

Lancaster University
Doctoral Programme in Clinical Psychology
Guidelines for Thesis Format: Advice to internal
and external examiners

This document sets out the guidelines for assessing Lancaster DClinPsy theses. Please also refer to the University guidance on the examination of research degrees:
<http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/sbs/registry/docs/ExternalExaminers/guidance-notes-research-degree.pdf>

1. The thesis should consist of an investigation with human participants and be of relevance to the theory and practice of clinical psychology. The thesis should include investigative work, the results of which can be judged to constitute a substantial contribution to knowledge, and should afford evidence of originality by the discovery of new findings and by the exercise of independent critical power. The DClinPsy thesis does not resemble a PhD in scope; it will have only one research ‘chapter’. However, the trainee’s goal is to produce work which is of publishable standard. The candidate should be able to demonstrate in what respect her or his work appears to him or her to advance knowledge or practice in clinical psychology. The main substance of the thesis should not exceed:
 - 1.1 26,000 words excluding tables, figures, reference lists and appendices;
 - 1.2 56,000 words including tables, figures, references and appendices.
2. Each candidature shall be completed by the presentation of a bound thesis detailing the background, methods and results of the project, and the approval of such thesis by the examiners.
3. The bound thesis shall constitute the following components:
 - 3.1 An abstract of not more than 300 words, outlining the major issues, methods and findings of the research.
 - 3.2 A literature review, written in the format of a relevant peer-reviewed academic journal specified by the candidate. The text of this literature review (excluding tables, figures and reference lists) shall be not less than 3,000 words and not more than 8,000 words.

- 3.3 A research paper describing the major findings of the project, written in the format of a relevant peer-reviewed academic journal specified by the candidate. The text of this research paper (excluding tables, figures and reference lists) shall be not less than 3,000 words and not more than 8,000 words.
- 3.4 A critical appraisal of the project, outlining the strengths and limitations of the project and discussing potential future research projects arising from the project. The layout of this critical appraisal shall be the same as that of the research paper, and (excluding tables, figures and reference lists) shall not be more than 4,000 words.
- 3.5 An ethics proposal, written in the format required by a NHS Local Research Ethics Committee (or other ethical committee, as appropriate), which shall not exceed 6,000 words (excluding tables, figures and reference lists).
- 3.6 Appendices. These appendices, together with the figures, tables and reference lists of the earlier parts of the thesis, shall not be more than 30,000 words.

4. **The Abstract of the thesis should contain the following:**

- 4.1 A title of not more than 15 words.
- 4.2 An abstract of not more than 300 words, outlining the major issues, methods and findings of the project. This abstract should be in 12- point font, double-spaced, with page margins not less than one inch.

5. **The literature review**

The literature review should be written in the format of a specified peer-reviewed academic journal. The text of this literature review (excluding tables, figures and reference lists) shall be not less than 3,000 words and not more than 8,000 words. Tables, figures and reference lists are included in the word count for Appendices; note that *tables and figures should be placed after the reference list of the relevant section, before the appendices* rather than within the text.

Although the literature review should be written in the format of a peer-reviewed journal, because of the word limit of the thesis, it can exceed the recommended word limit for the nominated journal. However, if relevant, candidates can be asked at viva how they would trim the literature review for publication in their nominated journal.

The literature review can take a number of forms; a meta-analysis, systematic review or a more narrative review. It is important that the choice of review is clear and that it seems appropriately justified in the text. The review is likely to relate in some way to the research paper and must be relevant to the theory and/or practice of clinical psychology. However, given that it is a stand-alone piece of work, it might have a more tangential aspect. For example, if the areas covered in the candidate's research paper have been the subject of a

recent systematic review then this choice of review is not likely to be still relevant. Candidates should be able to defend their choice of review at viva.

Most peer-reviewed academic journals contain notes for contributors, which outline the type and range of material which the journal will publish. Furthermore, detailed instructions concerning the format, layout, referencing style etc. should be provided in the notes for contributors section. The literature review should conform precisely to the style laid out in the notes to contributors, and a copy of the notes for contributors should be placed in an Appendix.

