



CDU PhD by Creative Artefact + Exegesis Guidelines

(Guidelines based on literature, sector standards, and input from CDU stakeholders across faculties and schools)

What is a PhD by Creative Artefact + Exegesis

The PhD by Creative Artefact + Exegesis (PAE) is an award that may be appropriate for someone who has an undergraduate degree in the creative arts/design or an established career or profile in the creative/design industries. The PAE can often also suit those seeking to use creative research methods within the humanities and social sciences more broadly, including Indigenous Studies. The typical PAE thesis format is a 30 000-50 000-word exegesis and a significant body of creative work. PAE awards are most commonly found in, but not limited to, disciplines such as visual and performing arts, creative writing, architecture, design practice, anthropology, media studies and Indigenous studies. Artefacts or Non-Traditional Research Outputs (NTROs) can be (but not limited to) plays, music performances, models of buildings, novels, films or art exhibitions. The NTROs are generated by research and practice during the PhD candidature and the exegesis must clearly articulate the significant original contributions to a specific focused area of knowledge. The PAE follows the same examination process and criteria as a traditional PhD in which the scholarly contribution to knowledge is the key factor.

Volume and type of outputs

A PhD by Creative Artefact + Exegesis should include a 30 000-50 000-word exegesis that accompanies the creative project. This is because practice-led research situates creative practice as both a driver and outcome of the research process. Exegeses are inherently fluid and varied, and the structure can differ depending on the discipline but see the CDU library for study skills and writing an exegesis [Writing an exegesis | Charles Darwin University](#). The exegesis contextualises, analyses, and explains the creative work or portfolio. It demonstrates how the practice functions as research and contributes to scholarly knowledge. Whether the creative artefact is a film, performance, exhibition or design, the exegesis captures the candidate's intentions, methods, influences and findings. The exegesis thesis and creative artefact or NTRO should reflect the work and focus of three – four years full-time or six – eight years part-time study. Several exhibitions, collections of writing or a

portfolio of design or media work should cluster in a particular knowledge area, demonstrating distinct outstanding knowledge contribution. NTROs can also include several significant research reports for government or industry organisations that clearly solve significant problems in the field or industry being investigated. Credibility and quality of creative artefacts can be demonstrated by relating the significance of where the work is exhibited or performed, the audience/readership, publications, media attention and awards.

Is a PhD by Creative Artefact + Exegesis a suitable option?

The Higher Degree by Research opportunity provides candidates with Australian Qualifications Framework level 10 training in academic research and writing. PhD applicants and candidates sometimes mistakenly consider a PhD by Creative Artefact + Exegesis an easier option. However, the PAE presents additional challenges and requires a clear creative research strategy to demonstrate the same significant contribution to knowledge as the traditional PhD. For candidates without a record in a creative field of practice, the PAE may not be a viable option.

Applicants considering a PhD by Creative Artefact + Exegesis should conduct their own research to develop their understanding of what the NTRO entails. General reading around, along with specific reading in the chosen field of research (FoR) is essential. This reading will inform the critical reflections and analysis presented in the exegesis which must engage with the written literature in a rigorous and scholarly manner while also positioning the research in relation to other creative practitioners within the chosen field of study. Reviewing examples of exegetical writing can assist and the CDU library support team can offer guidance.

Two key questions to ask when considering if the PAE is a viable option for doctoral studies are:

1. Why does this creative project need to involve doctoral-level research?
2. Why does this research question need to be investigated through a creative project or practice?

Where possible, applicants should try and include a supervisor on their panel who has experience of supervising a PhD by Creative Artefact + Exegesis in the relevant FoR. However, this will depend on supervisor availability and may not always be an

option. The Centre for Creative Futures and the Academy of the Arts profiles experienced creative researchers in the Faculty of Arts & Society at CDU.

Eligibility criteria for the PAE

Determining a potential candidate's suitability to complete a PAE will include consideration of background and experience from a number of perspectives, including:

- Undergraduate/honours/Masters study in the field of research aligned with the creative practice
- Postgraduate certificate in Research Methodology (with high RPA score)
- An extensive history of original creative works
- Significant and sustained experience as an employee, mentor or volunteer in a particular creative/design industry
- Experience in writing reports for an external body
- Experience in curating or producing substantial public events or exhibitions
- Portfolio/Collection of original creative works with external recognition or peer-review
- Significant contribution to First Nations knowledge and community engagement through a recognised project, event, program, performance or publication that benefits First Nations people

References

Charles Darwin University Library. (2025). *Study skills: Writing an exegesis*. <https://www.cdu.edu.au/library/study/exegesis>

Sierra, M. (2022, December). Explainer: What are non-traditional research outputs, and why do they matter? *NiTRO + Creative Matters: Perspectives on creative arts in higher education* (Ed. 26).

<https://creativematters.edu.au/explainer-non-traditional-research-outputs>