencing the thesis. However, while completing such units you should also give serious consideration to your thesis, the argument and the background reading. A common question relates to whether or not there is a desired level of competence in relevant coursework units that best prepares one for thesis work? In this regard, you should aim to attain at least a Credit grade and preferably a Distinction grade in all coursework units that you undertake as a requirement of the School to prepare you for the thesis.

Students who do not have prior and adequate background in a particular methodology or analytical techniques are recommended to choose a method of research for which they are prepared. For example, do not pursue research using quantitative methods without prior preparation in biostatistics and/or measurement; and do not pursue research in qualitative areas without prior preparation in qualitative methods.

**The research proposal**
University regulations require all research candidates to develop and submit a Research Proposal during their first year of candidacy. The time limit (from commencement) to submission of the Research Proposal is 6 months for full-time PhD, 9 months for part-time PhD, 4 months for full-time Masters and 8 months for part-time Masters.

The guidelines for developing the Postgraduate Research Proposal are available on the Graduate Research School website:


The development of the research proposal is a crucial phase for a new research student. The School has a procedure for ensuring that the project is feasible, scientifically valid, and likely to make a substantial and original contribution to knowledge, and to ensure that the written proposal is of appropriate quality.

Upon commencement, the candidate should immediately begin to develop the project and prepare the research proposal under the direction of the supervisors. The supervisor and candidate may seek advice from other individuals with relevant expertise.

After the candidate has formulated the draft proposal, and prior to formal submission of the Research Proposal,

- the candidate should arrange, through the School seminar convenor, to present their proposal to the School via a seminar (at least 4 weeks before the submission deadline for full-time candidates and 8 weeks for part-time candidates),
- the primary supervisor should identify two UWA (usually SPH but not necessarily) academic staff (not supervisors) who are willing and available to be independent reviewers and arrange for them to review the written draft proposal, attend the seminar and prepare written comments within one week of the seminar.
- The primary supervisor will submit, prior to the seminar, a copy of the draft proposal, notice of the seminar, and names of independent reviewers, and later, a copy of the written reports from the independent reviewers to the Graduate Research Coordinator.

The seminar should involve 30 minutes of presentation and allow 30 minutes for discussion and feedback. All staff and postgraduate research candidates of the School are invited to attend the seminar. The supervisors and independent reviewer(s) must attend the seminar. In addition, the candidate and supervisors may also invite relevant people from outside the School to attend.

Following the seminar the independent reviewers prepare written comments on the proposal and submit these to the candidate via the supervisor. This written report should be available no longer than one week after the seminar. After receiving the report from the independent reviewer(s), the candidate shall, if required and under the direction of the supervisors, amend the proposal before formal submission.

The primary supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the above process is followed.

Plan for Professional Development
Whilst the Research Proposal should clearly delineate the program of research to be conducted that will lead to the production of the thesis, your professional development is also an important part of your research training. It is also advisable to have a plan for professional development. The aim of professional development is to assist you to acquire the skills to work effectively in the chosen field of study in a timely fashion. Developing a plan calls for the critical review of your academic and professional experience and the identification of needs that should be addressed during the candidature.

The plan may comprise components of formal and informal training. Formal components include coursework units within the School of Population Health and other specialised training not available in the School. Candidates are also encouraged to seek out training from student and staff development programs at the University. The workshops include Preparing a Proposal, Managing Research, Developing a Thesis, Working with Your Supervisor, scientific writing and writing reports and courses on public speaking. Further details are available from the Graduate Research School, Student Service (http://www.studentservices.uwa.edu.au/information_for/students/learning/workshops/research_skills_workshops), and the Centre for Staff Development.

Informal training can come from many sources within and outside the School. There are opportunities to ‘sit in’ on lectures within the MPH Program. Candidates should discuss this beforehand with the lecturer concerned. Population Health seminars are held every week during semester in the School. The presentations are given by Population Health staff and students and a range of professionals with special interests in population health issues.

Your supervisors and other senior academics in the School can help you to develop a professional development plan.

**Making Satisfactory Progress**

Each year all Masters and Doctoral research students, your supervisors, and the Graduate Research Coordinator/Head of School must complete an Annual Report on candidates, sent to you by the Graduate Research School (on the anniversary of your enrolment). This is to be completed even if your thesis is under suspension or near to submission. Full details of the Annual Report are available on the Graduate Research School website http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/home/heads/forms?f=41844

This is a very important activity and you should candidly report your progress and plans and raise difficulties (if any). These annual reports are used by the School and Graduate Research School to monitor your progress.

