



Faculty of Nursing Master's and Doctoral Thesis Guidelines (Traditional & Paper-Based)

The following guidelines are specific to the Faculty of Nursing and are superseded by those guidelines and policies that are outlined by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) and University requirements as stated in the University of Alberta Calendar.

The thesis is developed and implemented by the student with guidance and direction from the supervisor and supervisory committee members. A key consideration for prospective doctoral students is the alignment of the student's proposed dissertation with the graduate supervisor's area of substantive and/or methodological research expertise. During the first year of graduate coursework, the thesis outline should be established as it will increasingly become the focus of course assignments and other learning outcomes related to program progression. Students are encouraged to discuss their proposal with other committee members, experts in the area, and other students.

The thesis will be provisionally approved by the supervisory committee members prior to the scheduling of the date for the final thesis examination. It is important that the supervisory committee agrees that the thesis requirements have provisionally been achieved, and that the document is satisfactory to proceed to the final examination. The thesis is normally expected to be prepared to a level that merits scholarly peer-reviewed publication. Due consideration of timelines and time requirements for a proper and diligent review of the student thesis is important.

To be eligible for convocation, following completion of the final thesis examination, all students in a thesis degree program must submit to FGSR an electronic copy of a thesis depicting the results of their research.

Thesis Requirements

Key academic requirements for both master's and doctoral theses are described in the University of Alberta calendar.

For students in a master's degree program, the minimal requirement is that the thesis work demonstrates both the student's ability to engage in scholarly work and the student's familiarity with the subject area of the thesis. As far as possible, it should be an original contribution.

For students in a doctoral program, the minimal requirement is that the thesis work is an original contribution to knowledge and is of sufficient quality to merit peer-review publication.

A paper-based thesis includes an introductory chapter, multiple independent though interrelated papers in journal-article format, and a concluding chapter. All papers are manuscripts that have been developed as part of the thesis proposal and project (i.e. previously published works submitted prior to approval of the dissertation proposal are typically not permitted with the exception of knowledge synthesis, conceptual or methodological papers that have been developed with input and guidance from the supervisory committee).

The number of papers to be included in the thesis is determined in consultation with the supervisor/supervisory committee and varies depending on whether it is a master's or doctoral thesis. Each paper will typically address a unique objective or question and will form a coherent and integrated project as outlined in the thesis proposal. Papers must be thematically related such that the contribution to nursing knowledge emerges across the papers as a body of work. Co-authorship and appropriate or relevant journals to target for publication should be identified as part of an authorship plan that is developed and documented prior to candidacy examination. Each article must be approved by all members of the supervisory committee prior to submission for journal publication.

It is expected that the student will write the thesis without substantial assistance from others. Academic copy editing for theses, dissertations and publications is available for a fee through the Academic Success Centre and the University of Alberta Libraries. When students engage editors or other academic services for writing assistance, it is intended that such services will improve the student's writing capabilities to submit better work. Plagiarism is considered to be academic misconduct and will be investigated pursuant to the University of Alberta Code of Student Behavior.

Thesis Formatting Requirements

Formatting requirements that are specified by FGSR (2014) are outlined in the FGSR Minimum Thesis Formatting Requirements document, which provides a detailed checklist for guidance on minimum requirements to be incorporated in preparation of the thesis. All master's and doctoral theses must conform to the requirements of the Theses Canada program sponsored by Library and Archives Canada and the requirements of the University of Alberta Libraries.

Choosing a Traditional or Paper-Based Thesis

Graduate students have the option to use either a traditional thesis format or a paper-based thesis format. This is a critically important decision and should be explored by the student and supervisor immediately upon entering the graduate program. When the option for the paper-based or traditional thesis is selected, early planning should clearly document the likely scholarly outputs and timelines. Supervisor and student need to weigh the pros and cons of each approach using some of the considerations below:

- Graduate student writing and analytical skills
- Familiarity and comfort with the publication process
- Nature of methodology and scholarly outputs
- Timelines and available resources
- Overall structure of the scholarly work to be reported in the thesis

Traditional Thesis

A traditional thesis is a multi-chapter monograph and is preferred when the inquiry is best presented as a coherent document that offers a systematic account of the research process, findings, and implications for future research and practice. Although the traditional thesis is unlikely to be published "as is", it is expected that part of the thesis will be adapted for scholarly publication in future.

