

# GUIDELINES FOR PRESENTATION OF MASTERS AND PHD DISSERTATIONS/THESES BY RESEARCH

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to students and supervisors on how to prepare a dissertation/thesis for Masters by Research and PhD degrees using the manuscript or publication format..

## 2. Introduction

These guidelines must be read together with the College of Health Sciences (CHS) Handbook as well as the Jacobs documents on examination policies and procedures for PhD degrees. The rules on thesis format are based on modification of point 1 of the definition of terms section in the Jacobs document. In this section a thesis is defined as *“the supervised research component of all PhD degrees, whether by supervised research only, or coursework and research, or by papers that are either published or in manuscript form (the supervised research component of the PhD degree by paper(s) comprises the introduction, literature review, account of the methodology, selection of manuscripts, and conclusion).”* A dissertation is defined as *“the supervised research component of all Masters degrees, whether by supervised research only, or coursework and research, or by papers that are either published or in manuscript form (the supervised research component of the Masters degree by paper(s) comprises the introduction, literature review, account of the methodology, selection of manuscripts, and conclusion).”*

### 2.1 PhD thesis

In the CHS Handbook the rules for a PhD thesis are not in one place; they are stated in DR8 a i & ii, DR9 c and CHS 16. DR8 a i & ii and direct that a thesis be presented in the standard format together with one published paper or an unpublished manuscript that has been submitted to an accredited journal, arising from the doctoral research. CHS16 (thesis by publications states that the thesis may comprise of at least three published papers or in press in accredited journals; such papers must have the student as the prime author. The same CHS16 provides for a thesis by manuscripts that may have at least 3 papers with the student as the prime author that have not yet been published but are in the form of manuscripts; at least two of such papers must constitute original research. In both cases (thesis by publications and manuscripts), there must be introductory and concluding integrative material sections.

The standard type thesis is being phased out in many African countries in favour of the other options that originate from the Scandinavian countries. While this format ensures that all details of the work done for the doctoral degree are captured and thoroughly interrogated, they often remain as grey literature which is mainly useful to other students, usually within the same university, although with digitization of theses, such work may become more accessible beyond the source university. Apart from the risk of losing good work because of it not being on the public domain, as students rarely publish such work after graduating, this approach denies the college additional productivity units (PUs) emanating from publications.

The thesis by publication encourages students to publish key aspects of their doctoral research as they will not graduate if the papers are not published or in press. This approach ensures that the work of the student enters the public domain before the thesis is examined, providing the examiner with some assurance of prior peer review. The thesis must constitute a full study of the magnitude expected of a PhD with the papers providing a sound thread or storyline. Furthermore, the college maximizes the students' work as PUs are awarded for the papers as well as for graduating. However, this approach may negatively affect throughput and frustrate students as

they cannot graduate unless all the papers are published or in press, in addition to the synthesis chapter demonstrating the story line of the thesis.

The option of a thesis by manuscripts ensures that students make efforts to start publishing. The risk of not passing because of failure to publish all papers (as in the thesis by publication) does not exist under this option. However, the PUs emanating from publications from the doctoral work are not guaranteed as the submitted papers may eventually be rejected. Thus there is a possibility of the doctoral work remaining on the university library shelves as is the case for the standard thesis format. The standard thesis does have the advantage that more details of the doctoral work are usually included.

In view of the above, the best option for the college is that of a thesis by publication. However, in the interim, the attractive option is that of thesis by manuscripts, as it provides the possibility of publication without putting the student at risk of delayed graduation when some of the manuscripts are not published/accepted, which also disadvantages the college in terms of PU earnings. The standard thesis option should ultimately be phased out for the stated reasons and students are not encouraged to present their theses in that format. Consequently this document does not describe the standard thesis.

## ***2.2 MSc dissertation***

The rules on presentation of MSc dissertations are presented in CR13 (course work), CHS 14 (course work) and MR9 (research) in the CHS Handbook. CR13 c and MR9 c direct that a dissertation “may comprise one or more papers of which the student is the prime author, published or in press in peer-reviewed journals approved by the relevant college academic affairs board or in manuscripts written in a paper format, accompanied by introductory and concluding integrative material.” Such a dissertation should include a detailed description of the student’s own distinct contribution to the papers. Both CHS14 and CR13 specify that reviews and other types of papers in addition to original research paper/s may be included, provided they are on the same topic.

## ***3 Length of thesis and dissertation by word count***

Table 1 provides a guide of the length of a thesis or dissertation by word count excluding preliminary pages and annexes.

