THESIS PROOFREADING AND FORMATTING

CHECKLIST FOR THESIS WRITING

Having read over 100 theses from 2008 to 2023, we pass on these suggestions to help you present your research in the best way possible in keeping with current research presentation conventions and universities' guidelines. Candidates and supervisors decide whether to accept or reject our suggestions.

These notes relate to occurrences which we have read in theses. We refer to APA7th edition (and the Concise edition) and The Australian Government Style Manual.

CONTENTS

DOCTORATE OF PHILOSOPHY

The comments in this section are mine and may not reflect the opinion or practice of any specific university.

> *It would be reasonable to assume that a considerable part of the PhD journey is dedicated to philosophy and its incorporation into this significant piece of research. Anecdotally, it is also reasonable to assume that even those embarking on a PhD struggle with truly understanding the role of philosophy in a PhD.[1]*

Over the past decade we have noted that the P has become lost in PhD dissertations. Why should a philosophical underpinning not frame every doctoral-level enquiry? From our point of view, a rigorous discourse explaining why a certain philosophy (western, eastern, middle eastern, indigenous, or spiritual philosophies, or a combination of them) should form the approach to finding truth about the research question/s or hypothesis.

Such a theoretical perspective frames the enquiry, is reflected in the methodology, and guides the method of analysis of data and the research narrative. Clarification of, and justification for, adherence to these choices through the steps towards conclusion, adds weight and depth to the creation of new knowledge.

The process of investigation (whether it be by reflection, critical analysis, interpretive analysis, scientific analysis, etc.) should refer back to the methodological choices outlined in the methodology chapter which, in turn, should relate to the philosophical underpinning of the research. This adds weight to the research, and justifies for an examiner, the appropriateness of the methodological choices in answering hypotheses.

Doctoral candidates can justify their chosen theoretical perspective by citing approaches to research which has used similar philosophies to produce new knowledge. An examiner may ascribe more weight to a thesis by this inclusion, and the knowledge created may have greater legitimacy. Its omission denies new knowledge the weight it deserves, and denies candidates academic and personal growth. Namely:

> *"…universities—in so far as they live up to their true function—serve the ennoblement of the individual."* [2]

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[1] Putting the philosophy into PhD. Adele Baldwin. *Working Papers in the Health Sciences* 1:10 Winter 2014 ISSN 2051-6266 / 20150063
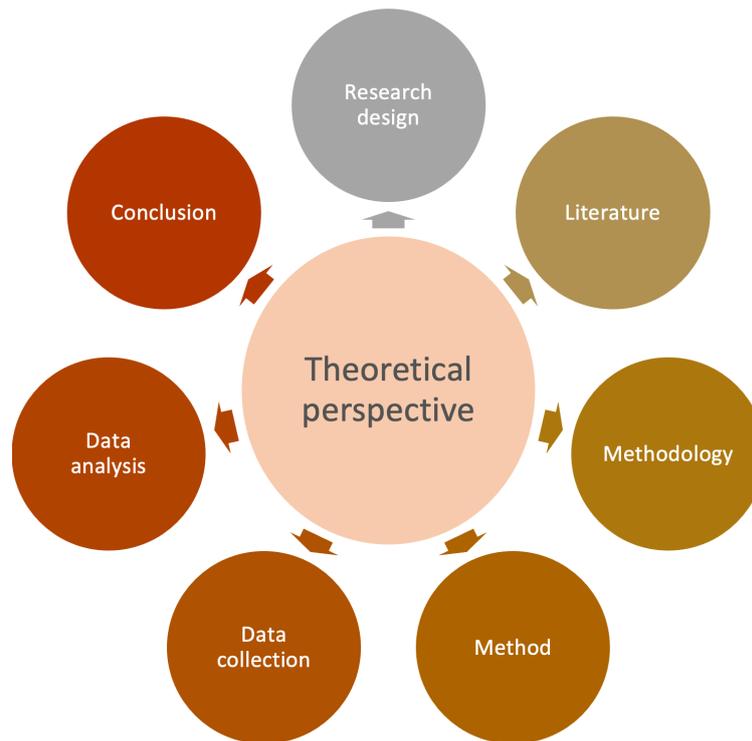[2] Albert Einstein, *Moral Decay*, 1937

Figure 1 Influences of a theoretical perspective during the research process

SUGGESTIONS FOR METHODOLOY

QUALITATIVE OR QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES

Qualitative or quantitative research are not philosophical orientations; they are theoretically complementary ways of gathering, analysing and presenting data. Qualitative approaches may suit the Human Sciences disciplines better than quantitative approaches which may suit the Natural Sciences—but neither are exclusive to one or the other.

