

# Preparation and Presentation of a Higher Degree Research Thesis for Examination Guideline

## Section 1 - Governing Policy

(1) These procedures are governed by the [Higher Degree Research Policy](#).

## Section 2 - Scope/Application

(2) These guidelines are applicable to:

- a. All candidates who are enrolled in a Higher Degree Research (HDR) program at ACU;
- b. Supervisors of HDR candidates enrolled at ACU;
- c. All ACU staff involved with or supporting the HDR Examination process; and
- d. All examiners of HDR theses

(3) Candidates who are enrolled in a Cotutelle or Double-badged degree should refer to the [Joint \(Cotutelle\) Doctoral Enrolment Policy](#).

## Section 3 - Preparation of a Higher Degree Research Thesis

(4) Candidates should discuss the presentation of their thesis with their principal supervisor. The general format should follow the principles outlined in Sections 2 and 3 of these Guidelines whilst also taking discipline conventions into account.

(5) It is the responsibility of the candidate to submit drafts of the major sections of the thesis as chapters and/or papers to the principal supervisor for feedback, and to respond constructively to that feedback. The candidate may also be required to submit a final draft of the thesis to the principal supervisor for advice and comment before the thesis itself is submitted for examination.

(6) The thesis should provide sufficient information to enable an external examiner to appreciate that the investigation has been conducted with a high level of technical and analytical skill, that the candidate is familiar with the most recent literature and has employed the most suitable methodology or statistical techniques, and that the approach, insight, and various procedures employed are clearly of higher degree research standard.

(7) It should be made clear in the thesis which part of the work has actually been performed by the candidate, in which case the results obtained by another person have been analysed and used, and what level of statistical and other analytical assistance has been obtained.

(8) There should be an appropriate balance between the different parts of the thesis. In particular, the original

contribution to knowledge should be clearly distinguishable from the introductory material and the survey of the literature. Likewise, the method and interpretation of data should clearly support the interpretations and conclusions reached in the thesis.

(9) It is the responsibility of the candidate to ensure that the format of the thesis meets the requirements and directions for presentation set out in section 3 of these Guidelines.

(10) A thesis which does not meet those requirements will normally be returned to the candidate, either by the principal supervisor or Associate Dean, Research of the Faculty, before being submitted to the examiners. If there are special reasons which justify a departure from the specified formats, official approval must be obtained from the Associate Dean, Research in discussion with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) before preparation of typescript or other work is begun.

(11) The candidate should also be aware of the potential implications for publication of the thesis, of entering into a confidentiality agreement, or of including potentially defamatory material.

## **Section 4 - Length of a Higher Degree Research Thesis**

(12) For a PhD degree, the thesis would normally consist of a number of chapters and be between 80,000 and 100,000 words in length, inclusive of footnotes/endnotes. In the case of professional doctorates, such as the Ed.D. and the DMin., the length will not normally be more than 70,000 words. The reference list/bibliography (hereafter referred to as bibliography) is excluded from the word count.

(13) In the case of the Master of Philosophy degree, the thesis is expected to be between 40,000 and 50,000 words in length (excluding bibliography). A professional master's thesis may vary in length between 35,000 and 50,000 words (excluding bibliography).

(14) For a PhD by Creative Project, the project will normally be accompanied by a thesis of between 40,000 and 50,000 words (excluding bibliography).

(15) The maximum word limit for a thesis will include appendices such as maps and diagrams, and tables. Lengthy appendices and bibliography may need to be included in a separate volume. Candidates should seek the advice of their principal supervisor in this regard.

## **Section 5 - Presentation of a Higher Degree Research Thesis**

(16) Within the thesis, the candidate must ensure that:

- a. all typing errors have been corrected;
- b. spelling, grammar, punctuation and choice of language are worthy of a higher degree by research thesis; and
- c. the bibliography is thorough and exact.

(17) The thesis should be word processed and printed on both sides of the paper in not less than 1.5 line spacing on international size A4 paper (297 mm x 210 mm) or a standard size as close to this as possible. The copies must be reproduced to a high standard on both sides of the page.

(18) The inside margin must be 3cm wide and the top, bottom and outside margins at least 2cm wide.

## Section 6 - The Traditional PhD Thesis

(19) PhD research will produce a substantial body of knowledge at the forefront of the discipline (see the [Higher Degree Research Policy](#)). A traditional PhD thesis must have continuity in format and in content, relevant published materials should normally be submitted as supporting papers within an appendix of the thesis.

(20) Appendices and bibliography follow the main text.

(21) Examination of a Traditional PhD thesis:

- a. The thesis will be submitted to the examiners as an integrated whole. The thesis will be examined in accordance with the [Appointment of Examiners and Examination Policy](#) and [Appointment of Examiners and Examination Procedure](#).

