

**THESIS AND DISSERTATION FORMATTING GUIDELINES**

It is the responsibility of the student and the supervisor to ensure that the thesis or dissertation complies with the guidelines outlined in this document prior to submission to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for approval.

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**Section 1. Introduction**

The following guidelines should be consulted when writing your thesis/dissertation as the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) at Athabasca University has minimum formatting requirements, which must be met for acceptance. Furthermore, the thesis or dissertation is a published and archived document, so following required guidelines for formatting and structure are important to ensure readability and because the quality of the work is a reflection of both the student and the university.

It is important to note that each degree program may also have additional style guidelines and a preferred citation format so students are encouraged to check with their supervisor and program director for any additional requirements. It is the responsibility of both the student and the supervisor to ensure that the thesis/dissertation is formatted properly and follows all of the citation and structure guidelines before submission to FGS. Students should request that their supervisor review the thesis or dissertation before submission to FGS for approval. Once approved by FGS, the thesis or dissertation will be deposited into the DTheses repository (<https://dt.athabascau.ca>), and then harvested by Library Archives Canada, where it will become a publically accessible document.

The guidelines that follow contain the information required for formatting a thesis/dissertation according to minimum institutional requirements. In addition to these requirements, most programs require the thesis/dissertation to be written in APA format. Please check with your program. An APA-style thesis/dissertation template is also available on the FGS website, as well as APA formatting resources, a checklist for completion, and the required copyright declaration form. This form must be submitted along with the final thesis or dissertation.

**Section 2. Types of Theses and Dissertations**

Master’s theses and doctoral dissertations may be written in one of two styles. The ‘traditional’ style is described as a coherent document that provides a complete and systematic account of the student’s research. A ‘manuscript-based’ style is a thesis/dissertation constructed around two or more related manuscripts that have been published or submitted for publication. Students should consult with their supervisor early in their degree program to determine which format is best for the nature of their research area and the timeframe for their program completion. The following table (in APA-format) outlines the differences between the two types of theses/dissertations:

**Table 1**

*Criteria for traditional versus manuscript-style theses and dissertations*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Manuscript-  thesis/dissertation | Traditional thesis/  dissertation |
| Permission from supervisor/supervisory committee required |  |
| Written as a collection of papers by the student either submitted or accepted for publication, or previously published | A monograph that includes original, unpublished work by the student |
| Includes full chapters of previously published work | Can include information from previously published work as the student sees fit |
| Presents a cohesive report of a single area of research based on one or more related manuscripts | Presents the study of a single area of research based on one manuscript |
| Student can author or co-author the paper/chapter, but must have done the majority of the writing and obtained co-authors’ permission | Student is the author |

Formatting guidelines for each type of thesis/dissertation can be found in Sections 4 and 5 of this document, following the general formatting guidelines in Section 3. Make sure you follow the general guidelines set out by FGS ([www.fgs.athabascau.ca](file:///C:\Users\shaunaz\Documents\FGS\www.fgs.athabascau.ca)) in Section 3, the style guidelines outlined by your program (often APA), as well as the guidelines applicable to the type of thesis/dissertation chosen (Sections 4 or 5).

FGS has provided minimal guidelines as well as an FGS APA-formatted thesis/dissertation template, and additional resources on APA-formatting. Please note there are minor differences between the FGS guidelines and an APA-formatted manuscript for running headers and page numbers. Please consult the FGS APA-formatted thesis/dissertation template as this document clearly demonstrates what is expected in the final submission. It is also important to note that the template provided by FGS includes information on the possible ways the chapters and headings may be organized, depending on the nature of the thesis/dissertation.

In some disciplines there is an opportunity to write a “non-traditional” or “creative” thesis/dissertation, in which a creative work as an innovative element may be included. Be sure to consult with your supervisor and graduate program about writing a non-traditional thesis/dissertation.

Failure to meet the formatting requirements may result in the thesis being rejected by FGS and Library and Archives Canada and returned to the student for correction. These specifications on theses/dissertation formats (with samples of title pages, table of contents, length of abstract, and so on) ensure that Athabasca University theses/dissertations are compatible with standards established by Library and Archives Canada and provide a standard and professional format for all theses that are requirements for the degrees offered by Athabasca University. Since the thesis/dissertation is one of the requirements for the fulfillment of a degree, it must conform with the format requirements, or graduation will be delayed until the requirements are met.

FGS provides a “Next Steps” email to students prior to depositing their thesis/dissertation into the DTheses repository. Students should follow the instructions contained in this email. One important note is that the title of the thesis/dissertation cannot have any spaces in it for submission to the repository as Library and Archives Canada cannot harvest the thesis/dissertation if there are spaces in the title. This information, as well as other important information contained in the “Next Steps” email, should be followed in conjunction with the guidelines in this document and in the thesis/dissertation template.

