

Guide for Preparing a Proposal, Thesis or Research Paper

The information contained in this guide is intended to supplement the information presented in the general regulations of the University of Ottawa. Important information can be found here: <https://www.uottawa.ca/graduate-studies/students/theses>. Please note that the information related to the thesis and research paper may change at any time.



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Université d'Ottawa
Département de communication

<https://arts.uottawa.ca/communication/en/graduate>

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1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Definitions and Goals

The General Regulations of the University of Ottawa define a thesis and a research paper as follows:

Thesis

“A thesis is a significant original body of work produced by a student and put in written form... A master’s thesis must show that the student is able to work in a scholarly manner and is acquainted with the principal works published on the subject of the thesis. As much as possible, it should be an original contribution... A good thesis is thoroughly researched; demonstrates rigorous critical thinking and analysis; presents a detailed methodology and accurate results; and includes tenacious verification of knowledge claims.”

Research Paper

“The research paper (or report), is shorter than a thesis, and consists of extensive research and a strict methodology. The student must show the ability to work independently in a scholarly manner, just as with a thesis. In some disciplines... the research paper may be either a case study or take the form of a more theoretical paper. “

Format of the Thesis and Research Paper

Theses submitted for the M.A. in Communication should be no less than 25,000 words and no more than 30,000 words in length (i.e. 80 – 100 pages, excluding bibliographic references, and any appendices which provide supporting information).

Research papers submitted for the M.A. in Communication should be no less than 15,000 words and no more than 20,000 words in length (i.e. 50 – 60 pages, excluding bibliographic references, and any appendices which provide supporting information).

Note: If you submit a thesis or research paper that exceeds the above specified word/page limit, examiners may assign the thesis or research paper a non-satisfactory verdict (equivalent to a failure). If your thesis or paper is over the word/page limit, please ensure you ask your examiner(s) for their written consent prior to submission.

The Supervisor

The role of the supervisor is to advise the student on all aspects of the research project, including the choice of the research topic, the problem to be addressed, the literature review, the theoretical

framework, the methodological choices, the feasibility of the research, work schedule, etc. The student is responsible for choosing a supervisor with whom they agree on the procedures to follow and a schedule of meetings. As a student, please ensure you choose a supervisor with whom you will establish a mutual relationship of trust and respect. As the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies sector of the University of Ottawa states: “Before thinking about a supervisor, students should make sure they are committing to the area of study that most interests them. They should ask themselves whether they are enthusiastic enough about a topic area to sustain this enthusiasm over the period of time it will take to prepare the thesis. Speaking to students and professors who do research in the proposed area of study will help clarify the student’s thoughts. The students should make sure they are well-informed before they approach any potential supervisors.”

Source: <https://www.uottawa.ca/graduate-studies/students/theses/supervision>

Please note: “A professor is not obligated to take on a student if he or she feels the match-up would not be a good one, or if the professor lacks lab space, time, or funding.”

Source : <https://www.uottawa.ca/graduate-studies/students/theses/supervision>

For information to collect before contacting a potential thesis supervisor:

<https://www.uottawa.ca/graduate-studies/students/theses/supervision/information-collect-contacting-potential-supervisor>

Questions to ask following a meeting with the potential supervisor:

<https://www.uottawa.ca/graduate-studies/students/theses/supervision/questions-ask-after-meeting-potential-supervisor>

2. WRITING THE M.A. THESIS AND RESEARCH PAPER PROPOSAL

Students are required to submit a research proposal before formally starting the research for their thesis or research paper.

The proposal should situate the project within the theoretical tradition that informs the work and outline the major substantive research findings in the field. The student must conduct a review of the literature related to their field of research in order to identify the theories, concepts and / or relevant hypotheses. They must then select the most pertinent information and justify their choice in order to clarify their research question or formulate their own hypotheses. These must be verified according to a methodology that the student must also specify. In a thesis or a research paper, the student claims a position that they have to defend.

Thesis and research paper proposals must not exceed 3000 words, that is 12 to 15 pages (excluding the cover page, abstract, table of contents, and bibliography). Since the proposal is the initial research statement, it begins with a concise and clear statement of the general research question. The general research question can be thought of as a "puzzle" or a problem that you are trying to solve. At this stage, it is not a question of presenting a solution, but a description of the responses / anticipated results and, above all, the approach that will be implemented to get there.

Structure and Content of the Thesis and Research Paper Proposal

Presentation Format

3000 words (12-15 pages) maximum (excluding the cover page, abstract, table of contents, and bibliography). It is imperative to abide by these requirements as the proposal is also an exercise in concision.

