

Northern Illinois University



The Graduate School

Guidelines for Preparing a Thesis at NIU

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Introduction

This document focuses on the preparation of a master’s thesis for degree completion at NIU. A “thesis” is the research paper required for some master's degree programs. Master’s thesis students work under the direction of a faculty member in their discipline; this faculty member is called the student’s thesis “director.”

The Thesis

The NIU Graduate Council defines a thesis as "a scholarly contribution to knowledge. Its subject must be in the area of the student’s major and be approved by the student's thesis director and, ultimately, by the thesis advisory committee. The thesis presents research that has been conducted under the supervision of a graduate faculty member from the student’s major department The document may not have been published previously, and the thesis must be successfully defended in an oral examination” (*NIU Graduate Catalog*).

Students are responsible for satisfying all requirements for the thesis that may be specific or unique to their departments of study in addition to those required by the Graduate School, as detailed in this document.

While Graduate School policy states that published manuscripts are not acceptable in fulfilling the thesis requirements for graduate degree programs, it is permissible to include some previously published material (for example, a chapter, a section, or data/findings) in the thesis so long as the thesis as a whole is original, unpublished work. A thesis that includes previously published material must conform to all format requirements of the Graduate School as detailed in the Guidelines for Theses and Dissertations at NIU and be stylistically and organizationally coherent. Such a thesis must contain a single overarching abstract, a single integrative introduction, and a single unifying conclusion. In addition, the student must:

- Be the principal author of the published work.
- Obtain both advisory committee and Thesis Office approval to include published work in the thesis in advance of submitting the work for Graduate School review.
- Obtain written permission from the publisher to use the material in the specific context of a thesis.
- Include that permission (a scanned letter or email) in an appendix to the thesis.

- Acknowledge the material in a footnote on the first page of the previously published chapter or section. Sometimes the exact language of the note will be stipulated in the permission from the publisher. Otherwise, use a statement similar to the following: “This [or ‘Parts of this . . . ,’ as appropriate] chapter [or section, as appropriate] was [or ‘were,’ as appropriate] previously published as [full citation as per the APA, 6th edition]. It is reprinted by permission of [copyright holder’s name as stipulated in the permission letter].”

Thesis Office staff are available to advise students on style and format requirements of theses in all disciplines, but students are encouraged to become familiar with the variety of helpful resources and instructions found on the Thesis and Dissertation Office webpage.

All theses accepted for degrees at NIU, following successful defense, must be submitted to the Graduate School Thesis Office in electronic form (PDF) for review and final approval. Throughout this document and other resources of the Thesis Office, the acronym “ETD” stands for “electronic thesis/dissertation.” The complete submission process is thoroughly detailed in “The Submission Process” found on the Thesis and Dissertation Office webpage.

Academic Integrity

Student papers are to be prepared with integrity. Plagiarism is the attempt to present another’s work as one’s own. Plagiarism includes copying or paraphrasing material from books, periodicals, or other sources without identifying and acknowledging these sources.

Plagiarism, falsification of data, or other research misconduct may result in a thesis being declared unacceptable. Further, the student may be subject to suspension or dismissal from the university, revocation of the degree, or other sanctions if he or she is found to have plagiarized any part of his or her thesis.

Research Involving Human Subjects, Live Vertebrate Animals, and Recombinant DNA

Any graduate student who proposes to undertake research involving human subjects, live vertebrate animals, or recombinant DNA must obtain approval for the project from NIU’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) **before the data collection phase begins**. Research using questionnaires, evaluations, surveys (mailed or otherwise conducted), or personal interviews is included in the category of human subjects research.

Forms requesting approval for such research may be obtained from most departmental offices or from the Office of Research Compliance and Integrity. The ORCI also offers specific training, resources, and guidance for researchers.

Immediately after a thesis topic has been approved, the student must submit an IRB inquiry form to the Graduate School, a milestone in the Degree Progress Report. This form is found in the Forms section of the Graduate School website.

Style

All papers are to be written with spelling, grammar, syntax, and punctuation consistent with

Standard American Edited English for academic audiences, except for foreign-language citations and quotations and except for theses within the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, which may be partially or wholly in the language appropriate to the degree.