Table 1: Thesis length by word count

Sections	PhD		Masters	
	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
Introduction	2700	2700	2000	2000
Chapters	10000	25000	6000	11000
Synthesis	2000	2000	1700	1700
Bridging	300	300	300	300
Total	15000	30000	10000	15000

#### **4. Intention to submit**

A written intention to submit a thesis or dissertation should be submitted to the appropriate postgraduate office with endorsement of the supervisor at least three months before the actual date of submission which should be before November if the student intends to graduate in the following year. The actual submission will under normal circumstances require approval of the supervisor.

#### **5. Format for theses/dissertation**

There is little variation in the actual format of the PhD thesis and Masters dissertation for the various types described above. The box below summarise the outline of a thesis/dissertation for the thesis by manuscripts and thesis by publications.

##### **Box 1: Outline of thesis**

<p><b>Preliminary pages</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>i. Title page</li><li>ii. Preface and Declaration</li><li>iii. Dedication</li><li>iv. Acknowledgements</li><li>v. Table of contents</li><li>vi. List of figures, tables and acronyms (separately presented)</li><li>vii. Abstract</li></ol> <p><b>Main Text</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Chapter 1: Introduction Introduction including literature review Research questions and/or objectives Brief overview of general methodology including study design</li><li>2. Chapter 2 First manuscript/publication</li><li>3. Chapter 3 Second manuscript/publication</li><li>4. Chapter n Final manuscript/publication</li><li>5. Chapter n+1: Synthesis Synthesis Conclusions Recommendations</li><li>6. References Appendices</li></ol> <p>NB. Between the manuscripts or publications there must be a 1 page (maximum) bridging text to demonstrate the link between them</p>
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#### **6. Details for thesis/dissertation subheadings**

This section summarizes what is expected under each subheading shown in Boxes 1 and indicates where there might be variations between a Masters Dissertation and PhD Thesis.

### **6.1 Title Page**

The officially approved title that is concise (Fewest words that adequately describe the contents of the thesis/dissertation – usually 15 or fewer words) is presented at the top. This should be followed by the candidate's name in a new line. At the bottom the thesis statement should be presented. The thesis statement may be stated as "*Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of \_\_\_\_\_ in the School of \_\_\_\_\_, University of KwaZulu-Natal*" for a PhD/Masters by Research thesis. In the case of a Masters Dissertation it should be stated as "Submitted as the dissertation component in partial fulfilment (% stated) for the degree of \_\_\_\_\_ in the School of \_\_\_\_\_, University of KwaZulu-Natal". For both Masters and PhD the date of submission must be stated.

### **6.2 Preface (Optional)**

The preface merely states the reason (motivating factors) why the study was conducted without getting into details of what was investigated.

### **6.3 Declaration**

This must be structured as follows:

I, Dr/Mr \_\_\_\_\_, declare as follows:

1. That the work described in this thesis has not been submitted to UKZN or other tertiary institution for purposes of obtaining an academic qualification, whether by myself or any other party.

*Where a colleague has indeed prepared a thesis based on related work essentially derived from the same project, this must be stated here, accompanied by the name, the degree for which submitted, the University, the year submitted (or in preparation) and a concise description of the work covered by that thesis such that the examiner can be assured that a single body of work is not being used to justify more than one degree.*

2. That my contribution to the project was as follows:

*This is followed by a concise description of the candidate's personal involvement in and contribution to the project, in sufficient detail that the examiner is in no doubt as to the extent of their contribution.*

3. That the contributions of others to the project were as follows:

*This is followed by a list of all others who contributed intellectually to the project, each accompanied by a concise description of their contribution. This does not include people who ordinarily would be "acknowledged" as opposed to considered for authorship.*

4. Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **6.4 Dedication**

This is an optional section. Should it be included it must be very brief merely indicating to whom the work is dedicated. Avoid anything too flowery

### **6.5 Acknowledgements**

This section acknowledges all individuals, groups of people or institutions that the candidate feels indebted to for the support they rendered. The funding source for the work should also be acknowledged.

## **6.6 Table of contents**

Table of contents must be inserted after the preliminary sections and must capture all major sections of the thesis at the various levels (primary, secondary, tertiary subheadings). It should be electronically generated and should be able to take the reader to specific headings in the thesis.

## **6.7 Lists of figures, tables and acronyms**

These lists must be presented separately. All titles of figures presented in the thesis/dissertation must be listed indicating on what page they appear. Similarly for tables the titles must be presented indicating on what page they appear. In the case of acronyms, the acronym is stated and all the words describing the acronym are presented. Only key acronyms should be stated. In some cases they may not be listed as long as full text is presented whenever the acronym is used for the first time.