- Font: *Times New Roman 12*, double-spaced
- Referencing Style: APA (<https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/>)

Content to Include

- Title Page
- Short Summary / Abstract
- Table of Contents
- Introduction
- Problematization
- Methodology
- Conclusion
- Thesis or Research Paper Plan
- Timelines
- Bibliography

Content Overview

Title Page

- Title of the thesis or research paper and date.
- Student name, student number.
- Key words: 2 on the concepts, 2 on the methods, 1 on the field of observation.
- Department, University.

Short Summary / Abstract (100 words)

The abstract for a research proposal typically answers the following questions:

- What is the subject / topic / issue at hand?
- What is the guiding theoretical framework?
- What is the general problem?
- Which methods and research techniques will be used?
- What are the expected / anticipated findings?

Table of Contents

Introduction (1-2 pages)

- General presentation of the problem.
- Context / explanation of the proposed research.
- Research objectives.

Problematization (including a literature review) (4-5 pages)

The primary aim of this section is to provide evidence that you understand the broader issues associated with the topic selected. The text should be presented in an essay format. In this part of the research proposal, it is important to provide an overview of the fundamental concepts related to your theoretical framework and define the key concepts that will be used to guide your research.

The specific objectives are:

- Examine the main theories relating to the subject of study.
- Explanation of a theoretical framework specific to the subject being studied.
- Definition of the key concepts which will be used to guide the research (by specifying how they are defended by certain researchers and disputed by others, and also how they fit within the general theoretical paradigm in which the project is situated).

In the literature review you are not stating your opinion. Instead, the aim is to demonstrate, through strong argumentation, that you are aware of the various positions taken by different authors on the subject of your research. The structure should be based on an ‘inverted triangle’ model – i.e. from the general to the specific.

You will therefore summarize the main ideas, concepts, arguments, and points of view proposed in the relevant research and their implications for your work. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the statements or positions adopted by different authors in your field of research?
- What postulates (or paradigms) support these positions?
- What are the foundations of the proposals put forward by the researchers? (In other words, are these arguments based on observable facts or on speculation).
- What are the consequences, if any, of their findings on your own research?
- What can you learn from building your own research?

You will conclude this section by presenting the theoretical framework developed from the concepts or theories identified above, and you will demonstrate how the main question, or your hypotheses, came from research done on the subject. *(i.e. Proponents of perspective X claim/argue/assert that In contrast, proponents of perspective Y claim/argue/assert that ...These competing views give rise to question/hypothesis Z).*

Note: The central research question must be clearly stated at the end of the literature review.

Methodology (4-5 pages)

It is important for the student to establish how the proposed research methodology will not only produce valid data, but also facilitate an analysis that will provide congruent answers to the questions posed at the outset.

Description of the methodology proposed in the research.

- Identify the strengths, weaknesses, and limits of the methodology.
- Identify the sources of information or data that will be used.
- Describe the data collection instruments.
- Describe the value and availability of this data.

If your proposed thesis research involves human subjects (e.g. as interviewees or as participants in a small group experiment), you must obtain approval from the appropriate ethics board (www.uottawa.ca/research/ethics) before you will be permitted to begin collecting your data.

Conclusion (1-2 pages)

Presentation of a brief discussion on the importance and relevance of the research problem (how the research results may potentially contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field).

Thesis or Research Paper Plan (1-1.5 pages)

Listing of chapter titles and brief summary (i.e. 3-4 sentences maximum) of chapter content.

Timeline (1 page)

- Presentation of a (provisional) work schedule.
- Where applicable, students must take into account the deadline for approval of their project by the ethics committee.

Bibliography

Work cited in the proposal and other relevant work in the area of study.

3. WRITING THE M.A. THESIS AND RESEARCH PAPER

The master's thesis and research paper should reveal that the candidate is able to work in a scholarly manner and is acquainted with the principal works published on the subject of the thesis. Insofar as it is possible, an M.A. thesis should be an original contribution to the advancement of knowledge.

Regardless of the time and effort devoted to research, the evaluation essentially takes into account the quality of the written document both in terms of content (relevance) and in terms of form (structure and clarity of the thesis), as well as the defense in the case of a master's thesis. Although each case is unique, there are general rules for writing and presenting a thesis or research paper. The following pages can serve as a guide in this regard. We also encourage you to consult the following website on this subject:

<https://www.uottawa.ca/graduate-studies/students/theses/writing>

Structure of the Thesis and Research Paper

For a 25,000-word M.A. Thesis (approximately 100 pages)

- Font: *Times New Roman 12*.
- Double spaced.
- Referencing Format: APA

For a 12,500-word M.A. Research paper (approximately 50 pages). Proportionally distributed according to the orientation and the theoretical and methodological limits set by the supervisor.