## Section 7 - The PhD with Publication

(22) A PhD with Publication will comprise one or more papers that either have been accepted for publication or are in press with high quality research outlets. Papers proposed for publication may also be included. The thesis will also comprise some chapters written in a more “traditional” format. Conference proceedings will not be acceptable. On all papers, the candidate should be listed as the primary author and have contributed no less than 50% to that publication. Primary author means that the candidate will have been responsible for planning and preparing this work for publication.

(23) A PhD with Publication will comprise research conducted during candidature. The number of papers to be included in the PhD, and the overall length of the thesis, will depend on the nature of the research question, the methodological approach adopted, analytical strategies, and current practice within the discipline. The key feature is that the papers (and supporting chapters) must address a fundamental research question at the forefront of the discipline and are linked in such a way as to form a coherent whole. The simple fact of a paper or papers having been published will of itself not necessarily guarantee the awarding of the PhD. The candidate’s thesis will need to convince the examiners that the collection of papers and other chapters included in the thesis comprise doctoral level research.

(24) A PhD with Publication may incorporate PDF copies of the published papers, provided that the candidate has permission from the publisher of the journal article to do so (see also section 8 of these Guidelines). If permission is not forthcoming, the candidate must include the final pre-publication version of the journal paper. If a PDF copy is being used, then a copy of the publisher’s permission letter must be incorporated in the Research Portfolio Appendix – see clause 35 of these Guidelines.

### PhD with Publication Structure

#### Introduction and Overview

(25) This chapter will be written in traditional format. It must establish a coherent and logical framework for the program of research to be reported. It must state the research problem and/or question, the specific aims and overall objectives of the research, and explain how the papers are linked. This is important to provide continuity for the reader. This chapter must be entirely the candidate’s own work (that is, no joint authorship). It must demonstrate original and independent critique of other research relevant in the field of study and place the candidate’s research in the context of current knowledge.

#### The Literature Review

(26) The Literature Review must conform to the accepted practices of the discipline and may be a traditional literature

review, a meta-analysis, or a systematic review. It should, however, contain a clear statement of the significance of the project aims, a critical review of relevant literature, identification of knowledge gaps, and the relationship of the literature to the proposed research. The published and proposed papers of the thesis by their nature are likely to provide a more limited or piece-meal literature review; thus a more substantial literature review is required in this section. This should form a separate chapter (or chapters) of the thesis and follow the introduction and overview.

(27) Should the literature review already have been published as a peer-reviewed paper (e.g. as a meta-analysis or as a systematic review), then this chapter should be used to ensure that recent developments which may not appear in the published literature review are acknowledged.

(28) Should the published papers include a comprehensive coverage of the relevant literature then a short section within the introductory chapter which overviews and references key ideas from the literature, may suffice.

(29) Regardless of the exact approach taken or the exact structure of the thesis, the examiners will need to be convinced that the candidate is aware of the most recent developments in the field.

### **Methodology and Design**

(30) Given that published or proposed journal papers tend to be brief, a full explanation and exposition of the conceptual framework and methodological approach, research design, sampling procedure and proposed data analysis should normally be provided as a separate chapter. There should be a clear link between the overall aims and rationale of the project and the method and design.

### **Actual and Potential Published Refereed Paper(s) as Chapter(s) of the Thesis**

(31) Each paper is viewed as a chapter. It is desirable that the papers and other chapters are connected by short interlinking chapters. Given publication lags and length of time to actual final completion of the thesis, the candidate needs to ensure that all elements of the thesis are current and up-to-date. For example, if the literature review has been published as a refereed paper, it will be necessary for the candidate to identify how the literature pertains to the overall thesis. If the review has been published several years previously, the candidate will need to provide an update of relevant literature in the field in the introductory section of the chapter. If the methodology has been published as a refereed paper, the introduction should identify relevant links to refereed papers pertaining to the findings. The introduction to any actual or potential publication must clearly situate the paper(s) in the context of the overall thesis.

### **The Discussion and Conclusion Section**

(32) The Discussion and Conclusion section must integrate the significant findings of the whole thesis, identify the limitations of the research and highlight future directions. This chapter will be written in traditional format and must be entirely the candidate's own work. The standard Discussion section of published and unpublished papers in earlier chapters is not an adequate discussion of the thesis as a whole.

### **List of References/Bibliography**

(33) The bibliography should include all references cited in all chapters and papers.