Style Manuals

The default documentation style of the Graduate School is American Psychological Association (APA), 6th ed., but the Graduate School does not specify a particular manual of style because different disciplines follow different practices. A department may designate a style appropriate to its scholarly literature, for example:

- American Antiquity
- American Chemical Society
- American Dietetics Association (ADA)
- American Mathematical Society
- American Medical Association (AMA)
- American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME)
- Chicago or Turabian
- Modern Language Association (MLA)

In cases where the department's preferred style differs in its format requirements (i.e., margins, pagination, line spacing) from the Graduate School guidelines presented here, **Graduate School requirements take precedence.**

In any case, the student is required to be consistent in the use of the style adopted. The student must also follow the most current edition of any style manual. If a student has questions regarding style manuals or documentation, contact the Thesis Office.

Theses in Foreign Languages and Literatures

If the primary language of the thesis is not English, an additional copy of the abstract in English must be included with the document.

Copyright and Permissions

Under federal law, the author of a thesis automatically has ownership rights and copyright protection for that paper. A student who wishes to declare this may insert a copyright notice on the title page, for example:

© 2014 Chris Student

Additional legal protection may be obtained by registering the thesis with the U.S. Copyright Office of the Library of Congress, but the Graduate School does not require copyright registration.

If your thesis includes materials that are themselves protected by copyright, for example, artworks, graphics, musical scores, lyrics, test instruments, etc., you must obtain permission to include them in your thesis. Each copyright holder will need to be contacted for

permission and the subsequent permission must be granted in writing, although it may be an e-mail or other electronic medium. **Permissions must be in hand before the paper is defended.**

Copyright is a complex body of law and may be difficult for students to understand. Contact the Thesis Office if you have any questions.

Freelance Formatters and Editors

As a courtesy for students, the Graduate School maintains a list of freelancers who have indicated their availability and interest in formatting theses for a fee. This list is found on the Thesis Office website. Hiring a professional freelancer does not absolve students of the responsibility to ensure the paper meets the standards and requirements of the Graduate School. Likewise, the Graduate School cannot assume responsibility for the quality of work done by a freelancer.

The Thesis Office recommends that students confer with the freelancer about rates, schedules, and details of the particular manuscript before work begins so that both parties have a firm understanding about the work to be performed and the charges to be paid. Graduate School deadlines are firm and will not be waived because the student has failed to allow sufficient time for the freelancer to complete the work.

Organization of the Thesis

A thesis is organized as follows. **Examples and templates may be found on the Thesis and Dissertation Office webpage.**

- Abstract

Front Matter (paginated with lowercase Roman numerals)

- Title Page (p. i)
- Acknowledgements (optional, p. ii)
- Dedication (optional, p. iii)
- Table of Contents (p. ii, iii, or iv)
- List of Tables (if necessary)
- List of Figures (if necessary)
- List of Appendices (if necessary)
- Preface (optional)

Body (paginated with Arabic numerals)

- Main body of thesis (begins on p. 1)

Back Matter (numbered in sequence from the last page of the body of the text)

- References/Bibliography/Works Cited/Works Consulted (**select one** as appropriate for literature in your discipline)
- Appendices (if applicable)

Abstract

There is no word limit on abstracts. The abstract is neither paginated nor counted in the front matter pagination. Abstracts may not include citations.

Title Page

The title page is the first page of the thesis (p. i, but the page number is suppressed, i.e., hidden). All information on this page (except the copyright statement and director information) is typed in capital letters. The remaining front matter is paginated from this page forward in lowercase Roman numerals.

Acknowledgements

This optional page immediately follows the title page. Acknowledgements recognize the persons or organizations to whom the author is indebted for guidance and assistance, those to whom he or she is grateful for any special or nonroutine aid, and sources of any financial support received for the work. Acknowledgements should be expressed simply, succinctly, and tactfully.

Dedication

A dedication page is also optional and follows the acknowledgements page. The dedication is normally limited to one or two lines.

Table of Contents

The Table of Contents contains all front matter material that follows it, such as the List of Tables, List of Figures, List of Appendices, and Preface. It also lists the chapters or other main divisions of the body of the work, the bibliography, and any appendix (if included). Each item in the Table of Contents must be worded exactly as it appears in the text.

