

Organising your Thesis

Choose a logical and consistent method to organise your thesis so that it makes sense for you and other readers. Consult thesis writing guides, previous theses in your discipline, and your supervisor as to preferred organisation options. *There can be variations within disciplines in content and style.*

In case work is lost or destroyed at any stage, authors of theses should make sure that they retain a copy (drafts, notes and other material necessary to reconstitute a thesis) and also that they back up computer files, keeping the duplicates in a separate location. An accident is not likely to happen, but if it did the results could be devastating.

Contents in this document

1.	Thesis Guides	1
2.	Word Processing	2
3.	Thesis Contents	2
4.	Abstract	3
5.	Figures	3
6.	Tables	3
7.	Numbers	4
8.	Quotations	4
9.	Appendices	4
10.	Citing Sources In-text	4
10.1	Footnotes	5
10.2	Author-Date System or Parenthetical System	6
10.3	Reference-Number System	6
11.	Bibliography or References	6
11.1	Commerce and Humanities	7
11.2	Sciences and Biomedical Sciences	7

1. Thesis Guides

Guides to writing and researching theses may be found in the Library catalogue under the following subject headings:

- Dissertations, academic — Handbooks
- Dissertations, academic — Research, handbooks, manuals
- Academic writing
- Medical writing
- Report writing — Research, handbooks, manuals
- Technical writing

2. Word Processing

While these are general guidelines specific heading and citation styles may differ within Departments. Please consult your supervisor.

It is recommended that chapters are kept as separate document files during writing, to retain formatting. Once the thesis is complete these files can be merged as a new document.

IT Training offer subsidised student courses on Thesis Writing. Please see the [ITS website](#)ⁱ for a list of current dates.

This course covers page layout and numbering, indents and text alignment, built-in and custom styles, headers and footers, document sections, tables, charts and images, captions and figures, footnotes and endnotes, table of contents and indexes, and combining multiple documents.

LaTeX is another word processing system incorporating features for the scientific and technical documentation, such as formatting equations. It is sometimes used by departments such as Computer Science, Information Science, Physical Geography, Mathematics and Physiology. [Technical support](#)ⁱⁱ for LaTeX can be found online and in the Library's [Managing your References guide](#).

3. Thesis Contents

The following order is usually observed:

[Author Declaration Form](#) (only in the Library copy)

A. The preliminaries:

1. Title page
2. Abstract
3. Preface (usually contains acknowledgements)
4. Table of contents¹
5. List of tables }
6. List of illustrations or figures } (if applicable)
7. List of abbreviations }

B. The text:

1. Introductory chapter
2. Main body of the work divided into chapters
3. Final chapter which usually includes a summary, conclusions and any recommendations

¹ A 'thesis by publication' has a referenced list of publications to alert the reader, or they are placed in an Appendix when publications are additional to the thesis.

C. The reference matter:

1. Bibliography or References
2. Appendix or appendices¹ (if applicable)

The preliminary pages (those outlined in A above) should be numbered by lower case Roman numerals, and all other pages (B & C above) numbered by Arabic numerals. The page number is not shown on the title page, but it is still counted. When a double-sided format is used, verso pages (left hand pages) are even numbered, and recto pages (right hand pages) are odd numbered.

Each major sub-division, e.g. preface, table of contents, list of illustrations, individual chapter, etc., should begin on a new page with a centered heading in capitals or bold type. Paragraphs should be indented five spaces (approximately 10 mm). The text should begin on the third line below the heading. Subdivision of text up to three levels is common, i.e. 2, 2.1, 2.11.

4. Abstract

An abstract of no more than 500 words is required for theses submitted for doctoral and masters degrees and for postgraduate diplomas in the Faculty of Medicine, and the Bachelor of Medical Science. Other authors are recommended to provide an abstract.

The abstract should consist of a statement of the problem, an explanation of the method and procedures, and a summary of conclusions.

5. Figures

The term 'figure' is normally used to denote any kind of graphic or illustration other than a table, e.g. figures may include photographs, maps, graphs, charts, diagrams and musical examples. The placing and numbering of figures is the same as that for tables (see below), except that the word Figure, its appropriate number and caption should appear below the figure. Musical examples are the exception with the figure details placed above the example. Referencing styles will vary on use of Figure in text, or fig. used parenthetically in text, e.g. (see fig. 3).

