Writing your Thesis

These notes provide a general introduction to writing your thesis. Additional, specific instructions may be provided by your department.

What documentation do I need to submit?
You need two bound copies of your thesis – one for the Library and one for your department. You should submit two copies of both the abstract (one of them will be sent to Aslib for inclusion in the Index to theses accepted for higher degrees in the universities of Great Britain and Ireland) and the title page. An extra copy of the table of contents should be submitted, along with the Higher Degree Entry Form that includes the Library declaration statement and, for a Ph.D., a British Library agreement form.

What about basic formatting?
- Paper - use good quality A4 paper and print on one side only.
- Margins - leave sensible margins: at least 2 cm at the top, bottom and right-hand margins and a left-hand margin of 4 cm to allow for binding.
- Spacing - use double or one and a half spacing. (Single spacing can be used for footnotes).
- Pagination - number pages consecutively throughout, including all preliminary material and appendices (you may want to do the numbering once the final version of the thesis is complete!) Use running page numbers for a multi-volume thesis, but ensure each volume has its own title page.
- Type - your thesis should be clearly printed (or typed), since the British Library may need to produce a microfilm copy at a later date. Photocopies may not be suitable.

How should the contents be set out?
- Abstract - it should be printed on one side of A4 with your name and the title of the thesis at the top (no more than 300 words). It should be bound near the front of the thesis.
- Title page - it should include the full title and sub-title; the total number of volumes and the volume number (if more than one); your full name; the degree for which the thesis is being submitted (M.Phil., Ph.D., etc); the name of the University and the department in which the research was undertaken; and the year of submission. The title should give an adequate indication of the subject matter to help other researchers make use of the thesis.
- Table of contents - it should follow the title page and list all sections of the thesis with their corresponding page numbers. For more than one volume, the whole contents should appear in the first volume and then a specific list of contents in each subsequent volume. A list of tables and illustrations, with page numbers, should follow the table of contents.
• Declaration - include a declaration indicating what material (if any) has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university and any contributions from other researchers. A statement of copyright should also be included to safeguard your author’s rights: “The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published in any format, including electronic and the Internet, without the author’s prior written consent. All information derived from this thesis must be acknowledged appropriately”.

• Main text - it should be divided into chapters, each with a clear title.

• Appendices - if used, each one should have a descriptive title.

• Bibliography – it should contain all sources consulted.

**When and how should I use footnotes?**

Footnotes can be a nuisance to the reader and so should be used only where appropriate. In your thesis it is acceptable to use footnotes:

- To amplify a point that is not central to the main argument of the text but that is not long enough to form an appendix.

- To provide cross-references to other parts of the thesis.

- To acknowledge direct quotations or sources of information.

- To cite the authority for statements you have made, allowing the reader to check the evidence on which the argument is based.

Footnotes can be single spaced and are usually set out at the foot of the page, separated from the main text by a solid line. Footnotes that give bibliographic citations should be clear and accurate, but concise. If a full bibliography is included in the thesis, reference footnotes need only provide enough information to point the reader to the entry in the bibliography, where further details can be found.

The first reference to any work should include: the author’s name, the full title of the work (underlined), the date of publication or full publication details if necessary (in round brackets) and the relevant page numbers, e.g. Kate L. Turabian, *A manual for writers of research papers, theses and dissertations* (1982), pp. 94-107. Subsequent references to the same work can be given in an abbreviated form. The common alternatives are:

- Author’s surname, contraction of the title and page numbers:
  
  Turabian, *A manual for writers*, pp. 94-107

- Author’s surname, date of publication in round brackets and page numbers:

  Turabian (1982), pp. 94-107

- Author’s surname, Latin phrase op. cit (“in the work cited”) and page numbers:

  Turabian, op. cit, pp. 94-107

- Author’s surname and page numbers:

  Turabian, pp. 94-107
These abbreviated forms should be used with care – they all assume that no author with the same surname has been cited and the last example also assumes that no other work by that author has been cited either. Whatever convention you choose to use, be consistent. As an alternative to footnotes you could use “end notes”, listing your notes in numerical order at the end of each chapter, but these can be difficult to follow. In Science theses footnotes are often avoided by inserting a short reference into the main body of the text (the Harvard System). For more information on this and other methods of citing references, see the Library guide Writing your bibliography and citing references.

**How should a bibliography be arranged?**

A bibliography should include all relevant material that has been consulted and found useful, whether or not it has been cited in the thesis. It can be divided into sections either by subject or by manuscript, primary and secondary sources. There are various ways of setting out a bibliography, but any system can be followed as long as it is clear and consistent. For further information on citing bibliographic references, see the Library guide Writing your bibliography and Citing References.

**Is there a particular format for binding?**

Your thesis should be hard bound in cloth binding of a serviceable (dark) colour (usually black), with all pages firmly secured. Ideally each volume should not be more than 7 cm thick. The front cover should bear your name, the title of your thesis, the degree for which you are submitting it and the year of submission. The spine should have at least your name, degree and year. If the thesis extends to more than one volume, the cover and spine should also carry the volume number. Make sure you give the binder plenty of time to do the work. Look in your local yellow pages for binders in your area.

**How do I include accompanying material?**

Wherever possible, all maps, diagrams, charts, illustrations, photographs and computer printout should be bound in the thesis near the appropriate piece of text. If the material can not be bound in, as in the case of computer disks, folded maps, audio cassettes or videos, a pocket to hold it can be made inside the back cover of the thesis. If there is a lot of supplementary material or it is an awkward shape, it can constitute a separate volume: have it packaged in a rigid box of roughly the same size and appearance as your thesis and label it in the same way as the bound volume. Larger items, like maps or music compositions, can be packaged in a similarly labelled portfolio.
Where can I get more information on writing a thesis?

Your department and the Graduate School will be able to offer advice and answer queries and The University Calendar gives specific guidelines in the Rules for the Submission of Work for Higher Degrees. The following list of books may get you started:


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For more details, please see our web pages:

This leaflet is also available in alternative formats on request