In 2006, the Board of the Graduate Research School and Academic Board introduced a process for formal Confirmation of Candidature for new candidates after a year for PhD candidates at UWA. In brief, candidates will initially be enrolled as conditional candidates. Their continued enrolment after a year (FTE) will be conditional on their having completed designated tasks. These tasks will be agreed between the candidate,
supervisor and school, and set out in the Research Proposal for approval by the Graduate Research School.

The School of Population now requires that the following milestones be achieved in the first year of candidature in order for students of the School’s candidature to be confirmed:

1. Undertake appropriate training in safety courses as required such as Chemical or Laboratory safety, and on-line induction in occupational health and safety;
2. Complete introductory courses in electronic literacy (e.g., using Endnote, undertaking literature searches);
3. Complete an annotated bibliography or review of the literature;
4. Four weeks before the formal Proposal is due, make an oral presentation of the draft Research Proposal at a School seminar and receive formal feedback from two reviewers;
5. Have Research Proposal approved (within 4 months for full-time Masters students and 6 months for full-time PhD students) and include these milestones within proposal;
6. Obtain any ethics and other approvals prior to commencing the research;
7. Put in place steps to obtain data for proposed research or commence own data collection (as applicable);
8. Develop detailed thesis plan and make good progress towards completing literature review Chapter of thesis (or published manuscript);
9. Complete a course in intellectual property;
10. Commence relevant, approved coursework units; and
11. Complete other relevant, approved development activities as cited specifically in the Research Proposal (e.g., English literacy and courses in academic writing, project management etc).

WORKING WITHIN THE SCHOOL

The Head of School and Graduate Research Coordinator

While the most important working relationship during your candidature is that with your supervisor(s), there are other important relationships. Good working relations with all of the staff and students with whom you come into contact will often help you achieve your goal, but you must be prepared to give as well as take. There are two people in the School who have particular responsibilities of which you should be aware. These are the Head of School and the Graduate Research Coordinator.

The Head is the ‘general manager’ of the School and has the responsibility to approve all significant administrative decisions related to your candidature on behalf of the School. The Head is also responsible for conflict resolution procedures at the School level. However, it is customary for the Head to delegate responsibility and decision-making authority for the Schools’ research training program to the Graduate Research Coordinator who therefore can act as Head in these matters. The Head is also assisted by
the School Manager, who oversees much of the supporting machinery of the School in areas such as finance, human resources, equipment and accommodation.

The Graduate Research Coordinator is responsible for monitoring the progress and performance of the School’s postgraduate research training program and developing policies and plans. The Coordinator is the first point of contact for the postgraduate research student body when they wish to raise policy or planning issues. The Coordinator is also responsible for allocations of resources from the School’s research training budget.

**Orientation**

Unless you are already a student or staff member of the School, as a new postgraduate research candidate you should receive an orientation when you first arrive. The process includes meeting with the Graduate Research Coordinator, your supervisor(s), and various administrative and technical support personnel.

Your supervisor is responsible for organising the orientation.

The Induction Checklist for New Research Candidates lists all the important aspects of getting oriented and is available in Appendix 1.

**Technical support in computing and statistical analysis**

The School has staff available for consultation in techniques of statistical analysis and computing. Such technical support is an entitlement for all postgraduate research students. Those attached to a research group should, if available, seek computing and statistics support from within the group. For those students not attached to a research group with a technical support person, another person is designated to provide this support. Usually this is the postgraduate students’ computer support officer who also manages the postgraduate computing laboratory. It is the supervisor’s responsibility to ensure that the student has adequate technical support. There is an expectation that students will have completed units in biostatistics or taken relevant training in software packages before requesting detailed technical support in these areas. It is not an efficient use of the time of support people to provide one-to-one basic training.

**Communicating with Fellow Students and Staff**

Research is exciting, challenging, and far more interesting than most expect, but sometimes it can be a lonely and tiring activity. Isolation can be a common companion, but all this need not happen. The foundation of networks among students and staff is particularly valuable, and the School emphasises the need for everyone taking responsibility for the creation of a ‘communication culture.’ We realise that you have other lives, family, work, commitments; but it is worth generating new friends among fellow students and staff. The onus is on you to form groupings for discussion, mutual support, sharing resources, checking ideas, reading drafts, and assisting and commiserating.
The postgraduate student community of the School has become affiliated with the UWA Postgraduate Students Association. It is called the Population Health Postgraduate Society (PHPS). The PHPS is the representative body for postgraduate students studying at the SPH. The primary role of the PHPS is to support postgraduate students enrolled within the School. This involves sitting on various School committees, and most importantly facilitating an enjoyable and stress-free environment for study and research.