**Section 3. General Formatting Requirements for All Theses/Dissertations**

The thesis/dissertation proposal and the final thesis/dissertation must be written according to a standard style acknowledged by a particular field of study and recommended by the program of study. Most programs at Athabasca University use APA format, but students should check with their program. This section outlines the general formatting guidelines required by FGS for submission to Library and Archives Canada.

**General Organization**

In general, the organization of the thesis/dissertation includes the following key components, which are illustrated in the figure below. The structure may vary, depending on the type of thesis/dissertation you write, however, each of these overall components is required unless otherwise noted.

\* Indicates optional components.

\*\* Indicates components that are only required when applicable.

Please do not include the following in the thesis/dissertation: student identification numbers, signatures, emails, mailing addresses, and a signed Library and Archives Canada page. Please also ensure that signatures or any personally identifiable information is removed if a research ethics approval page and a copyright permissions page is included in the Appendix.

**Page Size, Layout, and Spacing**

Standard page size is 8.5 x 11 inches (North American Letter size) and should be in portrait orientation. All of the pages of the thesis/dissertation are to be single-sided. Blank pages should not appear in the document. Recommended margins for all pages must be at least 1 inch (2.54 cm) on all sides (top, bottom, left, right). If binding, then a wider left margin should be used, 1.5 inches (3.8 cm).

Large tables, figures, illustrations, appendices should be reduced to fit within the margins, provided that the print clarity is not affected. If the print quality deteriorates, then it is preferable to exceed margins as little as possible. Wherever possible, charts, blueprints, graphs, maps, and tables, which are larger than the standard page size, must be photo-reduced in such a way that the material remains clearly legible. It is recommended that such pages be avoided unless absolutely necessary. Tables and figures should not cross two pages, if possible.

All pages should be double-spaced or one-and-one-half spaced, including the Abstract and other preliminary pages. If the Table of Contents, List of Figures, or List of Tables are long, it is possible to use single-spacing. Single-spacing may also be used for long quotes.

Pages may be justified (even left and right-hand margins) or left justified (ragged right-hand margins), which is used by APA, but the type of justification used must be consistent throughout.

**Font**

Use only one single typeface (font) with italic and bold variants used for titles of sections through the entire thesis, such as title page, acknowledgements, references, and appendices. Only font size twelve is acceptable, although a smaller type size may be used for graphs, tables, formulas and appendices.

APA formatting recommends 12-point serif font like Times New Roman or 11-point san serif font. Do not use multi-coloured font, black font is recommended, except for hyperlinks, which can be blue.

**Page Numbers**

All pages should be numbered and the page numbers should appear in the same place throughout the thesis/dissertation. Please note that APA paper format uses page numbers at the top right hand corner of the page, but this is not required for theses/dissertations as long as the page numbers are consistent throughout. Prefatory or preliminary pages must be numbered with lower case Roman numerals (ii, iii, iv, etc.). The Body of the thesis/dissertation must be numbered with lower case Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.). If the thesis/dissertation calls for it, for example, if it includes an original artistic work, the pages may be numbered differently than the standard requirements.

**Header**

The header should be placed in the upper left corner of each page of the thesis/dissertation beginning on the Abstract page and should continue to appear on every page including the references page and the appendices pages. The header title should consist of a few key words from the title (less than 50 characters). The header should be capitalized, e.g. FGS THESIS/DISSERTATION GUIDELINES. This is shown in the header above for this document and in the Thesis Template in APA format (6th and 7th editions) on the FGS website. Note on an APA format paper the header for the title page includes the words “Running Head” preceding the header title for the title page only, but this is not required for a thesis/dissertation.

**Title Page and Title**

A title page should be included at the beginning of the thesis/dissertation. This page is important because it provides the reader with information about the author and the work. All items on the title page are to be in uppercase letters, double-spaced (even the title), and centered within the margins.

The name ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY is at the top of the page, followed by the title, the word “BY”, and the name of the student. The name of the student should be identical in both places on the title page (under the title and after the copyright symbol at the bottom of the page). The student name should be the legal name as it appears in university records. The full name of the degree should be listed. If the degree is interdisciplinary then the home graduate program is listed first, followed by the word “and” before the second graduate program is listed. The location of the institution, ATHABASCA, ALBERTA should have a comma in-between. The name of the month and the year that the final copy of the thesis/dissertation was submitted to FGS should be then listed, separated by a comma. The copyright symbol appears to the left of the student’s name and there is no comma between the name and the year. Please note if the thesis/dissertation is to be released under Creative Commons license the symbol to be used is (cc) with the appropriate conditions added. For more information on this please consult the copyright form and the copyright guidelines ([www.fgs.athabascau.ca](file:///C:\Users\shaunaz\Documents\FGS\www.fgs.athabascau.ca)). Please see the example of a proper title page on the thesis/dissertation template located on the FGS website.

