



Department of Marketing Management
School of Consumer Intelligence and
Information Systems
Postgraduate Studies

MASTERS AND DOCTORATE

M COM & PhD DEGREES

**GUIDELINES FOR THE PREPARATION
OF DISSERTATIONS AND A THESIS**



1. INTRODUCTION

Scientific research cannot be meaningful in isolation. It should always form part of the knowledge base of a specific science in order to make any sort of contribution to the science in question. This means that reporting on the research is possibly just as important as the research itself. The research report, ie. The report on both the literature and the empirical research, should obviously be in a scientific format and, as such, meet scientific standards. In a certain sense, the report can be regarded as academic or scientific communication that highlights an important aspect of scientific practice, namely an action in which the scientist argues a specific point of view, hypothesis or finding for the benefit of fellow scientists. It is up to the scientist to indicate that the research being reported on meets the requirements of his or her science in terms of reliability, validity, objectivity and accuracy. The researcher must also indicate in the report what the central argument of the research is, and provide reasons for the scientific acceptability of the study.

Reporting, or scientific communication, is a validation action: to propose arguments or reasons (theoretical or empirical) to support or disprove a specific hypothesis or finding (also see Mouton & Marais, 1988: 194-200).

1. TERMINOLOGY

“**Dissertation**” refers to a written scientific report on research, which is the requirement for obtaining a research master’s degree.

“**Mini dissertation**” refers to a written scientific report (or paper) associated with a structured master’s degree (research report supplemented by course work).

“**Thesis**” refers to a written scientific report on creative and original research, which is the requirement for a doctorate.


“**Supervisor**” refers to a full-time or part-time staff member of the Department of Marketing Management at the University of Johannesburg, or an employee of any other company, who is directly involved in providing postgraduate students with guidance.


2. WRITING A DISSERTATION OR THESIS

2.1 A DISSERTATION OR THESIS AS SCIENTIFIC COMMUNICATION

A dissertation or thesis is a document that clearly and thoroughly indicates what the researcher had done to solve the problem he or she has identified. It must be factual, logical and readable. The writer or researcher must, therefore, be able to communicate clearly.

There are a number of requirements for scientific reporting. When writing any dissertation or thesis, the following must be borne in mind:

- The scientific document must inform the reader about the problem, and the implications must be explained in such a way that everyone reading the document has the same orientation towards the problem.
 - The necessity of the study just be motivated and the goal must be explained clearly.
 - Sufficient theoretical background to understand the study must be provided.
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- The method(s) followed and the aids used must be described clearly.
 - The data must be presented in such a way that all the researcher's interpretations and inferences are supported.
 - It must contain a list of the sources consulted.

In addition to the above requirements, the nature of the research (literature study versus empirical research) will also determine the format of the dissertation or thesis. Leedy and Ormrod (2001:288) state that a report is a document that clearly and specifically indicated what the researcher did to solve the research problem. In this regard, the report must achieve four objectives:

- It should give the reader a clear understanding of the research problem and why it merited an in-depth investigation.
- It should describe exactly how data were collected.
- It should present sufficient and accurate data that should substantiate all interpretations and conclusions contained in the report.
- It should interpret the data for the reader and indicate exactly how the data was used to solve the research problem.

1.1 THE LAYOUT OF THE DISSERTATION OR THESIS

The previous paragraph dealt with the objectives that should be pursued and achieved in a research report (dissertation or thesis). The discussion indicated in broad terms the payout, arrangement or format of the research report –


- The introductory section.
- The presentation and discussion of the data, and
- The conclusion or final part of the report.

Although this general format must be followed throughout a research report, it goes without saying that a more detailed arrangement is necessary in order to present the contents systematically and accurately. In Leedy and Ormrod (2001:297-299), the format of a research project (dissertation/thesis) is discussed in detail.

The format of a research project, dissertation or thesis can vary. However, the design and the nature of the research (literature study versus empirical research) will to a large extent determine the format of the research report. Leedy's example of a format or layout is based on a research proposal suitable for an American university.

The possible decision-making steps in the research process were discussed in the preceding sections. However, all the steps need not necessarily be executed. Some of the steps can be combined, provided that the study lends itself to such an action. It is also not necessary to follow all the steps in strict sequence. You will, however, agree that some of the steps cannot be executed before others.





You are therefore strongly advised to follow a specific sequence of steps that will enable you to conduct your master's or doctoral study in a purposeful manner.

2. AN EXAMPLE OF THE CHAPTER CLASSIFICATION OF A TYPICAL DISSERTATION OR THESIS

The following should be seen as an example only – in practice, the chapter classification of a dissertation or thesis will be determined by the research project. A more modern tendency for doctoral theses is to write each chapter with its own introduction, literature survey, results and discussion and conclusion (almost like an article for a journal). In such cases, the thesis must still have a general introduction to the entire thesis and one conclusion at the end that will summarise the overall conclusion.

