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# ***The preparation and submission of theses by higher degree candidates***

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## **Introduction**

This outline describes the specifications and requirements of the master and doctorate theses by research. Students who are doing part-year theses which are called dissertations in MNU must refer to the guidelines in their programs. In American Higher Education terminology, dissertations are reports of original research written in fulfillment of *doctorate* degrees, and theses are very much shorter in length. In the UK, Australia, New Zealand and in many other Commonwealth countries, it is the opposite; dissertations mean shorter reports than theses. It is useful to keep this distinction in mind when reading overseas literature.

MNU has long ago adopted the referencing style of American Psychological Association (APA) for its scholarly publications and reports. As such, you may find APA publications on these very useful. The most recent one is *Dissertations and Theses. From Start to Finish: Psychology and Related Fields*, Second Edition. This outline summarizes the essence of stylistic content in that book.

A thesis is the report of a substantial research you have undertaken in your thesis year. The research is supervised by one or several of your supervisors who will guide you in your undertaking and advise you on the report or thesis.

## **Requirements of thesis**

In the traditional sense, a thesis is a proposal put forward for validation by the researcher. The researcher then systematically gathers evidence in support of the proposal. Nowadays, the report of the proposal and the evidence gathered or the research undertaken is known as the thesis although the word is still used in the traditional sense. In your research methodology module you would have already been introduced into the format of research reports. Over time, the format of the thesis has been standardized and students are asked to follow the format closely. Whatever, you choose to do, there are two requirements you must meet: the thesis must be original and substantive. In other words, the research you undertake must address a significant problem and advance the state of knowledge in that area.

## **Finding a research topic**

Most of the difficulties students find when they face the thesis year is finding a suitable topic to investigate. There are several options you may consider in finding a suitable topic.

In your first year of masters you may have already found topics that are of great interest to you. Maldives is unique in that little research has been undertaken in the local context. You may discuss with your classmates your ideas and also find out from them what they are doing. Often such discussions help you to focus your ideas.

Another fruitful way to find a suitable topic is to find out from school teachers, administrators, newspapers and websites the current issues in education and other disciplines, and then investigate the causes and solutions to the issues. You may like to read journals available from the library which often give new insights into the topics you are interested in. EBSCO, and ERIC in particular, do have a large number research reports from past master and doctorate students. These may also invoke you thinking into new facets of research that could be carried out. You can replicate their studies in the Maldivian contexts, extend their studies, or add a new dimension to what has already been done.

## **Writing the research proposal**

All students doing the full-year research must get their research proposal approved by the Higher Degrees Committee (HDC). Your research proposal is written with the support of a supervisor in a given format. Before you attempt to write the report, you must undertake an initial literature survey and plan out what you wish to do. In fact, the proposal is nothing more than a plan of what you intend to research. The research proposal is usually between 3 to 25 pages. You may present the research proposal in the following format. There are other formats equally valid.

*Abstract:* A paragraph summarizing what you wish to do in the research, how data will be collected and analyzed and the possible outcomes in about 100 words. You may precede the abstract with a title page and a page for contents.

*Background:* Background to the problem, including previous research, if any, and the outcomes thereof together with a justification as to why the research is significant.

*Research questions:* In this section you will write the specific research questions or hypotheses you want to investigate. You may write about the variables involved and what would the independent and dependent variables.

*Methods:* Explain how the study will be conducted; what instruments/methods would be used and what samples would be involved. You may briefly describe the data to be collected, how it will be analysed.

*Literature Review:* A short review of literature dealing with the topic of your interest with key ideas summarized. The purpose is to show that you are familiar with research area.

*Expected Results:* In this section you will write the anticipated results, and how the data answer the research questions you posed, how the results can be generalized and defend your assertions. You may outline the problems you are likely to encounter and how you would circumvent them and the limitations of the study. You may like to describe the implications that may arise from your research in this section as well.

*Budget and Timeline:* An estimated budget of the research and a rough timeline of the different activities of your research. A Gantt chart is useful to show timelines for different aspects of the research. If the cost of the research is to be borne by the university, you or a third party, you may need to work out the figures very well.

*References:* Key references cited in the body text of the proposal in APA format.