Tables and figures are each numbered consecutively throughout the text, or per chapter, and their titles are written without terminal punctuation.

Photographs, maps and graphs should be numbered in Arabic numerals. Text references are made in brackets and should precede the figure unless mentioned as part of a sentence. Where they are not the author's own work, the source must be acknowledged and copyright clearance obtained.

6. Tables

Tables (any matter appearing in tabular form, such as statistics) should appear as near as possible to the discussion relating to them, and should be numbered consecutively using

Arabic numerals. The heading 'Table' and its number and caption title should appear above the table, leaving the remainder of the page for source citation or explanatory notes. However, if the table occupies a full page, the caption may be typed on the reverse side of the preceding page, facing the table to which it refers.

7. Numbers

The generally accepted rule is to spell out exact numbers up to ninety-nine. The following exceptions should be noted:

Use numerals for percentages, decimals, street numbers, page numbers and dates, and in technical or statistical discussions where groups of figures are used. Numerals at the beginning of a sentence are spelt out.

8. Quotations

All quotations should correspond exactly with the original in wording, spelling and punctuation.

Short direct quotations (not more than three lines in length) should be enclosed in double quotation marks and incorporated into the text. Longer quotations should be single-spaced without quotation marks, and indented at both margins forming a block that stands out clearly from the text.

Single quotation marks are generally used for quotations within a quotation. Omissions in quoted matter are indicated by three spaced periods . . . and care must be taken when using these that the original meaning is not altered.

Note that the use of double or single quotation marks varies from style to style. Where the Modern Languages Association and Chicago (Turabian) use double quotation marks around short quotations, Harvard style uses single quotation marks, and APA uses none. Check with your supervisor in case your discipline has a preferred style.

Any interpolated comment should be enclosed in square brackets, e.g. [sic], used to assure the reader that some error has been noted in the original.

9. Appendices

An appendix is not always required. It provides a place for material that is not absolutely necessary to the text, or is used where whole inclusion in the text might break the flow of argument, e.g. the full text of an Act of Parliament. Appendices may be sub-divided according to the class of materials included, in which case each appendix should be listed by capital letter and title in the Table of Contents.

10. Citing Sources In-text

There are three principal documentation systems for referring to sources in a text:

- ~ **footnotes**
- ~ **the Author-Date system or Parenthetical system**

~ the Reference-Number system

The Author-Date system is generally used in scientific and biomedical literature but it has also been adopted by some other disciplines. The Reference-Number system is sometimes used in scientific and biomedical literature.

Footnotes may be used in combination with the Author-Date or Reference-Number system for purposes apart from citing references.

Consult your supervisor as to the preferred method in your subject area.

Note: As well as selecting one of the documentation systems for referring to sources in the text it is also necessary to decide on one of the various [bibliographic styles](#)ⁱⁱⁱ for laying out the elements of each reference cited in the bibliography.

10.1. Footnotes

Footnotes have four main purposes:

- 1 To cite the authority for statements in the text.
- 2 To provide cross references.
- 3 To acknowledge indebtedness.
- 4 To explain or supplement material that is included in the text.

A footnote reference is indicated by placing an Arabic number slightly above the line immediately after the punctuation mark ending the material for which the reference is given.

Footnotes are arranged in numerical order at the foot of the page, separated by a double space below the last line of the text. Alternatively it is possible to draw a line above the footnotes. The last line of a footnote should be 20 mm above the bottom of the page.

They should be indented as for a paragraph and single-spaced, but double spaced between each one. Footnotes are usually numbered consecutively throughout each chapter.

Works referred to in footnotes are listed in the "Bibliography" at the end of the thesis. Footnote style should be related to the style used in the bibliography.

After the first footnote reference is spelt out in full subsequent references can be referred to by author and short title followed by page number/s.

The following Latin abbreviations were once used to refer to subsequent references. They are no longer recommended except for *ibid.* which is still sometimes used.

