



GUIDE FOR PREPARING THESES AND DISSERTATIONS

**The Graduate School
Whiddon Administration Bldg.
Room 340
251.460.6310**

Updated: September 2022

Dear Graduate Student:

I congratulate you on initiating work on a thesis or dissertation for a graduate degree. This will be a significant undertaking but one which you will take pride and satisfaction in accomplishing. The conduct of your study and the process of writing a thesis or dissertation constitute the heart of the professional skills of a graduate education.

The contents of a thesis or dissertation are important. You, your major professor, and your committee are responsible for the accuracy and the validity of the content of a thesis or dissertation. You and they are also responsible for the form, and we in the Graduate School wish to assist you. That is the purpose of these guidelines. Form is critical, because errors in writing and formatting distract the reader, and may suggest that this lack of attention to detail affected the results and conclusions of your study. There is a practical consideration also; the document is electronically published. Every page must meet the exact standards for these processes.

Dissertations and theses are published and distributed through ProQuest Information and Learning. Several professional societies include theses and dissertations in bibliographies, so wide dissemination is likely. You, your major professor, your committee, and the Graduate School must necessarily be concerned that your professional reputation appears in the best light and that the quality of your work enhances the image of the University.

English is an expressive and flexible language, but its richness creates pitfalls. Clarity in written communication is most certainly an important skill necessary in scholarly endeavors. I hope you will look upon the writing of your thesis or dissertation as an opportunity to perfect your use of this skill. It is, and will be, of great importance to you both personally and professionally.

As you prepare to present the results of your research, the Graduate School wishes you well. I encourage you in your intellectual enterprise and look forward to the day when I can recommend you to the President of the University of South Alabama for the degree toward which you are now working.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Harold Pardue". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Harold" and last name "Pardue" clearly distinguishable.

J. Harold Pardue, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

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I. GETTING STARTED

- A. **Expectations:** Your thesis or dissertation is a significant and time-consuming undertaking that must reflect a mastery of your field, contribute to the existing body of knowledge of your field and demonstrate the level of high quality expected by the Graduate School and University.
- B. **Prospectus:** Follow your department's guidelines in developing your prospectus.
- C. **IRB Approval:** If your study involves human research, you must obtain USA Institutional Review Board (IRB) [approval](#) prior to data collection.

II. REVIEW OF THESIS/DISSERTATION APPROVAL PROCESS

- A. Below are the steps involved in this process. You will find detailed instructions on these steps in later sections of the guide.
 1. [Thesis/Dissertation Committee form](#)
 2. Thesis/Dissertation draft to committee (this may take several submissions)
 3. Email signature page draft to gradschool@southalabama.edu for approval of formatting before you get it signed.
 4. Defense completed ([Thesis/Dissertation Submission form](#) and signature page should be signed at defense)
 5. First submission
 6. Graduate School Review
 7. Second submission (and subsequent submissions- if necessary)
 8. Graduate School Review
 9. Final submission (you will receive a clearance memo via email)

III. APPOINTMENT OF GRADUATE FACULTY TO A DISSERTATION OR THESIS COMMITTEE

A. Thesis/Dissertation Committee Form

- 1. Completion and submission of this [form](#) is the beginning of the Graduate School's oversight of your thesis/dissertation and is REQUIRED. This form is due before starting or registering for your T/D hours.**
- 2. Chair of Thesis/Dissertation Committee qualifications and responsibilities**
 - a) The chair may be an associate graduate faculty member for thesis papers. A dissertation chair must be a full graduate faculty member.**
 - b) The chair is responsible for the overall supervision of the thesis/dissertation. The chair will communicate the requirements of the process and will meet regularly with the student. The chair will also proofread the prospectus and subsequent document drafts for style, format and validity of the document.**
- 3. Committee Member qualifications and responsibilities**
 - a) A thesis committee must consist of at least three members of the Graduate Faculty and a dissertation committee must consist of four members of the Graduate Faculty. Both must have at least one member from outside the student's department or program.**
 - b) However, professionals from outside of the university may be considered for committee membership and will be [administratively appointed](#) to serve on specific student's committee, upon approval by the Graduate School Dean.**

c) Two-thirds of the committee must be an Associate or Full Member of the [USA Graduate School Faculty](#) for a thesis committee. A dissertation committee must consist of 1/2 graduate faculty. Teaching members of the USA Graduate School Faculty must be individually appointed. The committee members determine the appropriateness and quality of the study. Furthermore, committee members review the prospectus and consider aspects such as topic, feasibility, design, importance, impact, and student preparedness. Committee members are also responsible for proofreading the prospectus and subsequent drafts of the thesis/dissertation.

