



# **GUIDE ON STANDARDS AND LAYOUT FORMAT FOR THESIS AND DISSERTATION**

**AT  
UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND**

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A MANUAL

**RESEARCH, INNOVATION  
AND POSTGRADUATE STUDIES**

2024

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The dissertation or thesis must be a coherent, scholarly body of work and must meet the specified format and standards.
- 1.2 This document sets out the standards expected in thesis or dissertations. It offers suggestions about how to format and present the dissertation or thesis for examination, and gives advice on the University expectation on the style of the manuscript.
- 1.3 Format and style are not synonymous.

## 2. FORMAT AND STYLE OF THE DISSERTATION / THESIS

- 2.1 Format is concerned with the way the parts of a thesis/dissertation are organised, presented, and the overall visual aesthetics of the text; it is a set of formal requirements laydown by the University, whereas style is a set of guidelines on how certain information should be captured, such as how sources should be cited in the thesis / dissertation. Style is affected by the discipline in which the study is undertaken. It is also affected by the research philosophy adopted.
- 2.2 A dissertation / thesis typically consists of **three main parts**; (a) the preliminary pages, (b) the main text or body, and (c) the references and appendices sections.
- 2.3 The rule is that the style of presentation should be maintained throughout the sections. All accepted rules of grammar, spelling and punctuation should be followed and be consistent. Typographical errors must be eliminated, and punctuation corrected. The language of the thesis must reflect the highest standards of scholarly expression.
- 2.4 Academic journals in a discipline give a fairly good idea of the preferred style to follow in your discipline (e.g., referencing style, in-text citation style, etc.). The American Psychological Association (**APA**), **Vancouver**, or the **Harvard** Style systems are the two styles adopted by the University, depending on the discipline. See the University Referencing Guides.

### 3. SEQUENCE OF THE PARTS

As a rule, each item must start on a new page.

#### 3.1 Title page

3.1.1 This page contains the dissertation /thesis title, your full name, the name of the degree for which the dissertation /thesis is submitted, the subject area, the name of the university, the supervisor(s), and the month and year of submission. The information should be presented in that order.

3.1.2 This page should NOT be numbered.

#### 3.2 Dedication page

3.2.1 The dedication is to honour those who inspired or encouraged the writing of the dissertation / thesis. A maximum of one page is permitted. This page is NOT numbered and is optional.

#### 3.3 Declaration and Authentication page

3.3.1 Two aspects are covered on this page. It makes *declarations* to acknowledge any external support the candidate received during the research journey and the writing up of the manuscript. This may include: Professional editing services; Government funded scholarships; Industry funded scholarships; Donor contributions; and, any declarations that are not suited to your personal acknowledgements page. The declaration should also include any conflicts of interest.

3.3.2 This page also gives a *statement of authentication*. This is a signed statement to the effect that the work has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other institution, and an undertaking that the work is original and a result of the candidates own research endeavour. The candidate must sign this page, even if the work is being submitted electronically. A scanned copy of your signature is acceptable. See example at **Appendix 1**.

3.3.3 This page is NOT numbered and is compulsory.

#### 3.4 Copyright statement page (see example in **Appendix 2a**)

#### 3.5 Table of Contents page

3.5.1 This page is NOT numbered and is compulsory.

3.5.2 The table of contents page is a guide to the contents of the dissertation or thesis.

3.5.3 The first item *listed should be the first item that appears after (not before) the table of contents*. Every heading and subheading within the body of the manuscript should be listed "verbatim" in the table of contents.

3.5.4 The headings on the table of contents page should be indented in a consistent style. And page numbers should be aligned with the correct heading or with the last line of multi-line heading.

#### 3.6 Acknowledgements page

3.6.1 This is the first item in the Table of Contents.

3.6.2 This page is to *express recognition of*, and *appreciation for*, special professional assistance provided by academic supervisors, and personal support and

*encouragement* by family, friends, other persons, agencies and institutions. *It is not a declaration page*, and should not be used to make declarations.

3.6.3 This *page is numbered* (Roman numerals)

### 3.7 Abstract page (English & isiZulu language)

3.7.1 The abstract is a sophisticated summary of your research project, covering the following (a) the problem statement (one sentence) and purpose (including objectives and research questions or hypothesis) of the study (b) the research methodology used, (c) the major findings, their foregrounding in theory, (d) and conclusions.

