**ORGANISING YOUR CHAPTERS**

by Simon Moss

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| **Introduction** |

How many chapters should a PhD or Masters by Research thesis comprise? What are the contents of these chapters? What is the usual length of these chapters? Are these chapters the same in all disciplines? This document is designed to answer these questions.

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| **Common arrangements of chapters** |

The theses that PhD and Masters by Research candidates submit do not have to conform to a specific arrangement. For example

* in some theses, the introduction and literature review are presented in one chapter
* in other theses, several chapters review distinct strands of literature
* in some theses, one chapter outlines the methodology and methods
* in other theses, this description of the methodology and methods is embedded within several chapters, such as the introduction and empirical chapters

Nevertheless, the following table specifies the main sections and chapter headings of a typical thesis. In addition, this table specifies the average number of words these chapters include—for PhD theses and Masters by Research theses respectively.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Section or chapter | Approximate number of words: PhD | Approximate number of words: Masters |
| Preliminary sections |  |
| Title page |  |  |
| Declarations |  |  |
| Abstract | 500 | 300 |
| Table of contents |  |  |
| List of Tables |  |  |
| List of Figures |  |  |
| Acknowledgements |  |  |
| Abbreviations |  |  |
| Glossary |  |  |
| List of publications |  |  |
| Chapters that tend to precede the research |
| Introduction | 2500 | 1500 |
| Literature review | 25 000 | 12 500 |
| The present research | 500 | 500 |
| Methodology and methods | 8000 | 4000 |
| Research chapters |  |  |
| Study 1 | 10 000 | 15 000 |
| Study 2 | 10 000 | 0 |
| Study 3 | 10 000 | 0 |
| Concluding chapters |  |
| General discussion | 10 000 | 5000 |
| References |  |  |
| Appendices |  |  |

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| **Common variations on these chapters** |

The precise sequence of chapters will depend on the study, the discipline, and the preferences of candidates and supervisors. The following table clarifies some common variations to the sequence of chapters that was presented in the previous section.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Section or chapter | Common variations |
| Preliminary sections | |
| Title page | * Although you should always start with the title page, the order in which the other preliminary sections begin tends to depend on personal taste |
| Declarations |  |
| Abstract |  |
| Table of contents |  |
| List of Tables | * Sometimes omitted |
| List of Figures | * Sometimes omitted |
| Acknowledgements |  |
| Abbreviations | * Sometimes omitted |
| Glossary | * Sometimes omitted |
| List of publications | * Omitted unless the thesis comprises past publications |
| Chapters that precede the research | |
| Introduction | * Can be called “Background and Introduction” * Can appear in the same chapter as the literature review |
| Literature review | * Distinct strands of literature can appear in separate chapters |
| The present research | * Can be called “Rationale and aims” * Can be called “Research questions” * Can be called “Aims and hypotheses” * This chapter is often embedded in the introduction or literature review instead |
| Methodology and methods | * The methodology and methods are often embedded within the introduction, literature review, or subsequent research chapters instead * Could comprise two chapters, called methodology and project implementation respectively. One chapter specifies and justifies the approach. The other chapter presents the details, such as the number of participants or interviews that were actually chosen. |
| Research chapters |  |
| Study 1 | * If the research comprises only one large study, one chapter, called “Results”, might replace “Study 1”, “Study 2”, and “Study 3” * A more descriptive title, such as “Interviews with the children”, can replace “Study 1” * Each chapter might even comprise more than one study—but one introduction and literature review—if these studies are highly related. |
| Study 2 | * Rather than three studies, the thesis might comprise between 1 and 10 studies |
| Study 3 |  |
| Concluding chapters | |
| General discussion | * Sometimes called “Conclusion” * Occasionally omitted |
| References |  |
| Appendices |  |

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| **Main contents of each chapter** |

Finally, this section offers some insights into the main contents of each chapter. Nevertheless, you should read other theses to learn more about these sections and chapters.

**Title page**

The first page, called the title page, often resembles the following format, but printed on a white background.

|  |
| --- |
| **Do Humble Supervisors Enhance the Creativity and**  **Productivity of Research Candidates?**  Simon Moss  A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, April 2020  The Mental Health Division  College of Health  Charles Darwin University  Darwin, Australia |

**Declarations**

On a separate page, you should include the following declarations or a close variant:

|  |
| --- |
| This thesis contains no material that has been submitted for any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by me or another person, except when this material is acknowledged in the thesis.  I consent to this copy of my thesis, once deposited in the Charles Darwin University Library, to be available to loan, photocopy, and access online.  Signed  Image result for signature  Date: 4 April 2020 |

In various instances, if the thesis contains sensitive or commercial information, you can seek an embargo that can last up to 24 months. You would still include the previous consent, however, because the thesis would not be deposited in the Charles Darwin University Library until the embargo ends.

