

STYLE AND FORMAT OF A THESIS

Formatting Work

It is a courtesy to your readers and a requirement of your examiners that your written work should be lucid and presented in a scholarly manner. Display only as much evidence as is essential to substantiate your argument without loss of weight or clarity. Document it in a manner which is concise, consistent, accurate and complete.

The text must be in an easily readable font, preferably in 12pt and no smaller than 11pt, using double spacing. Indented block quotations, footnotes and endnotes, must be in single spacing, and no smaller than 10pt. Single spacing should also be used for most tables, documentary material and for entries in the bibliography.

Pagination: Each page after the first (by convention left unnumbered) should be numbered, preferably at the top right-hand corner, where numbers are most easily seen.

Examination regulations

Read carefully the regulations given in the *Examination Regulations* for the preparation and submission of essays. They are University regulations and must be complied with. They can be found online at: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/examregs/information/contents/>

The relation of text, notes and appendices

The ideal relationship is perhaps best expressed as one of scale. The text is self-evidently your major contribution. The word limit placed upon your thesis assumes a scale appropriate to the topic, the time you have to research it, and the importance of reporting your results clearly and succinctly. In writing and revising it, strive always to make it simpler and shorter without prejudicing the substance of your discussion.

When revising your text, you may find it helpful to relegate as much as you can spare of it to footnotes, until your argument stands clear. Then pare down the footnotes until they serve primarily to offer essential references, citations of primary evidence, or cautionary qualifications.

Conventions

There are several sets of conventions and published guides to explain them. None is obligatory, but some are more appropriate than others for literary theses. The Faculty recommends following the conventions in the latest editions of EITHER *MHRA Style Guide: A Handbook for Authors and Editors*, OR *The Chicago Manual of Style* OR *The MLA Handbook*.

A list of works consulted (a bibliography) must be provided, usually at the end of the essay (or before the glossary, if a glossary is presented). The bibliography does not count towards your word count.

Quotations

Your examiners will treat any casual modernisation of older texts as misquotation. Any passage you quote must be completely faithful to its source in all details of spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, etc. Where there is more than one edition, the most authoritative must be cited, rather than a derivative one, unless textual variation dictates alternative versions.

Quotations from primary works, and from other works to which substantial or detailed reference is made, should normally be given in their original languages, and a translation provided, either in a footnote (in the case of brief or very occasional quotations) or in an appendix (in the case of long or frequent quotations). Where such an appendix is necessary, it will not count towards the word limit. The translations provided should be straightforward and literal in spirit. Quotations from pre- thirteenth century English texts should always be given in the original, except where they are clearly incidental or peripheral to the main argument,

and a translation need not normally be supplied unless some difficulty of comprehension is likely to arise. It is, however, acceptable to quote a foreign-language text in a standard modern English version in cases where the work does not form the principal focus of discussion and where the original wording is not of central importance.

Quotations from modern criticism and scholarship originally written in a foreign language may also be quoted in translation where a published version exists (though it may be appropriate to use the original version if a particular point of terminology or interpretation is at stake). In the case of an edition of a text no translation need be supplied, provided that a glossary or a commentary on linguistic difficulties is included. Anyone in doubt about the best procedure should consult his or her supervisor.

Footnotes

The main function of a footnote is to cite the authority for statements you make in the text, so that your readers may verify it by reference to your sources. It follows that to frustrate or mislead your readers by giving an incomplete, incorrect or ambiguous reference is to negate its function. Examiners regard such faults as serious, not venial.

Footnotes, numbered continuously for each chapter, are preferable to endnotes; but if their organisation presents difficulties, endnotes may be used instead and placed at the end of the chapter to which they refer.

Try to place footnote references at the end of sentences or paragraphs in your text. Up to a point you can also reduce their number by giving several references in a single note.

Avoid long footnotes. They should rarely include discussion. There may be occasions when some qualification of a point made in the text, fuller citation of a primary document, or brief summary of a contrary view, is called for. But keep such diversions to a minimum.

Textual apparatus

If you are presenting an edition of a literary work, the textual apparatus, in single spacing, must normally appear at the foot of the page of text to which it refers.

References

Illustrations, Tables, etc.: The sources of all photographs, tables, maps etc. which are not your own must be acknowledged, preferably close to the item itself, otherwise in a separate but itemised list.

Glossary

Any glossary will normally follow the appendices. Whether it is select or complete, or whether etymologies are given, will depend on the nature of the work edited. Do not use it to accommodate even brief explanatory notes. These should come in a distinct section devoted to them and their existence be signalled thus in the glossary: 2115n, which indicates that there is a note to line 2115. It is best to follow an established example: consult recent authoritative editions in your field.