3.7.2 The abstract should as informative and accessible as possible, focussing on the central argument pursued in your thesis. When the abstract correctly written it places the in the correct context, which makes it easy for future researchers to locate it.

3.7.3 This *page is numbered* (Roman numerals)

3.7.4 The abstract should be translated into at least two African languages, and included. *Each abstract starting on a new page.*

3.7.5 Template (see **Appendix 2b**)

### 3.8 List of tables page

3.8.1 All Tables (including those in appendices) should be listed and numbered (Arabic numerals) in the order of appearance in the manuscript.

3.8.2 Even if there is only one table it should be included in a list of tables. *Follow the APA or Harvard System* for the correct *style* to present and label tables in the manuscript.

3.8.3 This *page is numbered* (Roman numerals)

### 3.9 List of figures and illustrations page

3.9.1 The list of figures and illustrations can be formatted similarly to the list of tables.

3.9.2 Even if there is only one figure it should be included in a list of tables. *Follow the APA or Harvard System* for the correct *style* to present and label figures in the manuscript.

3.9.3 This *page is numbered* (Roman numerals)

### 3.10 Abbreviations page

3.10.1 Provide a list of acronyms and other abbreviations used. These should be presented in alphabetical order.

3.10.2 This *page is numbered* (Roman numerals)

### 3.11 Body of the dissertation / thesis

3.11.1 Each **chapter** or major section of the work should begin on a new page. A typical sketch of the sections and case-level of the traditional chapters as follows. See the marking criteria of dissertation or thesis in **Appendix 3**.

## CHAPTER 1: SPECIFICATION OF THE STUDY

A clear and convincing background to the research problem, showing the gaps in the current body of knowledge on the issue /phenomenon being investigated. Heavy reliance of empirical background to make the case and locate the study as unique, one with currency, and importance. Rationale for it is a clearly stated research problem. The delineation of the research problem supports the formulation of appropriate (main and sub) research questions; aim and objectives / hypotheses. Consistency of the research question(s), aim and objectives/ hypotheses. The delimitation of the scope of the study so that it is clear to the reader what you are (or are not) investigating.

Clear statement of the significance or value of the study and why it's worth doing. The contribution to the body of knowledge in the discipline (esp. for PhD) should be discussed. And the operational definition of the terms or variables should be fully laid out, with clear support in the literature for each concept used. Some studies have intellectual property value, and the property value should be discussed. Discuss the reciprocity value as appropriate. An outline of the chapters, showing what each chapter covers, is vital part of chapter 1. Each chapter should end with a summary.

See the assessment criteria.

## CHAPTER 2: RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

This is a critical review of past studies related to the research questions or objectives or hypotheses set out in Chapter 1. The structure of this chapter depends on the scope of the review being undertaken. There can be more than one literature review chapters.

What is key is that the **Chapter** should clearly show the topic under review, and should critique and discuss the preliminary concepts in the topic, or research questions or objectives, or hypotheses. It should critique the empirical literature especially on the relationships among the variables /concepts of interest. Conceptual literature (10%) should be a fraction of the Empirical literature (90%).

Rely on relevant, contemporary authority and scientific sources. The key is the skills to critically review and logically and coherently present the relevant literature in the field of study. The gaps in the body of scholarship should be summarised to give further support to the problem statement.

The literature review may be presented in more than one chapters. See the assessment criteria.

## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter flows from the literature review. It explains the theoretical and conceptual framework that anchors the study, and which forms the lens through which the findings are interpreted.