**Abstract**

Typically, an abstract, or executive summary, should include the following information

* **Background**. Write one to three sentences about the problem in society, or controversy in the literature, you are attempting to resolve, primarily to justify the importance of this study. You might, for example, first highlight the prevalence or significance of some problem. You might then describe the limitations of previous attempts to resolve this problem.
* **Purpose.** Write one to three sentences to clarify the aim or purpose of this study. Although usually one sentence is adequate, a second or third sentence could be included to clarify the unique feature of this research, to justify the approach, or to present the hypotheses.
* **Methods.** Write one to four sentences that describe the method. Only include enough details to enable the reader to understand the research—to be able to visualize the research. If your study comprises human participants, you would primarily describe the activities the participants completed. If your study mainly comprises animals, specimens, chemicals, or other objects, you would primarily describe the main activities that you completed and the properties of these objects. You should also prioritize features that differentiate this study from past research
* **Findings.** Write one to three sentences that summarize the findings or results. In general, describe a few significant patterns or discoveries rather than specific details or statistics, unless critical. Write concretely but refrain from too many details.
* You might also choose to describe each study in sequence or to integrate the studies.
* **Conclusions.** Finally, the abstract usually includes one or two sentences that clarify the key implications or conclusions. Avoid generic statements that apply to all studies, such as “Future research is needed to clarify the issue”. After all, future research is always needed to clarify the issue

**Acknowledgements**

The acknowledgements are important, partly because the examiners might learn something about you. If you write this section well, they could learn that you are grateful or that your research was very arduous. You should thus typically express gratitude towards

* your supervisors
* your participants
* academics or peers who offered considerable assistance
* people in the relevant communities or organizations who offered assistance
* friends and family who were especially helpful

**Introduction**

Most theses begin with a brief introduction, designed to outline the purpose of this thesis, and perhaps the unique methods or perspectives, before reviewing the literature. During this introduction, you could

* demonstrate the significance of some problem or controversy in the literature
* outline previous attempts to resolve this problem
* summarize some of the key obstacles or limitations of these attempts
* describe some distinct features of this thesis that were designed to address these challenges
* briefly outline each of the subsequent chapters

**The literature review**

The literature review is, ultimately, designed to unearth shortcomings in the literature and thus justify this research project. The review, for example, will often

* clarify the magnitude of some problem or issue
* outline the theories and arguments that have been utilized to solve this problem
* summarize the findings that support or refute these theories or arguments

**The present research**

Although sometimes embedded in other chapters, you should, at least somewhere

* summarize the key limitations of past research
* summarize how this thesis could address these limitations
* outline the aims, objectives, or research questions this thesis explores
* present the hypotheses, if applicable.

**Methodology and methods**

Again, although sometimes embedded in other chapters, research candidates will describe the methodology and methods. You should include all details that could affect the results. In addition, you should justify these methodologies and methods, often in more detail that would authors of research papers. In particular, this chapter should specify and, whenever necessary, defend the

* ontology, epistemology, paradigm, and theoretical perspective, especially if qualitative
* methodology, especially if qualitative
* participants, animals, sites, or specimens
* apparatus, materials, or measures
* procedures that researchers or participants completed
* techniques utilized to analyze and interpret the data

Sometimes, to defend these choices, you might need to discuss, and then refute, alternatives.

**Empirical chapters**

Sometimes, after presenting the methods, candidates might write one or more chapters that present the results. Alternatively, each empirical chapter might include

* a short introduction and literature review to justify the aims of a particular study
* the methodology and methods applied in this study
* the results of this study
* a discussion of this study—in which you might summarize the study, explain the results, consider alternative explanations, discuss limitations, suggest future research, and consider implications.

**General discussion**

Typically, the final chapter should

* summarize the key problem, solution, methods, and results
* discuss recurring limitations and future research that resolves these limitations
* present the theoretical implications and practical implications of your research

**References**

Most candidates include a list of all the references they cited during the thesis

**Appendices**

Appendices will often include

* ethics applications
* materials used
* comprehensive output from data analysis, such as statistical output or the codes used to analyze transcripts