Capitalize all letters of chapter titles in the Table of Contents. Indent subheadings and list them under the chapter heading using traditional title capitalization style, i.e., uppercase and lowercase letters.

The Table of Contents must present all chapter titles. Headings and subheadings within chapters may also be listed on the Table of Contents, but if you choose to include any particular level of heading below the chapter level, all headings of that level throughout the paper must also be listed.

A page number must be specified for each listing in the Table of Contents, including chapter titles. Single-digit page numbers should be lined up with the last digit of multiple-digit page numbers.

List of Tables

This list appears after the Table of Contents. Each title must be worded exactly as it appears on the table in the document. All tables in the text and in the appendices must be included.

List of Figures

This list appears after the List of Tables. Each entry must be worded exactly as it is worded in the figure title, except that parenthetical information in the figure legend that has meaning only in reference to the figure need not appear in the figure title in this list. All figures appearing in the text and appendices must be included on this list.

When a figure is preceded by a cover page containing its number and legend, this page number is the one listed in the List of Figures.

List of Appendices

If there are two or more appendices, they must appear on a List of Appendices following the List of Figures. Each appendix title must be worded exactly as it is worded in the appendix. Each appendix must be preceded by a title page and the number of the title page is its page number on the List of Appendices.

Preface

A preface is optional and includes explanatory remarks about the background of the study. It immediately precedes Chapter 1 and is paginated as part of the front matter (with lowercase Roman numerals).

Body

The body of the thesis follows the front matter. A thesis is divided into chapters, which also may be divided into sections and subsections. The body of the text is paginated with Arabic numerals, starting with p. 1.

References/Bibliography/Works Cited/Works Consulted

Different academic disciplines may prefer different terms or titles for this list. Choose the term or title appropriate for your discipline. However, "References" and "Works Cited" include only those works actually cited in the text. "Bibliography" and "Works Consulted" list all works cited in the text plus other background works that may be relevant to the study but not explicitly cited in the text. No matter what you call the list, each entry should be single-spaced with a double space between entries. **Do not split an entry across a page break.**

There must be a reference entry for every citation in the text, with spelling, dates, publishing information, etc., that are correct and presented consistently. Accuracy is very important. **Check the reference list against the textual citations before submitting the postdefense version for review.**

Appendices

Normally, appendices are placed after the reference list. An appendix is the appropriate location for various types of materials that are germane to the research being reported but are considered somewhat tangential to the text itself. Examples are raw data, questionnaires, letters of transmittal, etc. Sometimes material is placed in an appendix because its length would make it too intrusive if it appeared in the text. The appendices must conform to all pagination and margin guidelines but may be single- or double-spaced.

Each appendix should be provided with a title. When more than one appendix is included, each of the appendices must be designated by a letter (APPENDIX A, APPENDIX B, etc.) as well as by title. The appendix letter and title should be placed on a separate cover page preceding the material, in all capitals, centered halfway down the page. If the title is longer than two lines, it should be arranged in inverted pyramid style and double-spaced. The page number is not printed on the cover page, but this page is counted in the pagination.

A List of Appendices in the front matter is required if the paper contains two or more appendices. Because the appendix cover page is considered the first page of the appendix, it is the number that is printed in the List of Appendices, even though the page number is suppressed on the cover page itself.

If the paper contains only one appendix, no List of Appendices is needed; in that case, the appendix would be indicated at the end of the Table of Contents.

Format

Fonts

A standard font (such as Times New Roman) of either 10- or 12-point size should be used. The same font must be used throughout the thesis, with the exception of material contained within tables or figures. Italics and boldface are acceptable only for occasional, appropriate use.

All fonts must be embedded. Manuscripts without embedded fonts may cause all punctuation and formatting to disappear when the document is printed from the digital file. To avoid this problem, create your manuscript using a TrueType font—**not** a scalable font. Select one of the following:

- *Arial 10pt
- Garamond 12pt
- ***Georgia 12pt**
- Microsoft Sans Serif 10 or 12pt
- Tahoma 10 or 12pt
- *Times New Roman 12pt (preferred)
- *Trebuchet MS 10 or 12pt
- *Verdana 10pt

* Web font designed for easy screen readability. Because many readers are likely to view and/or use your thesis on screen, you may wish to improve the readability of your text by using one of these fonts.