The selected journal should carry reviews of the type written by the candidate.

It is important to note that the literature review bound into the thesis is presented in the format for a specified peer-reviewed academic journal. There is an expectation that the literature review is actually sent to the journal in question. However, there is no requirement that the literature review be accepted by the journal.

6. Research paper

The research paper describes the major findings of the project, written in the format of a specified peer-reviewed academic journal. Obviously, the nominated journal for the research paper does not have to be the same as that proposed for the literature review given that they are stand-alone pieces of work. The text of this research paper (excluding tables, figures and reference lists) shall be not less than 3,000 words and not more than 8,000 words. Tables, figures and reference lists are included in the word count for Appendices; note *tables and figures should be placed after the reference list of the relevant section, before the appendices* rather than within the text. Quotes within qualitative papers do count towards the total paper word count.

As with the literature review, the research paper should conform precisely to the style laid out in the notes to contributors, and a copy of the notes for contributors should be placed in an Appendix.

The selected journal should be an appropriate vehicle for the content and design of the research paper and this can be assessed at viva if necessary. Again, although the research paper should be written in the format of a peer-reviewed journal, because of the word limit of the thesis, it can exceed the recommended word limit for the nominated journal. However, if relevant, candidates can be asked at viva how they would trim the research paper for publication in their nominated journal.

The purpose of the research paper is to summarise the principal findings from the project. The development of the research idea should be described in the brief introduction and this should lead to the aims and hypotheses/research questions. A good introduction would convince the examiner that the study was both necessary and that it was appropriate to carry it out in the way the

candidate had. In the method section, the candidate should describe exactly how the study was conducted. The amount of detail here will depend on the study design, with, typically, quantitative designs having more detail in the Materials and Participants sections. A comprehensive account of the results should follow. In some qualitative designs, the Results and Discussion sections are combined and this is acceptable if presented in this way in the nominated journal. Where the Discussion stands as a separate section, then this should focus on discussing the findings in relation to previous work, noting study limitations and clinical implications. The different components of the paper should form a coherent whole. Consequently, whilst the precise format of the paper will depend upon the requirements of the journal selected, the research paper should normally contain the following components:

- 6.1 Abstract - This should follow the nominated journal format so can be either structured or unstructured.
- 6.2 Introduction – The aim of the Introduction is to argue the case for the study to be conducted. It is unlikely that cut and pasted sections from the literature review will be able to make this argument.
- 6.3 Method - This is likely to contain sections detailing participants, measures and procedures. It is important it is appropriate for the study and the journal.
- 6.4 Results - In this section, for quantitative studies, it is important to seek a balance between descriptive text and tabulated or graphical presentation of data in order to explain clearly how hypotheses have been tested or research questions addressed. For qualitative studies, too many quotes which are not incorporated into the text are unlikely to make a convincing section. It is important to present sufficient information to allow the reader to make an informed judgement on the implications of the results. However, it is also important that the results section focuses on the most important information and analyses. Information or data sets that are not directly relevant to the focus of the paper can be included as Appendices.
- 6.5 Discussion - Here, the results presented in the results section are briefly summarised in relation to the aims/ hypotheses/research questions outlined in the Introduction. The strengths and weaknesses of the study, the meaning of the findings in relation to previous work, suggestions for future research, and clinical and/or theoretical implications of the study should also be included. It is important not to speculate too far beyond the findings of the study in this section. The critical appraisal (Section 7) may be used to expand more fully on the strengths and limitations of the project and future research directions which may suggest themselves from the findings.

As with the literature review, there is an expectation that the research paper is actually sent to the journal in question. However, there is no requirement that the research paper is accepted by the journal.