TRIANGULATION

We have read some odd applications, but this sums it up well. In the social sciences, triangulation refers to the application and combination of several research methods in the study of the same phenomenon.

Triangulation refers to using multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to understand phenomena. Four types of triangulation have been identified: method triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and data source triangulation. [3]

TAKE A LOOK AT

It doesn't happen often, but research in higher education doesn't casually "take a look at". One takes a look at TV, art, gardens, etc…not elements of research topics. The intention of examining others' research documents, asking specifically designed questions, or recording data about events for a defined purpose, deserves more than a look at in doctoral research.

WRITING CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions which might, possibly, perhaps, could…?

A conclusion is the finale to a grand opus. When we read that there might be the possibility that … or perhaps scientists could review, or maybe in the future, we wonder if the candidate really believes in their work. It has taken four or six years to complete the research, from generation of a hypothesis to submission. A conclusion should convince the reader that the researcher believes in the consequences of their research:

- This thesis creates new knowledge about the way…
- This research proves that the hypothesis that …. is wrong (or right), because it has been tested by…
- Thus, an outcome has been determined and a relevant set of conclusions has been drawn. They are…
- The implications for this are…
- If this research is ignored, the consequences are likely to be this or that ….

Another cause for concern is when a thesis writer introduces a new topic/field/concept into the conclusion which has not been mentioned anywhere else. It has happened!

WRITING TIPS

VAGUENESS

A large percentage of students, great distances, huge amounts, various studies, many people, are all unqualified and unquantified expressions. Anything relate to quantity needs to be quantified, not interpreted by a reader's own imagination.

The wider community… What is meant? The surrounding suburb, the state, the nation, the whole world? Women with Type 2 diabetes who live on the outskirts of Darwin, children from single parent families who live on the New England tablelands, ex-patriots from Australia who live in central London, are clearly expressed and not open to interpretation.

Globally… I doubt anyone can honestly qualify or quantify *globally*. Many Australians; most people these days; many countries of the world; and, most third world countries, are also inaccurate expressions. Suggest: 80% of Australian people… (and cite source); from 2000 to 2022, 95% of Australian voters… (and cite source); and, countries such as Norway and Switzerland.

Candidates may fall into the trap of writing about a wide body of literature and quote one or two authors! Literature on this aspect is exemplified by authors such as Blogs and Jakes who claimed, said, contributed that, would suffice. (PS There is something mildly unsettling about the use of the hackneyed term: "wide body of literature".)

THINK ABOUT BEING ACCURATE

- How is this different? The total number of participants was 25, versus: There were 25 participants.
- Check that percentage totals in tables equal 100%.
- *About 14.3%* is exact, not roughly. Starting a new sentence with 14.3% is OK.
- Table 13, or Figure 22, not the table or figure below or above or on p. 25
- Do not refer to anything on any specific page number – you are setting yourself up for trouble as page numbers alter throughout the writing and the formatting processes, or in preparing for journal publications. Say, *Discussion of yellow submarines is in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.*

IRRELEVANT RESEARCH REPORTING

These include:

- *Given the constraints of time, space, resources*. These are common issues for all candidates and will not receive sympathy from an examiner who may have experienced likewise.
- Supervision problems
- How much running around to interviews and interviewees not being on time
- Who made the tea during the interviews
- How long transcription took, losing data and technological difficulties

(Extenuating circumstances worth stating relate to childbirth, ill health or tragedy.)

SEE ABOVE, SEE BELOW

From a friend/ex examiner: She objected to being told to *see above* (ceiling) or *see below* (floor) from where she was physically positioned! Identify a specific section, graph or figure in the work.

FURTHER VS FUTURE

Use, *further research could* … not *future research could* —everything happens in the future.

THE SCOPE OF APA7th

Candidates often don't know that APA7th has rules related to formatting, heading styles, text and document layout, grammar, and punctuation; plus, in text, parenthetical and reference list styles. We will refer to some of the most commonly made mistakes in the next sections.

APA7th now has 50 different categories of reference formatting styles for specific sources so this process needs time; not an 11th hour effort.
https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/references/examples

You will need to comply with your universities' thesis presentation guidelines too.

PUNCTUATION

This is just a smattering of common errors in theses.