All postgraduates enrolled at SPH are now automatically PHPS members. Please see the website or contact one of the committee members for more information (Website: http://www.sph.uwa.edu.au/welcome/students/currentpg/phps)

**Committee**

Hayley Cutt hecutt@cyllene.uwa.edu.au  6488 8737
Andrew Jardine andrewj@sph.uwa.edu.au  6488 1296
Sarah Joyce sarah@sph.uwa.edu.au  6488 1279
Sarah Foster sfoster@sph.uwa.edu.au  6488 8730

Some ways to meet and get to know your fellow students and staff include:

- Attending one or more MPH coursework units.
- Being active in the PHPS
- Reading the School website, notice board and e-mails
- Contacting students and staff with similar interests.
- Discussing projects and issues with other students and staff
- Having morning or afternoon tea or eating lunch in the common rooms.
- Attend the regular School seminars
- Giving a seminar on your work
- Participating in teaching activities
- Taking on a School role (eg Seminar Convenor)

The School attaches particular importance to the regular Tuesday morning seminars (see http://www.publichealth.uwa.edu.au/welcome/seminars/s1_2006 for details). These presentations are usually of high quality and are informative about a diverse range of population health issues. Often postgraduate students present their research proposal or results and this provides an opportunity to learn about what other students are doing and how they have solved problems similar to your own. While it is not compulsory for any student or staff member to attend the seminars (no-one takes a roll call), there is a general expectation that postgraduate students and staff are encouraged to attend as many seminars as possible. Check the notice board for details or ask the School secretaries for the program, which is arranged each semester.
Staff who are Postgraduate Research Students

The School is strongly supportive of research staff with the prerequisite qualifications and skills undertaking postgraduate research studies in population health. Traditionally, a significant proportion of graduates has obtained their degrees in this way, and very often the topic of their thesis is one that is directly related to the duties of their position. Under these circumstances, the question often arises as to how much time the candidate may devote to their thesis project during hours of employment. The following is the School’s policy on this matter.

A staff member of the School enrolled in a higher degree for research in the School may devote up to 20% of paid working time to their research training (this includes the thesis project and any associated coursework or other training requirements) provided that the following conditions are met

1. The candidate is employed in the School for a minimum of 22.5 hours per week;
2. The candidate is not engaged in the generation of private income through consultancies during working hours (i.e., for academic staff the time devoted to candidature is in lieu of that normally allowed for private practice); and
3. The candidate has made satisfactory progress in accordance with their research plan.

Sometimes a thesis project overlaps significantly with the candidate’s duties of employment; e.g., as a research officer employed on a particular project grant. Under these circumstances, it is only the part of the work on the thesis that would not otherwise have been necessary as a duty of employment that forms the 20% of paid working hours that may be spent on the thesis.

Resources for postgraduate research candidates

The School has a policy that all research candidates have access to adequate accommodation, computer equipment, photocopying and stationery, and a reasonable level of funds to support research, travel expenses and thesis preparation. The source of resources and funds available depends upon whether the candidate is supported by a scholarship, is a School staff member, is primarily based within the School or elsewhere or jointly enrolled with another School. In the latter case, the funds available to support candidates will be distributed on a pro rata basis.

The supervisor has a role in helping the student with access to appropriate resources from their research program, the school and university.

All full-time candidates based in the School are entitled to their own desk and computer. Part-time candidates are required to share a desk and computer (if one is required). The desk will be located within a research group (if the student is affiliated with a research group) or in office areas reserved for postgraduate students. Students who are also staff and students who are attached to a funded research program will normally be provided with a computer by the research program. Students who are supported by a scholarship that includes funds for equipment should access those funds to purchase a computer. In other cases the School’s Research Training Support Account (under the control of the Graduate Research Coordinator) will fund the purchase of a computer.
The School will cover normal photocopying and routine stationery, postage and telephone (i.e., approximately $500 per year). It is expected that significant stationery, postage, phone calls and local travel in connection with the specific research project (e.g. for a survey) is funded by a specific project grant where available, from the research program (if student’s project attached to a funded project), or from the student’s scholarship account (if available). Under exceptional circumstances, data collection costs up to $500 will be supported through the School’s Research Training Support Account. **Note that research project expenses must be estimated and approved as part of the admission and research proposal approval process.**