- Font: *Times New Roman 12*.
- Double spaced.
- Referencing Format: APA

Note: Examiners may refuse to assess a thesis or research paper if it exceeds the specified word limit by more than 10%.

Sections of the Thesis and Research Paper

- Abstract
- Acknowledgements
- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: Problematization
- Chapter 3: Methodology
- Chapter 4: Results and Discussion
- Chapter 5: Conclusion
- Bibliography
- Appendices

Abstract (150 words maximum)

A succinct summary of the research question(s), the research design and methodology, and the key findings. In the final sentence, the main conclusion of the research should be provided.

Structure of the abstract:

- What is the subject/topic/issue at hand? What is the conceptual/theoretical framework guiding the study and the central research problem/question? What methodology has been employed? What are the key finding(s)? What is the contribution to the advancement of knowledge?

Acknowledgements

Writing a research paper or thesis requires energy, motivation and conviction. It is an endeavour that is seldom achieved alone. Thus, it is common practice in academia to recognize the contribution of people who have, directly or indirectly, helped us achieve our goal. Of course, electing to have an acknowledgements section is a personal decision. Acknowledgements are typically meant to pay tribute to people close to us and to one's thesis or research paper supervisor. The student who chooses this option will do so in a simple and efficient manner, in one or two paragraphs on a separate page positioned just ahead of the table of contents.

With regard to a dedication, which also comes ahead of the table of contents (but after the acknowledgements), it is intended to pay homage to one or a few people who, in the eyes of the student, have played a meaningful role. It too, of course, is optional.

Chapter 1: Introduction (between 4 and 8 pages)

Presentation of the general problem (motivation, context, current relevance of the subject, general and specific questions).

Structure:

- What is the research question?
- What is the background / context? (Avoid turning this into a historical essay or, in the case of a work that originates from personal experience, into an autobiographical essay).
- What is the theoretical framework? (Do not develop arguments, specify the theoretical context in which the thesis is written).
- What is the general research question(s)?
- Describe the methodology or operationalization to answer the general research question (2-4 paragraphs: "This or that methodology was used in circumstances A, B, C")
- Presentation of the general plan of the thesis or research paper, highlighting the important elements of each chapter (one paragraph per chapter)

Note: If the research is inspired by a social, political, cultural, historical, current media question, or a problem raised in the literature, it should present its conceptual context and highlight the potential contribution of the proposed research.

Chapter 2: Problematization (between 20 and 40 pages)

An exhaustive review of the literature (6,250 words / 20-22 pages), leading to a specification of the research questions or hypotheses. It is a question of making a selection among the works and theories surrounding the research question and specifying how these contribute to the formulation of the project.

- Presentation of the conceptual framework (or theoretical framework) of the research (1,250 words / 3-4 pages): definitions of concepts, models or theoretical approaches.
- Presentation of research questions and hypotheses.
- Presentation of a clear and concise argument (750 words / 2-3 pages) which explains how existing research contributes to the understanding of the phenomenon studied and to the advancement of knowledge in the field.

Steps to Follow:

- Structure the chapter based on an ‘inverted triangle’ approach –i.e. from the general to the specific.
- Know the current positions of the literature related to your field of study (the subject you are studying).
- Clearly establish the links between the theoretical elements from the literature and your objectives in the field you are studying. This may require the inclusion of key contextual or historical elements.
- Clearly formulate the hypotheses and their operationalization (transform the concepts into indicators).

Chapter 3: Methodology (between 5 and 10 pages)

The first part of the chapter (2,500 words / 6-8 pages) is a justification for the approach. It describes the research strategy used and justifies the methodological approach chosen to study and answer the research questions. It is not a question of describing in detail the techniques of data collection and the results obtained, but rather of developing a clear and convincing argumentation which justifies the relevance of the strategies implemented and the research instruments used.

A second part (1,250 words / 3-4 pages) presents a summary of the methods and procedures used. Whatever the type of research undertaken (empirical or theoretical), it is important to justify the use of the chosen approaches by identifying i) the criteria which governed the choice of the chosen approach, and ii) the reasons they were selected over other approaches. The

chapter ends with the presentation of the limits of the research, specifying the constraints and the scope.

