

UNIVERSITY STYLE GUIDE

FOR THE FORMATTING OF THESES AND DISSERTATIONS

College of Graduate Studies

Middle Tennessee State University

Revised June 2021 by John Sousa and Rachel J. Lambert

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Process for Completion of Your Thesis or Dissertation

An outline of the entire process to complete your thesis or dissertation from selecting your advisory committee to graduating as a published author can be found on the Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines page on the College of Graduate Studies' website at <https://mtsu.edu/graduate/student/thesis.php>. Also located on this page is a list of forms that must be submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and the order in which they should be submitted. Please consult this page at the beginning of your writing process and check back throughout to ensure all forms are submitted and processes are being followed.

Purpose of this Guide

This style guide is intended to complement the style guide preferred by your academic discipline, whether that is Chicago, APA, MLA, etc. With the exception of some specific guidelines required by ProQuest, you should defer to your department-mandated style guide.

Role of the Editor

While the editor generally does not comment on the content of the thesis or dissertation, occasionally obvious errors such as misspellings in the header or missing information will be cause for requesting revisions. The editor is mainly concerned with the formatting of the document, making sure that the chosen style has been followed. The editor also checks for consistency in font and typeface, that pages are numbered correctly, and that there were no errors caused in the process of uploading and converting documents from their original file (Microsoft Word, Google doc, etc) to a PDF format.

If a document needs revision, the author will receive an email detailing the severity of the revision needed (most revisions are minor) and what exactly needs to be revised. Because the editor does not typically edit for content or grammar, The College of Graduate Studies recommends that students have their papers proofread and/or edited prior to submission. Consult with the chair of your committee on any discipline-specific procedures for editing in your field.

The editor is available by email at askgrad@mtsu.edu for any questions about formatting and uploading a document to ProQuest and is available to meet with students by appointment, in person, or over the phone for any in-depth questions or concerns the student may have.

Organizing and Formatting Your Thesis or Dissertation

Font Size and Typeface

Your dissertation should be readable, so you want to select a suitable font. Generally, you will want to stick with the style preferred by your discipline. The College of Graduate Studies recommends using typeface such as Times New Roman, Calibri, or Helvetica in 12 point font.

Margins

This is the one area where this University Style Guide takes precedence over your discipline's chosen style. These margins are required by ProQuest for publication. Set the margins as follows:

Top Margin: 1.25"
Bottom Margin: 1"
Left Margin: 1.5"
Right Margin: 1"

You can apply these to your document in Microsoft Word by clicking **File > Page Setup > Margins** and entering the numbers in their appropriate boxes.

Pagination

Every page should be numbered except for the title page, which is counted but not numbered. Prefatory pages, that is all pages before the body of the thesis or dissertation, should be numbered using Roman numerals (i, ii, iii, iv...); these numbers should be centered at the bottom of the page. All pages in the body of the document should be numbered with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3...); these numbers should appear in the upper right-hand corner of the page or as dictated by your discipline style guide.

Follow these instructions to use two different numbering schemes:

1. Add a section break between the two sections of your document by making sure the cursor is at the end of the last prefatory page (make sure it's actually in the document and not in the footer section).
2. Click **Page Layout > Breaks > Next Page** under **Section Breaks**. You should see some code and the words "Section Break (Next Page)."
3. Go to the next page below the section break (this should be the first page of the body of the document) and click into the footer section where the page number is.
4. Click **Header & Footer Tools** and look for a checked box next to "**Link to Previous**." Uncheck the box.
5. Now you can format the page numbers for the body section starting at Page 1 by clicking **Header & Footer Tools > Page Number > Format Page Numbers**.

Spacing

All text must be double-spaced, except for long quotations, which should be single spaced and indented. These are termed "block quotes" and should only be used when a direct quotation from a text will span more than four (4) lines of text in the document. For example:

This is an example of what a block quote should look like if it being utilized in the body of your thesis or dissertation. It must take up at least four lines of text to qualify as a block quote, be single spaced (unlike the rest of your paper which is double-spaced), and every line must be indented. Consult your field's style guide for instructions on citing block quotes.

There should be three spaces before and after tables and figures that are inserted between lines of text. Table data and references may be single spaced or as required by your discipline's style guide.

Avoid "orphan" headers, that is a section header that is at the bottom of a page, separated from its text. Similarly avoid a single line of a paragraph at the bottom of the page, or a single, short word of a paragraph that ends up on the next page.

All ellipses must have spaces between the dots (. . .). Put a space before and after an equal sign (=), less than sign (<), and a greater than sign (>).

