

Writing a Masters Thesis or Capstone Project Report

1 Introduction

A master's thesis is a scholarly treatise which is presented by a degree candidate to a graduate committee for approval on behalf of the University and then presented to the director of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master's Degree. The original is placed in the University Library to be read by future scholars. It is an important scholarly achievement that should be presented with pride.

The purpose of this Guide is to simplify, clarify, and above all, promote excellence in the presentation of theses written in support of Master's Degrees. The guidelines set forth in this Guide allow great flexibility in the presentation of theses. The Graduate Council recognizes the need for the highest quality graphic presentation of theses. Published standards used by the field of scholarship shall take precedence in all matters of presentation of a thesis in the discipline. The standards used must be recognized as appropriate for the specific discipline, such as those described in a style manual or *Author's Guide* in a leading journal. The Graduate Council further acknowledges that many students are not aware that variations from the traditional thesis format are permissible. This Guide will emphasize the range of presentation styles permitted and make provisions for other styles not specifically mentioned.

The form of the thesis should be divided into sections and follow this general outline. These sections will be required regardless of the subject matter and content of the thesis. They should contain the information described in the following sections.

2 Overview of Sections

The following outline should be used in the order in which the sections are listed:

- The title page.
- The acceptance page
- The abstract.
- The acknowledgements (optional)
- The table of contents.
- The list of illustrations.
- The text.
- The references.
- The appendix/ces.

2.1 The Title Page

The title page should be concise and should indicate the subject of the thesis clearly and succinctly. It should state the title of the thesis, the author's name, the statement, "Submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies at the University of Southern Indiana," and date (month—May or December—and year). See sample A.

2.2 The Acceptance Page

The Acceptance page will have the following statement centered two inches from the top: "Accepted by the Graduate Faculty of the University of Southern Indiana, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies." Centered below will be the original signatures of the thesis committee members, with their names and titles typed under the lines with their signatures. See sample B.

2.3 The Abstract

The abstract should be a brief, comprehensive summary of the contents of the thesis. It consists of no more than 350 words. Avoid a mere expansion of the title. A well-prepared abstract can be the most important paragraph in the thesis. Write the abstract last. Include a concise description of the subject matter explored and conclusions of the thesis. The emphasis to be placed on various aspects will depend on the nature of the individual work being reported.

The abstract itself is double-spaced. The heading of the abstract is single-spaced and contains the following information: candidate's name, degree (Master of Arts in Liberal Studies), University of Southern Indiana, month (May or December) and year degree is to be conferred, the thesis title, and the name of the major professor. See sample C.

2.4 The Acknowledgements

Acknowledge only real indebtedness. It is not necessary, although permissible, to thank family, friends, or the members of one's committee. Acknowledgment *must* be made of any grants or other aid (especially financial) received in support of the investigation. This section should be brief and in good taste.

2.5 The Table of Contents

Every thesis has a table of contents. A good rule to follow is to include all major headings and all first-level subheadings. Other levels may be included if they facilitate quick reference to specific sub-sections of the thesis. There must be **exact** correspondence between the Table of Contents and the text of the thesis. The principal headings should be listed verbatim and in the order in which they appear in the thesis, together with the page number on which each of them begins.

The References and Appendices are part of the text of the thesis. They are listed in the Table of Contents as major divisions, set flush with the left margin and capitalized consistently with other major divisions. See Sample D.

2.6 The Illustrations

Tables are simply data presented in tabular form. Figures are materials presented in graphic form, including maps, charts, graphs, photographs, computer printouts, music script, and the like. All these are ordinarily grouped as figures, or by some authorities as illustrations. Tables precede figures.

If there are large numbers of one type of illustration, these may properly be separated and listed by themselves, e.g., List of Maps, List of Graphs.

Normally, photographs and many maps are referred to as Plates. A thesis may well contain a List of Tables, a List of Figures, and a List of Plates, if each listing is of adequate length. If only one type of illustration is used, only one list is required. If illustrations of any type are infrequent (if any list takes less than one third of a page), lists may be combined as List of Tables and Figures, or as List of Illustrations. (A table may properly be called an illustration; it cannot properly be called a figure.)

2.7 The Text

The text describes the project and will contain chapters with various titles, but chapters of research theses will most likely fall into the following types of sections. Plays, novels, or other literary works will result in different text divisions.

2.71 The Introduction

Every report will have an introduction. The introduction presents the problem or concept that will be analyzed. It articulates the argument and contains the pertinent sources and approach to analysis. The thesis will use the sources throughout and demonstrate how the strain of thinking in each contributes to your argument.

2.72 The Literature Review

Critically discuss and analyze previous important work pertinent to the specific issue of your project. Integrate literature from other fields as necessary. Demonstrate logical continuity between previous work and the present work. Integrate the use of literature in support of your project.

2.73 The Theory/Thesis/Analysis Section

These chapters comprise the body of the thesis. Describe the problem statement or question you pursued, the process of how you answered the question, and other similar items which describe what you did, how you did it, and how each activity relates to the original purpose and intent of the project. The approach to analysis is the theory or method behind the analysis.

This section concerns the project. Report any data used in sufficient detail to justify the conclusions. Mention all relevant results, including those that run counter to the hypothesis. Present the data gathered in the project in tables, figures, charts, and graphs as appropriate. Incorporate small tables, photographs, charts, and graphs into the body of the text itself. Large size or voluminous materials should be listed in the main text and displayed in the appendices.

2.74 The Conclusion

The conclusion tells the reader what the argument said; it should identify what was significant and why and what might the implications be for the work. Show what remains to be done now that your thesis has introduced or opened up. Do not simply summarize or repeat what was written in the preceding sections. Draw inferences and make recommendations or describe proposals for further study.

2.8 The Bibliography

Bibliographical references shall be provided for works mentioned in the text and shall be listed in alphabetical order. Prepare the reference section according to the MLA Style Manual.

References to books should contain (in this order), the author's name/s (last name first); the title of the book; and the city of publication, publisher, and date of publication. References to journal articles should contain the author's name/s (last name first); the title of the article; and the title of the journal, the volume number and issue number, the date of the journal, and the page numbers where the article appears. References to electronic works must contain the date of access and network address, in addition to the author and title information.

2.9 The Appendices

Appendices should be used for supplementary matter which would not be appropriate to include in the main body of the text and for oversize or documents too voluminous for inclusion in the main body. Other documents may also be presented which are necessary for complete understanding of the project and which may not be readily available to the reader. Special forms devised for data gathering, listings of computer programs, underlying computations in spreadsheets, and other similar items generated in support of the work should also be included in the appendices. Appendices should be labeled (e.g., Appendix A. Actions, Proposals, Time Sheets).