Steps to Writing a Thesis, Dissertation or other Publishable Written Work

The dissertation is an academic project that marks your transition from student to scholar. Your skill as a writer will be evaluated by your dissertation.

Writing a thesis or dissertation is a lot like writing a book. It will enable you to start developing a set of valuable research and writing skills. Thinking analytically, synthesizing complicated information, writing well, and organizing your time will all serve you well regardless of your career. The research strategies, work schedules, and writing techniques that help you do the thesis or dissertation will help you write books, articles, sermons and lectures in the future.

If you take some care in developing your thesis or dissertation, the document can be transformed, after graduation, into a book or series of articles.

❖ You should stay in contact with your Assessor about your progress
❖ Find out if your Assessor prefers to see -
  ➢ whole drafts of chapters
  ➢ relatively polished drafts
  ➢ smaller chunks of less-well-formed writing
  ➢ A weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly progress report

The following, are criteria for grading thesis or dissertations - They are the standards generally use when evaluating student writing.

What is Expected: The two principal characteristics are:

1) Its rich content: The information is presented in such a way that the reader (yes, even the Assessor) feels significantly taught by the author, sentence after sentence, paragraph after paragraph. Students are graded on their academic ability.

2) Its flawless mechanics: The paper is marked by stylistic finesse: the title and opening paragraph are engaging; the transitions are substantive rather than superficial; the phrasing is tight, fresh, and highly specific; the sentence structure is varied; and the tone contributes to the meaning of the paper. And, all of the mechanics of the paper, e.g., the grammar, punctuation, footnotes, references, citations, and bibliography are nearly flawless. A rule of thumb for papers with regard to mechanics is that they should not have more than one mechanical error for every five pages.

Your paper should leave the reader with a sense of having read a complete, satisfying piece of work.

How many quotations should be used in an academic paper?
How much of the paper may be quotes and how much should be your own writing? Here is the rule of thumb:

No more than 20% of your paper should be quotes.

Anyone can list a bunch of quotes; there is no academics to that. The academic paper must be primarily the student's original writing that shows that the student -

1) Has learned the material researched
2) Is doing his or her own work
3) Plagiarism will not be accepted (all papers will be scanned)
4) Papers that do not meet or exceed the above requirements will be returned for further work.

One MAJOR KEY with regard to how many and how long your quotes should be is this:

A Thesis or Dissertation should be written in such a way that a reader should be able to read the entire paper and be able to skip all of the quotations and it still makes perfect sense.

So, if your paper had all of the quotes removed from it, it should still flow well and make sense to the reader. In other words, the student is not to let someone else do his or her argument. The quotations are there to buttress and support the argument, not make it.

Please note this: It is not simply that you must have these sources listed in your bibliography, you must also interact with them in the body of your paper. Any assertions made must be backed up with evidence, and this evidence will often be quotations from various scholars. Because Primus University of Theology is strictly a Christian University we expect that a majority of your quotes will come from The Bible (always site the translation used).

❖ A dissertation for a Theology Degree may require fewer reference sources.

**Thesis or Dissertation Length**

- The minimum length of your thesis or dissertation is determined by the word count of the body of the work plus your footnotes.

  The body begins with the first word of your Introduction and ends with the last word of your Conclusion.

  When you count the words in your work do not count the Front Matter, the Table of Contents, the Bibliography, or the Appendices.
• *MASTER’S THESIS:*
  15,000 to 30,000 words (60 to 120 pages)
  Bibliography Sources: 20 or more

• *DOCTORAL DISSERTATION:*
  30,000 to 60,000 words (120 to 240 pages)
  Bibliography Sources: 40 or more

**Requirements for the Thesis:** This is a major research document, required for a Master’s degree. An 8-credit Thesis will require *well more* than twice as many pages as 8 credits in regular classes. This is the same with a doctoral dissertation which is required for a Doctoral degree. While there is no set limit on how many pages one will have to read for their Thesis or Dissertation, you can be sure that it will be more than twice that for the same amount of credits in regular classes.

*The following is an example of the minimum standards that have been established for reading requirements for a regular class:

- **Master's:** 250 pages per credit (4-credit class = 1,000 pp of reading)
- **Doctoral:** 350 pages per credit (4-credit class = 1,400 pp of reading)

All written work, regardless of length, must be excellent in content, logic, writing, grammar, and academic style.