4. Department Chair

By signing the committee form, the Chair verifies that the study as proposed in the prospectus is feasible in terms of utilization of facilities, resources, materials and equipment, as well as if the study is appropriate in terms of departmental policies and procedures.

5. Director of Graduate Studies

By signing the committee form, the Graduate Studies Director verifies that the administrative procedures have been followed in development, completion and approval of the prospectus and that Institutional Review Board approval was granted (if applicable). Furthermore, the Director verifies that the study is acceptable pertaining to the College/School policies and procedures.

6. Dean of Graduate School

a) By signing the committee form, the Dean verifies approval of the student's thesis/dissertation in regards to University standards and policies.

IV. THESIS/DISSERTATION DEVELOPMENT

A. Your thesis/dissertation must contain and address certain key elements:

- 1. Problem/topic**
- 2. Review of existing body of knowledge**
- 3. Description of study (must include subjects, procedures, equipment, materials and other pertinent information)**
- 4. Results**
- 5. Analysis of results**
- 6. Implications and impact on existing body of knowledge**
- 7. If your thesis/dissertation is creative in nature (i.e., creative writing), you are required to follow the formatting guidelines, see below.**

V. FORMATTING AND CONTENTS

A. Your thesis/dissertation must follow an acceptable formatting style. Many students use the APA style, the MLA is also acceptable. Other professionally recognized style guides are allowed. For technical papers the LaTeX document preparation system is often utilized. Check with your committee for style requirements and/or recommendations consistent with your discipline. The Graduate School will email you a LaTeX template upon request.

B. Margin requirements are specific due to the binding of your final copies. ALL pages must meet the margin requirements.

- 1. Left margin = 1 ½ inch**
- 2. Right margin = 1 inch**
- 3. Bottom margin = 1 ¼ inch**
- 4. Top margin = 1 inch, except for pages with major headings (i.e., chapter headings), those pages can have a 1 or 2 inch top margin or pages with a centered figure as long as consistency is followed with either.**

C. Text

- 1. Printing must be done on ink jet or laser printers.**
- 2. The font should be consistent and be a standard Roman or serif type font style. Font size must be 12 point.**
- 3. Left justification only, full justification is not allowed.**
- 4. General text must be double spaced.**
- 5. Single space is used only for lengthy quotations, footnotes, notes, multi-line captions and bibliographic entries.**
- 6. Paragraph indentions must be 5 spaces.**

D. Page Numbering

- 1. Preliminary pages are numbered at the bottom, center of the page, ½ from the bottom of the page. Preliminary page numbers are always lower-case roman numerals. All page numbers should be in the same font and size as the body of your paper.**
- 2. The first page of your paper must be page 1. There are two options for numbering these pages. The page numbers can be at the center of the page, ½ from the bottom or can be placed at the top right corner, flush with the right margin.**

E. Preliminary Pages:

- 1. Signature page- see template on the Graduate School thesis webpage. You can also refer to the below section for information regarding the signature page. This page is required. This page is not numbered or counted. Top and bottom margins only may be reduced to allow for all information to fit on one page.**
- 2. Title page- see template located on the Graduate School webpage. This page is required. This page is not numbered, but is counted as page i.**
- 3. Dedication- This page is optional. If you wish to include a dedication, be brief and center it in the middle of the page. This is page ii.**