All postgraduate research students are entitled to one Postgraduate Research Travel Award towards an interstate or overseas conference during their candidature funded by the UWA Graduate Research School (details available at [http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/home/current/travel](http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/home/current/travel)). The following amounts are available:

- For travel within Australia, the awards provide up to a maximum of **$505***, inclusive of fares and subsistence.
- Awards for travel overseas provide an allowance up to a maximum of **$1520***, inclusive of fares and subsistence.

Other potential sources of conference support include:

- **Convocation Travel Awards** (see [http://www.psa.guild.uwa.edu.au/grants/convocation_travel_awards](http://www.psa.guild.uwa.edu.au/grants/convocation_travel_awards)). The purpose of these awards is to enable postgraduate research students to enhance their work through travel in Australia or overseas. Awards are made available through the generosity of graduates and with assistance of the University, the Postgraduate Students Association and BankWest. A limited number of awards (13 in 2005) up to $2,500 are available.

- The **PSA Conference Travel Awards** which provide funds to assist students travelling to attend a conference to present their work and receive peer review and feedback. The PSA with the help of the UWA Graduate Research School provides ten awards to the value of $500 for international or domestic conference attendance. Five awards will be made available in each semester. The PSA reserves the right not to distribute all of the awards. It is anticipated that postgraduates who have exhausted their travel funds throughout their candidature but have significant results to present at conferences will apply for the awards ([http://sponsored.uwa.edu.au/psa/grants/psa_conference_travel_awards](http://sponsored.uwa.edu.au/psa/grants/psa_conference_travel_awards)).

- In 2006, the Population Health Postgraduate Society is offering two travel awards of $500. Closing date for applications is June 2. See the PHPS website for details. ([http://www.sph.uwa.edu.au/welcome/students/currentpg/phps/announce/new6](http://www.sph.uwa.edu.au/welcome/students/currentpg/phps/announce/new6)).
For additional conference attendance funds, students should access their Scholarship Account (if available) as the next source of funds, followed by their research group (if applicable) or supervisor. If funds are not available from other sources, PhD students are entitled to apply to the School for up to $1000 towards attendance at an interstate or overseas conference during their candidature and Masters students up to $600. This award may provide additional funds (if necessary to cover basic costs) or funds for a second conference if attendance is thought to be important by the supervisor and Graduate Research Coordinator. The candidate is expected to present a poster or a talk at the conference. Applications with matching funds from other sources are encouraged.

Scholarship holders normally have an allowance for thesis preparation and binding costs. Other candidates may claim re-imbursement, upon presentation of receipts, for up to $500 of thesis preparation expenses from the School’s Research Training Support Account.

Only in exceptional circumstances will the School’s Research Training Support Account provide more than $2,000 in any one year to a candidate. The availability of resources and funds from research programs and scholarships is considered in the allocation of funds from the School’s Research Training Support Account.

THE LATTER STAGES

Structure and size of the thesis

What is in a thesis? What does a thesis look like? If you have followed the advice above, you would have seen that there is no one set pattern. The following headings are offered as guides only and they serve primarily to introduce some of the major issues that you will probably confront in your studies. No thesis need follow this format, although the majority do. The final format is up to the student in consultation with their supervisor(s). One of the best ways to appreciate the possible variation in the structure of a thesis is to peruse those that have been completed by other students and available in the School’s library.

The University has regulations concerning the style, format and length of the thesis. These must be followed. Normally, PhD theses must not exceed 100,000 words, excluding appendices, tables and illustrative matter. Master’s theses must not exceed 50,000 words.

The format of a standard thesis is title page, abstract, table of contents, acknowledgments, main text, references and appendices. The main text often (but not necessarily) has chapters on Introduction, Literature Review, Methods, Results, Discussion, and Conclusions.