1. Students must submit their final product as a PDF file on a CD.
2. CD’s must be shipped in their own hard plastic case to the Registrar’s office, 4680 East Main Street, Humboldt, Tennessee 38343
3. The disc may have a label or a handwritten description of the work. On the label (or in permanent ink in black), these things must be clearly readable:
   a. Student’s full name
   b. The title of the work
   c. The degree
   d. The date (month - year) work was finalized and accepted

Students who write thesis and dissertations are required to submit one copy of their work in PDF on a CD, which becomes the property of the school (however, the student retains all copyrights).

**Overview of Basic Steps:**

1) You will need to understand the basics of grammar, how to organize thoughts and notes, writing down everything that comes to mind that needs to be covered in the Work, this is the brainstorming process. After all the thoughts are down on paper, put them in order and organize them into an outline

2) Write an overview of the thesis or dissertation idea and explain it in one sentence. Be as concise as possible. Expand the sentence into a paragraph summary or overview. Try to keep this step to
one hundred words or less. This process will produce a paragraph that resembles the introduction that is found on the back of a book.

3) Develop the summary into a full page synopsis. Many publishers want a chapter by chapter outline for this step. To do a chapter by chapter outline, use your brainstorming outline and write a paragraph summary of what will happen in each chapter. This outline is the same as a synopsis.

4) Managing your topic -Think about variables that could be cut down and how changes would affect the length, depth, breadth, and scholarly value of your work.

5) Begin writing each chapter. Expand the outline or chapter-by-chapter synopsis into full chapters. Continue writing until the manuscript is finished. This will be the rough draft, the first completed manuscript.

Writing a Work can appear to be a mammoth, tedious undertaking. But when the process is broken into manageable pieces, it can become a fun adventure.

**Getting Started:**

**Step One:** The planning phase - Choose your subject. You can write on a subject that you find interesting or you can write on a subject that you have had an expertise in. Whatever subject you write on, there should be a purpose and reason for others interest for the information contained in your writing. If you are writing a book, make sure that your book fills a need.

Determine your audience. Who is going to read your written work? If you are writing a book, this will ensure that you have an audience for your book, and people that are going to buy it.

Summarize Your Idea: Take the idea which inspires you, and summarize it in 1-2 sentences. If you cannot encapsulate your main concept in two sentences or less, it’s a good indication that your story lacks focus.

Having a specific, defined focus for your work is vital to its success. If you try to cover too much in your thesis or dissertation, you may create a rambling mess which will alienate readers. Knowing what you are writing about, and being able to express it succinctly, is also crucial when seeking publication.

**Step Two-** The outline phase: Proper attention to the outline will cut your writing time drastically. The outline is actually the most critical part of writing your thesis or dissertation. Outlining is essential it empowers you to write your manuscript quickly, without writer’s block. If you have worked out the structure of your thesis or dissertation in advance, your creative imagination is freed up to focus on other aspects of your Work.

Talk with your thesis or dissertation assessor about your ideas and the topic you are planning to write about. They will guide you through the defining stage which will clarify your subject matter and in the process help you to create a writing project plan and a general outline.
A good way to develop your detailed outline is to call on a friend or two.

1. Take the general outline you created and divide each chapter into a conversation you will have with one or more people.

2. Sit down with your friends or colleagues and "talk" about the chapter. What are the most important points you want to make in the chapter? What stories do you remember or would like to tell? And, most importantly, what are the biggest emotional needs of your target market that can be addressed in this chapter? Record your entire conversation, and make notes as you go along.

3. Have your recording transcribed and put into a word processing document. Then simply construct a detailed outline from what was said. You may have to rearrange a few things, but all the main points will be there. Write a Synopsis

Now that you have clarified what your Work is about, it is time to expand your thoughts and purpose.

A good synopsis will cover the main elements of your thesis or dissertation, point by point, and will offer insights into your theory and motivation.

The synopsis should not be long, at this early stage you are only aspiring to develop a broad overview of your thought process. Usually a 3-5 page synopsis will suffice, depending on the complexity of your Work.

