

What a Thesis Looks Like¹

I. Title Page (see attached)

II. Abstract

This is a brief (usually 150 words), comprehensive summary of the contents of your paper in which you should describe a) the problem you're studying, b) specific relevant characteristics of your participants, c) the experimental method, d) the findings, and e) the conclusions and implications or applications [each of these parts is generally conveyed in one sentence.

III. Introduction

In this section, you present the specific problem you're working on and describe the research strategy. Important questions to ask yourself as you write this are:

- What is the point of my research?
- How do the hypotheses and the experimental design relate to the problem?
- What are the theoretical implications of the study, and how does the study relate to previous work in the area? What are the theoretical propositions tested, and how were they derived?

This section also includes a literature review. You should provide a thorough discussion of your topic area, but you don't need to do an exhaustive historical review. You should clearly acknowledge the contributions of other researchers to the field through accurate citation of their work. Also, be sure to cite research that is pertinent to your specific issue, but avoid references that are only tangentially relevant. If you summarize earlier work, avoid nonessential details—just emphasize important findings, relevant methodological issues, and major conclusions.

It is also critical in this section to demonstrate the logical continuity between previous and present research—clearly articulate how your project developed out of and is relevant to the body of research you reviewed AND indicate how your findings will advance knowledge in the area.

The closing paragraph of an introduction should clearly state the purpose and rationale of your research. State your hypotheses clearly here, and also define your variables. Keep in mind these questions as you close your introduction:

- What variables did I plan to manipulate?
- What results did I expect and why did I expect them? [You must make the logic behind your hypotheses explicit.]

IV. Method

This section describes in detail how the study was conducted. You want to be very clear and explicit here, so that readers can evaluate the adequacy of your method, and so that someone could easily attempt to replicate your study by precisely following your methodology.

The method section is often broken up into subsections, which include headings such as:

Participants²: Who participated, how many participants were there, and how were they selected?

Materials: Describe the materials used and their function in the study (also, any complex equipment you use should be described, often by providing the commercial name and model number of the apparatus).

¹ Much of what's contained in this handout is derived from the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 4th edition (1994)

² According to APA guidelines, 'subjects should now always be called 'participants.'

Procedure: Precisely what did your participants experience in your experiment? What instructions did they receive, how were individuals assigned to conditions, how do you counterbalance randomize, or control various features of the study?

Dependent variables: Describe in detail the measures you used (e.g., if your dependent variable is "satisfaction with performance," you might write: "Participants were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with their performance by rating themselves on a 1 (not at all satisfied) to 7 (very satisfied) response scale.")

I think the method section is the easiest part of your paper to write, and would recommend you do it first (it will give you a sense of accomplishment!). Remember, all you're doing here is explaining, in clear language, what your study entailed.

V. Results

This section summarizes the data collected and the statistical treatment of them. First, briefly state the main results or findings, then report the data in sufficient detail to justify the conclusions. You don't need to discuss the implications of your results here—that happens in the discussion section. Mention all relevant results, including those that run counter to your hypotheses.

To report your data, you'll want to use the medium that suits them best (i.e., that allows you to clearly and economically present results). Tables and/or figures may be appropriate. APA has specific guidelines for the format of tables and figures—you should take a look at the Publication Manual if you will be using these.

When reporting inferential statistics (e.g., t-tests, F-tests, chi-square), include information about the magnitude or value of the test, the degrees of freedom, probability level, and the direction of the effect. Also be sure to include descriptive statistics (e.g., means and standard deviations). APA also has specific guidelines for reporting the results of statistical tests; again, see the manual.

VI. Discussion

In this section, your job is to evaluate and interpret your data, especially with respect to your original hypotheses. Here you are free to examine, interpret, and qualify the results, as well as draw inferences from them. Emphasize any theoretical consequences of the results and the validity of your conclusions.

You should open the discussion with a clear statement regarding the support or nonsupport of your original hypothesis. Similarities and differences between your work and the work of others should clarify and confirm your conclusions. You may want to remark on shortcomings of the study. Negative results should be accepted as such without any undue attempt to explain them away.

In general, in this section, you should be guided by these questions:

- What have I contributed here?
- How has my study helped to resolve the original problem set forth?
- What conclusions and theoretical implications can I draw from my study?

VII. References

Use APA guidelines for reporting references. Note that these have changed recently; references are now indented in the same manner as paragraphs. E.g., a journal article citation will look something like this:

Ashmore, R. D., & Del Boca, F. K. (1979). Sex stereotypes and implicit personality theory: Toward a cognitive-social psychological conceptualization. *Sex Roles*, 5, 219-248.

VIII. Endnotes

These appear on a separate page (following references). On this page, center the label "Footnotes"; be sure to double space these notes, and to indent each note as in a paragraph. E.g.:

1 All t-tests are two-tailed, unless otherwise reported.

OTHER INFORMATION:

- Pages are numbered, along with a running head, in the top right margin (as on this handout)
- All sections are headed, with one exception: The introduction is not labeled "introduction", but rather the title of your thesis is repeated at the top of the first page of your thesis.
- Sections run into each other— i.e., do not begin a new page to start your method section, discussion etc. However, references and footnotes do begin on their own, separate pages.
- Tables and/or figures are worked into the text, typically on separate pages, where appropriate. For example, if you refer to Table 1 on p. 8 of your thesis, the table itself may appear on p. 9. This is one discrepancy from APA style, which places tables at the end of a manuscript.
- Avoid the use of sexist language

EXAMPLES OF REPORTING STATISTICS:

From Biernat & Kobrynowicz (1996):

"The data were analyzed using an applicant sex X job type X instruction (minimum standard, ability standard) X response scale (objective, subjective) analysis of variance (ANOVA). On an index tapping performance levels the participant required from an applicant before recommending him or her for a second interview, we found only a main effect of instructional set, $F(1,269) = 6.19$, $p < .02$. Instructions to assess "ability" led participants to require a higher level of performance ($M = .12$) than did instructions to assess minimum standards ($M = -.13$). These data provide us with general evidence that respondents saw the inference of ability as a higher standard than the inference of minimum competence."

From Biernat, Vescio, & Billings (1996):

"Verbal ability judgments were analyzed using a target race X verbal ability (quality) level X response scale repeated measures ANOVA. This analysis revealed main effects of race, $F(1,23) = 7.06$, $p < .05$ and quality level, $F(1,23) = 115.86$, $p < .0001$, as well as significant race X scale, $F(1,23) = 6.92$, $p < .05$, and the predicted race X quality X scale interaction, $F(1,23) = 10.22$, $p < .01$. The relevant means for this interaction appear in Table 1."

Table 1

Interaction Between Race of Applicant, Quality of Applicant and Response Scale on Verbal Ability Judgments. Study 3

Verbal Skill of Target	Subjective Scale		Objective Scale	
	Black	White	Black	White
High	3.96 ^a	3.60 ^a	3.35 ^c	3.90 ^c
Low	1.94 ^b	2.31 ^b	1.96	2.23

Note: Black-White contrasts were calculated within each scale type and quality level. Means with matching superscripts were significantly different at $p < .05$, using pairwise t-tests and the pooled error term.

TITLE

(in capital letters)

by

Your Name

Submitted to the Department of Psychology at the University of Kansas
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors
in Psychology.

(Name of your advisor) .Faculty Advisor

(Name of faculty reader) .Faculty Reader

(Name of Honors Director) .Honors Program
Director

Date approved