The thesis may also be presented as a series of papers/manuscripts (which may have been published). A PhD thesis would normally require 4-6 papers and a Master’s thesis 2-3 papers and the thesis must read as a coherent whole with introduction and conclusions. Often each of the papers will have sections on Introduction & Literature Review, Methods, Results, Discussion & Conclusions.
Introduction

The introduction section/chapter serves to introduce the domain of study, what you intend to study, and most critically, indicates the importance of studying this topic. It may contain an explanation of the thesis topic as a thesis problem with sub-problems; an extension of the meaning of the thesis topic by justifying the significance of the thesis problem in terms of its relevance to trends and issues in theory, research and practice; an introduction to themes and subjects which generally define the scope and direction of the study and setting the stage for later discussions on questions, issues, problems and propositions.

Literature Review

Past literature can be considered as a source of data to argue a case for and against your thesis. In the Introduction, you would have introduced your argument, and the literature should now be interpreted with respect to this argument. The review should focus on the hypotheses and arguments to be defended in the subsequent sections. This approach adds structure to the review, and makes it more effective in convincing the reader (i.e., other researchers) of the strength of your argument. The subsequent study and conclusions are then already placed in context. This approach has much merit.

Too often, the review of literature is seen as a place to demonstrate that you have read everything or to provide a compendium of research studies in historical order. This leads to the situation where you present a review, then at the end say, ‘now all that is wrong and so here I am.’ By the conclusion, the review has been forgotten. Such reviews typically are criticised by examiners.

The literature review chapter emphasises a conceptual perspective to establish an intellectual standpoint; structure and direct a review of issues; introducing themes and subjects which define the general scope and direction of later discussion on questions, issues, problems and propositions. If it is possible to take the Literature Review chapter out of the thesis with little or no effect on the total thesis, then the Literature Review is obviously meaningless to the thesis.

Methods

Its aim is to describe your research methods as a considered choice from among possible alternatives. It is not the place to argue that there is only one way to study the phenomenon (there is not), or denigrate the alternatives. You may need to justify the research methods in the light of the research demands of the thesis problem and sub-problems, the review of ideas and practice, and detailed research questions and propositions. You will typically need to discuss the population of interest, sampling procedures, the sample, the assessment instruments, how they were administered, and the statistical analyses. Be sure that you have permission for use of any materials developed by others which are not available in the public domain. The test is whether a half-intelligent successor could duplicate your study, including analyses of the data, from reading the chapter on methods alone, with a reasonable prospect of duplicating your findings as well.
Results

This chapter/section presents and describes all the results. The manner in which the results are presented should be consistent with the aims of the research and the methods used. It typically consists of a variety of text, tables, and charts. Avoid duplication of material in text and tables/charts. However, important and interesting features of tables/charts should be highlighted. It should be clearly structured so that the reader does not get lost or bewildered by the material. If necessary, relegate detailed supporting material to appendices. A good rule is to consider relegating to an appendix any detailed material that is not essential to understanding the results.

Discussion

In your discussion you should discuss your findings in the context of the questions and/or hypotheses you raised in the introduction. You should also present and explore the meaning and significance of your research results as evidence. The discussion generally restates principal findings briefly, considers whether they are likely to be valid or biased, and assuming they are valid, reviews in the light of relevant previous research. This is the place to integrate your findings or analysis with the previous literature, that was discussed in the literature review.

Conclusions

This chapter allows you to provide depth and finality of meaning to the argument advanced in the thesis. It is not an addendum, a final few words, or a summary of the previous chapter(s) and certainly not a paraphrasing of results. This is the chapter where your views, research competencies, and substantive knowledge can truly shine. Consider advancing suggestions for further research as a consequence of this study. Some academics argue that the hallmark of a good thesis is that it raises more or better questions for further research than it answers.

References

Ensure that you use the appropriate style. The styles widely used in population health are the Vancouver style and the Harvard style. Include all references actually used in the thesis. As this is not a bibliography, there is no place for other sources than those cited in the thesis. Ensure that there is a perfect match between sources in the text and the reference list. This is a very time consuming task, and it is profitable to become very familiar with your preferred style prior to commencing your thesis. Endnote is the computer package adopted by the School for organising bibliographic databases and you should become familiar with the use of this package. The University Library is an excellent source of advice on referencing (http://www.library.uwa.edu.au/guides/citingsources/) and runs workshops on using Endnote.

Appendices

Include material that is not available elsewhere. The aim is to allow others to replicate your study. Appendices could include copies of tests, surveys, and original data. Some critics do not like appendices, arguing that if it is not worth saying in the text of the thesis, then it is probably not worth saying at all, but this is not a universal view. For example, inclusion of survey instruments in an appendix is often a very useful record for
future readers of your thesis who wish to replicate or refine your methods. Do not include that which is clearly recoverable or retrievable by others.

