IS MY RESEARCH LIKELY TO BE TOO LIMITED OR EXTENSIVE?

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Introduction

A common question that Masters by Research and PhD candidates ask revolves around the amount of data they need to collect and analyse to complete a thesis. Should a thesis comprise three, four, or more studies. Is 50 interviews or 3 surveys enough? This question is vital because

* although uncommon, supervisors might demand more data collection than necessary
* supervisors and examiners might not be certain of whether the magnitude of data collection and analysis is sufficient

The degree of data collection and data analysis you need to complete varies across disciplines, topics, and individuals. So, the answer to this question of whether your research is likely to be too extensive or limited is complex and ambiguous. Nevertheless, here are some principles or approaches you should consider.

## Compare to conventional works

Across Australia, many people utilize this simple guideline

* a PhD is the equivalent of 3 to 4 journal articles in your field
* a Masters by Research is the equivalent of 1 to 2 journal articles in your field

But, several complications limit the utility of these guidelines. In particular

* in most fields, the degree of data collection and data analysis varies significantly across journals.
* for example, some journal articles might comprise 10 distinct studies, conducted over decades. Other journal articles might comprise only one short study.
* in many fields, individuals seldom publish journal articles but utilize other media, such as conference papers or creative outputs

To accommodate these findings, the following table offers some more precise guidelines

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Guideline | Clarification |
| Determine the category of publications that is most common respected and relevant to your field of interest | The most common category is refereed journal articles but might instead include   * scholarly book chapters * conference papers * reports * computer programs * creative works, and so forth |
| In this category, skim or read several legitimate but ordinary publications in your fields | To illustrate, if the category is refereed journal articles, you could skim or read a publication from   * a journal with an impact factor around 1 * a journal that is ranked in the top 40 to 60% of publications in your field   To identify these journals, you could   * visit [www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php](http://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php) * Choose the subject area in a box towards the top left * Perhaps choose the specific subject category in the next box if you like * The bottom left of this page should specify the number of journals in this category * Locate some journals that are about half way down this list |
| In general, a PhD should comprise a similar level of data collection and data analysis to 3 to 4 of these publications | For example, if most papers in these journals report one student, the PhD might report   * three sizeable studies * three studies plus a systematic literature review * three studies plus a pilot study * four studies |
| In general, a Masters by Research should comprise a similar level of data collection and data analysis to 1 to 2 of these publications | For example, if most papers in these journals report one study, the Masters by Research might report   * one sizable study * one study plus a systematic literature review * one study plus a pilot study * two studies |
| A PhD by creative works should comprise one major creative work together with a 30 000 to 50 000 exegesis—or discussion of the work | A major creative work might include   * a novel, play, or series of poems * a book * a film * an exhibition of art * an invention, and so forth   all of which are conventional in length |
| A Masters by Research by creative works should be about half the length and scope of the PhD by creative works |  |

## Compare to past works

Second, you might compare your research plan to past CDU theses in your field. That is, to access these theses, you could utilize the document in Learnline about which theses you should read. The following table includes examples to illustrate the amount of data that past PhD and Masters by Research candidates collected. Each row in the table corresponds to one thesis.

**PhD theses**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Design and discipline | Data collected |
| **Mixed** |  |
| Education | * Phase 1: 24 interviews * Phase 2: 17 follow-up interviews * Phase 3: 175 participants completed a survey * Phase 4: evaluate 210 documents |
| Psychology | * Phase 1: 196 participants completed a survey * Phase 2: 513 participants completed a survey * Phase 3: 17 interviews |
| Education | * Phase 1: 362 participants completed a survey—with some open-ended questions * Phase 2: 14 focus groups * Phase 3: 20 sessions of observing child for one hour |
| Education | * Phase 1: 56 interviews, 13 observations of settings, 270 participants completed the surveys * Phase 2: 47 interviews and 120 participants completed the surveys * Phase 3: 120 participants completed the surveys |
| **Quantitative** |  |
| Psychology | * Longitudinal survey completed at 3 times—with 182, 84, and 56 participants at each time respectively |
| Medical and Health Sciences | * Phase 1: medical assessments of 270 individuals—but completed by assistants * Phase 2: clinical measures of 227 individuals over 3 times—but completed by assistants * Phase 3: Analysis of archival data |
| **Qualitative** |  |
| Education | * Phase 1: 20 interviews * Phase 2: Analysis of many technical and non-technical reports * Phase 3: Reported personal experience too |
| Education | * Phase 1: 10 focus groups * Phase 2: 64 interviews—of 32 people twice * Phase 3: Analysis of many policy texts, newspapers, blogs, and other electronic resources |

NB: Masters by Research theses typically entail about half the data collection and analysis—such as 1 to 2 Phases only.

## Time

Roughly, for PhDs, you should devote about 9 to 12 months—about 1350 to 1800 hours—towards data collection and data analysis. For Masters by Research, you should probably devote about 3 to 6 months—about 450 to 900 hours— towards data collection and data analysis. But, which activities constitute data collection and data analysis varies across projects. The following table could help you decide which activities constitute data collection and data analysis

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Activity** | Entails… |
| Interviews and focus groups | * Develop the interview questions * Organize the interviews * Conduct the interviews * Transcribe the interviews * Analyse the transcription |
| Surveys | * Construct the surveys * Administer the surveys * Enter or download the data * Analyse the data |
| Observations | * Develop the materials to record observations * Organize the opportunity to observe * Conduct the observations * Analyse the data |
| Analysis of documents | * Search the relevant documents * Organize access * Analyse the documents |
| Lab studies | * Complete the relevant training * Organize the materials * Conduct the lab studies * Analyse the data |
| Field studies | * Organize the opportunities * Prepare the materials * Conduct the field studies * Analyse the data |