If you must embed fonts after the work has been created, follow these steps (for MS Word 2010 on a PC):

1. Pull down the File menu and choose Options.
2. Select Save.
3. Check the box to “Embed fonts in the file.”
4. Save the document.

If you are using a Mac, fonts are automatically embedded during conversion to PDF.

Color

Native digital manuscripts will appear in color when viewed electronically. Microfilm and print reproductions will **not** preserve color; all colors will appear in shades of gray and may compromise legibility of figures, illustrations, photographs, and graphics. Data and information that are color-coded or based on color shading may not be interpretable.

Paper Size and Margins

The paper size selected must be **Letter** (8.5” x 11”). The margins on each page must be 1 inch all around (essentially forming a 1-inch frame of white space), except on pages that begin with a first-level heading (for example, the first page of each chapter). On those pages, the top margin above the heading must be 2 to 2.25 inches. **All text, including page numbers, footnotes, tables, and figures, must be fully within the specified margins.**

Line Spacing

All text in the main body of a thesis must be double-spaced, with the exception of block quotations, table and figure titles, notes, and some tabular material, which should be single-spaced.

References/Bibliography entries should be single-spaced with a double space between entries.

Pagination

Except for the abstract, every page must have a number, though on certain pages the number is suppressed (hidden). Page numbers are placed in the upper right-hand corner within the required 1-inch top and right margins (i.e., a minimum of 1 inch of white space above the number and 1 inch of white space to the right of the number). Numbers may not be embellished with periods, dashes, hyphens, or letters (e.g., "43a"). **Running heads should not be used.**

Pages in the front matter are numbered with lowercase Roman numerals. Body pages are numbered with Arabic numerals. The title page is always page i, and the first page of the body is always page 1. Back matter (i.e., references and appendices) are numbered in sequence from the last page of the text. The abstract is an independent document and is neither paginated nor counted in the front matter pagination.

Suppress the page numbers on the following pages: all abstract pages (remember that the abstract is not paginated at all, not even suppressed), title page, figure legend cover pages (if used), appendix cover pages, and any page with a 2-inch top margin, such as **the first page** of chapters, front matter sections (Table of Contents, List of Tables, etc.), and References or Bibliography. Subsequent pages of these sections are numbered.

Headings

A consistent system of headings must be used throughout the thesis. Headings break a large, densely packed document into smaller units of material based on their relationship to the material above and below them. A clear, sensible system of headings aids readers in understanding complex documents.

At minimum, all theses must have chapter headings; additional headings/subheadings are optional but often advisable. The chapter number and title must be typed in the same manner for all chapters. If chapters are further subdivided, all second-level headings within chapters must be typographically alike, and so on. Five levels of headings are allowable, but not all papers will need all five levels. Except for fifth-level headings, spacing above and below headings should be triple-spaced consistently throughout the paper to clearly distinguish the headings from the text. Fifth-level headings are “run in” the line of text and paragraph indented.

A heading near the bottom of a page must be followed by at least one line of text on the same page. If there is not sufficient space within the required margins to accommodate a line of text, bump the heading to the top of the next page.

Underlining

Certain elements require underlining (also called “ruling”), and underlining should not be confused with italicization (see Italics section below). **Heading levels 3-5 should be underlined rather than italicized, contra APA.** Underlining must be done with a solid line (spaces between underlined words must also be underlined). Do not underline terminal punctuation.

Italics

Italics should be used for titles of books and journals in the References/Bibliography and in the body of the text. Italics should also be used for variables and statistical symbols (e.g., *t*, *p*, etc.). Other applications of italic type are acceptable only for occasional, appropriate use. Nonitalic or “ordinary” type is called “roman.”

Leader Dots

Leader dots should be used in the Table of Contents, List of Tables, List of Figures, and List of Appendices. They should follow the last word of the heading or title, should be lined up under one another, and should not run directly up to the page number.