- 4. Acknowledgements-** This page is optional. The heading **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** (in all caps) is centered 1 or 2 inches from the top of the page. The text begins on the 4th line below the heading (3 blank line spaces).
- 5. Table of Contents (TOC)-** This page is required. See template located on the Graduate School thesis webpage. The heading **TABLE OF CONTENTS** (all caps) is centered 1 or 2 inches from the top of the page. The text begins on the 4th line below the heading (3 blank line spaces). The captions in the TOC must **EXACTLY** match what is in the body of your paper. This includes capitalization. Single space multi-line captions. Do not allow caption text to extend all the way to the page number, leave at least 5 blank spaces. If you have a multi-page TOC, only the first page should have a 2 inch top margin. Page number listings **MUST** be accurate. Do not list preliminary pages before and including your Table of Contents in your TOC.
- 6. List of Tables (LOT)-** This page is only required if you have tables in your paper. See template. The heading **LIST OF TABLES** (in all caps) is centered 1 or 2 inches from the top of the page. The text begins on the 4th line below the heading (3 blank line spaces). The captions in the LOT must **EXACTLY** match what is in the body of your paper and is limited to the first sentence of the table caption. Single space multi-line captions. Do not allow caption text to extend all the way to the page number, leave at least 5 blank spaces. If you have a multi-page LOT, only the first page should have a 2 inch top margin. Page number listings **MUST** be accurate.
- 7. List of Figures (LOF)-** This page is only required if you have figures in your paper. See template. The heading **LIST OF FIGURES** (in all caps) is centered 1 or 2 inches from the top of the page. The text begins on the 4th line below the heading (3 blank line spaces). The captions in the LOF must **EXACTLY** match what is in the body of your paper and is limited to the first sentence of the figure caption. Single space multi-line captions. Do not allow caption text to extend all the way to the page number, leave at least 5 blank spaces. If you have a multi-page LOF, only the first page should have a 2 inch top margin. Page number listings **MUST** be accurate.

8. **List of Symbols, Abbreviations, and/or Nomenclature-** This page is only required if you have symbols, etc. in your paper. The heading **LIST OF SYMBOLS**, or whatever the case may be, (in all caps) is centered 1 or 2 inches from the top of the page. The text begins on the 4th line below the heading (3 blank line spaces). Formatting should be tailored to the student's field of study.

9. **Abstract-** This page is required. See template. The heading **ABSTRACT** (in all caps) is centered 1 or 2 inches from the top of the page. The text begins on the 4th line below the heading (3 blank line spaces). The first paragraph is single spaced and must contain your name (last name first), abbreviation of degree, name of institution granting degree, the date (month/year of graduation), and the name of your committee chair. The second paragraph is double spaced and must consist of a statement of the problem, a brief exposition of the research and a condensed summary of the findings. If your paper is creative, your abstract should be a summary of your work. A thesis abstract may only be 1 page in length. A dissertation abstract may be 2 pages in length.

F. Body of Thesis/Dissertation

1. **Major heading and subdivision formatting-**See template.

2. **Introduction-** Your introduction may precede chapter one or function as chapter one. If it is not your first chapter, the heading **INTRODUCTION** (in all caps) is centered 1 or 2 inches from the top of the page. The text begins on the 4th line below the heading (3 blank line spaces).

3. **Body-** Functions as the substance of the thesis/dissertation and as the detailed statement of the student's endeavor. The internal organization of chapters, sections, and subsections is up to the student. Note that it is important to include one or more problem statements, objectives, or hypotheses early in the thesis to introduce the reader to the purpose of your study. Findings relative to these concepts should be addressed later in your thesis when you report the results of your study.

- 4. Cumulative 3 (or more) article Theses/Dissertations (this style is optional and must be approved by the student's committee):**
- a) Adoption of the 3-article format requires permission from the student's thesis/dissertation committee. Programs may have requirements beyond the Graduate School's for 3-article theses/dissertations.**
 - b) There must be a common theme/coherence/rationale in tying together the 3 or more articles into a thesis or dissertation.**
 - c) All articles used must be of publishable quality, as determined by the committee.**
 - d) The student must be the first author on all articles. Student co-authors are not allowed. Other co-authors, if applicable, must be identified and approved by the thesis/dissertation committee.**
 - e) The student must obtain the necessary permissions, in writing, from the copyright holder, and other authors, if applicable. Written permission must be included in the thesis/dissertation (see formatting requirements in the next section).**
 - f) The formatting style must meet the Graduate School formatting standards and the same style must be followed throughout the paper regardless of the style of the articles. Published articles may not be included in the original published format. Screenshots or photocopies will not be accepted. However, the content of the published article must remain the same. Revisions to the content of a previously published article are not allowed.**
 - g) The Graduate School submission deadlines are the same for 3-article thesis or dissertation, as they are for other theses or dissertations.**

h) Organization of a Cumulative (3-article) thesis or dissertation:

- 1) Include copyright information on the title page at the bottom or a separate page following the title page.**
- 2) Include written permissions as an appendix at the end of the thesis/dissertation.**
- 3) The abstract must present and organize all articles into a cohesive whole.**
- 4) Each article must be identified in the Table of Contents as a separate section (usually a chapter) by giving it the same title as the applicable article. Only list subheadings from the introductory and summary sections.**
- 5) The List of Tables and List of Figures (if applicable) should list all tables and figures that appear in the paper. Numbering should follow Graduate School standards.**
- 6) The List of Abbreviations (if applicable) should include the entire paper.**
- 7) The main body of the paper must include:**
 - i. The Introduction must state why the specific articles were chosen, a discussion of the relationship between the articles, the overall purpose or hypotheses tested, any relevant background information, and a statement summarizing the findings. Each article must be necessary to the thesis/dissertation.**
 - ii. Each chapter must include the relevant subsections of the specific article (Introduction, Literature review, Method, Results, Conclusion, Reference list, Appendices) formatted per Graduate School standards.**
 - iii. The closing chapter must have an overall conclusion for the thesis/dissertation as a whole, discussion, applications, and future research (emerging from each and as a whole).**
 - iv. Appendices at the end of the thesis/dissertation should only include additional appendices that relate to the thesis/dissertation as a whole.**

- 5. Tables are generally used to designate tabulated numerical data or text in the body of the document and/or in the Appendices.**
- a) Tables are numbered separately from figures, usually 1, 2, 3, etc. Each table must have a unique, consecutive number. If tables appear in the Appendix section, they may be numbered A1, A2, A3, etc.**
 - b) Tables are separated from the text of your paper by 3 blank line spaces, top and bottom.**
 - c) If a table and its caption are on a page without text from the paper, it must have a 1 inch top margin.**
 - d) There must be one single blank line space between a table and its caption.**
 - e) Captions must be single-spaced, unless otherwise specified by your style guide. The caption must begin with the table number, preceded by the word “Table” and if a table should extend to the next page, the top line reads, for example, “Table 1 cont.”**
 - f) Table captions can be formatted in two ways:
 - 1) The word “Table”, its number and caption may appear above the table, left justified or centered.**
 - 2) Or the word “Table” and its number may be centered on one line and the caption on the line below.****
 - g) If a table is too large to be placed vertically on a page, you may place it horizontally; however, the page margins and page number remain the same. If there is not enough room to place the caption on the same page, it may go on the facing page slightly above the center of the page.**
 - h) More than one table can appear on the same page, as long as they are separated by 3 blank line spaces.**

6. Figures are generally used to designate non-verbal material such as graphs or illustrations, and are included in the body of the document and/or in the Appendices.

a) Figures are numbered separately from tables. Each figure must have a unique, consecutive number. If figures appear in the Appendix section, they may be numbered A1, A2, A3, etc.

b) Figures are separated from the text of your paper by 3 blank line spaces, top and bottom.

c) If a figure and its caption are on a page without text from the paper, it must be centered on the page, unless otherwise specified by your style guide.

d) There must be one single blank line space between a figure and its caption.

e) Captions must be single-spaced, unless otherwise specified by your style guide. The caption must begin with the figure number, preceded by the word "Figure" and if a figure should extend to the next page, the top line reads, for example, "Figure 1 cont."

f) Figure captions are placed below the figure and should end with a period, unless otherwise specified by your style guide.

g) If a figure is too large to be placed vertically on a page, you may place it horizontally; however, the page margins and page number remain the same. If there is not enough room to place the caption on the same page, it may go on the facing page slightly above the center of the page.

h) More than one figure can appear on the same page, as long as they are separated by 3 blank line spaces.

7. Oversize pages (if printed)

a) Sheets up to 11 x 22 ½ inches are acceptable if the folded edge is at least 1 ½ inches from the left edge to permit unfolding, as so that the right edge lines up evenly with the standard sized paper. The page number placement should be the same as the rest of your paper.