The *structure of this chapter depends on the scope* of the problem investigated. However, the chapter needs an (a) introduction, (b) discussion of the main concepts that anchor the study, and (c) the theoretical underpinnings of the concepts. Discuss how the concepts you have drawn together will assist in the interpretation of the findings /results. See the assessment criteria.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

See the assessment criteria. A typical methodology chapter includes:

- 4.1 INTRODUCTION** (i.e., introduce the chapter)
- 4.2 PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY**
- 4.3 RESEARCH APPROACH**
- 4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**
- 4.5 STUDY CONTEXT AND POPULATION** (i.e., as applicable)
- 4.6 STUDY SAMPLE, SAMPLE SIZE AND PROCEDURES** (i.e., as applicable)
  - 4.6.1 Study sample
  - 4.6.2 Sample size
  - 4.6.3 Sampling methods
  - 4.6.4 Description of the sampling procedures
- 4.7 DATA COLLECTION**
  - 4.7.1 Design and description of instruments
  - 4.7.2 Description of the data collection procedures
  - 4.7.3 Piloting of instruments (i.e., where applicable)
- 4.8 RESEARCH QUALITY**
  - 4.8.1 Reliability and Validity of the data collection instrument (if quantitative)
  - 4.8.2 Measures to ensure trustworthiness of data (if qualitative)
  - 4.8.3 Mixed methods (if mixed)
    - 4.8.3.1 Reliability and validity factors for the QUAN data instruments
    - 4.8.3.2 Measures to ensure trustworthiness of the QUAL data
- 4.9 DATA ANALYSIS METHOD(S) AND PROCEDURES**
  - 4.9.1 Analytical methods
  - 4.9.2 Description of the analytical procedures
- 4.10 ETHICAL AND SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS ADOPTED**
  - 4.10.1 Informed consent
  - 4.10.2 Debriefing
  - 4.10.3 Withdrawal from investigation
  - 4.10.4 Confidentiality and anonymity
  - 4.10.5 Protection of participants
  - 4.10.6 Data protection and storage
- 4.11 SUMMARY**

## CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

There are two elements in this chapter, namely: data analysis and data interpretation. *Data analysis* implies looking for patterns in the data and working out what the patterns really mean. *Data interpretation* is explaining the patterns discovered. It is the discussion of the findings. The theoretical/conceptual framework in Chapter 3 and the literature review in Chapter 2 should guide this discussion. The aim is to foreground the findings in the available theory or literature.

Both data analysis and interpretation are intertwined and dependent on each other. If the data analysis section is extensive, you can separate it from the interpretation/discussion so that you have two separate chapters.

The discussion must make the necessary critical connections with the literature. See the assessment criteria.

Where, tables, figures, graphs, and/or scientific notations are used in the data analysis, follow the rules for using them. See the *APA referencing Manual* or the *Harvard referencing Manual* for guidelines on appropriate practices and expected standards.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS**

A typical conclusions, recommendations, implications and limitations Chapter includes should have a section on introduction, conclusions, recommendations, implications and limitations of the study:

## **CHAPTER 7: REFLECTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY**

It is advisable for doctoral candidates to have a chapter in the thesis where they provide reflections on their doctoral journey, and the contribution of the study to knowledge, practice/policy, innovation development, etc.

### 3.12 References page

- 3.12.1 The references come immediately after the last chapter.
- 3.12.2 The dissertation or thesis must include references for *every source mentioned* in the text.
- 3.12.3 The reference list should only include sources which have been cited in the manuscript.
- 3.12.4 See the Vancouver referencing, *APA referencing Manual* or the *Harvard referencing Manual* for guidelines on appropriate practices and expected standards. See link:

### 3.13 Bibliography page

- 3.13.1 This comes after the references. Background materials or other sources used in carrying out the research that are not specifically listed or referenced in the text should be included in a separate bibliography.
- 3.13.2 Do not confuse references and bibliography.

### 3.14 Appendices cover page

- 3.14.1 Appendices consist of supplementary, informational, or illustrative materials that are too lengthy for inclusion in the body of the manuscript.
- 3.14.2 Each appendix should be *labelled on the top margin* (at the left or centred), sequentially using capital letters and numbers (for example **Appendix A** or **Appendix 1**). Inside the body of the manuscript, ALWAYS make *cross-reference* to the supporting documents placed in the appendices (e.g., see Appendix 1 for Letter of Consent; see Appendix 2 for Sample of the Questionnaire used in data collection).
- 3.14.3 In cases where Table and Figures are placed in the appendices, number them consecutively (e.g., Appendix 1, Appendix 2, etc.).