Block Quotations

Block quotations are single-spaced (contra MLA), set off from the text without quotation marks, and indented by one tab. The terminal punctuation of a block quotation follows the last word of the quoted passage, then the citation is placed after without additional punctuation. For example:

... end of quotation. (citation)

Footnotes

Notes (if any) should be positioned as footnotes, placed at the bottom of the page on which the note is “called out” by a superscript numeral. Entries should be single-spaced with a double space between entries. The numbering of footnotes begins anew with each chapter.

Mathematical and Chemical Notations

Symbols other than letters of the Roman alphabet and Arabic numerals should match the type style used for the rest of the thesis whenever possible and ideally should be selected from the fonts in the program used to prepare the body of the text. Fonts must be embedded; select a font from those recommended in the Fonts section above or follow the instructions for embedding fonts throughout the final document.

There should be spacing above, below, and between lines of mathematical or chemical notation presented on separate lines to ensure visual clarity. There should be at least two lines of space between the subscripts of one line and the superscripts of the line below.

Tables and Figures

Tables, including those in the appendices, are to be numbered consecutively throughout the thesis in order of appearance. The same is true for figures and other types of illustrations. Place the number and title of a table above the table. Place the number and title of a figure below the figure or on a cover page as described below. The typeface of table and figure titles must match that of the text.

All tables and figures must be referenced explicitly in the text immediately preceding their placement. If a table or figure is no more than half a page in size, it should be inserted at the paragraph break following its reference, if space permits. Do not interrupt a paragraph on a given page with the placement of a table or figure. Finish the paragraph before positioning the table or figure. **If there is not sufficient space on the page to place the table or figure, continue the text to the normal bottom margin and place the table or figure on the next page.**

If a table or figure is more than half a page in size, it should be placed by itself on the page immediately following the page on which it is first mentioned. **In this case, continue text to the normal bottom margin on the preceding page and resume the text normally across the page break**, continuing on the page following the full-page table or figure.

If a table is longer than one page, it should begin at the top of a page and continue on succeeding pages as necessary, with the notation “continued on following page” (in parentheses) at the bottom of the page and a notation such as “Table 1 (continued)” at the top of succeeding pages.

If two or more small tables or figures are included on a single page, do not combine them with text. **In all cases, tables or figures should be separated from the text and from each other by at least four lines of space.**

Tables and figures must fit within the prescribed margins. Tables and figures may be positioned horizontally on the page (called “landscape”). The top of a landscaped table or figure must run along the left margin when the page is viewed vertically (“portrait” orientation), but the **page number must still be in portrait orientation** and in the same upper right location as required on ordinary text pages.

When a table or figure is referred to in the text, the reference should be to the table number, not to “the table below.” If a figure legend appears on a cover page, the page number **is not** printed on the cover page, but a number **is** printed on the page on which the figure appears. However, the page number of the cover page is the number that appears on the List of Figures. If a cover page is used for any figure, **all** figures in the paper must have cover pages. Notes for a table should be placed directly below the table, not at the foot of the page.

File Format

Postdefense theses must be submitted to the Thesis Office in Adobe PDF. Files may not be compressed (i.e., zip files) or password protected. Digital signatures are not allowed. You are wholly responsible for the appearance of your manuscript in PDF. It will appear and may be downloaded exactly as you submit it. The maximum file size supported by the electronic submission platform is 1000 MB, including the thesis and all supplemental files.

Multimedia Files

The following formats are acceptable with external or internal links:

Images: GIF (.gif); JPEG (.jpeg); TIFF (.tif)

Video: Apple Quick Time (.mov); Microsoft Audio Video Interleaved (.avi); MPEG (.mpeg)

Audio: AIF (.aif); CD-DA; CD-ROM/XA; MIDI (.midi); MPEG-2; SND (.snd); WAV (.wav)

See the Supplemental Materials section below for additional requirements regarding media files.

Supplemental Materials

If you wish to include audio or video files, they must be submitted as supplementary files to reduce the size of the main document. These files are uploaded separately during the online

submission process (see Submission Guidelines for more information). Include a description of each file (or set of files, if more appropriate) in your abstract. The maximum file size supported by the electronic submission platform is 1000 MB.