The thesis/dissertation title should be meaningful and descriptive of the content of the work, but should be less than or equal to 12 words. The thesis title will be a valuable reference for other scholars only if it can be easily located within the libraries. Retrieval systems use key words in the title to locate the thesis. The title of the thesis/dissertation should be identical on the Thesis/Dissertation Approval Page and on the Final Oral Exam Report (including capitalization and punctuation).

**Abstract**

The abstract should be a concise and accurate summary of the thesis/dissertation that presents the problem, method of study, and general conclusion. Abstracts must not exceed 150 words for a master’s thesis and 350 for a doctoral dissertation. The abstract must be double-spaced. Do not use graphs, charts, tables or illustrations in the abstract. Do not include references in the abstract. Display symbols, foreign words and phrases clearly and accurately.

**Bibliography/References or Literature Cited**

This list compiles all of the relevant material you sourced in writing the thesis/dissertation. Use a citation format that has been approved by your program. Any approved format can be used, but it must be used consistently throughout the work. The Bibliography or References are to be placed at the end of the thesis preceding the appendices. Any non-textual work, such as works of art, must be listed as “References” and cannot appear as part of a “Bibliography.”

**Illustrative Material**

Illustrative material, such as maps, tables and figures, must be of excellent quality and all labeling must be clear and sharp. All photographs and reproductions of photographs should be of professional quality with a sharp contrast. Maps should be redrawn if acceptable quality is not obtained. Maps taken from published sources usually require copyright permission. Students should follow the information in the Copyright Permission section found in the FGS guidelines.

**Tables and Figures**

Number all tables and figures and identify each with the word “Table” or “Figure” and its number. Whenever possible, the title and caption of each table and figure should be on the same page as the figure or table. The table and figure number as well as the title or caption should be located at the top of tables and figures according to APA format. The entire table or figure should be on one page (in other words, not straddle across two pages), if possible. The table or figures should be inserted as close as possible to the relevant text rather than putting the material in groupings at the end of the chapter or thesis/dissertation. Please see the thesis/dissertation template for examples on formatting tables and figures on the FGS website.

**Accompanying Materials**

Items which are not contained within the text of the thesis (e.g. audiorecordings, video recordings), are not included in the copy provided to Library and Archives Canada. Audio and visual files may be uploaded to the Athabasca University DTheses repository. The files must be saved as separate files and not be embedded within the thesis. They may be added to DTheses with the pdf version of the thesis. DTheses accepts many file formats such as pdf, ppt, jpg, gif, zip, xml and bmp. The files must be virus free.

**Section 4. Formatting Requirements for Traditional Theses/Dissertations**

The traditional style is the most common form of theses/dissertations. The titles and content of the chapters will vary by topic and discipline. For example, the first chapter of a thesis may be called ‘Chapter 1 Introduction’ or ‘Chapter 1 Significance of the Problem’. The subsections in this chapter may vary and may include an Introduction, Significance of the Problem or Issue, and Purpose of the Study. In some cases the theoretical framework may be called a conceptual model and may be included in a chapter of its own or included in the same chapter as the literature review. The important sections and their order of appearance are as follows:

Prefatory pages:

Title page (see example)

Approval page (provided by FGS to student)

Frontispiece or Quote page (optional)

Dedication (optional)

Acknowledgements (optional)

Abstract (see example)

Preface (optional)

Table of Contents (see example)

List of Tables (see example)

List of Figures and Illustrations (see example)

List of Plates, List of Symbols, Nomenclature, or Abbreviations (if any, see example)

Body of Text:

Chapter 1 Significance of the problem (or Introduction)

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework

Chapter 4 Methods (includes design, sample recruitment, sample characteristics, data collection method (tools, their reliability and validity), details on analytical methods, ethical/access considerations)

Chapter 5 Results (or Findings) (in some cases students may include 2 results chapters separating out qualitative and quantitative results)

Chapter 6 Discussion (can also include implications for further research, education, practice, etc.)

Chapter 7 Conclusion

Final Sections:

Footnotes (if any)

References

Appendices (may include ethics approval and renewals; permissions from publishers; details of methodology, tabulated data and other information not provided in detail in the previous chapters)

Index (optional)

**Section 5. Formatting Requirements for Manuscript-style Theses/Dissertations**

Each program will have guidelines for manuscript-style theses/dissertations, including the following:

* whether only published articles/materials will be accepted
* the minimum number of published/unpublished materials to be included
* whether multiple authored works are allowed
* whether the materials should be submitted to or published in a refereed journal
* whether book chapters are allowed

The manuscripts that are included in the thesis/dissertation may be published or submitted for publication, depending upon the requirements set out by the student’s program. FGS will not allow manuscripts to be included in a thesis/dissertation that have been ‘published’ in a newsletter, professional association newsletter, or newspaper.