### **The Research Portfolio Appendix**

(34) Candidates are required to compile a research portfolio as an appendix which will include:

- a. Publications: Provide a list of all actual and potential publications and their status – submitted, accepted or 'in press' – along with relevant evidence, that is, proof of refereeing. In the case of a paper accepted for publication, proof of acceptance is also to be provided.
- b. Statement of Contribution of others: The purpose of this statement is to summarise and clearly identify the nature and extent of the intellectual input by the candidate and any co-authors. The statement must be signed

by the student, the supervisor and any co-authors. The statement from the student may say “I acknowledge that my contribution to the above paper is X percent. A written statement from each of the co-authors must also be provided indicating the extent of their contribution and also stating “I acknowledge that my contribution to the above paper is X percent”. Given that it is the candidate’s work that is being assessed, it is expected that they will be the senior author on any co-authored papers, with the contribution on each paper being at least 50%.

### **Examination of a PhD with Publication**

(35) The thesis will be submitted to the examiners as an integrated whole inclusive of published papers.

(36) The thesis will be examined in accordance with the [Appointment of Examiners and Examination Policy](#) and [Appointment of Examiners and Examination Procedure](#).

## **Section 8 - The PhD by Creative Project**

(37) The thesis component will be between 40,000 and 50,000 words.

### **The PhD by Creative Project structure**

(38) Introduction and Overview

- a. the Introduction must establish a coherent and logical framework for the research. It must state the research question, the specific aims and overall objectives of the research and the design of the research project.

(39) The Literature Review

- a. the Literature Review must contain a clear statement of the significance of the project aims, a critical review of relevant literature, identification of knowledge gaps, and the relationship of the literature to the research.

(40) The Project Explained

- a. the project must be comprehensively documented in this section as the dissertation and project should be considered as complementary, mutually reinforcing parts of a single work. The candidate should coherently argue the relationship between the two parts of their dissertation and their contribution to the originality and creativity of the whole. The process design and methods must be clearly articulated and the process followed explained. In some cases a portfolio may be the most appropriate form for documentation.

(41) Project Materials

- a. for example durable record of performance, exhibition of visual arts, writing, design, film, multimedia, CD, DVD, software program or other creative work.

(42) Conclusion

- a. critical reflection, recommendations and limitations.

(43) Bibliography

- a. the bibliography should include all references cited in all chapters and papers.

(44) Appendices

- a. for example, a program of the event, critical reviews.

### **Examination of a PhD by Creative Project**

(45) The PhD by Creative Project will be submitted as an integrated whole to examiners and will be examined in accordance with the [Appointment of Examiners and Examination Policy](#) and the [Appointment of Examiners and Examination Procedure](#). The candidate must submit one electronic copy of the thesis with the creative project materials for examination. It is expected that, where the creative project cannot be submitted in full (e.g. live performance), the DVD, CD, photographs, or any other form allowing full access to the work, will be submitted (i.e. Project Materials chapter as in clause (41) of these Guidelines). The candidate is responsible for ensuring that any evidence of the creative work is readable in Mac or PC format using an internationally acknowledged program. The electronic copy of the work submitted will be the copy used for examination and form the basis for any revisions that may be required.

## **Section 9 - Copy Editing**

(46) It is expected that the candidate's supervisors will provide clear advice regarding all aspects of editing the thesis. This includes, but is not limited to, structure of content, language usage, and completeness.

(47) Candidates may not make use of "ghost writers", that is, the candidate may not use the services of another person to write the thesis on their behalf.

(48) Where professional editors are used, they should limit themselves to editorial advice only; it is the candidate's responsibility to consider and then act upon this advice. Professional editors must not write or re-write the thesis for the candidate. Candidates should note in their thesis the extent to which external editorial advice has been sought and the extent to which that advice has been acted upon.

## **Section 10 - Copyright**

(49) As with other students at ACU, HDR candidates are subject to University regulations regarding academic misconduct and plagiarism. Candidates should also be aware that Australian copyright law will apply and be familiar with its application.

(50) Candidates will own the copyright in their thesis unless by signing a contract you have transferred it to another party (e.g., publishers, certain Corporations, etc.).

(51) Candidates need also to ensure they comply with Australian copyright law when including third-party (material owned by another person) works in their thesis. In seeking copyright clearance, it is strongly advised that candidates use a template (copyright management plan) to collate their information. This could comprise:

- a. date;
- b. page of thesis;
- c. copyright item;
- d. amount of work being used in thesis in relation to the whole amount of the external work;
- e. the importance of the item used to the thesis;
- f. is a "fair dealing" applicable, or whether permission is required and was requested, and whether permission was obtained (O'Brien et al., 2007).

(52) The copyright law also has some exemptions for research purposes. It is therefore important that students consult the ACU website regarding copyright at the following link:

<https://library.acu.edu.au/copyright/copyright-for-students>. ACU also regularly runs Research specific copyright sessions for HDR candidates.