Paper-Based Thesis

A paper-based thesis includes an introductory chapter, multiple independent though interrelated papers in journal-article format, and a concluding chapter. The number of papers to be included in

the thesis is determined in consultation with the supervisor/supervisory committee and varies depending on whether it is a master's or doctoral thesis. Each paper will typically address a unique objective or question and will form a coherent and integrated project as outlined in the thesis proposal. Papers must be thematically related such that the contribution to nursing knowledge emerges across the papers as a body of work. Co-authorship and appropriate or relevant journals to target for publication should be identified as part of an authorship plan that is developed and documented prior to candidacy examination. Each article must be approved by the supervisory committee prior to submission for journal publication.

The introductory chapter must provide an overview of the entire thesis and clearly state the background to the research and the research question(s). The introduction will include a conceptual framework that guides the thesis, and a general literature review of the area(s) relevant to the thesis as a whole if it is not presented in a manuscript. Where appropriate, review of literature specific only to individual papers may be deferred until chapters containing those papers. Thus, there may be some overlap or redundancy between the literature review in the introductory chapter and the papers. If the included manuscripts only provide superficial reporting of the study methods, a more in depth report of research methods may be added to the introductory chapter.

At least one manuscript should describe the dissertation research project and must include all the elements of a traditional thesis. Other manuscripts may be reviews, philosophical, empirical, or methodological papers.

The concluding chapter should summarize the relationship(s) between the papers and clearly state the contribution to knowledge represented by the overall thesis as a body of research. The chapter should propose or highlight the salient conclusions to be drawn from the thesis. The conclusion must demonstrate that the papers form a thematically related body of work which represents an original contribution to the discipline of nursing.

In addition to the *references* listed at the end of each paper, a final *bibliography* for all the sources cited throughout the thesis must be included at the end of the thesis. Normally, one referencing and formatting system is used throughout. For the purposes of the dissertation, the manuscript format does not change to adhere to specific journal requirements.

Paper-based theses for doctoral students normally include a minimum of three papers that would merit publication in a peer reviewed journal in addition to the introductory and concluding chapters. Prior to the final oral examination, at least one of the manuscripts must be under consideration for publication in a peer reviewed journal. Other papers may be prepared for submission, submitted, or in review with a peer reviewed journal.

Paper-based theses for master's students normally include one or two publishable papers in addition to the introductory and concluding chapters. At the discretion of the supervisor/committee, depending on the scope and complexity of the topic, one paper with an overview chapter may constitute the master's thesis. Prior to the final oral master's examination, at least one paper must be under consideration for publication in a peer reviewed journal.

Publication or acceptance for publication before presentation of the thesis in no way supersedes the evaluation of the publication by the supervisor/committee, the external examiner, or the final doctoral examining committee. Inclusion of published material in the thesis does not guarantee that the thesis will be found acceptable for the degree.

If a paper has been published or is being considered for publication, it is the student's responsibility to proactively obtain copyright permission in advance from the publisher to include the paper in the thesis. A small number of publishers consider the inclusion of a thesis in a university repository to be a prior publication and University policy requires compliance with copyright law. If the publisher requests an embargo of the publication, the student must submit a written request to the Faculty prior to submitting the final versions of the thesis to FGSR. A request to [restrict public access to a thesis](#) may be approved for a maximum of one year.

Co-Authored Papers

Graduate students have intellectual property rights protected under copyright law and University of Alberta intellectual property policies. Unless they have signed an agreement stating otherwise, graduate students “have the right to own the copyright for their own written or artistic work, or computer software” ([Intellectual Property Guidelines for Graduate Students and Supervisors](#), 2004, p. 7). Papers emanating from the thesis may be sole authored or co-authored. The student should be the first author of all papers and hold primary responsibility for the conceptualization of the study, analyses, interpretation and writing. Deviation from this practice should be reviewed by the supervisory committee, and agreement and rationale for such variation must be documented in writing with permission from the student. In co-authored work, documentation should include a description of the respective contribution of all authors.

A discussion on authorship for each of the proposed papers needs to take place early in the course of the development of the research work. Resulting agreements should be documented in an authorship plan that specifies the anticipated co-authors from the supervisory committee, their roles for each publication (as per the guidelines below), as well as journals that will be targeted for submission of manuscripts. The plan should address identification of the corresponding author who will coordinate and collaborate on journal publications following the completion of the student's program. The authorship plan should also consider a process that could permit the supervisor to pursue publication if the student chooses not to move the work forward within a reasonable time period following the final thesis examination.

FGSR [Guidelines for Authorship](#) state that:

“1) All authors should have made a substantial contribution to the conception, design, analysis, or interpretation of data;
2) they should have been involved in writing and revising the manuscript for intellectual content; and,
3) they should have approved the final draft and be able to defend the published paper.
Those who have made other contributions to the work (such as data collection without interpretation) or only parts of the above criteria should be credited in the acknowledgements, but not receive authorship.”