

THE FINER DETAILS OF THESIS WRITING

Having read 60 theses from 2008 to 2017, we pass on these suggestions to save the candidate and the proofreaders a few headaches and give clarity for an Examiner. We are not Examiners—just proofreaders who may make editorial comments. It is up to the candidate and his or her Supervisor to decide whether to accept or reject our suggestions.

We wish you well in examination!

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1 EDITORIAL COMMENTS

1.1 Doctorate of Philosophy – or Not?

The weight ascribed to a Doctorate of Philosophy thesis may be augmented by inclusion of a discussion of the **philosophical underpinning** which frames the enquiry and a rigorous discourse as to why that certain philosophy will form the approach to finding answers to the research question/s or hypothesis.

A theoretical perspective is reflected in the methodology, frames the enquiry and guides the method of analysis of data and the research narrative. Clarification of adherence to these choices through the steps towards conclusion, adds weight and depth to the creation of new knowledge. Doctoral candidates can justify their chosen theoretical perspective by citing approaches to similar productive studies.

EXERCISE

Write your own linking descriptions in this equation. Rationalise forward and back.

Linking philosophical orientation ↔ methodology ↔ method ↔ data and data collection ↔ data analysis ↔ conclusion.

1.2 TRIANGULATION

There are four types of triangulation in research practice: data triangulation; investigator triangulation; theory triangulation; and, methodological triangulation. Explain which has been used and why.

1.3 WRITING CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions which *might, possibly, perhaps, could...*?

This is the finale to your grand opus. When we read *this research proves that there might be the possibility that ... or perhaps scientists could review ... or maybe in the future... etc.*, we wonder if the candidate really believes in his or her work.

It has taken 4 or 6 years to complete the research, from hypothesis to submission and it is not easy. A conclusion should convince the reader that the researcher believes in the consequences of his or her research. Eg.

- *This thesis creates new knowledge about the way...*
- *This research proves that the hypothesis is wrong (or right), because it has been tested by...*
- *An analysis of the data shows that...*
- *Thus, an outcome has been determined and a relevant set of conclusions has been drawn. They are:...*
- *The implications for this are:...*
- *I recommend 1), 2) & 3).*
- *If action from this research doesn't happen, the consequence are likely to be this or that*

And, don't write *investigate in the future* – it will not happen in the past.

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

1.4 'TAKE A LOOK AT...'

The intention of examining others' research documents, asking specifically designed questions, recording data about events, etc. for a defined purpose, deserves more than a *look at* in doctoral theses. The process of 'looking at' (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 justification for examination, about the appropriateness of the methodological choices in answering the research question/s.

2 WRITING TIPS

2.1 Vagueness

1. *Numerous, a number of, huge, a few, some, large, very large, various, several, many.* There is no qualitative or quantitative value in these vague expressions.
2. *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 with single parent families who live on the New England tablelands, ex-patriots from Australia who live in central London, etc.. Globally, many American people, and many countries of the world, most third world countries,* are also non-descriptive. Suggest: *Countries such as Norway and Denmark etc.*

3. Candidates often fall into the trap of writing about *a wide body of literature* and quote one or two authors! *Literature on this topic is exemplified by authors such as Blogs and Jakes who claimed, said, contributed that ... etc*, would suffice.

2.2 Being Accurate

1. How is this different?
The total number of participants was 25 versus The number of participants was 25.
2. Check that percentage totals in tables equal 100%
3. *About 14.3%* is exact, not roughly. Starting a new sentence with 14.3% is OK.
4. *In the 1960s or 2010s.* Not possessive so no apostrophe.
1960's or 2010's style... Possessive, use apostrophe.
5. Quantify percentages, distances, numbers, increases, decreases, quantities, amounts, studies, etc. *A large percentage of students, great distances, huge amounts, various studies* are unqualified and unquantified.
6. *Table 13, or Figure 22,* not *The table or figure below or above or on p. 25*
7. Do not refer to anything on any page – 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.*

2.3 IRRELEVANT STATEMENTS

1. *Given the constraints of time, space, resources.* Common issues for all candidates and won't get sympathy from an examiner who may have experienced likewise.
2. How much running around to interviews is irrelevant
3. Interviewees not being on time is irrelevant
4. Supervision problems are irrelevant
5. Who made the tea during the interviews is irrelevant
6. How long transcription took is irrelevant.

3 GRAMMAR

3.1 HYPHENS

Ignore what MS Word tells you about 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, happily integrated classrooms – no hyphen as happily is an adverb.

3.2 VOICE

Active voice is preferable.

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

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

3.3 100s OF WORDS/PHRASES

1. 100s of **however**. However is not a conjunction. It can be used in situations where one would say:
The children had fun at the beach; however, they were tired at the end of the day.
The town was abuzz on Saturday; however, the streets were deserted on Sunday.
This punctuation is appropriate: semi colon, then however, then comma.
A sentence can begin with *However, ...*
2. 100s of **therefore**. The meaning of the sentence should indicate that something is different from the previous sentence, without writing 'therefore'.
3. 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 (teacher support, parent support, and peer support) affecting ...
To this: ... and suggests three interpersonal factors (teacher support, parent support, and peer support) 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.