(53) There are a number of other useful publications and guides, including the "Copyright Guide for Research Students: What you need to know about copyright before depositing your electronic thesis in an online repository" (O'Brien et al., 2007) which is also available at: <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/9994/1/9994.pdf>

## Section 11 - Thesis Title

(54) There is no requirement for formal approval of the thesis title at examination. It is assumed that the thesis title will be selected after discussion with the principal supervisor.

## Section 12 - Order and Format of Contents

(55) Title Page which should show:

- a. the title in full;
- b. the full name and degrees of the candidate;
- c. the academic unit in which the candidate submitted the work;
- d. the degree for which the thesis is submitted; and
- e. the date of submission of the thesis. Also see [HDR Thesis Sample Title Page](#) for an example of title page layout.

(56) Declaration or signed Statement of Authorship and Sources, in the following words:

- a. "This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required)."

(57) Further paragraphs will be included in the Statement of Authorship and Sources if applicable, specifying:

- a. The extent of collaboration with another person or persons; and
- b. The extent and the nature of any other assistance (e.g. statistical analysis, computer programming, editing) received in the pursuit of the research and preparation of the thesis.

(58) A Statement of Appreciation or Dedication (if desired by the candidate).

(59) The Table of Contents:

- a. For a PhD with publication, a list of publications will be included in the Table of Contents.
- b. The candidate may also list, on a separate page, any other work related to this thesis (e.g. conference presentations or proceedings). In a traditional thesis format, a list of additional publications or conference presentations/proceedings by the candidate on matters relevant to the thesis may be shown as an appendix.
- c. A list of all illustrations and diagrams follows the Table of Contents.

(60) The Abstract should summarise the aims, scope and conclusions of the thesis, and should not normally exceed 700 words.

(61) Notes in the text, where used, should be presented consistently so that they are easily accessible to a reader. Individual disciplines may specify a particular approach to notation, appropriate to their discipline.

## Section 13 - Diagrams and Figures

(62) Full-page diagrams or illustrations should appear at the first opportunity after reference to them in the text. The legend for such a diagram should be below it; i.e., the diagram (or illustration) plus legend should not exceed a full page. Where required, figures, diagrams, etc., may be placed on the left-hand side facing the relevant right-hand page of text. If for the sake of clarity, a diagram or illustration is of such a size that the accompanying legend requires a separate page, the diagram should appear on the left-hand side immediately following reference to it, with the legend on the right-hand side, opposite it.

(63) Technical advice may be required concerning the advisability of reproducing typescript on the reverse of full-page diagrams.

(64) Smaller diagrams should be incorporated in the text. There should be a list of all diagrams and illustrations after the Table of Contents.

## Section 14 - Bibliographic Citation

(65) Style of Citation:

- a. All sources from which information has been derived, sources of quotations, and authorities for statements of fact and opinion must be clearly, concisely and accurately cited in any scholarly work – see also clause (66) of these Guidelines.
- b. There are no standard rules for the citation of the bibliography; the discipline standard should prevail. Bibliographic style should be established early in the preparation of a thesis, otherwise a great deal of time-consuming work is required at the time of preparation of the final manuscript. Candidates should also be guided in their treatment of references by the advice of the principal supervisor. It is essential that the style adopted is followed consistently.

(66) Content of Bibliography:

- a. A candidate must cite in the bibliography all sources from which information is derived and all works quoted or referred to in the text or notes to the text. There are a variety of expectations regarding the presentation styles of printed and published works as well as referencing styles – see clause (65)b. of these Guidelines. These tend to be discipline specific. Candidates are encouraged to follow the guidance of the principal supervisor.

## Section 15 - Abbreviations

(67) If the full titles of periodicals and other serials are not used, abbreviations should normally be those used in the World List of Scientific Periodicals, or the Bibliographic Guide for Editors and Authors (Washington, D.C.: American Chemical Society, 1974), or the International List of Periodical Title Word Abbreviations (ISO 833-1974).

## Section 16 - Review

(68) Unless otherwise indicated, this Guideline will still apply beyond the review date.



## Section 17 - Associated Information

(69) For related legislation, policies, procedures and guidelines and any supporting resources please refer to the Associated Information tab.

## Status and Details

<b>Status</b>	Current
<b>Effective Date</b>	19th December 2023
<b>Review Date</b>	30th April 2024
<b>Approval Authority</b>	University Research Committee
<b>Approval Date</b>	19th December 2023
<b>Expiry Date</b>	Not Applicable
<b>Responsible Executive</b>	Abid Khan Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise)
<b>Responsible Manager</b>	Michelle Lopez Director, Graduate Research School
<b>Enquiries Contact</b>	Michelle Lopez Director, Graduate Research School <hr/> Research and Enterprise