The student is producing an original work, which is to create new knowledge or provide a unique interpretation of current knowledge, and therefore the publication must be recognized by the profession as one that is rigorous, considered credible by the student’s discipline/profession, and undergoes a review process that is conducted by experts in the related research field.

In the case where the supervisor and supervisory committee allow a manuscript-style dissertation as partial fulfillment toward the requirements of the degree, FGS specifies the following must be included:

* An introduction that sets the context of the work, sets out the overall objectives and implications of the work, summarizes and critiques the research on the topic as a whole, and provides the rationale for the current study
* A section with a general discussion that links the separate manuscripts
* A discussion on how the manuscripts relate to the student’s research topic as a whole
* A concluding chapter that shows clearly how the articles form a coherent substantial body of work and should represent a significant advance of knowledge. The document must be a coherent presentation of the student’s research work. The different chapters or sections must contribute to the general theme. Repetition of material that appears in more than one journal article (e.g. introductions, background, methodology) should be avoided.

The important sections and their order of appearance are as follows:

Prefatory pages:

Title page (see example)

Approval page (provided by FGS to student)

Frontispiece or Quote page (optional)

Dedication (optional)

Acknowledgements (optional)

Abstract (see example)

Preface (optional)

Table of Contents (see example)

List of Tables (if any)

List of Figures and Illustrations (if any)

List of Plates (if any)

List of Symbols, Nomenclature, or Abbreviations (if any)

Chapter 1 (Introduction)

Chapter 2 (the methods and how each manuscript is related to study)

Chapter 3 (may consist of the manuscripts)

Chapter 4 (Conclusion, implications, limitations)

References (for areas of thesis not cited in the manuscripts)

Appendices

Body of Text: Each chapter should begin at the top of a new page and be in APA paper format.

Introductory chapter (Introduction) to the entire thesis (scope of study, purpose, significance of the work, a summary and critique of current literature)

Discussion of methods (how study performed, how each manuscript relates to each other, what was not published but conducted with the findings of the work that was not published).

Each subsequent chapter comprises each manuscript with its preface – role of the student if multi-authored; how each manuscript fits with the rest of the manuscripts and the overall research problem (if not included in the introduction)

Final Chapter (general discussion, significance of the findings and how study has advanced knowledge, implications for further research overall as a result of thesis).

**Multiple Authors**

In the case of multi-authored works, the student should be the first author. A preface to the thesis must be included that clearly documents the student’s contribution to each of the multiple authored works. The student’s original contributions should be indicated, thereby justifying in what way this work becomes the student’s dissertation. In terms of copyright, the status of the rights of each co-author in the work must be determined. The candidate must secure from any co-author of a published work a written waiver of all rights in favor of Athabasca University and the National Library of Canada, to permit publication of the thesis in their repositories. In addition, written permission must be obtained from any co-author who retains copyright or the person to whom the co-author has assigned copyright, by way of a grant of an irrevocable nonexclusive license to Athabasca University and the National Library of Canada to reproduce material generated by the student as part of the thesis. The thesis should indicate that articles have been printed either ‘with permission’ or ‘under license’ (either by a statement in the preface or on the first page of each article). Copies of the letters of permission or licenses should be provided to the supervisor and FGS prior to arrangements for the final oral examination.

**Unpublished Works**

For unpublished works (e.g. a paper that has been submitted, but not published yet), a statement concerning the status of any dealing or contemplated dealing with the copyright or the auspices under which the work was prepared must be on the first page of the separately prepared, unpublished work. A letter from the publisher that the paper is under review or in press should be included in the Appendix of the dissertation.

**Published Works**

It is permissible to include in the thesis the ‘pdf’ created by the publisher of the published articles. For each published article, a complete citation, including the first and last page number in the journal publication, and recognition of the copyright holder must be printed on the first page of the article. Written permission to include copyright material in the thesis must be obtained by the student from the copyright holder. See the Copyright section of the FGS guidelines.

**Page Numbers**

The previously published or prepared materials should be assigned page numbers that are sequential within the thesis. To reduce confusion, it is preferable to remove the journal page numbers.

**References**

A list of references will form a part of most journal articles or manuscripts that are reproduced for inclusion in a thesis. References should remain self-contained, within each article, if that is how they appear in the original document. The references for the new material in the thesis should be listed at the end as usual. Material that is referenced in one or more of the reproduced articles or manuscripts should be included in the main thesis reference list only if it is also cited in the new material.

**Appendices**

Appendices (may include ethics approval and renewals; permissions from publishers; details of methodology, tabulated data and other information not provided in detail in the previous chapters).