**Writing the thesis**

You should always begin with a structural outline or draft table of contents. Most writers find it easier to write one section/chapter at a time, that is, complete the draft of an entire section/chapter before moving on to another. Some students write drafts of the early chapters (literature review and methods) as they are conducting the research rather than waiting till the end.

There are a number of texts available on writing style. Student support services has information and other resources that may be of assistance to you and they also run thesis writing and scientific writing workshops for postgraduate students.

Writing the thesis and tidying up the ‘little things’ generally takes more time than initially expected. The ‘little things’ are very important and include checking references, ensuring good quality figures and tables, ensuring that the correct style has been used throughout, typing, editing, and checking typographical errors. Examiners will tend to pick up every error and, when a critical mass is reached, their attitude to the rest of the thesis becomes tainted – how could a student who is so lax in presentation be ready for independent research? Think of final editing as akin to the final spray painting of a restored car. The mechanics may be perfect, but a poor paint job ruins the image. PhD candidates should allow 3-6 months for writing and final editing and Master’s candidates should allow 2-4 months.

Some candidates, especially those whose first language is not English, may find it useful to enlist the help of a more experienced writer at the last stage. Spell checks on computers are a good start, but they are no replacement for an expert. There are also computer programs to check your grammar, and while worthwhile, they are not the complete answer. Of course your supervisors will read your work but is not their job to re-write the thesis.

**Submission and examination**

The University has regulations regarding the binding and submission of a thesis. Follow these regulations to the letter. Three temporarily bound copies of a Masters thesis and four copies of a PhD thesis must be submitted.

It is an expectation, but not a requirement, that you present your supervisor(s) with copies of your final thesis. This is a minimal return for the efforts they have made to assist you. Most supervisors choose to display the work of their students proudly on their shelves.

All theses must be read by all supervisors and checked by the Graduate Research Coordinator/Head of School and a form signed by the Graduate Research Coordinator/Head of School agreeing that the thesis is ‘in a fit and proper state’ to be
examined before it is submitted. This does not imply acceptance but merely that it is ready for examination by conforming to the rules. Under no circumstances should a supervisor or any member of staff say that the thesis will pass examination. This is impossible and goes against the very notion of independent examiners. The student must take full responsibility for submitting the thesis and the outcome of the examination process.

Officially, the Head of School (or Graduate Research Coordinator) recommends the examiners to the appropriate committee of the University. He/she usually consults supervisors, and often supervisors consult you. You should consider suggesting examiners; particularly scholars that you have been reading, who are closely linked with your field of study. There are many considerations in choosing examiners, but the most critical are reputation and credibility of the proposed examiner. Availability and previous experience of potential examiners should also be considered. See the Graduate Research School website for the Recommendation of Examiner forms: http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/forms/thesis_examination.

Although you are allowed to know the names of the recommended examiners, you are not permitted to contact examiners during the examination process. At the end of the examination, the identity of examiners may be revealed.

The time line for the process of examination varies from about 4 months to 6 months or sometimes longer. The Graduate Research School makes every effort to ensure a quick turn around. If you have planned appropriately before you submit then the time can be reduced. This planning involves

- Submitting the title of your thesis and an abstract to the Graduate Research Coordinator as early as possible.
- Discussing possible examiners with your supervisors well in advance.
- Being aware of the process regarding binding, and number of copies.
- Discussing your time plans with your supervisor(s) as he or she may not be available during the critical last two or three months - this is particularly the case over the Christmas and New Year period. It is not expected that supervisors will be waiting for you to have your vacation to work on your thesis; they too can be absent or unavailable.


The School is responsible for paying for the temporary binding of your thesis.

What do examiners typically expect and say? Examiners clearly expect a research thesis to draw on established methods of investigation. Candidates were expected to develop a systematic and rational approach. Although examiners differ in the extent to which they scrutinise various parts of a thesis and in the strictness with which they apply assessment criteria, they almost universally share similar views on the need for a logically ordered research design and a carefully structured written presentation.

