



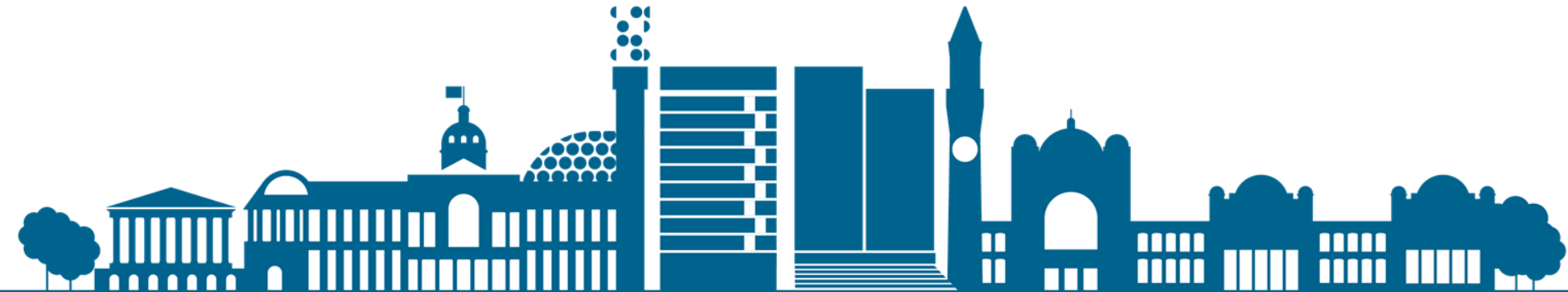
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Structuring your thesis

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Based on *Part-Time Researcher: Structuring your thesis Vitae®*
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‘Think of your report as part of your investigation, not as a duty to be undertaken when your work is otherwise complete.’

Barras (1993:136)



Time spent thinking about and planning how you will structure your thesis is time well spent!



Learning outcomes

By the end of this session you will have:

- encountered some typical PhD structures
- audited your own writing and thought about what you have already written
- written your argument in the form of a hypothesis
- planned a structure for your thesis



Thesis – word length

| College | PhD | Professional Doctorate | 1 year MRes | 1 year MA/MSc by research |
|------------------|--------|---------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|
| CAL / COSS | 80,000 | 50,000 | 20,000 | 40,000 |
| MDS / EPS/LES | 50,000 | 40,000 | 15,000 | 30,000 |

The word length excludes: abstract, acknowledgements, contents pages, appendices, tables, diagrams and figures (including associated legends), the list of references, bibliography, footnotes, endnotes & any bound published material.



Thesis structure - the regulations

Presenting your thesis

- ☐ Formatting your thesis
- ☐ In English
- ☐ Acknowledgement
- ☐ Proof-reading regulations
- ☐ Copyright



Basic structures

5 mins

On the cards provided you will find the basic structure of a PhD thesis

In groups, quickly organise them into a possible structure

You don't have to use all of the cards and you may add in new sections if you like



Basic PhD structure

- ☐ Copyright waiver
- ☐ Declaration (Library copy only)
- ☐ Title page
- ☐ Abstract
- ☐ Dedications & Acknowledgments
- ☐ Table of contents, list of illustrations, list of tables, definitions, abbreviations
- ☐ **Introduction**
- ☐ **Literature review/background**
- ☐ **Middle chapters**
- ☐ **Conclusions and suggestions for further work**
- ☐ References
- ☐ Appendices



Copyright waiver

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University of Birmingham Research Archive

e-theses repository

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Middle chapters

- These could follow a very conventional **IMRaD** format:

IMRaD

- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion

- Alternatively you may feel your topic needs a **multiple IMRaD** approach or some other format more suited to your research



Multiple IMRaD

Overview of PhD

Literature survey(?)

Topic one

- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion

Topic two

- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion

Topic three

- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion

Conclusion/drawing strands together



Thematic

Overview of PhD

Literature survey(?)

Theory (?)

Methods (?)

Theme one
eg class

Theme two
eg gender

Theme three
eg race

Conclusion/drawing strands together



Write early, write often



Audit what you have...



2
mins

- **Make a list** of everything that you have written already
 - Don't worry how finished each of these pieces of writing is
 - Pieces could be draft chapters, notes, reflective journals etc

- Estimate **how many words** each piece of writing is:

What will the total number of words for each chapter be?

What is the total number of words you have written?



Some writing tasks to complete while you are researching:

- ☐ Research proposal
- ☐ Literature survey
- ☐ Analysing data and detailing pilot studies
- ☐ Reports for your supervisor
- ☐ Notes from reading
- ☐ Reflective journals
- ☐ Methodology chapters
- ☐ Early drafts of other chapters



Example theses



8 mins

Analysing a thesis

In groups, look at the example theses and answer the questions!