Now, you need to choose the title of your work. The more compelling and focused your title is, the easier it is to write.

Step Three: Preparing for the first draft - You have a detailed outline. Now is the time to start filling in the pieces. Go through each item on your outline list and determine whether or not you need additional information or data. You might need to find a reference or gather research data to back up your main point. Get the information and insert it into the right place on the outline. As you review the outline you'll naturally see things you want to add, change, remove, or move. Go ahead - this is the perfect time to do a little cleaning and organizing.

Step Four: Writing the first draft - You may have to make time in your day to write, by getting up early, staying up late, or skipping lunch. Do whatever you have to do to write every day.

Now comes the easy part. Sit down with your recorder, your detailed outline, any additional notes or information. You know your material inside and out, so this won't be hard. Talk through each item on your outline. That's it. No writing is required.

Now that your story has been charted out, it’s time to write. This is by far the longest step in the process. But if you come to it prepared, you should have a finished manuscript within a few months.
Using your outline as a road map, write out your thesis or dissertation, step by step. Set a weekly goal for yourself, and keep it realistic. For working people and parents, producing fifteen to twenty double-spaced pages a week is a reasonable expectation.

The secret to completing this step is as follows:

Do not edit as you go. Simply write, write what comes to your mind.

If you produce chapter that you are not that happy with, just let it be, and keep pressing forward. Don’t expect your first draft to perfect.

**Step Five:** Determining the length of your thesis or dissertation. Remember, standard length is:

**MASTER’S THESIS**
15,000 to 30,000 words (60 to 120 pages)
Bibliography Sources: 20 or more

**DOCTORAL DISSERTATION:**
30,000 to 60,000 words (120 to 240 pages)
Bibliography Sources: 40 or more

**Step Six:** Write your chapter titles. Once you know how long your Work is going you can plan your structure. A 200 page Work has 20 chapters, each ten pages long. Write down your 20 chapter titles, they don’t have to be in order. Once you have the subject matter for each chapter, you can amplify them into compelling chapter titles by using the same exercise you used for the Thesis or Dissertation title.

Break each chapter into 10 or more subtopics. To make the writing process even easier, write down 10 or more points that you want to cover in each chapter. Each point will take up approximately one page.

Decide how much time you have to write every day. If you write steadily, and give yourself 10-15 minutes per subtopic, it will take you approximately 100 - 150 minutes to write a ten page chapter. That means if you can devote an hour to an hour and a half a day, your 20 chapter Work will be completed in 22 - 33 days.

**Step Seven:** Editing the first draft
Read through the entire Work, chapter by chapter.

- Does it flow?
- Are your points clear?
- Is it interesting to read?
- How does it feel?
- Read it as if you are your target market
• Make notes
• Talk through the changes with a colleague
• Write down suggestions or changes

These steps will ensure PROMPT completion of the second draft.

**Step Eight:** Revise Your Manuscript

Take a break for a few days or a week. When you return to your manuscript with a fresh perspective, you will more than likely find it to be better than you remember.

An author once said *that great Works are not written, but revised.* It’s in this step that your true talent will come to the forefront.

Take the raw material of your first draft, and reshape it into something exceptional. If you allow your creative energies to take control, you can transform your awkward first draft into an engaging, well-paced written work. Nothing is more satisfying than taking an imperfect, rough manuscript, and polishing it into a thing of beauty.

**Step Nine:** Final review - Now all you have to do is a final review of your Work.

**Step Ten:** Let go - Send your second draft to a professional editor. There are websites that are designed specifically for editing, you can go to: www.Paperrater.com or www.grammerly.com

You MUST have someone else read the Work for consistency, flow, and for general editing. We all leave out words, sentences, and even complete paragraphs because we "see" it in our mind, even when it's not there. Your editor will see your minor omissions as blaring errors.

**The sources for this information were found in the following sites:**


http://mythicscribes.com/writing-a-Work/

*Burl  _Steps to Writing a Work: Novel Writing Tips on How to Write a Manuscript Suites101.com_* http://suite101.com/article/basic-steps-to-writing-a-Work-a184789

How to Write a Work, 10 Simple Steps, by Bob Burnham, Expert Author Publishing

http://bburnham.wrytestuff.com/swa247222.htm