G. Summary and conclusions

1. This is usually the last major division (chapter) of the paper. Revisit your hypothesis and state whether your hypothesis was proven or disproven and in what way. Recommendations may be included in this section or put in a subsequent section.

H. References

1. Your reference section may include a cover page (optional). Center the word "REFERENCES" or "LITERATURE CITED" in the center of the page. Cover pages are not numbered or counted. If you do not use a cover page, insert your major heading at the top of the first page of this section. See below.

2. List the heading again with a 1 or 2 inch top margin on the next page, followed by 3 blank line spaces before beginning the reference list.

3. You must follow a style guide for your references, such as APA, MLA, etc. There are online software products available for formatting your references. The USA Library recommends [Mendeley](#) which is free of charge.

I. Appendices

1. This section is optional. It is added if your supplementary data is too long for inclusion in the text or not immediately essential to understanding the topic.

2. If you are utilizing an Appendix section, a cover page (optional) labeled APPENDICES (in all caps) centered on the page. If there is only one, label as APPENDIX. If you do not use a cover page, insert your major heading APPENDICES or APPENDIX at the top of the first page of this section.

3. You may divide your APPENDICES into sections if you have a large amount of material. Treat these sections as first order subdivisions. List each appendix or each section (labeled Appendix A, B, C, etc.) in the Table of Contents. Each appendix must be numbered and captioned.

J. Biographical Sketch

1. This section is required. Your Biographical Sketch may include a cover page (optional). Center the word “BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH” in the center of the cover page. See template.

2. Center the heading “BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH” in all caps, followed by 3 blank line spaces. This page must have a 1 or 2 inch top margin.

3. For your biographical sketch page, there are two acceptable formats (only use one or the other, not both). Your date and place of birth is optional due to privacy concerns:

a) Essay format example: Jason Denham was born in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, on June 6, 1983. He graduated from the University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, with a B.S. in Biology in 2001. A graduate assistantship was awarded to Jason in his first year at the University of South Alabama. Jason has published an article in *Science* magazine. He is married to Dianna Denham of Seaside, Florida, and they have two children.

b) Outline format example (you may include awards, honors, and/or publications, please do not include any publications *in press*):

Name of Author: Jason Denham

Place of Birth: Ocean Springs, Mississippi

Date of Birth: June 6, 1983

Graduate and Undergraduate School Attended:

University of Southern Mississippi,
Hattiesburg, Mississippi

University of South Alabama, Mobile,
Alabama

Degrees Awarded:

Master of Science in Biology, 2007, Mobile,
Alabama

Bachelor of Science in Biology, 2001,
Hattiesburg, Mississippi

Awards and Honors

Young Scientist Scholarship, 2005, Young
Scientists Foundation, Mobile,
Alabama

Publications

J Denham, "Salt marsh habitat erosion,"
Science, Vol. 25, pp. 67-70, 2006.

VI. DEFENSE, SIGNATURE PAGE and THESIS/DISSERTATION SUBMISSION FORM

A. Your committee chair or department secretary should contact the Graduate School office with the date, time and location of your defense so that we may email an announcement to the USA faculty and staff at large. The Graduate School is not responsible for scheduling your defense. Since your entire committee will be present at your defense, plan to get your signature page and your [submission form](#) signed at your defense if at all possible. You will not be allowed to graduate with an incomplete signature page and/or submission form. Faculty members may be traveling out of state and potentially out of the country at any time, particularly during the summer term. Plan ahead to ensure you can complete these forms so that you may graduate on time.

1. Signature Page

2. Prior to getting your signature page signed, please email it to the Graduate School at gradschool@southalabama.edu so that we may check it for correct formatting. For your convenience, there is a signature page template posted on our thesis webpage as well.

a) Requirements:

1) This page can include electronic signatures. If not, all signatures should be in black ink only. Consider bringing a black ink pen. Acquire all signatures with the exception of the Dean of the Graduate School. The Dean will only sign when your paper is approved for final submission.