When all the examiners' reports are returned to the Graduate Research School, the Board of Postgraduate Studies considers the reports and classifies the thesis as passed without
any requirement for revision, passed subject to revisions to the satisfaction of the
supervisors and Head of School (Graduate Research Coordinator), deferred whilst the
thesis is revised and re-submitted for examination, or failed. It is extremely rare for a
thesis that has been submitted with the support of the supervisors and Head of School
(Graduate Research Coordinator) to fail. Generally, if the thesis is classified as ‘revise
and re-submit’, the candidate is requested to re-submit within 12 months. In this case the
revised thesis may go back to one or all original examiners and possibly even a new
examiner.

It is possible for the examiners to disagree and this makes the role of the Board very
important in forming a resolution. In some cases, the Board may seek comment from the
Head of School / (Graduate Research Coordinator) on the examiners’ reports before
classifying the thesis.

If asked to revise the thesis, the letter indicating that you need to revise your thesis
typically will include examiners’ reports and sufficient information about what needs to
be corrected or changed. You will then be required to address these issues. You should
not alter aspects of the thesis with which the examiners have not found fault. You may
disagree with the examiners. You can either incorporate appropriate comments into the
thesis or write a letter to the Board expressing your views. Since this may raise more
questions it should be carefully discussed with your supervisor(s).

The final grades for the degree of MMedSc MPH (thesis) and PhD are pass or fail. The
PhD may also be awarded with distinction.

Publications

The publication rate from theses is high in the School of Population Health. There is a
view that if the study is completed and not communicated in a refereed scientific
journal, then we have not honoured our obligation to students; that is, to make them
researchers. Also, if public funds have been used to support the research then there is an
obligation to tell people what you discovered, usually through publication in a refereed
journal.

All research students are strongly encouraged to prepare papers for publication based on
their research work. Depending on its feasibility, you may be encouraged to do this
during your candidacy. Publication (or getting accepted for publication) prior to
submission for examination is like taking out insurance and can greatly enhance the
perception of your work in the eyes of examiners. Also, your ability to win post-doctoral
and other research-related positions will be enhanced if you already have publications.

As part of the research training, PhD students are encouraged to write at least one paper
for publication during their candidacy. Learning how to publish, the effects of reviews,
and the joy of acceptance are all part of the research process.

The usual rules for authorship should apply to research articles for publication. Normally
the student is the first (primary) author and supervisors are co-authors. Also
remember to acknowledge the source of funding support for the project if relevant and
the contributions of others such as those who provided technical advice and help, research field staff and the study participants if relevant.

**Nominating your supervisor for an award**

If you believe that you have been fortunate to have an excellent supervisor then why not consider nominating him/her for a research supervision award.

Details of awards are available at the:


**APPENDIX 1**

**Induction Checklist for New Research Students**

We wish to make your induction into the School of Population Health as smooth as possible. You may find it useful to use the following checklist to ensure that all the administrative and orientation requirements are carried out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you have confirmation that you are enrolled?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2    | Meeting with School Graduate Research Coordinator relating to:  
(a) Topic area and supervisors  
(b) School guidelines for PG research students  
(c) When you will take up residence in School (if applicable)  
(d) Accommodation and computing needs | Student |
<p>| 3    | Meeting with primary supervisor regarding supervision arrangements and expectations | Student |
| 4    | Tour of School building &amp; introduction to HOS, Admin Staff, PG Computing Officer, PHPS President, OH&amp;S Officer, and other relevant staff. | Supervisor |
| 5    | Introductory email sent to all staff and PG students | Supervisor |
| 6    | General Introduction at School Morning Tea | Supervisor |
| 7    | Application for Computing Network Access and email, discussion of computing requirements, and getting onto student email list | Postgraduate Computer Support Officer |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Task Description</th>
<th>Responsible Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Meeting with president of Public Health Postgraduate Society</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Confidentiality Agreement signed (if applicable)</td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Office Keys (if applicable)</td>
<td>Administration Office staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Security Pass - Campus Card</td>
<td>Student Administration/Campus Card Help Desk x 2523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Parking Permit Application</td>
<td>Unipark Office x 3020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Library Card</td>
<td>Campus Card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Add to School Phone/Email Directory</td>
<td>School Manager / IT Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.ucas.uwa.edu.au/web/studen">www.ucas.uwa.edu.au/web/studen</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Door Sign (if applicable)</td>
<td>Administration Office staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Discussion of working conditions, public holidays, leave forms etc</td>
<td>School Manager, Population Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Scholarship holders – Scholarships Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Photocopy Number</td>
<td>Administration Office staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Occupational Health &amp; Safety Induction</td>
<td>OH&amp;S Officer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>