All documents and raw data related to research work should be kept according to the guidelines and procedures outlined by the university research and ethics board upon approval for the research project. For projects that do not require an ethics certificate, documents and raw data must be kept for a period of 5 years after the student receives their master's degree from the University of Ottawa.

Empirical Research

Empirical research involves operationalizing research questions so that they can be made concrete and amenable to empirical investigation from data that is readily available. To do this, two steps are required:

A. Data Collection. If the research involves a content analysis, experiment, survey, or qualitative interviews, the data collection approach must be specified.

- For surveys and experiments: justify the selection of a sample of the population.
- For qualitative interviews: Justify the selection of participants.
- For document or media analysis: Justify the selection of material (collection of texts to be studied or database).

B. Research Instruments. Research instruments are questionnaires, interview grids or guides, or coding guides for content analysis. Particular care must be given to how these instruments were developed.

- Validation of instruments by tests.
- Descriptions of the procedures adopted.

Note: For example, how were the interviews conducted, were they recorded and later transcribed? How was the coding done? The reader should be able to reproduce what you have done based on the information provided when you describe your instruments.

Theoretical Research

Theoretical research involves approaching research questions from the analysis of related concepts and theories. This type of search can include the following:

- Critical analysis of theories relevant to the field of research.
- Analysis of the internal rationale of the work of one or more authors.
- Comparative study of different schools of thought.
- Interpretative approach.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion (between 20 and 40 pages)

There is no one way to present the results and analyses. The presentation model adopted is mainly linked to the quantitative or qualitative nature of the results. Students are encouraged to seek the advice of their supervisor before deciding which format to present.

Regardless of how the data and analyses are presented, the results should be discussed in the context of the research questions and the theoretical framework. Explanations and interpretations about these results should be given. An analysis of the relevancy of the hypotheses and the choice of methods used must be made in the light of the results obtained. This is where we return to the method, but it is not a question of emitting new ideas that have not been previously subjected to analysis.

Quantitative Analyses

Results. This section presents the quantitative results of the research analyses (descriptive statistics, appropriate graphs, tables, and statistical tests). The results may be obtained through traditional statistical software packages such as SPSS, or more advanced software including R, SAS, or AMOS. The exact procedures for what to report depend on the analyses conducted and should be guided by existing literature that has used the same analytical approaches.

Discussion. The results are discussed in the light of research hypotheses and in the context of the literature review. In other words, what has been empirically observed is placed in the context of the objectives, the problematic and the methodology. Explanations should be given for hypotheses that have not been confirmed and analyses regarding the research methodology. Finally, the practical and theoretical implications of the research should be discussed, as well as the lines of future research.

Qualitative Analysis

Generally, results and discussion for qualitative analyses are presented simultaneously. The results can be obtained using a traditional or electronic content analysis methods (for example by using NVivo, QNudist, Atlas or Modalisa software).

The presentation of the results is structured according to the main themes identified, which are illustrated by justified citations noted in the collection of texts studied or database.

If the results and analysis are presented separately, the main results can be shown in a table or grid. For example, the questions that guided the interviews may constitute the column headers and the rows the results of the interviews. Each of the boxes in the table or grid would include a concise summary of the interviewees. The themes linked to the research questions drawn from the table or grid are developed and illustrated by the appropriate citations.

Chapter 5: Conclusion (between 3 and 5 pages)

This section should include a concise summary of the main implications (theoretical, methodological, empirical) of the thesis or research paper. It must also provide an overview of future research directions that should be undertaken.

Elements addressed in the conclusion:

- Summary of the results.
- Reminder of the importance of the results (confirmation or invalidation of the expected results).
- Discussion of the practical implications results.
- Reflections on the limits and future directions for research.

Note: The last paragraph of the thesis is important. The general conclusions of the thesis must be presented convincingly.

Bibliography

The bibliography must comply with the APA referencing standards (see page 13). All bibliographic references in the text should be cited fully and appear in alphabetical order in the reference list.

Appendices

All documents used for data collection (consent forms, questionnaires, tables and statistical procedures, transcripts, grids or interview guides, coding procedures) should be included as an appendix.

APA Referencing Guide

<https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/>

Plagiarism:

<https://www.uottawa.ca/vice-president-academic/sites/www.uottawa.ca.vice-president-academic/files/academic-integrity-students-guide.pdf>

4. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Professors (evaluators) assess each thesis and dissertation according to the following official criteria:

- Understanding of the subject.
- Understanding of the contribution of the thesis or research project to the advancement of knowledge.
- Soundness of research methodology.
- Analysis of results and value of conclusions.
- Organization, style, and presentation of the thesis or research project material.