- 2) Only one copy is needed.
- 3) The month/date on your signature page must reflect the month/date of your graduation. This may change from year to year for the summer terms. Refer to the USA Academic Calendar for when final grades are due for this information.
- 4) Page margins must be the same as the rest of your thesis/dissertation, see margin requirements above.
- 5) Spellcheck does not work on all caps. Your title will be in all caps. Carefully review your title for correct spelling.

3. Thesis/Dissertation Submission Form

- a) Your [submission form](#) may be submitted electronically.
- b) This form indicates whether your defense was successful.
- c) This form includes a statement regarding the research integrity of your paper. Your committee chair is responsible for using ["Turnitin"](#) (or a similar review) – if your chair is not familiar with the turnitin process/code, have him/her contact the Innovations in Learning Center.
- d) The Graduate School will not review your paper unless this form has been completed and submitted.

VII. FIRST DRAFT SUBMISSION TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OFFICE

A. After you have successfully defended your thesis or dissertation you may submit your first submission.

1. Your completed and signed submission form must be submitted at this time.

2. It is highly recommended that you submit your signature page with your first submission. However, you may submit it at the final deadline if preferable. Be aware of the schedules of your chair, committee members, etc. as faculty may be traveling out of the area. Your signature page must be complete for you to graduate on time. All original or electronic signatures are required. Exceptions may be granted if you have a member who is out of state. High quality scanned pdfs are acceptable. The Graduate School will convert your signature page to a fillable pdf upon request. No faxed signatures will be accepted.

3. Your first submission should be submitted via email in Word or a searchable PDF to gradschool@southalabama.edu.

4. Submission due dates are published on the [Graduate School Thesis/Dissertation Preparation webpage](#).

5. It is highly recommended that you submit your paper earlier than the first submission due date. This will give you more time for any needed edits. Bear in mind that the Graduate School receives from 35-55 papers per semester and reviews them in the order in which they are received.

B. The Graduate School office checks for formatting, thoroughness and quality of scholarship. If misspelled words are noticed, they will be pointed out; however, in depth proofreading is not the responsibility of the Graduate School office. The student bears the responsibility of carefully and thoroughly reviewing the thesis/dissertation.

C. There is a [form](#) listing the most commonly encountered errors that students make in their papers. Please refer to this list as you review your paper before submitting it to the Graduate School office.

D. Second and subsequent draft submissions

1. The Graduate School office makes every effort to return your submission to you in a timely fashion to allow you time to make the needed revisions. Do not hesitate to email or call to check on the status. You will receive notice via email on what revisions are needed.

VIII. FINAL SUBMISSION OF THESIS/DISSERTATION COPIES

A. The Graduate School will email a clearance memo to you with detailed instructions on the final steps in this process.

1. All students are required to upload copies of their theses and dissertations to ProQuest where they will reside in the company's database for perpetual and global access. You may delay publication of your paper for up to 2 years in ProQuest and customize search engine access to your paper. The Graduate School and the Marx Library no longer require bound copies of theses or dissertations. Individual graduate programs and major professors, however, **MAY REQUIRE** bound copies of theses and dissertations for their departmental collections. Students have more than one means of printing required or personal copies as follows, as well as diverse online companies:

a) *ProQuest*: All students are required to upload their document to ProQuest. The company also offers printing services available 6 to 8 weeks after the document has been uploaded into their database. ProQuest's website provides various binding, paper, and shipping options for your copies.

1) After the thesis or dissertation is published, a student may request temporary removal of their thesis or dissertation from ProQuest and public access. The student must complete and submit the Request for temporary removal [Form](#). After review and approval, the thesis or dissertation will be removed for the specified amount of time.

b) *Online companies*: A brief google search will result in diverse companies who offer options on binding (Examples include thesisondemand, PhDbookbinding, acmebinding, etc.).

2. Doctoral students must complete the SED (Survey of Earned Doctorates) online survey. The link to the survey will be included in the final submission clearance memo.

IX. COMPLETION/APPROVAL OF THESIS/DISSERTATION

A. The Graduate School office will issue a memo to your committee chair, committee members, department head, graduate director and the Registrar's office that you have successfully completed your paper and are cleared for graduation.

Congratulations! You have completed your thesis or dissertation. The Graduate School wishes you every success in your future endeavors.