You should write the Research Proposal under the supervision of a mentor allocated to you by the university, who will guide you in the preparation of research proposal. Once your research proposal is completed you may ask your mentoring supervisor for his or her advice. S/he may ask a colleague for second opinions if necessary. A research proposal must meet several criteria for it to be acceptable:

- Proposed research must answer a significant problem and thereby advance knowledge
- It should be do-able
- It should be able to be completed in the given time-frame
- Equipment or other resources required for the study must be available
- Access to populations or samples must be available
- The costs must be covered by self, university or a third party.

Time spent on writing the research proposal is usually very beneficial as the content usually forms the first chapter of the thesis proper.

## **Oral Presentation of Proposal**

Masters as well as doctorate students are required to present their proposal to the Higher Degrees Committee for approval before the actual research begins. The purpose in presenting is not only to ensure that the proposal is worthy of the qualification but to assist the student in formulating a study that is of sufficient depth and scope and tease out the issues in validity and reliability of the proposed study. Even if you have not fully completed the proposal it is always helpful to present the proposal as the committee members and others present can often fill in

the gaps and critique the study to assist you make it better. Many students do change their topics after they begin because their initial proposal has not been well-thought of. The oral presentation precludes such loss of time. A date will be fixed for the presentation by HDC. The HDC is responsible for allocating supervisors for your study.

### **Timeline for preparation of proposal and submission of theses**

	<i>Masters</i>	<i>Doctorate</i>
Research Proposal to HDC	End of fifth week after enrolment	End of 14 <sup>th</sup> week after enrolment
Semester Progress Report	End of each semester	End of each semester
Final draft for examiners	End of second semester	End of sixth semester

### **The format of theses**

Tradition has already set most aspects of the preparation of theses over decades in the higher education sector. In almost all universities of the world, the preparation and format of these are almost alike. It is very instructive to study examples and how-to books available in the library on theses.

The thesis is a report of the research that you have undertaken. Hence, it is usually written in the past tense though the outcomes would be valid for the present. The most important aspect of theses is that they be original and that they significantly advance the state of knowledge in the area of the study. Students are not permitted to include related work previously done in different contexts; all work must have been carried out in the candidature of the students.

Writing is considered one of the strongest indicators of well-developed critical thinking. Students must be able to write with precision, clarity and conciseness whatever the language the thesis is written in. At every stage of the thesis preparation the supervisors must be consulted for what is to be included and excluded and appropriate language usage.

#### **Word limit**

Masters theses must be less than 40,000 words and doctorate theses must be less than 80,000 words, excluding figures, tables, maps and appendices. Footnotes are explicitly discouraged. For theses in Dhivehi and in Arabic the text may be 60,000 words because of the nature of the word conjugation in these languages.

Often students wonder what would be the minimum length of thesis. The thesis must contain what is specified and depending on the nature of the topic and the research design, the thesis can be short. There are masters and doctorate theses that are less than 100 pages long.

Any student writing in excess of the above normative word limits must obtain permission from the HDC.

### **Paper size and margins**

The theses should be written on ISOA A4 (297 mm x 210 mm) sized 80 grams per square metre paper. Depending on the direction of writing, the starting direction should have at least a 35 mm margin and the other sides must have a 25 mm margin. You may write on both sides of the paper.

### **Fonts and line spacing**

In the preparation of theses written in English, Times New Roman font should be used. The body texts should be in 11 or 12 points. If writing in Thaana, the font should be A-Faruma; body text is to be in 12 points. The line spacing should be 1.5. For those writing in Arabic, students must write in Traditional Arabic.

{For those not fully conversant with English, the following additional instructions may be followed:

- أن يكون حجم الخط على الأسلوب التالي. إن كان يكتب باللغة الديويهيية: وعناوين الأبواب والفصول حجم ١٥ والعناوين الجانبية حجم ١٣ ونصوص حجم ١٢ .
- أن يكون حجم الخط على الأسلوب التالي. إن كان يكتب باللغة العربية:
- الأبواب حجمها: 46 . الفصول حجمها: 34 . الباحث حجمها: 26 . المطالب حجمها: 24 . المقاصد حجمها: 20 . أ - 18 . ب - 16 . النصوص حجمها: 14 . الهوامش حجمها: 12 .
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### **Pagination**

Pages must be numbered consecutively and clearly. Large sheets of paper as insertions or appendices must be folded to open to the top and right.