You can view most UoB theses online at:

1. E-repository: <http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/>
2. UK theses via [EThOS](#)



What type of thesis is/will be yours?

- ☐ Experimental? (IMRaD / Multiple IMRaD)
- ☐ Theoretical? (Series of chapters addressing a specific issue)
- ☐ Thematic
- ☐ Other?



Starting your write up



What is your hypothesis / central argument / research questions?



2 mins

Your hypothesis

- Ask yourself *‘What am I trying to prove in my thesis?’* or *‘What am I trying to explore?’*

- Write it in a hypothesis format (or a question)
 - Ethnic background has a significant impact on school choice
 - The Hubble telescope will give more accurate readings of gamma radiation than earthbound telescopes



Be on the lookout for your plot

- You start to have a feeling for where your thesis is going after doing some data analysis, BUT ask yourself:

What do I know about x by now?

What is the relationship between x and y ?

How can I explain why x happened?

Why do I think that the model I am going to recommend is the best option?

Test your plot against your data as you go along & adjust it accordingly.



Developing the big picture / story of your thesis as a whole

- Once you have the idea of what the plot is, organise the sections to build up a story of the whole thesis
- Preparing an outline can help you to put the pieces together



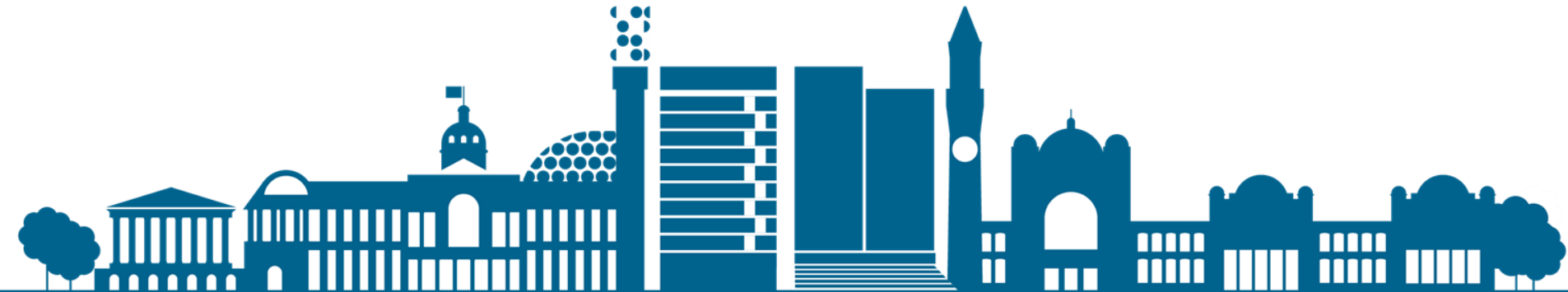


Write a draft structure...

Write your patchwork (what you already have) on to sticky notes.
Put one chapter per note.

Write your hypothesis/research question across the middle of a
blank piece of paper

Use the sticky notes to create a rough structure for your thesis.
Do you notice any gaps?



Plan your structure

Spend a few minutes filling out the handout based on what we have looked at today

Structuring guide

| Chapter no | Chapter title | How long (no of words) | Deadline | What have you got? |
|------------|---------------|------------------------|-----------------|---|
| 1 | Introduction | 1,000 | Last thing I do | Notes that I've taken while writing other chapters. |
| | | | | |



Reviewing your structure

As your research and writing develop you will revise and rework your structure.

Try to do this on a regular basis & amend plans for future chapters as you become more aware of what your thesis must include.



Once you have a draft structure...

- ❑ Look at the structure of published theses in your discipline
- ❑ Show the structure to your supervisor
- ❑ Attach a word length to each chapter
- ❑ Work out how what you have done already fits in
- ❑ Revisit the structure after you finish each chapter



Communicating your structure

- Your argument should be easy to follow; the structure of your thesis should support this
- It is key that you communicate your structure in your writing
- Repetition and effective signposting will help you to get your message across



Help your reader with signposts

- A detailed contents page
- Abstract
- Introduction and conclusion
- Chapters
- Sub-headings
- Signaling words & phrases ('and now it will be argued that...')



Further resources

- ❑ “[writing](#)” tag on the [UoB PGR Development blog](#)
- ❑ [Writing Skills for PGRs Resource List](#)
- ❑ [University of Birmingham eTheses Repository](#)

- ❑ Additional workshops:
 - [Starting to Write](#)
 - [Writing Clearly and Concisely](#)
 - [Writing Summer School](#)

- ❑ [Birmingham International Academy](#)
- ❑ [CAL Academic Writing Advisory Service](#)

