

Working with the thesis document

Have you considered starting your research journey where you're going to end: with a thesis document?

WHY?

- You create a strong connection between your research and your writing
- You collect all your notes in the one place and can sort them into relevant sections and sub-sections as the written document grows.
- You are growing the bibliography at the same time as noticing that you are progressing, and you are becoming familiar with the names of authors whose work you may want to follow.
- You can 'converse' with the document in the same way as a diary or a journal, asking it questions, making comments, and instructing yourself on what you need to do next. All these comments are placed in the relevant 'chapters' and sub-sections.
- It is easy to move from the research questions to the literature review – to check that you are on track.
- It is easy to change or alter your questions as your reading demands.

STEPS TO CREATING THE THESIS DOCUMENT

1. Use writing and publishing software appropriate to your field.
2. Create a '**Working title**' for your document. This title may change as your project develops.
3. Create chapters for your document based on the type of thesis you are creating. For example, almost every thesis has an introduction, a literature review, a conclusion and a bibliography or reference list. Much quantitative research, particularly in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine (STEMM), includes methodology, results and discussion chapters. Other theses may have thematically-based chapters with the literature and methodology either in separate chapters or spread throughout the other chapters:

INTRODUCTION

LITERATURE REVIEW

METHODOLOGY

RESULTS

DISCUSSION

CONCLUSION

REFERENCE LIST

INTRODUCTION

(LITERATURE REVIEW) (METHODOLOGY)

THEME 1

THEME 2

THEME 3, etc.

CONCLUSION

REFERENCE LIST

4. Begin your INTRODUCTION by creating a background context for your project. Can you formulate research questions at this early stage? It's good to try, even if they change later. The research questions are likely to help guide your reading. As you write the Introduction, note what topics you want to cover and create sub-headings, e.g. Background; The Gap; The Outline; The research questions.

5. You can start building the LITERATURE REVIEW almost immediately. Start reading on the general research topic first and make notes in your master document. You can revise and summarise it later. Use sub-headings to gather reading on different aspects. Can you link these readings together? Are the authors writing on the same or different aspects of the research? Make notes in red to highlight future links. Write down questions you need to answer in the document itself.
6. Start creating the Bibliography immediately. A bibliography documents everything you read on the topic. If you decide you will not use the reference, mark it as a non-ref doc.

NOTE: I have been using one of the templates in **Scrivener for Mac** as my master document – it is an online software service that automatically backs up work, and can be managed in a number of different ways (as manuscript, as key points, as summaries, etc.). It is easy to create sections and sub-sections, and it has places to keep research notes that cannot yet be placed in any specific section. It can import references into the master document.

Other people use Microsoft Word as the master document. If you are using images or tables, however, you will need to break up the Word document into separate file chapters – it tends to become unstable with big-byte images and loses formatting.

A NOTE ON FORMATTING

Don't spend too much time on formatting in the early stages of the thesis. Wait until the document is beginning to take shape and then learn how to create a template that will meet your existing requirements.

A WORKING DOCUMENT IS MEANT TO CHANGE – ARCHIVE ALL VERSIONS

This document is a 'flexible' account of your HDR journey.

Regularly download versions, and label them in sequence so that you can keep a record of the journey. WHY? Sometimes Thesis Version 2 will have an entry you deleted from Version 3, but now want to include in Version 4.

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USEFUL SOURCES:

- **Using Word to Write Your Thesis**
<http://bitesizebio.com/21732/using-word-to-write-your-thesis-creating-a-master-document/>
- **Writing your thesis in LYX: a Setup Guide**
<http://www.aarondefazio.com/tangentially/?p=19>
- **Producing a Thesis Using Word**
Edinburgh University <http://www.docs.is.ed.ac.uk/skills/documents/3726/3726.pdf>
- **Inger Mewburn's love affair with Mendeley**
<https://thesiswhisperer.com/2013/08/21/endnote-vs-well-everything-else/>

- **LaTeX templates**
<http://www.latextemplates.com/template/masters-doctoral-thesis>