7. Critical appraisal

The critical appraisal of the project starts off with a brief recap of the results of the research paper and then goes on to outline the strengths and limitations of the project and discuss potential future research projects arising from the research. The format of this critical appraisal should be the same format as that used in the research paper, and (excluding tables, figures and reference lists) shall not be more than 4,000 words. Tables, figures and reference lists are included in the word count for Appendices and should be placed in Appendices.

The structure and content of the critical appraisal will be very much guided by the research paper and the candidate's own choices as to what elements of the research paper need further discussion. Obviously these choices can be discussed at the viva if necessary. This critical appraisal may resemble an expanded version of the discussion section of the research paper. The strengths and limitations of the research project can be discussed, with reference to their potential impact on the findings of the project. Potential ways forward for future research studies, in terms of avoiding some of the limitations of the current research project and carrying the research field further forward, should be discussed. In this section the candidate may wish to discuss some of the process issues which arose during the research project and the candidate's own reaction to such issues. If it is a qualitative project then you would expect more reflection on the analysis. Some candidates may wish to focus on one particular aspect (e.g., ethical issues) and this is acceptable as long as the arguments are justified.

8. Ethics Proposal

The Ethics proposal should be written in the format required by an appropriate ethics committee, which shall not exceed 6,000 words (excluding tables, figures and reference lists). For Lancaster DClinPsy projects all research proposals should have gone through at least one committee – either within the NHS or the university. Printed words on ethical committee forms do not count towards the word count. All ethics proposals should contain the following, even if not required by the specific ethical committee form:

- 8.1 The names and addresses of the applicant (i.e. the candidate) and relevant supervisor(s).
- 8.2 A title of not more than 15 words.
- 8.3 A summary of the project proposal, including a reference to where the study will be carried out.
- 8.4 An introduction summarising previous work in the field, drawing attention to gaps in present knowledge and stating how the proposed project will add to knowledge and understanding.

- 8.5 The aims of the proposed project, and, if appropriate, the hypotheses to be tested. These should, wherever possible, be stated as a list of questions to which answers will be sought.
- 8.6 A plan of investigation, consisting of a statement of the practical details of how it is proposed to obtain answers to the questions posed above. The proposal should contain detailed information on the research design and research methods to be used:
 - 8.6.1 Participants - a brief statement of the nature and anticipated number of participants to take part in the project, together with details of any inclusion and exclusion criteria to be used.
 - 8.6.2 Design - an explanation of the overall design of the project, with reference to participant groups, timing of measurements etc. as appropriate.
 - 8.6.3 Measures - a full explanation of the specific research method to be used, including references to particular scales, interview procedures of observation coding schemes where appropriate. Full copies of questionnaires, interview schedules, observation coding schemes or other research measures are to be placed in an Appendix.
 - 8.6.4 Procedure - an explanation of the procedures by which participants are to be contacted, how consent is to be sought, and how information is to be collected. Blank copies of information sheets for participants and consent forms are to be placed in an Appendix.
 - 8.6.5 Settings and equipment - a statement on the location(s) of the proposed project, and the resources or equipment required to complete the project.
 - 8.6.6 Data analysis - an explanation of how information collected will be collated, stored and analysed.
 - 8.6.7 Risk to participants - a statement of the potential risks to participants arising from participation in the project, and a statement of how these risks will be managed or minimised by the researcher.
 - 8.6.8 Payment - a statement of any payments which are to be made to participants or services as a result of taking part in the project, together with a rationale for any payments made.
 - 8.6.9 Approval from professionals - a statement that approval for the proposed project has been gained from relevant professionals.
- 8.7 A statement of the potential benefits arising from the proposed project.
- 8.8 A timetable for the proposed project, including a start date, finish date, and project milestones.

