

THE LAYOUT OF THE DISSERTATION OR THESIS

Before starting your dissertation or thesis you should start by setting out each chapter, section and sub-sections. The outline of the report should clearly reflect the logical details of the book. The logical structuring of chapters, sections and sub-sections help to introduce the reader systematically to the necessary background and makes him/her receptive to the new ideas and conclusions which he or she will be exposed to. Each chapter must have a central idea which is introduced, argued and concluded. The same applies to sections. The chapter classification of a dissertation or thesis will be determined by the research project. As you develop a deeper understanding of the area that you are working in, you may realise that there are better ways of organising your report.

Chapter classification of a typical dissertation or thesis

The following should be seen as only an example when you write your dissertation or thesis. Normally you will have an introduction, a literature review, methods, the research results and then your conclusion. You will also have to write an abstract as well as making a bibliography list.

➤ **Section 1 – Introduction** (*Normally Chapter 1*)

Your dissertation or thesis will start with an introduction. Here you should introduce the reader to the topic, telling the reader precisely what you are going to do and why it is worth doing. The introduction is usually a summary of the project proposal explaining what you are interested in and why and in general sense how you intend to study your topic, specifying your objective. It prepares the reader for the scientific argumentation and evaluation of the information and findings.

➤ **Section 2 - Literature review** (*Normally 1 to 3 chapters*)

The literature review chapter(s) is an important part of your dissertation or thesis and it takes a lot of work and time to complete. It identifies the research that already has been completed in your topic area and provides an analysis of all current information relevant to the topic. A literature review should demonstrate that you have read broadly in your field and that you understand the important and analysed the literature relevant to the topic.

It is important for the student 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 the student often neglects literature study. They start collecting data only to find out during the literature study that their methodology and questions have critical weaknesses. This has a negative effect on the study 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.

➤ **Section 3 – Methods and the materials** (*Normally 1 chapter*)

The research methodology will explain to your reader the methods you used to gather the information and data for your paper to answer your research question, almost like a recipe. This chapter is regarded as the core of the dissertation or thesis as an error or weakness in this explanation can invalidate the findings, dooming the study as a whole. This chapter is often scrutinised very critically by other scientists, and weigh heavily in examining.

- Start the chapter with a clear explanation of the methodology that will be used to solve the problem.
- Provide a detailed description of the components of the methodology.
- Describe what the methods are all about and how you have executed the methodology. It should be clear why you choose to use this specific methodology for answering your research question.

➤ **Section 4 - Research results and discussions –The Body** (*Normally 1-3 chapters*)

This component also known as “the body” of the dissertation or thesis, consists of the final results of the research, your analysis of them and your sub-conclusion. You should keep the body of your dissertation or thesis simple. Your findings can be anything from data from archives, results from an experiment or answers to questions.

To present the massive volume of data collected in an ordered manner, the data must be put in writing. Arrange the data into tables and figures and arrange it in such a way that the specific groups of data correspond. The body of your dissertation or thesis will be divided into chapters and the chapters will be divided into sections and sub-sections. You do not want to “loose” your reader so you need to structure the body of the dissertation or theses carefully. You should make it as logical, cumulative and simple as possible.

The conclusion must be motivated, and where applicable, based on a sound statistical analysis of the data. If there are different views of the concept it must be clearly stated by means of logical reasoning to indicate why one view is preferred to another.

Conclusions and findings must always be clear on which facts and/or published literature the conclusions and findings are based.

➤ **Section 5 - Conclusion** (*Normally 1 chapter*)

In the final chapter all the loose ends are tied up and you must tell your reader what you have discovered in each phase of the research process and the worth of it. Here you give an overview of the research process clearly formulate your findings and conclusions regarding the research problem, sub-problems or hypothesis.

5.3.2 Title Page (Cover page)

This page must contain the following information:

- full name of the student, including all forenames and surname
- the full title of the dissertation or thesis and the year and place of imprint
- The name of the department as well as the name of the faculty, the university as well as the name of your supervisor/promoter must appear on the page.
- The correct name of the instructional programme (eg. Magister Technologiae: Information Technology) must appear on the title page.

5.3.3 Abstract

An abstract is a short informative summary that briefly describes the problem, summarises the main argument, the research methods and procedures and lists the main findings and conclusions. Remember to keep it brief, normally an abstract must not exceed 500 words in the case of a thesis and 300 words in the case of a dissertation. This summary must appear in the front of the dissertation or thesis following the table of content and must end with a list of not more than ten key words.

Note 14 :

Candidates may include a second summary in a language of their choice, provided that, if the language is not one of the official NMMU languages, the translation must be a sworn translation furnished at the cost of the candidate.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements are a matter of choice. Here you have the opportunity to thank or acknowledge those who have been helpful regardless of the type of

assistance. A large percentage of research could not be successfully completed without the input of institutions and individuals. Mention must be made of financial support received and staff or other persons who have provided support. It is traditional to acknowledge your supervisor or promoter. You simply name the person or institution, mention the contribution and thank them (eg. *I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to: My supervisor, Prof XYZ, for his/her positive attitude and guidance and the Institute XYZ for financial assistance*)

Table of contents

This is the last thing you should do. You should take this as an opportunity to ensure that cross-references are correct and that the wording used for headings is exactly the same in the tables of contents, in the headings in the dissertation and when referred to them elsewhere. The index must contain the headings of all chapters, sections and numbered sub-sections. Each chapter or heading number is typed against the left hand side of the paper followed by a leader (eg a row of dots) leading to the page number at the right-hand side of the page.

For example:

CONTENT

Page	
	LIST OF TABLES
	12

Check that the page numbers that you give in the table contents correspond with what is in the dissertation. It is a sort of cross-referencing – the wording you use for headings should be the same in the table of contents.

List of Figures and Tables

The number of tables must not overwhelm and confuse the reader. Tables must be simple and must concentrate on a single aspect. Tables should have captions that accurately represent the contents of the table. Tables with too much data are difficult to interpret and must rather be divided into smaller, more meaningful tables. Tables are used to highlight similarities and contrasts. If some additional information would help the reader to better understand your point, put it in a note directly below the table.

Bibliography

This is an alphabetical list of resources you used in writing of your dissertation and should be acknowledged by referring to the source of information in the text. It should be an alphabetical list of all the sources cited when writing the research report. It must be short and easy to look up. Only sources which have been cited in the text must be included in the bibliography or list of references. The

university use the Harvard method and APA style. But students can also make use the Vancouver system.

Appendices

An appendix is something that should be available to provide the reader with evidence that substantiates arguments made in your dissertation, but is too long to put in the body. It also explains long processes and provides extra and complete information on aspects that appear in the main text that are too long to put a specific section. Appendices should be numbered.