3.4 ACRONYMS

The Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC)... Use for first mention and subsequently *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.

3.5 HEDGING

APA Hedging. Candidates often use single quotes around commonly used words. Some authors hedge to avoid over-precise commitment to word use.

The use of single quotes around words or phrases is only reserved for newly introduced technical terms, colloquialisms, coined terms, quaint, sarcastic, ironic, or ambiguous words. (Aust Style Manual p.114). Suggest either committing to the word by removing the single quotes, or use more accurate expressions rather than use words which are intended not to convey the complete meaning. When introducing a new term or technological phrase, only use quotes the first time.

Eg. "... 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, 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 then explain, if it was supposed to be a paradigm shift but ended up as something else, then explain what that something else was.

Where language is part of everyday lexicon, hedging is unnecessary unless introducing a colloquialism, a coined term or a specific term. Once hedged, no need to continue.

3.6 NOUNS

1. 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 cannot be pluralised. (See Aust Style Manual p. 69.) Instead of *knowledges, behaviours*, etc. write: *five branches of knowledge, different types of adolescent behaviour*, etc.
2. Professionals, academics, staff. *Professional people, academic staff, staff members*.
3. Write about *people* not individuals.

3.7 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.

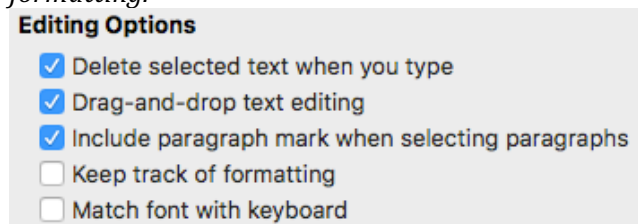
“Which” qualifies, “that” restricts. “Which” is more ambiguous however, and by virtue of its meaning is flexible enough to be used in many restrictive clauses. e.g., *The house, which is burning, is mine*. e.g., *The house that is burning is mine*.

4 FORMATTING

Some theses we receive have too many user introduced Styles. Modify existing Word styles if required: don’t create new ones.

MS Word’s Preferences may be set to introduce a new Style every time a different font face is chosen, a different alignment, bold, italics, size, colour, table fonts, list fonts, etc. This makes the job of standardising styles very difficult.

To prevent this happening, choose: Word, Preferences, Edit and **DESELECT** the command that lets the program create new styles. On this version of Word it is: *Keep track of formatting*.



4. Remove excess spaces between words
5. Standardise spacing between the end of one sentence and the next to either one or two spaces
6. Format Heading Style 1 to begin a new page
7. Do not insert a Section Break when you only need a Page Break. Margins and layouts can be altered within two Section Breaks.
8. Do not use for Section 6, say: 6.0, 6.1, 6.2. The zero numeral is not included.

9. Except for simple graphs, figures, or diagrams, .pdfs inserted in a Word document with a 4cm left margin for binding, may reproduce poorly when printed. For prepublished papers, pamphlets, booklets, etc, bind the originals separately and insert them in a sleeve inside the bound thesis' front cover.

5 APA FORMATTING – ALL? OR NOTHING AT ALL?

These are some of the instructions for document formatting according to APA 6th edition. Some candidates pick and choose what they want to comply with but check with the Supervisor on this. Some examiners are sticklers for compliance others may not worry.

Item	Instruction
Chapters	APA uses Sections, not Chapters and considers the word 'Introduction' irrelevant
Page numbering	APA numbers all pages from 1 including on front page to the end with Arabic numerals, not Roman.
Margins	4 cm left hand side for binding, thence university guidelines
Tables, graphs, figures, appendixes, etc.	All need to start on a new page. Table headings can be auto-formatted to repeat at top of each page.
Captions	Figure captions underneath, Table captions on top. Descriptions to be included with captions (but rationally, not in the Tables of Contents) Captions placed in tables or cells or text boxes cannot be used to automatically generate a list of figures, graphs, etc.
Heading styles Strictly itemised in APA's 6 th edition manual.	<p>Level Format – Times New Roman, all 12pt</p> <p>1 Centred, Bold, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading Paragraph begins below, indented first line</p> <p>2 Left aligned, Bold, Upper and Lowercase Heading Paragraph begins below, indented first line</p> <p>3 Indented, bold, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a fullstop. Paragraph supposed to start right beside but this creates problems with creating a Table of Contents including Level 3 heading – so start paragraph beneath.</p> <p>4 Indented, bold, italics, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a fullstop. Paragraph supposed to start right beside but this creates problems with creating a Table of Contents including Level 4 heading – so start paragraph beneath.</p> <p>5 <i>Indented, italics, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a fullstop.</i> Paragraph supposed to start right beside but this creates problems with creating a Table of Contents including Level 5 heading – so start paragraph beneath.</p> <p>Levels 3-5 first letter uppercase and remainder lower except for proper nouns.</p>

For complete instructions, see the APA 6th manual for referencing and formatting and check the Tutorial at: http://gseacademic.harvard.edu/~instruct/articulate/apa_mod/APA_Module1/player.html