



Postgraduate Research Thesis Guidance

Purpose of Guidance

The guidance sets out standards for the format of postgraduate research theses to provide clarity and consistency. This applies to theses submitted for assessment under the University's [Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees](#). This guidance is not applicable to MSc by Research students.

Scope: Guidance is not Mandatory

Postgraduate research students, supervisors of postgraduate research students, academic and professional support staff involved with postgraduate research thesis submission.

Contact

Students are asked to contact their Graduate School office with any queries about the format of a thesis that are not covered in this guidance note.

Document control

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Approving authority	Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC)				
Related policies, procedures, guidelines & regulations	Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees				
Alternative format	If you require this document in an alternative format please email academicpolicy@ed.ac.uk				
Keywords	Assessment, research assessment, thesis format				

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1. Submission of theses for assessment

1.1 Students are asked to submit their thesis for assessment electronically.

1.2 Every student must incorporate a declaration at the front of the thesis submitted for assessment, stating:

- (a) that the thesis has been composed by the student, and
- (b) either that the work is the student's own, or, if the student has been a member of a research group, that the student has made a substantial contribution to the work, such contribution being clearly indicated, and
- (c) that the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified, and
- (d) that any included publications are the student's own work, except where indicated throughout the thesis and summarised and clearly identified on the declarations page of the thesis
- (e) (where relevant) any use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the composition of the thesis.

1.3 Appendix 1 includes exemplar signed declarations for use in theses.

1.4 Guidance for postgraduate research students regarding the use of generative AI is provided on the University's web pages.

[Generative AI Guidelines for Postgraduate Research Students](#)

2. Formatting of theses for assessment

2.1 Where there is a choice of character style or font, a sans serif font (for example, Helvetica or Arial) should be used for the main text. Character size should be 12 points.

2.2 Text should be set to ensure an even spacing between words for any particular line. Word division at the ends of lines (hyphenation) should be avoided if possible. Students are expected to follow guidance on accessible formatting:

- [Creating accessible materials](#)

2.3 The title page should have:

- Title of thesis
- Author's name

And at the foot of the page:

- Name of degree
- The University of Edinburgh
- Year of presentation*

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*The year of presentation refers to the year in which the thesis is submitted for assessment. In the case of a thesis which is resubmitted, the year in which the thesis is resubmitted should be shown as the year of presentation.

2.4 An abstract and lay summary should be included in the thesis after the title page. For more information about the lay summary, see section 3 of this document.

2.5 A full table of contents should follow the abstract and include a list of tables, photographs and any other materials.

2.6 Where diagrams, maps, illustrations or other images are included in the thesis, these should be good quality and high resolution.

2.7 If you use third party material (images, photos, diagrams etc.) within the thesis, the use must be fair and the material correctly attributed. Third party material is any material that is not originally created by you and is borrowed from another source of origin. The use must be limited to what is necessary for the purpose of your work, and it must not negatively impact on the economic rights of the original work. This may mean limiting copying to shorter extracts of a work.

- [University copyright guidance](#)

2.8 We would recommend finding openly licensed content which can be freely shared online.

- [Finding open content](#)

2.9 For accessibility reasons, it is recommended to provide an alternative text to images. Alternative text ("alt text") is a machine-readable tag that describes an image in words if the image cannot be displayed, for example for someone using a screen reader.

- [University accessibility guidelines, policy and legislation](#)

2.10 Formatting of notes should be consistent, inserting the notes at the foot of the page, or at the end of each chapter, or at the end of the thesis. All separate sections, for example bibliography, list of abbreviations, should be identified on the contents page.

3. Abstract and lay summary

3.1 A lay summary must be incorporated at the beginning of the thesis submitted for assessment, and must be included in the final version of the submitted thesis. Lay summaries should conform to the formatting guidance in section 2 of this document. The lay summary is not included in the word count for the thesis.

3.2 A lay summary is intended to facilitate knowledge exchange, public engagement and outreach. It should be written in simple, non-technical terms that are easily understandable by a lay audience, who may be non-professional, non-scientific and outside the research area.

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3.3 Abstracts, particularly in science, engineering, medicine and veterinary medicine, may be highly technical or contain scientific language that is not easily understandable to readers outside the research area. Therefore, the lay summary is supplementary to the abstract.

3.4 Students may seek advice on the lay summary at any point from their Principal Supervisor.

4. Including publications in Postgraduate Research theses

4.1 There is no requirement in the assessment regulations for publications to be included in theses. This guidance is for students who choose to include publications as a part of their thesis. It is not for students who are matriculated for PhD by Research Publications, for whom there are separate regulations and guidance.