- ibid.* (*ibidem* = in the same) used for a consecutive reference to the same work, but not necessarily to the same page. If *ibid.* is used without a page number, the reference is to exactly the same page as that previously cited. *Ibid.* should not be used more than two pages after the original citation.
- loc.cit.* (*loco citato* = in the place cited) used for a non-consecutive reference to the same work and same page.

op.cit. (opere citato = in the work cited) used for non-consecutive reference to the same work but different page.

10.2. Author-Date System or Parenthetical System

In the Author-Date (e.g. Harvard or APA) system, or Parenthetical (e.g. MLA) system, citations to the literature are inserted into the text as the reference is made, instead of using footnotes. Author-date citations consist of the author's surname and the year of publication, enclosed in parentheses. Depending on the structure of the sentence where the citation is made, parentheses may enclose either the name, or the date, or both. Page numbers may be included.

One author: Smith (1970) or (Smith 1970) or (Smith 1970, pp. 34-40)

Two authors: Smith and Andrews (1970) or (Smith and Andrews 1970)

Three or more authors: Smith et al. (1970) or (Smith et al. 1970)

et al. (et alii = and others, that is other authors)

If the use of the author's surname and year results in two or more identical references for different works, lower case letters are added after the year of publication to distinguish the references, e.g.

Smith (1970a) or (Smith 1970a) for the first reference in the text.

Smith (1970b) or (Smith 1970b) for the second reference in the text, a different work.

Parenthetical citations use author and/or page numbers, e.g. (Smith) or (Smith 10-11). The year is only used when distinguishing multiple works by an author.

Full citations for these sources should be listed in the "Bibliography" section of the thesis where citations should be listed alphabetically by the authors' names then by date.

10.3. Reference-Number System

In this system a number, in superscript or parentheses, appears in the text at the point of citation and the citations appear in a numbered list of references at the end of the work. Vancouver, often used in the Biomedical Sciences, is an example of a "numbered" style and follows rules established by the [International Committee of Medical Journal Editors](#)^{iv}. Check examples of [Vancouver style](#)^v.

11. Bibliography or References

Considerable time and subsequent checking will be saved if all the necessary data for each citation is collected at the time of consulting the works concerned. Software for managing and downloading references includes [EndNote](#)^{vi}, [Zotero](#)^{vii}, Flow and LaTeX. Product comparisons are listed in the [Managing your References](#) guide.

There are various acceptable bibliographic styles; the important point to remember is that

having decided on a particular style, you should retain this form throughout the bibliography. Check with your supervisor as to the preferred method within your discipline. Print and online copies of manuals of style can also be found in the Library Catalogue.

11.1. Commerce and Humanities

For theses in the humanities it is usual to choose a heading such as “Selected Bibliography”, “Works Consulted” or “Reference List”. The list should include all sources which have substantially affected the form or content of the thesis, but a long list of vaguely relevant items should be avoided. For a “Works Cited” list only include materials referred to in-text. To facilitate the use of a lengthy bibliography, as in a history thesis, the references could be arranged according to type of material, e.g. primary sources (manuscripts, official publications, newspapers) and secondary sources (books, periodical articles, theses).

11.2. Sciences and Biomedical Sciences

In science theses full citations for each source mentioned in the text are listed in a bibliography section usually called “References”. Only citations referred to in-text should be included in the “References” section. If the Author-Date system has been used the references should be arranged alphabetically by author’s surname and under each name by year of publication. In the Reference-Number system the arrangement is either by authors’ names or in the order that the references are cited in the text. Biomedical referencing is covered by the National Library of Medicine (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/bsd/uniform_requirements.html)

Links

- ⁱ ITS website: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/its/services/help/ittraining.html>
- ⁱⁱ LaTeX Technical support: http://www-h.eng.cam.ac.uk/help/tpl/textprocessing/LaTeX_intro.html
- ⁱⁱⁱ Bibliographic styles: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/library/quicklinks/citation/index.html>
- ^{iv} International Committee of Medical Journal Editor: www.icmje.org
- ^v Vancouver style: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/library/quicklinks/citation/index.html#vancouver>
- ^{vi} EndNote: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/library/quicklinks/citation/endnote.html>
- ^{vii} Zotero: <http://www.zotero.org/>



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