9. **Appendices**

These appendices, together with the figures, tables and reference lists of the earlier parts of the thesis, shall not be more than 30,000 words. Relevant appendices should be bound into the thesis, along with the relevant section of the thesis (e.g. tables, figures and reference lists with the literature review, research paper, critical appraisal and ethics proposal; notes for contributors immediately after the literature review; additional data immediately after the research paper). The appendices should contain the following:

- 9.1 Notes for contributors for selected journals (bound with the relevant papers).
- 9.2 A copy of the letter from either the Institute/Division of Health Research Ethics Committee or the relevant NHS Ethics Committee indicating ethical approval for the project. Obviously all projects should follow the procedures specified on the ethics proposals.
- 9.3 Copies of measures and materials used in the research project (bound with the Ethics proposal).
- 9.4 Blank copies of information sheets and consent forms used in the project (bound with the Ethics proposal).
- 9.5 Tables of supplementary raw data, descriptive analyses or other material which complement data and analyses presented in the research paper but which were not essential for inclusion (bound after the research paper).
- 9.6 Other material from the project which was not included in the research paper. This may include additional data sets and/or additional data analyses which might form the basis of a second research paper. Any such material should be described in this part of the Appendix, with a description of its relevance to the research theme and how it may be taken further (bound at the end of the thesis).
- 9.7 Vignettes or case material. These may be helpful in illustrating research findings (bound at the end of the thesis).
- 9.8 A statement for the word count for each component of the thesis. Word counts for the thesis abstract, literature review, research paper, critical appraisal and Ethics proposal should not include tables, figures and reference lists, and in total should not exceed 26,000 words. Word counts for the tables, figures and reference lists should be calculated separately, and counted towards the Appendix word count, which in total should also not exceed 30,000 words.

Thesis Format Summary

Cover Sheet

Statement of total word count for text

Statement of total word count for appendices (including tables, figures, reference lists etc)

Abstract for thesis as a whole (300 words maximum)

Declaration that the research reported is the trainee's own and has not been submitted for any other academic award

Acknowledgements if there is anyone the trainee wishes to thank or acknowledge at this point

Contents page for entire thesis. For ease of referral, pages are to be numbered for each section separately, rather than consecutively throughout the whole thesis.

All the above are in 12-point font and double spaced, without page numbers.

Section 1: Literature review (page numbering 1-1, 1-2, 1-3 etc)

This to include the literature review (with any associated tables, reference lists etc according to the formatting instructions for the relevant journal), and the notes for contributors of the relevant journal (to be bound in here, although counting towards the appendix word count).

Section 2: Research paper (page numbering 2-1, 2-2, 2-3 etc)

This to include the research paper written for a specified journal (with any associated tables, figures, reference lists etc according to the formatting instructions for the relevant journal), and the notes for contributors of the relevant journal (to be bound in here, although counting towards the appendix word count). In addition, supporting material directly related to the content of the research paper (e.g. detailed descriptive statistics on the measures used, details of analyses done but not extensively reported in the research paper, additional quotes to support themes, successive versions of qualitative coding trees) to be bound in here as appendices. The journals chosen for the literature review and the research paper can be but do not have to be different.

Section 3: Critical appraisal (page numbering 3-1, 3-2, 3-3 etc)

This is to be written in the style of the same journal as the research paper. Content will vary between individuals, but will typically contain an extended discussion of the research paper and the project as a whole, and some discussion of the research process. Given APA guidance, it is preferable that, where relevant, the critical appraisal is written in the first person, although we would ask examiners to have some flexibility on this.

Section 4: Ethics form (page numbering 4-1, 4-2, 4-3 etc)

This to include one ethics form (if more than one has been submitted), together with correspondence with the ethics committee related to the content of the ethics

submission (rather than dates of meetings etc.). Measures to be used are also to be included in appendices after the ethics form if they have not already been placed in appendices following the research paper.

Section 5: Appendices not covered elsewhere (page numbering 5-1, 5-2, 5-3 etc)

These appendices might include a brief description of a pilot study, rationales for using particular research designs/approaches or measures, additional data and data analyses of interest but not directly linked to the research paper, and/or additional supporting material.

General issues

All identifiers concerning individual participants/services must be removed.