Title Page

The title page should be the first page of your thesis or dissertation, should be unnumbered, and the text should be centered. The following information must appear, in this order:

1. The title of the thesis or dissertation
2. The student's degree title
3. The university name
4. The Month and Year of Graduation

A template appears on the following page:

Title Of the Thesis or Dissertation

By

Student Name

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
of [degree] of [discipline]

Middle Tennessee State University
Month, Year

Dissertation/Thesis Committee:

Name of Committee Chair, Chair

Name of Committee Member

Name of Committee Member

Name of Committee Member

Dedication Page

This page is optional. If you wish to dedicate it to someone (a parent, spouse, advisor, etc.) this is the place to do it. The text should be centered.

Acknowledgments

This section is also optional and is used to give a brief statement of recognition or appreciation. It should have a centered header with the text, “ACKNOWLEDGMENTS” in all capital letters.

Abstract

Every thesis or dissertation submitted must include an abstract. It should be approximately 150 words for theses and 350 words for dissertations. The content will be determined by the student and their thesis or dissertation committee. The page should have a centered header reading “ABSTRACT” in all capital letters.

Table of Contents

Every thesis and dissertation submitted must include a Table of Contents. Every heading, section, chapter, and first set of subheadings must be included in the Table of Contents. Do not list any prefatory material in the Table of Contents. The page should have a centered header reading “TABLE OF CONTENTS” in all capital letters.

Please note, do not use the automatic table of contents feature of Microsoft Word. While this is a handy feature, it often breaks when converting the document to a PDF file. Manually enter the page numbers in the Table of Contents to avoid this.

List of Tables or Figures

A thesis or dissertation containing tables or figures (such as images) should include a List of Tables and a List of Figures. These lists should be after the Table of Contents and before the body of the text, with a centered header reading, “LIST OF TABLES” or “LIST OF FIGURES” in all capital letters.

List of Symbols/Abbreviations/Terms

As with a List of Tables or Figures, a thesis can include a list of symbols, abbreviations, or terms.

Body Text

The body of the thesis or dissertation should be formatted logically and consistently. Major divisions within the text should be identified by chapter headings or subheadings. Use a consistent typeface and font size throughout the body.

Formatting Tables and Figures

Tables and figures should be formatted according to the style manual (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc) the student is using. They should be identified in the text with Arabic numerals (Table 1, Figure 3, etc). Table titles go above the table, while Figure numbers go below the figure. Be mindful of page breaks when inserting tables and figures into the text.

Footnotes and Endnotes

Consult your style manual for guidance on creating footnotes and endnotes. In general footnotes must begin on the same page on which they are cited. Start over with the Arabic numeral 1 at the beginning of each chapter.

References Section

Label your references section according to the rules of your style manual. For example, for APA it would be labeled "REFERENCES;" for MLA it would be labeled "WORKS CITED." Center the label at the top of the page in all capital letters.

Appendices

Appendices are optional sections used to incorporate additional or supplementary material such as charts, diagrams, Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Letters, and survey questions given to research participants.

Insert a blank page labeled “APPENDIX” (or “APPENDICES” if more than one) with the text centered and in all capital letters.

Formatting your Thesis or Dissertation for Submission

When submitting your thesis or dissertation to ProQuest, it is important to save the document as a PDF **before you upload the document**. The vast majority of formatting errors occur during the PDF conversion process upon uploading a Word Document. Errors include blank pages, changes to typeface and font size, and missing tables and figures.

To save your document as a PDF, click **File > Save As > File Format**. Choose PDF under “Export Formats” and click **Save**. Now you can safely upload your document to ProQuest.

What to Expect After Submitting Your Thesis or Dissertation

Once your thesis or dissertation is submitted to ProQuest, the editor is notified. The editor will review the document to make sure this style guide has been followed. If revisions are required, the author will be notified via email with instructions on what to fix and how to resubmit the document.

Once the thesis or dissertation has been reviewed and any revisions have been made, the editor will confer with the College of Graduate Studies to ensure that all of the student’s paperwork has been completed. A shortlist of forms that need to be completed can be found on the Thesis and Dissertation page of the College of Graduate Studies’ website at <https://mtsu.edu/graduate/student/thesis.php>.

The process of reviewing the thesis or dissertation and verifying that the student’s paperwork has been correctly submitted can take up to two weeks, depending on the volume of documents submitted in a given semester.

Once this is done, the editor will formally accept the document in ProQuest. The author will receive a formal acceptance email and the editor will then deliver the document to ProQuest for Publication.

Please note that if the author requests an embargo on the publication of the thesis or dissertation that ProQuest will not publish the document until the date chosen has passed.

Who to Contact

Any questions about the graduation process can be addressed to askgrad@mtsu.edu.

Questions about graduation forms should be addressed to andrea.smith@mtsu.edu.

You can reach the editor at john.sousa@mtsu.edu with any questions about formatting your thesis or dissertation or to set up an appointment to discuss the ProQuest submission process.