## 4. FORMATTING OF DISSERTATION / THESIS

### 4.1 Font and size

- 4.1.1 The font colour of the thesis or dissertation should be **Black**, unless otherwise approved by the Higher Degrees Committee.
- 4.1.2 Font size of the main body text of the manuscript should be **12 points**. Footnotes, graphs, tables can have smaller font sizes (e.g., 9-10 points).
- 4.1.3 **Chapter headings** should be centred on the page at least **3cm** from the top and should be **4 points** larger than the main text: (e.g., if the font size of the main text is 12-points, the font size of the chapter heading should be 16-points).
- 4.1.4 **In manuscript**, main headings – should be boldface type and **UPPERCASE**. First level sub-headings should be boldface type but **lowercase**. Sub-subheadings should be italics and *lowercase (not bold)*.
- 4.1.5 Quotations and words in a foreign language can also be *italicised* to emphasise particular points.
- 4.1.6 Avoid underlining. It is not recommended.

### 4.2 Line spacing

- 4.2.1 Line spacing should permit ease of reading. The manuscript text should be one-and-a-half line spacing (1.5) (unless dictated otherwise by Faculty).
- 4.2.2 Footnotes, bibliographic entries, lists, tables and appendices may be single spaced. Lengthy quotes, captions for figures, or other descriptive text may also be single spaced.

### 4.3 Headings and subheadings

- 4.3.1 Subheadings should **not** appear as the last line of text on a page.
- 4.3.2 Numbering of *headings, subheadings and sub-subheadings* must follow the Chapter number (Chapter 1, Chapter 2, etc). The numbering of headings, subheadings and sub-subheadings in Chapter 1 should begin with the number 1, or in Chapter 2 should begin with the number 2, and so on. (e.g., in Chapter 1, headings should be 1.1, 1.2, etc., subheadings, 1.1.1; 1.1.2; etc., and sub-subheadings, 1.1.1.1, 1.1.2.1, etc.).
- 4.3.3 In the manuscript, sub-subheadings should not exceed four (4) level of numbering. The four level of heading should be *italicized*.
- 4.3.4 Heading/subheading numbering should be consistent throughout the thesis or dissertation.

### 4.4 Margins

- 4.4.1 Margins for the text, including tables, figures, charts, illustrative materials, references and appendices, should be set at least **25mm** from the left, right, top and bottom edges. The main text should appear within this frame.
- 4.4.2 Running footers may be placed outside the 25mm margins, but not closer than **15mm** from the outer edges of a page. This is to accommodate thesis binding.

## 4.5 Tables, Figures, and Diagrams

- 4.5.1 Tables, Diagrams and Figures should **fit on a page**, and not made to run across a page. See the *APA Style Manual* or *Harvard Style Manual*. Ensure all details remain clearly readable.
- 4.5.2 All tables and figures should be numbered consecutively, using **numbers**, and should be dispersed through the body of the text.
- 4.5.3 **In all cases**, the table or figure should appear on the page immediately following the first text that references or mentions it. **Table or figure titles** must be on the same page as the table or figure.
- 4.5.4 Diagrams, tables and figures may be placed in either portrait or landscape format. These must have the title and any related information displayed alongside in portrait or landscape format.
- 4.5.5 Where tables, graphs, diagrams or maps are oversized for the pages in the body of the manuscript, move them to the **Appendices**.
- 4.5.6 Diagrams or maps taken from published sources, or not created by the researcher, shall have **copyright permission** before they can be included in the thesis or dissertation. The full citation of 3<sup>rd</sup> party sources shall be indicated alongside diagrams, maps, figures, tables taken from 3<sup>rd</sup> party sources.

## 4.6 In-text citations footnotes, and endnotes

- 4.6.1 In-text citation shall follow either the **APA or Harvard referencing system**.
- 4.6.2 Avoid parenthetical references that correspond to reference list inside the body of the manuscript. If one is used, it should be carefully placed to avoid unduly interrupting the flow of the sentence.
- 4.6.3 Depending on the discipline, **footnotes** may be placed at the bottom of text pages, and **endnotes** at the end of each chapter.
- 4.6.4 Footnotes are normally separated from the text by a horizontal line.
- 4.6.5 Endnotes and footnotes should be numbered sequentially within each chapter.