## **6.8 Abstract**

The abstract should summarize the thesis mainly stating the purpose of the study, highlights of chapters and the new knowledge contributed by the thesis. The abstract must be approved by the supervisor of the thesis and should not be more than 350 words in length.

## **6.9 Introduction**

The introductory chapter for both types of thesis is similar. The section should include literature review and have the following information. Headings are used as appropriate and need not correspond exactly to the following.

- i. Background and the context of the study
- ii. Description of the core research problem and its significance
- iii. A comprehensive, critical, coherent overview of the relevant literature leading to clearly defined knowledge gaps
- iv. A coherent problem statement highlighting the nature and magnitude of the problem, the discrepancy, knowledge gaps therein and possible factors influencing the problem.
- v. Clear and SMART research questions, objectives and hypothesis and/or theoretical framework
- vi. A conceptual framework (optional)
- vii. Description of the study area and general methodology (*in a standard thesis this should be a stand-alone section*)
- viii. Layout of the thesis (thesis structure) indicating what chapters are presented in the thesis and how they address the objectives.

## **6.10 Literature review**

This section is subsumed in the introduction within the stipulated word count for a thesis or dissertation.

## **6.11 Methodology**

A standalone section is not needed as the methods are adequately described in each manuscript/publication.

## **6.12 Data chapters/manuscripts/publications**

The full published paper or manuscript submitted for publication should be presented as published or submitted to the journal. The actual published paper should be scanned and inserted

in the chapter. There should be a separator page between chapters that has text linking the previous chapter to the next and providing details of the next manuscript/publication indicating publication status.

### **6.13 General discussion/Synthesis chapter**

This is a general discussion that demonstrates the logical thread that runs across the various manuscripts/publications (synthesis). There should be no doubt that the manuscripts/publications complement each other and address the original objectives stated in the general introduction of the thesis. The general discussion/synthesis chapter should end with a conclusion and recommendations where necessary.

### **6.14 References**

Only references cited in the introduction and synthesis chapters should be listed as all other references should be within the manuscripts presented under data chapters.

### **6.15 Annexes**

All information (questionnaires, diagrams, ethics certificates, etc) considered important but not essential for inclusion in the actual thesis is put in this section as reference material. In addition papers that emanated from the work but not directly contributing to the thesis may be included.

## **7. Thesis formatting**

For standardisation of thesis the following formatting specifications should be followed.

### **7.1 Font**

Times New Roman 11pt should be used throughout the thesis. However, major headings may be made bigger (12pt) but using the same font type

### **7.2 Paper size and margins**

A4 (297 x 210 mm) should be used and in the final thesis both sides of the paper should be used. However, the loose bound copy submitted for examination should be printed on only one side. The recommended margins are 30mm for all the left, right, top and bottom margins.

### **7.3 Line spacing**

The copy submitted for examination should have 1.5 line spacing but the final copy should have single line spacing. Paragraphs should be separated by a blank line. Published or submitted manuscripts should remain in their original format in all aspects as they are inserted in their published format in appropriate places.

### **7.4 Headings**

A consistent numbering system and captions should be maintained with first level being in CAPS and centred, second level being **normal bold** font and third level being **italics bold**. If there is need for 4<sup>th</sup> level it should be *normal italics*.

### **7.7 Pagination**

Page numbers should be centred at the bottom of the page. All preliminary pages should be numbered in lower case Roman numerals and subsequent pages should be numbered as indicated in the Box The title page should not be numbered.

The body of the thesis (chapter 1 onwards) should be numbered consecutively with Arabic numerals. The numbers should continue consecutively from the introduction through the through the publications or submitted manuscripts and subsequent sections. The published papers will therefore bear two numbers: a set specific to the manuscript (it is recommended to place these in the upper right hand corner) or published paper, as well as the consecutive numbers belonging to the thesis as a whole. Care must be taken to distinguish these in terms of position and font.

### ***7.8 Referencing***

Supervisors have the freedom to decide the type of citation of references but there must be consistency. This is mainly applicable to the standard type of thesis. In the case of thesis by manuscripts or publications, individual papers will maintain the reference system of the journal but the supervisor can decide on the type of referencing for the introductory and synthesis chapters.

### **8. Final thesis submission**

The thesis should be submitted for examination in a loose bound form accompanied by a PDF copy. After the examination process the final version PDF copy of the thesis must be submitted to PG office for onward submission to the library. It is not a requirement to submit a copy fully bound in leather cloth or similar material.