The example that follows rests on the following two suppositions:

The research method will be either a literature study or an empirical investigation.
The research objective will be to conduct exploratory or descriptive research.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The function of an introductory chapter in a scientific document is to introduce the reader to the topic, and to indicate what previous work was done in this regard, what the problems are and why and how these problems were investigated. It prepares the reader for the scientific argument and evaluation of the information and findings. A thorough discussion of the background that gave rise to the problem is essential. The chapter is concluded with the objective(s) of the study. This chapter is a more detailed version of the first section of the research proposal, and introduces the reader to the study undertaken and the fundamental principles on which it is based. Although it is the first chapter, it is common practice to write it last.

Chapter 2: Literature survey


This chapter forms the literature section of the dissertation or thesis and contains the theoretical content that is necessary to understand the project and its necessity (with reference to existing research). The record-keeping system used by the student forms an important part of this section. The number of chapters and their contents will be determined by the nature and extent of the study. The student, guided by the supervisor, makes a decision in this regard.

It is important for students to note that it is essential to complete most of the literature study before proceeding to the final planning and execution of the research. The reason for this is that students often neglect the literature study. They start by collecting data, only to discover during the literature study that their methodology and questions have critical weaknesses. This results in a theoretical egg-dance, which inevitably has a negative effect on the quality of the final product.

Each section should be concluded with a summary of the principles found in the literature that are applicable to the study.

Chapter 3: Theoretical considerations

If applicable, particulars of the literature, mathematical processing and model development are dealt with in this chapter.





Chapter 4: Methods and materials

Details regarding the methods and materials are often scrutinized very critically by other scientists, and weigh heavily in examining. This section, containing one or sometimes more than one chapter, can be regarded as the core of the dissertation or thesis, since an error or weakness in this explanation can invalidate the findings, dooming the study as a whole to failure. The content of this section will be determined by the nature of the research. The following guidelines may be used:

1. Start the chapter with a clear explanation of the methodology that will be followed to solve the problem.
2. Provide a detailed description of the components of the methodology, ie. the nature, applicability, strengths and weaknesses, validity, tests, test samples, statistical methods, question curves, field workers etc.
3. In experimental research it will contain a careful, but detailed, description of equipment, reagents and/or chemicals used (where applicable) and detailed information regarding procedures and methods used. This part should provide sufficient information for other researchers to duplicate the work done.


Chapter 5: Results and discussion

Like the section dealing with methods and materials, this section is highly exposed to criticism. This is justified, as it is usually the section neglected by students. The research task is not completed when the processed data has been presented in tables, figures, models and so forth. The research task focuses on the interpretation and consideration of the results and the drawing of inferences – all of which form part of the pursuit of a solution to the problem. In the evaluation and examination of the research, both the researcher's reasoning abilities and his or her skill in the techniques of data processing and interpretation are put to the test. The following guidelines apply in this regard:

1. To present the massive volume of data collected in an ordered manner, the researcher must put the data in writing, arrange it in tables and figures and group it in such a way that specific segments or groups of data correspond to specific segments (or sub-problems) of the problem investigated.
2. The researcher must continuously deal with the data in such a way that the relationship with the problem or hypothesis is always indicated.
3. The interpretation of the data and the inference drawn on the basis of the data is especially important to determine the success or failure of the research. Statements or conclusions must be motivated and, where applicable, based on a sound statistical analysis of the data. Different views of a concept must be clearly stated, and the researcher must, by means of logical reasoning, indicate why one view is preferred to another. If the researcher does not accept any of the views, he or she must either provide his or her own view, or make an acceptable synthesis of other views. Once again the principle of logical reasoning applies.
4. Conclusions and findings must always be stated explicitly, and it must be clear on which facts and/or published literature the conclusions and findings are based. It must not be necessary for the supervisor or the general reader to reach conclusions by themselves or to struggle to find out how the conclusions were reached.
5. The discussion of the results must be objective, systematic and fluent.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations





Just as the introductory chapter is an introduction to the research problem and the investigation, the final chapter is a retrospective summary and a conclusion. In this chapter, all the loose ends must be tied up, and the researcher must indicate in a few paragraphs what has been achieved in each phase of the research process.

On the basis of this summary, the researcher must clearly formulate his or her findings and conclusions regarding the research problem, sub-problems or hypothesis.

In closing: An investigation of this nature often gives rise to recommendations, whether it be problems requiring further research or implications arising from the inferences. These recommendations can now be formulated to serve as guidelines for further research or other follow-up actions.

4. AN EXAMPLE OF A DISSERTATION

Please visit our website for an example of a completed dissertation and minor dissertation. It is important to avail yourself of the contents of the document before final submission to the supervisor.

Website: www.uj.ac.za/marketing

5. CONTACT INFORMATION

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