In general, it is expected that there will be some overlap in the content of different sections of the thesis, and also some repetition (e.g. of references in reference lists). However sections should not be identical.

If the outcome of the viva examination results in the requirement that the trainee adds text to the thesis, then the word count limits outlined at the beginning of this document should still be adhered to. Examiners may suggest where appropriate reductions in the length of the thesis could be made.

Examiners should prepare their pre-viva report so that it can be seen by their co-examiner before the viva. These reports should be independent of each other.

Examiners are requested at some stage during the viva process to explore publication options with the candidate. Not only has the discussion of publication at viva been shown to encourage trainees to publish their work, but it is likely that the external examiner especially will have useful experience in relevant outlets for the work and will be able to offer helpful advice. This type of discussion is often fruitful at the end of the viva, after the candidate has been called back in to hear the examiners' recommendation to the Exam Board. On occasion examiners at the viva have indicated that they would be interested in becoming an author on any subsequent paper resulting from the thesis in exchange for a specific input. However, we would politely request that any such discussions do not happen as any part of the viva process.

Lancaster University guidance on the examination of theses suggests that under some circumstances the viva should have a Chair. Where a Chair is not present then the viva must be audio recorded. The Chair, who is likely to be one of the course's research team but will not be the candidate's supervisor, normally collects the candidate and introduces him/her to the examiners. In addition to observing the viva voce the Chair has a number of responsibilities in the process:

1. The Chair shall have final decision on when the viva voce should finish, taking into account the views of the examiners, and the need to uphold fair play and to give the student an opportunity to defend his/her work.

2. The Chair should ensure that the trainee is given the opportunity to present a brief verbal summary of their work (15 mins maximum), towards the start of the viva voce if they wish to do so.
3. The Chair should ensure that the trainee is given an appropriate right of reply to points raised by the examiners, during and at the end of the viva voce.
4. If the trainee feels during the course of the viva voce that the questions are not fair or appropriate, that they are being denied the right of reply, or that proper procedures are not being followed s/he should be able to call for a break, and talk privately with the Chair. If a Chair is not present these responsibilities will be undertaken by the internal examiner. The Chair normally escorts the candidate back to the waiting area when the viva has finished. The Chair can be consulted, however, when the candidate is out of the viva room on issues such as the correct classification of the award and timescale for corrections.

The timing of the viva is usually based on an expected submission date which can, for a number of reasons, then change. Where this looks possible, the course should inform the external and see whether the original viva date is still possible. Where the original date is not possible then the course is committed to finding a new viva date that suits the availability of the external examiner.

At the end of the viva, the candidate will be asked to wait outside whilst you deliberate with your co-examiner, deciding on one of the categories on the post viva form. There are 5 categories for outcome

- three possible categories if you agree it should pass (pass forthwith; minor corrections; major corrections)
- a revise and resubmit alternative if you both feel the thesis should not pass at this stage.
- and a category indicating that the degree should not be awarded.

In the event that the outcome is in the 'revise and resubmit' category the trainee will need to resubmit the entire revised thesis to the Registry who will send this out to the examiners to be re-marked. Should this happen then the appropriate forms will be sent to you by the Registry but copies can also be obtained from Sarah Heard (s.heard@lancaster.ac.uk) upon request.

After deliberation, the candidate is invited back into the room and will be informed of the recommendation which will be made to the exam board, and give a verbal summary of any changes required.

You will be asked to complete the post-viva form with your co-examiner before you leave (this can be handwritten). This should detail clearly what (if any) changes are required. Including typos etc.

Before leaving also agree how written details of any changes required will be sent to the trainee. Trainees normally expect to receive corrections within 5 days, but substantial changes may take longer (up to a maximum of one month). The usual procedure is for these to be passed to the trainee via the internal examiner.

If there are any queries about any thesis examination issues, please contact Ian Smith,
Research Director and Chair of the Exam Board, on 01524 592822 or
i.smith@lancaster.ac.uk.

Ian C. Smith
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