### **Binding**

A thesis is submitted for examination temporarily bound. The thesis must be bound for permanent use after any amendments suggested by the examiners have been brought about. It should be bound in an appropriate colour, with thesis title, student name on the cover. The binding should be sewn or hot-glued and covered in thick board. The title, student name and year must appear on the spine. Two copies of bound theses and a soft copy of it must be deposited in the library as a requirement of graduation.

## Organization of Contents

Over the years, most universities have standardized the organization of theses, which is as follows:

- Title page
- Abstract
- Declaration
- Acknowledgments
- Table of contents
- List of tables, figures and illustrations (if list items are fewer than 10 in number, this is not necessary)
- Main text
- Bibliography or List of References
- Appendices

**Title page.** The first page of the thesis is normally the title page. On this page appears

- the full title of the thesis;
- the full name of the author as in registration record together with your qualifications;
- the degree for which the thesis is submitted (see below);
- month and year and
- the name of the faculty/centre and university in which the research was carried out.

Usually, the thesis is owned by the student and a few students later publish their work as a book. For these copyright reasons, university logo is not usually placed in student theses as it may indicate that the thesis is university property.

The degree for which the thesis is submitted is written as follows:

“Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of {name of discipline}”

If these theses were written for a doctorate, then the statement would be as follows:

“Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy”

**Abstract.** The abstract is a short summary of the thesis which includes all the aspects of the thesis including conclusions. The abstract may be 200 to 500 words long depending on whether it is a masters degree or doctorate.

**Declaration.** The declaration is essentially a statement by the student to say that the work of the thesis is students’ own. The statement for Master of Education and doctorate theses are shown below respectively. These statements are very similar to the statements recommended by Victoria University, Australia.

“I, [student name], declare that the Master by Education thesis entitled [title of thesis] is no more than 40,000 words in length including quotes and

exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work”.

Signature

Date

“I, [student name], declare that the PhD thesis entitled [title of thesis] is no more than 80,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work”.

Signature

Date

**Acknowledgments.** Acknowledgements are usually written on a new page and comprise statements of gratitude by the student for assistance received for the study and in the preparation of thesis. These may be academic, financial or other assistance and support.

**Table of contents.** The table of contents starts on a fresh page. These contents are generated automatically using Microsoft Word or other software packages. Students must get familiar with using style sheets in Word during the course of their writing theses.

**List of figures and tables.** Each of these also appears on a fresh page. They are required only if there are many tables or figures, say more than 10.

**Main text.** This part constitutes the main part of the thesis and usually has a set format. The main text is divided into a number chapters ranging from five to ten. They may, at minimum, include the following:

### **Introduction**

This is usually the first chapter and comprises the introduction to the study. The chapter outlines the following: Introduction to the problem you are investigating, the proposed solution, research questions and the significance of the study. Some students may write about the organization of the study in this chapter.

### **Literature review**

The literature review is usually a critical evaluation of previous research in the area you are studying. It is not sufficient to merely describe what other people had done in your area but you will be required to analyze their methods and outcomes and synthesize the findings in support of your thesis. This is usually carried out by writing summaries, comparing and contrasting, drawing out similarities and differences and generally

evaluating other scholars' efforts in the area. The literature review should, in the end, support the significance of your research in your choice of methods and research questions. There are many strategies for carrying out the literature review available on the Internet but the review should be based on refereed journal sources or other robust repositories. Students should restrict their literature review to the last five or ten years unless the literature cited is seminal in the area.

### **Methods**

The methods chapter deals with the research setup or context and data collection. The topics covered include discussions of research sample, instruments, procedure and data analysis. In other words, the chapter describes the steps you have taken to gather your data and analyze them. You must remember to include the safeguards you have taken to ensure that the data collected are valid and reliable, and confounding variables have been eliminated.

### **Discussion**

The discussion chapter reports the results of your study and discusses them both in the light of your research questions and the literature review. The results are written in a narrative supported by figures, illustrations and tables. As with other chapters, the results must be organized in a sequence dependent on the methods or questions or other criteria which you may have used in your thesis.

If reporting the results is the first section of this chapter, then the second part deals with the discussion and interpretation of the results. This discussion is carried out in relation to the research questions you have or themes you have identified in your research.