4.2 All PhD theses must form a coherent body of interrelated work that shows the student's ability for critical analysis. Where publications are to be included in the thesis submitted for assessment, they should in effect form a thesis chapter with introductory and concluding text added to place the publication within the structure of the thesis (see example below).

Example of chapter structure:

- Chapter X
- Introduction
- Published journal manuscript*
- Conclusion

*Published articles need not be reformatted and can be inserted, as they appear in the publication.

4.3 Published journal articles cannot be expected to be subject to correction. However, corrections the student may wish to make, or indicated by the thesis examiners, can be dealt with in the introduction or conclusion of the chapter containing the publication.

4.4 Articles included in the thesis which have been submitted for pre-publication (for example in pre-print servers such as bioRxiv, arXiv, SSRN etc) or for publication but which have not been published, or which are in proof, will be included in a format comparable to monograph thesis content. For example, text from unpublished or proof articles can be copied and pasted to match the format of the body of the thesis.

4.5 The complete body of work submitted, including published articles, should be equivalent to that expected of a monograph thesis and adhere to similar word lengths, as laid out within University regulations and local discipline-specific guidance.

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4.6 It should be emphasised that while peer reviewing of publications is a good measure of progress, it does not guarantee success at examination. The assessment of the standard of the submitted thesis rests with the examiners. Examiners will assess the standard and appropriateness of papers and publications included within a thesis.

4.7 Articles may not be included in the thesis for which students do not retain copyright, except with permission from the copyright holder. As students are responsible for the quality of the submitted thesis, it is therefore also the student's responsibility to ensure that the thesis complies with copyright law and advice should be sought in relation to copyright implications. Open access papers with a Creative Commons licence can be included in a PhD thesis without the need to seek permission from the journal. Supervisors may be able to offer advice in relation to copyright matters.

4.8 Jointly or multiple-authored publications can be included but students must ensure appropriate permission is obtained and their contribution is clearly indicated. Supervisors will be able to advise on discipline-specific expectations.

4.9 The inclusion of journal articles is also permissible for other postgraduate research degrees which are exit routes for the PhD, for example MPhil and MSc by Research.

5. Portfolios of musical compositions

5.1 Portfolios of musical compositions should be submitted digitally.

6. Thesis and non-textual elements for Practice-led MPhil and Doctorates

6.1 The thesis should follow guidance at 1-4 above. Final copies lodged in the Library will contain a permanent record of the exhibit, attached to the thesis (see section 7, on Final thesis submission).

7. Final thesis submission

7.1 The final version of the thesis is submitted electronically only. A declaration is not required in the final version.

- [How to submit the final version of your PhD thesis](#)

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Appendix 1 – Exemplar Signed Declarations for use in theses

Examples of a standard declaration:

1. I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.
2. I confirm that this thesis presented for the degree of [*degree sought*], has
 - i) been composed entirely by myself
 - ii) been solely the result of my own work
 - iii) not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification
3. I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Parts of this work have been published in [*state previous publication*].

Examples of a declaration including collaborative work:

1. The data presented in this thesis was obtained in an experiment carried out by the [*name of collaboration*] in [*location of experiment/where collaboration happened*]. I played a major role in the preparation and execution of the experiment, and the data analysis and interpretation are entirely by own work. Any contributions from colleagues in the collaboration, such as diagrams or calibrations, are explicitly referenced in the text.

I am aware of and understand the university's policy on plagiarism and I certify that this thesis is my own work, except where indicated by referencing, and the work presented in it has not been submitted in support of another degree or qualification from this or any other university or institute of learning.

2. I declare that this thesis is an original report of my research, has been written by me and has not been submitted for any previous degree. The experimental work is almost entirely my own work; the collaborative contributions have been indicated clearly and acknowledged. Due references have been provided on all supporting literatures and resources.

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Example of a declaration including jointly authored publications:

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1. I declare that the thesis has been composed by myself and that the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. I confirm that the work submitted is my own, except where work which has formed part of jointly-authored publications has been included. My contribution and those of the other authors to this work have been explicitly indicated below. I confirm that appropriate credit has been given within this thesis where reference has been made to the work of others.

The work presented in Chapter [*chapter number*] was previously published in [*publication name*] as [*title of article*] by [*authors – clearly indicate which is the student and author of the declaration. If the supervisor is a co-author this should be clearly indicated as well*]. This study was conceived by all of the authors. I carried out [*description of student's contribution*]. [*This paragraph should be repeated for each journal article included in the thesis.*]