POSSESSIVE APOSTROPHES:

Oh! the challenge to resist correcting incorrect either missing or misplaced apostrophes on public signs.

During a "save native forests" campaign a friend made me a "Save the Koala's" sign. A campaigner asked what it was the koala owned that needed saving and suggested: "Save the Koala's arse". Perfect use of the possessive apostrophe. I removed the offending apostrophe.

I bet myself I could find an apostrophe incorrectly used on the front page of today's SMH online. 03.11.23.

'I thought he was going to glass me': Wallabies fan confronts McLennan at restaurant

HAVE YOUR SAY

Why the Wallabies' expected exit in France is no fait accompli

Figure 2 Wallabies is a collective noun so Wallabies fan *is incorrect,* Wallabies' expected exit *is correct.*

- Automatic cars were available in the 1950s. Not possessive, so no apostrophe.

- 1950's models of automatic cars were produced by Chevrolet and Ford and other car manufacturers. Possessive, so use apostrophe.

- White paper author was not Dawkin, it was Dawkins, but *Dawkin's White paper* is incorrect. Use Dawkins's White paper, Dickens's novels, Decartes's philosophy, James's work, but Jesus' life work is OK! Concise APA7th, p. 100.

Speaking of which, writers use terms such as *the books belonging to the universities*, or *I wrote down the names of each interviewee,* etc. It happens so regularly we think writers are unsure about how to use the possessive apostrophe.

Singular apostrophe	Plural apostrophe
One university's lecturers…	*Several universities' lecturers…*
I wrote down one interviewee's name	*I wrote down all the interviewees' names*
One government's budget	*Several governments' policies*
One lady's glove	*Several ladies' handbags*
Plural nouns…*the children's memories, the people's belongings, the Wallaby's jerseys.*	NO possessive apostrophes for placenames, or expressions of plural measures of time; days, weeks, years, etc. Yet, *one day's wages,* etc.

APA QUOTATION MARKS

- Use double quotation marks for quotes less than 40 words within paragraphs.

- Use no quotation marks for quotes more than 40 words which should start a new line and be indented

- Use double quotation marks for the first mention of ironic, sarcastic, colloquial slang words, etc., then not for subsequent uses. APA7th p. 158.

- Use italics for the first use of key terms, no italics for subsequent uses. Concise APA7th p. 95.

ACRONYMS

The Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC). Spell out for first use followed by the acronym in brackets. Subsequently use the acronym, *ABC*. For first time use in subsequent chapters you may wish to repeat *The Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC),* especially if it is far removed from the first mention.

HYPHENS

It was time for decision making, rubbish collecting, information gathering, work making, book keeping. No hyphen is correct.

Used adjectivally: rubbish-collecting mechanisms, information-gathering network, work-making devices, book-keeping software, decision-making teamwork. All need a hyphen.

BUT, for *happily integrated classrooms* – no hyphen is used as happily is an adverb.

PREFIXES

APA7th requires most prefixes, eg, extra, non, pre, semi, and socio, to be used without a hyphen. Eg. extracurricular, nonsignificant, preexperimental, semidarkness, and socioeconomic. See Concise APA7th p. 103 for more examples.

GRAMMAR

This is just a smattering of common occurrences in theses.

VOICE

Active voice is preferable, not passive.

The full implications; however, were felt by the congregation in January when … (passive).

However, the congregation felt the full implications in January when … (active)

100s OF WORDS/PHRASES

- 100s of howevers

However is not a conjuction. This punctuation is appropriate: semi colon, then however, then comma.It can be used in situations where one would say:

   a. The children had fun at the beach; however, they were tired at the end of the day.
   b. The town was abuzz on Saturday; however, the streets were deserted on Sunday.
   c. A sentence can begin with However, …

- 100s of *therefores*

The meaning of the sentence should indicate that something is different from the previous sentence, without writing 'therefore'.

- 100s of *thats*

In some instances, *that* can be disused (or deleted when it is implied) to create a sleeker sentence, eg.

This:	*… and suggests that there are three interpersonal factors affecting …*
To this:	*… and suggests three interpersonal factors affect…*
This:	*That it was going to rain was quite obvious because of the dark clouds on the horizon.*
To this:	*Dark clouds on the horizon foretold rain.*

HEDGING

APA7th p.158. Candidates may swamp their theses with single or double quotation marks around commonly used words in order to give them a vague meaning, to euphemise meaning, to ascribe some sort of unspecific significance. This indicates avoiding an over precise commitment to the intended meaning. Examples:

"… based on competitive selection processes oriented to 'merit' and performance criteria..."
What does 'merit' actually mean here? If, simply merit, then why hedge? Is it ambiguous? Is it not really merit but nepotism, based on favours, gender bias, etc, then, say why it was not really merit.

