

## **Thesis and Dissertation Writing**

A master's thesis and Ph.D. dissertation are much more than research papers. The scope is broader, and they provide the student an opportunity to develop a career skill: to develop and write logical and systematic arguments on an academic topic. Writing a thesis or a dissertation is one of the final steps in earning your degree; therefore, it must reflect a thorough understanding of a discipline, relevant theories, and contain original research.

A thesis and dissertation have the following aims and objectives:

- To formulate a research question and develop a research plan that includes a time management strategy.
- To learn relevant and theoretical insights into real problems.
- To generate new knowledge.
- To report research and results clearly and systematically.
- To assist you in your development as an academician and scholar.
- To broaden your understanding of a discipline that you can bring to your work setting.

### **Abstract**

An abstract highlights major points and describes the content and scope of the thesis or dissertation. It reviews the document contents in an abbreviated format. It is ordinarily the first- and sometimes only- section read by readers and sets the tone for the thesis and dissertation. It is an important piece of scholarly writing.

Abstract length varies by discipline. The typical length, however, is between 100 to 500 words. It is rarely longer than a single page with the appropriate 1.5 line spacing, expected margins, and 12-point font size. The best way to write an abstract is to start with a draft of the completed thesis or dissertation and follow these steps:

- State your hypotheses and thesis or dissertation methods.
- Identify the major objectives and conclusions.
- Identify phrases and keywords in the methods chapter.
- Identify major results from the discussion and results chapters.
- Assemble the above information into a single paragraph.
- Omit detailed descriptions of methods.

- Revise the paragraph so the one-page abstract conveys only essential information.
- Study previous well-written abstracts as samples.
- Ask your colleagues to review the abstract for clarity and English language.

## **Introduction**

Prepare a draft of the introduction at the onset of the thesis or dissertation writing. Then, carefully refine the introduction after you have completed the document. This chapter is routinely about five pages in length. An extended introduction chapter is usually the result of an inappropriate mix of both introductory material and literature review data and statistics. The first page of the introduction begins with page 1.

The thesis or dissertation introduction include:

- Sufficient background information so the reader can understand the context and significance of the problem addressed.
- An acknowledgment of previous research work that you are building on.
- A statement of the problem with the gaps in research finding.
- Significance of the study.
- Scope of the work.
- Objectives of the study.

Focus on your research questions. All cited work should relate to the goal of the thesis or dissertation. Do not summarize everything you have ever read on your subject. Do not divide the introduction into subchapters or divisions. Present the contents in a logical and well-organized manner to maintain a flow of ideas.

## **Literature Review**

The literature review is a critical analysis of existing knowledge on the research topic. Much of this chapter is derived from your thesis or dissertation proposal. The review includes the strengths, limitations, gaps of previous studies, and justifies the need for the current research. This section must be relevant with recent citations. Ideally, most sources are from the past eight

years. Use citations that are nine years and older only when necessary and for historical purposes.

Not all published material possesses the same research rigor, scholarship, or value. For this reason, you must evaluate your sources. Aside from the dates of publications, there are questions you can ask as you read and choose your references.

## **Methods**

The methods chapter presents the sources of data, methods, collection, and analysis procedures. The research has been completed, so use the past tense. Provide a concise description of the conditions of the investigation, materials, procedures, experimental designs, and techniques. You may divide the chapter into subheadings depending on the nature of the study. Include the study area and calendar period, populations (source and study), sampling methods, data collection methods, study variables, quality control methods, data processing, analysis procedures, ethical considerations, and limitations. Restrict citations to data sources and references. Do not include a description of the results.

## **Results and Discussion**

In the results, present your findings without interpretation. Give primary results in clear sentences at the beginning of paragraphs. It is better to say “X had a significant positive relationship with Y” than to start with a less informative statement such as, “There was a significant relationship between X and Y.” Describe the nature of the findings and do not merely tell the reader whether they were significant or not. Avoid data repetition in tables and figures; however, when presenting data as a figure, you may show the raw data in the appendix. Focus the narrative for each table and figure on relevant observations and findings. The results narrative should be an objective report.

You may divide the chapter with subheadings. Present your results and answer the research questions described in the introduction with sufficient detail.

Use the discussion to describe the limitations and implications of the study. Follow the descriptions of major findings with appropriate interpretations and discussion. When writing the discussion, synthesize the discussion to flow with the results.

The organization of this chapter is important, and the steps listed below will help you sort your thoughts:

- Construct the discussion from the specific to the general, i.e., the findings, to literature, to theory, to practice.
- Use the same key terms, verb tense, and perspective you used when posing the questions in the introduction.
- Begin by restating the hypotheses and answer the questions posed in the introduction.
- Support your answers with results. Explain how your results relate to expectations and relevant published literature. State why they are acceptable and how they are consistent with previously published knowledge on the topic.
- Address the results relating to the questions, regardless of whether or not the findings are significant.
- Describe the patterns, principles, and relationships of each major finding and result and put them in perspective. The sequencing of information is important. First, state the answer, then state the relevant results, and then cite the work of others. If necessary, direct the reader to a figure or table.
- Defend your answers. If necessary, explain why your answer is satisfactory and why others may not be. Your argument is convincing only when both sides are available for scrutiny.
- Discuss and evaluate conflicting results.
- Discuss any unexpected findings.
- Identify potential limitations and weaknesses and comment on the importance of these to your interpretation of the results and how they may affect the validity of the findings.
- Provide two or more recommendations for further research based on the research findings. The recommendations should correlate with the research findings.
- Explain how the results and conclusions influence the knowledge or understanding of the problem examined.

## **Results and discussions**

Results and discussions are conceptually different. In the discussion, you interpret the research results. A common mistake in the discussion is to present a sketchy interpretation that merely restates the results.

If the results differ from earlier published reports, explain why that may have happened. If the results agree with your expectations, then describe the reports and interpretations to support them. It is not adequate to just state whether the data agreed with earlier reports. Also, do not attempt to discuss every finding. Focus on the major findings that call for interpretation.

### **Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

This fifth chapter provides a brief account of the objectives, methods, and major findings. This chapter concludes and gives recommendations on such issues as organizational development, procedural concerns, educational matters, policy implications, and other relevant concerns. You may also list unanswered questions that require research beyond the limits of the thesis or dissertation.

Avoid citations of previous studies and references to tables or figures in the narrative or the appendix. Where required, you may refer to numerical and probability levels. You may divide the chapter into three logical sections.

Avoid bulleting information in this chapter. Bulleting is considered a casual rather than scholarly writing technique. Do not just bullet and number in presenting your conclusions and recommendations. A narrative format is preferred with very some limited bulleting if approved by your advisors.

Recommendations from the research findings are an important facet of this chapter. Write your recommendations thoughtfully. What recommendations from your research findings can you make to practitioners and academicians in your field of study? How can your research findings contribute to knowledge in the discipline in your country, Africa, and globally? Any recommendations stated must be derived from the research findings conducted in the thesis or dissertation research. Theses and dissertations usually have two or more recommendations to offer the reader.