### **Conclusions**

The final chapter usually summarizes the outcome of the whole research effort by a discussion of the aims of the research and the conclusions you have arrived at. Invariably, this chapter discusses implications of your study for the context you have studied and concludes by a discussion of suggestions for further research and the limitations of the study.

**Variations in theses chapters.** Students must have strong mastery of the language in which the thesis is written. It is usually a long narrative, and different linguistic devices are used to make



Appendices are material not directly related to your study but supplementary to it, which you have used in your research. The material placed in appendices are usually too detailed to be placed in the main body of the thesis. A thesis should not require appendices in order for it to stand on its own. Examples of documents normally placed in appendices include interview questions, computer programs, images, transcripts of images, statistical tables, etc.

If appendices are included they should be numbered and included in the table of contents. Appendices are numbered in alphabetically or in natural numbers.

## **Editing theses**

In general, masters by research and doctorate of philosophy are more difficult to complete because these courses include self direction and writing narratives. Writing is a very important skill to acquire and often difficult to teach at graduate level. If you feel that you do not have sufficient writing skills you are well advised to do masters or doctorate by coursework.

Early in the course, the supervisor must assess your writing abilities by asking you to write a narrative long enough to assess your writing proficiency and composition skills. If you are judged to be in need of assistance, then you will require professional support in honing your writing skills. This support may be required throughout the years.

A thesis must be the student's own work and the supervisor is not expected to help you out in this task very much. The grant of the degree rests on the fact that the thesis is student's own work and the candidate must develop the competencies required to write well and argue with clarity. Acquiring these skills in writing and editing is considered an important part of your research training. Students are not expected to use paid editorial assistance to correct their own work. The use of third party assistance must be acknowledged in the thesis and must be restricted to only consistency and completeness.

## **Completion Seminars**

All students are required to make a public presentation of their research findings in the university before submitting their theses for examination. This seminar should ideally take place about three months before your submission date. The completion seminar is an opportunity for the student to get feedback from informed and experienced researchers and stakeholders. It allows the student to refine the thesis in the light of the feedback.

The Seminar will be more than an hour long with your supervisors present in the audience. The student is required to prepare an advanced summary of the research for key stakeholders and a brief for advertising among the public.

## **Submitting theses for examination**

Theses are normally submitted for examination in a bound manner. They may be bound using spiral, ring or any other form of temporary binding. The thesis is submitted with the relevant form. The names of examiners will be kept confidential but the student is free to suggest names.

It is necessary to submit an electronic copy in a single file as some examiners may have to be reached by email. The examination process is initiated once the thesis is submitted.

## **Making amendments and Oral Examination for Doctorate students**

Following the examiners' reports, the student is expected to correct the thesis. The corrections may arise from the oral examination, in case of doctorate students. The process of examining theses and oral examinations are covered in the MNU document entitled, "Doctor of Philosophy course rules." You should read these rules and familiarize yourself with the content thereof so that you may prepare for the oral examination well ahead.

Invariably, there are corrections to be made after the examination. The student must carry out these corrections as soon as possible.

## **Submission of Revised Thesis**

The revised thesis must be submitted to the Faculty/Centre with all the changes made along with the relevant form for the student to graduate. The form is attached.

The revised copies of the thesis must be bound permanently and submitted to the Faculty/Centre. Once these are received, the Faculty/Centre through the Students Administrative Service will send you an official "pass letter." The specifications for the bound copy are as follows:

	<i>Cover</i>	<i>Spine</i>
Colour	Black* if PhD	Black* if PhD
Title of thesis	Full title	Short title
Student name	Full name	Name with initials
Year		Year of submission

*Masters theses may be bound in Faculty/Centre colour or any other colour.*

The copies required and the nature of the electronic copy are included in the form, "Submission of Final Version of Thesis."

Theses of students will be made available on MNU's on-line library resources unless students expressly disallow it. Students who wish to restrict access must consult the HDC through your Faculty/Centre.

## **Bibliography**

There are many books and references on theses preparation. If I were to name **the best two books** for theses writing I would name the following:

Cone, J.D., Foster & Foster, S.L. (2006). *Dissertations and theses from start to finish: psychology and related fields (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.)*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Booth, W.C., Colomb, G.G., & Williams, J.M. (2008). *The craft of research (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)*. Chicago: The University of Chicago.

*Approved by HDC on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2012*