## 4.7 Linguistic and other technical presentation

- 4.7.1 The dissertation or thesis must be a coherent, scholarly body of work, and must meet the specified writing style and standards. The University expects the use of a high standard of English (or other African languages) in the thesis or dissertation, and a professional presentation of its contents.
- 4.7.2 The overall linguistic presentation in terms of grammar must be appropriate. The manuscript must be carefully and thoroughly edited for style and consistency and proofread for basic spelling and grammatical errors.
- 4.7.3 Appropriate use of statistical formula, equations, symbols, and notations.

## 5. LENGTH OF THE DISSERTATION OR THESIS

- 5.1 The word limits or length of the dissertation or thesis cannot be prescribed as an assessment criterion because requirements and expectations vary across disciplines. Dissertation or thesis length does not imply substance. Nevertheless, as a guide, a typical doctoral thesis is between 70,000-100,000 words. Master's dissertation (by research) is typically between 55,000 and 70,000 words. The word count for a coursework master's dissertation (i.e., mini-dissertation) is usually between 40,000 and 50,000 words.
- 5.2 The dissertation or thesis length does not include the preliminary pages, footnotes, endnotes, references, bibliography, or other similar details.

## 6. PROFESSIONAL EDITING AND TURN-IT-IN REPORT

### 6.1 Editing

- 6.1.1 You may use a **professional editor** in preparing your thesis or dissertation for submission. Only the work of professional editors approved by the University is accepted. A *list of professional editors* is published each year through the Research and Innovation Division.
- 6.1.2 Professional editing should be used for the purposes of *detecting minor typographical or style errors* in your dissertation or thesis. Its not to write or rewrite for you. to develop good writing and editing skills, work with peers, and practice by editing each other's work.

### 6.2 Turn-it-in originality report

- 6.2.1 Dissertation or thesis submitted to the University should be original. This implies that it must be free of *plagiarism*, or *AI generated contents*. You are encouraged to submit your work through the Turnitin plagiarism checking system to check the originality of your writing and identify referencing errors and omissions.
- 6.2.2 Turnitin will provide you with a comprehensive originality report that you should discuss with your supervisors and make changes to your work as required.
- 6.2.3 The Research and Innovation Division, the Library, and the Faculty provide *plagiarism*, or *AI generated contents* checks.

## APPENDIX 1: Example of statement of authentication and declaration

### Statement of Authentication and Declaration

This statement is to confirm that the research report contained in this manuscript is, to the best of my knowledge, original, except where I have acknowledged through citations in the text. Consequently, I hereby declare that this manuscript has not been submitted, either in full or in part, to University of Zululand or any other university or institution of learning, for a degree.

I also further declare that material in my dissertation / thesis has potential for intellectual property considerations and I deem this to be confidential. As such I declare that I have requested the University, through the Research and Innovation Division, to solicit from the external examiner, a signed confidentiality agreement for the purposes of examination.

[illegible]

.....  
(Signature)

.....  
(Date)

## APPENDIX 2a: Copyright statement

### Copyrights Statement

I, XXXXXXXXXXXX, the author of this dissertation / thesis own certain copyright or related rights in it (including all appendices and/or schedules to this manuscript) and I have given the University of Zululand certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.

Copies of this dissertation /thesis may be made, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, **only** in accordance with the Copyright, **Designs and Patents** Act of 2008 of South Africa (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University may form from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made.

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.....  
(Signature)

.....  
(Date)

## APPENDIX 2b

### Layout of Abstract

STUDENT PROFILE	
Name and <b>Surname</b> (Title)	
Student <b>Number</b>	
<b>Email</b>	
Tel/ <b>Cell</b>	
<b>ORCID</b> number	
<b>Faculty</b>	
<b>Department</b>	
<b>Degree</b>	
<b>Date</b> of submission of Abstract	
Thesis / Dissertation <b>title</b>	
SUPERVISOR(S) PROFILE	
Name and <b>Surname</b> (Title)	
<b>Email</b>	
Tel/ <b>Cell</b>	
<i>[insert English]</i>	
<i>[insert isiZulu]</i>	

### **APPENDIX 3: Assessment criteria for Marking Dissertation or Thesis**

See Assessment Criteria in a separate document.