"… emergence as a 'paradigm shift' from the old public …"

Paradigm shift is common language so does not need to be hedged. If it is not a paradigm shift then don't use the words, if it was something like a paradigm shift but not exactly, then explain, if it was supposed to be a paradigm shift but ended up as something else, then explain what that something else was.

Do not hedge words which are part of everyday lexicon. The Aust Style Manual 6thedn (p. 114) indicates hedging should only be used at the first use of a new technical term, sarcasm, colloquialism, coined terms, quaint, sarcastic, ironic or ambiguous words, and not for commonly used words or terms. Either commit to the word by removing the single quotes, or use more accurate expressions rather than using words which are intended not to convey the complete meaning.

Mass Nouns

Knowledge, behaviour, understanding, future. These are mass nouns like milk or weather. If there are different categories of knowledge and behaviour, identify…cultural knowledge, historical or non-Indigenous understanding, etc. These mass nouns should not be pluralised. (Aust Style Manual p. 69.) Instead of *knowledges*, *behaviours*, etc. write: *five branches of knowledge, different types of adolescent behaviour,* etc.

Academics

Academics, professionals, tradies, are a colloquialism when you think about it. Use *academic staff members*, *professional people*, etc.

Write about *people* not individuals.   Plus, *people who*…, not *people that*…

Which? or That?

This is a common mistake.

"That" is a restrictive pronoun. It's vital to the noun to which it's referring. e.g., *I don't trust fruits and vegetables that aren't organic.* This refers to all non-organic fruits or vegetables. In other words, I only trust fruits and vegetables that are organic.

"Which" introduces a relative clause. It allows qualifiers that may not be essential. e.g., *I recommend you eat only organic fruits and vegetables, which are available in your area's grocery stores.* In this case, you don't have to go to a specific grocery store to obtain organic fruits and vegetables.

"Which" qualifies, "that" restricts. "Which" is more ambiguous and by virtue of its meaning is flexible enough to be used in many restrictive clauses. e.g., *The house, which is burning, is mine.* e.g., *The house that is burning is mine.*

FORMATTING

STYLES, MARGINS, BREAKS AND SECTIONS

Some theses we receive have <u>too many user-introduced formatting Styles</u>. MS Word's Preferences may be set to AVOID introducing a new Style every time different formatting choices are made.

|	
To prevent this happening, choose: Word, Preferences, Edit and **deselect** the tick beside *Keep track of formatting.*	**Editing Options** ☑ Delete selected text when you type ☑ Drag-and-drop text editing ☑ Include paragraph mark when selecting paragraphs ☐ Keep track of formatting ☐ Match font with keyboard
Do not create a new Style. Alter, or modify, an existing Word style. In the Home ribbon click on the Styles Pane on the right-hand side. Scroll to the style you want to change, right click on the drop-down arrow beside it, choose Modify Style, and alter the appearance of that style.	Heading 1 ▼ Select All Modify Style... Delete... Update to Match Selection
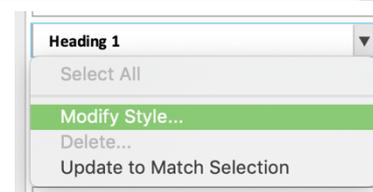
- Printed and bound theses need a 4cm margin on the left-hand side
- Remove excess spaces between words and use only one space between sentences
- Format Heading Style 1 to begin a new page
- Never insert a Section Break when you only need a Page Break.
- Do not use for Section 6, say: 6.0, 6.1, 6.2. The 0 numeral is not included.
- Except for simple graphs, figures, or diagrams, .pdfs inserted in a Word document may reproduce poorly when printed; especially when pages have a 4cm left margin for binding,

WORKS WITH PREPUBLISHED PAPERS

For theses with prepublished papers, pamphlets, booklets, check with your research department regarding their reproduction. For digitally published theses:

- To convert a thesis and papers from MS Word to .pdf. In MS Word, choose File, Print, then on bottom left of the Print window, choose PDF, then Save as PDF, choose a name and a folder, then click Save.
- Then open all the .pdf files
- View the Thumbnails and drag the .pdf papers' thumbnails into the main thesis's .pdf thumbnail list. Move up and down as required.
- Save the whole work as .pdf.
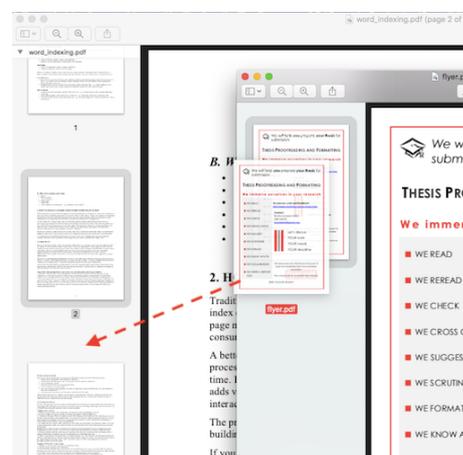
CAPTIONS FOR ELEMENTS

Standard captions in MS Word include Figures, Maps, Tables, and Charts. However, you can create names for your own captions such as this image shows. This allows you to create a list of any element which is included in your work. Choose, Insert, Caption then New Label and type name of your element into the field.
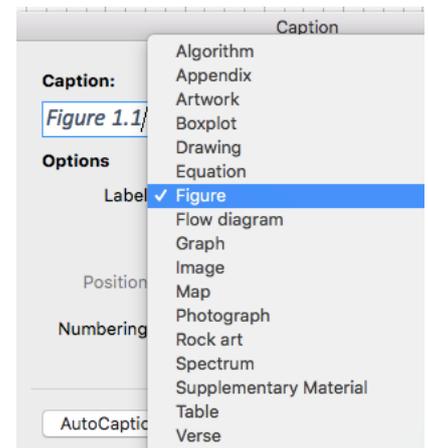
DISSERTATION FORMATTING INSTRUCTIONS APA7TH:

Some candidates pick and choose what they want to comply with but check with Supervisors on this. Some examiners are sticklers for compliance others may not worry.

There have been changes from APA6th to APA7th which makes formatting less complicated.

APA7th https://apastyle.apa.org/

DOWNLOAD STUDENT PAPER SET UP GUIDE
https://apastyle.apa.org/instructional-aids/student-paper-setup-guide.pdf

FONT FACE AND SIZE	Times New Roman, 11, Calibri 11, Arial 11, Lucida Sans Unicode 10, Georgia 11, Computer Modern 10
NORMAL SPACING	Double
HEADING LEVEL STYLES	<table><tr><th>Level</th><th>Format</th></tr><tr><td>1</td><td>**Centered, Bold, Title Case Heading** Text begins as a new paragraph.</td></tr><tr><td>2</td><td>**Flush left, Bold, Title Case Heading** Text begins as a new paragraph.</td></tr><tr><td>3</td><td>***Flush Left, Bold Italic, Title Case Heading*** Text begins as a new paragraph.</td></tr><tr><td>4</td><td>**Indented, Bold, Title Case Heading, Ending With a Period.** Text begins on the same line and continues as a regular paragraph.</td></tr><tr><td>5</td><td>***Indented, Bold Italic, Title Case Heading, Ending With a Period.*** Text begins on the same line and continues as a regular paragraph.</td></tr></table>
PARAGRAPH AND REFERENCES INDENTS	First line of each paragraph indented to 7 spaces
PAGE NUMBERING	Arabic numbers all pages from Page 1, including on front page. Page numbers on top right.
MARGINS	For binding: 4 cm left hand side, 2cm for top, right and bottom For digital presentation: Check university guidelines.
SECTIONS	Use Sections, not Chapters. The word 'Introduction' is irrelevant
CAPTIONS	Tables, Figures, Appendices, Maps, etc. to start on a new page. Tables' captions go **above the Table**; Figures' captions go **below the item**.

	Descriptions should go one space beneath the figure or table caption. Description and caption should be in the same font and size as the whole document. For text within an image, APA recommends using a sans serif font (e.g. Arial) with a size between 8 and 14 points.
TABLE FORMATTING	May be single-spaced, 1.5 spaces or double spaced. Hanging indent for text in cells which are more than one line of 0.5 cm. Tables which go over a page can have the heading row repeated.
TITLE PAGE example	Guided Imagery and Progressive Muscle Relaxation in Group Psychotherapy Hannah K. Greenbaum Department of Psychology, The George Washington University PSYC 3170: Clinical Psychology Dr. Tia M. Benedetto October 1, 2019

https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/tables-figures/tables