

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

As a requirement in a student's graduate education at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, a thesis or dissertation serves the primary purpose of training the student in the processes of scholarly research and writing under the direction of members of the graduate faculty. After the student has graduated and the thesis or dissertation is published (in the sense of being made available to interested readers either as a bound volume or in microform), it serves additional purposes. It makes a contribution to knowledge and as such is useful to other scholars and perhaps a more general audience as well. Because it bears the university's name, it represents the instructional and research functions of the institution to the outside world.

In keeping with such considerations, the Office of Graduate Studies, the university library, and the faculty of the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth—like those of most other universities—have established format standards that a thesis or dissertation must meet before it receives final approval as a graduate requirement.

1. 1 An Overview of Requirements

Some thesis or dissertation requirements are purely technical; thus, specifications for paper, print, and margins are based on considerations of durability, legibility, and binding processes. Other requirements, such as those for the title page and the signatory page, have been established to ensure that this important information is presented in an orderly, uniform manner. A number of specifications simply reflect generally accepted conventions of writing, especially scholarly writing, that have developed as aids to communication between author and reader.

The requirements in this manual apply to all UMass Dartmouth theses or dissertations. They are, however, designed to allow maximum flexibility in matters in which standard practices vary among academic disciplines—for example, in citations of references. Thus, while you will need to comply with the specifications given here, you will also need to consult a specialized manual of scholarly style in your field, or perhaps the style sheet of a leading journal. Your thesis or dissertation advisor should advise you on the conventions for scholarly writing in your field. Appendix A lists specialized manuals for many of the scholarly disciplines.

You will find instances in which a specialized style manual recommends practices that seem to conflict with this manual. If so, the requirements in this manual take precedence. Sometimes you will be allowed choices in regard to matters of style—for example, the system you adopt for capitalization and underlining in headings. Whatever choices you make from acceptable alternatives, be consistent in all matters of form.

Special circumstances will occur that make some theses or dissertations unable to follow some of the stipulations in this manual. Chapter 8 discusses such circumstances and how they are to be approached. Colleges and departments have flexibility in determining such special circumstances, and you should consult the Office of Graduate Studies if these circumstances might modify your thesis or dissertation's compliance with the basic formatting requirements.

It is generally not a good idea to use another thesis or dissertation as a model for yours, because the other work will necessarily be at least one step removed from an authoritative style guide. In addition, manuals and journal style sheets—not to mention this manual—are revised from time to time.

It is expected that a thesis or dissertation will be written in clear, grammatically correct English; that words will be spelled correctly and divided, if at all, according to syllables; and that punctuation will be standard and appropriate.

1. 2 The Role of the Office of Graduate Studies

The Office of Academic Affairs/Graduate Studies is ultimately responsible for certifying that theses and dissertations have been prepared in accordance with the regulations in this manual. After a thesis or dissertation is formally submitted, it is carefully reviewed in the office. At this point it should be close to final form, because both content and format will already have been checked and approved by the faculty, department, and college. The purpose of review by the Office of Graduate Studies is to check final format and the physical preparation, not the content, of the thesis or dissertation. Theses or dissertations found with errors or improper format will be returned for further editing. Sufficient time must be allowed for this process.

You are welcome to call, write, or visit the graduate office with general or specific questions. We believe that format problems which occur in thesis or dissertation writing have solutions within the framework of the stated requirements, and we are happy to help you find these solutions.

1. 3 Responsibility for the Thesis or Dissertation

In writing a thesis or dissertation, you may call upon a number of people for different kinds of assistance. Your thesis or dissertation advisor and committee provide guidance throughout the process as to the content of the thesis or dissertation and the forms and conventions appropriate for your field. You may hire an editor or a typist to assist in the preparation of your work. In all cases, however, the thesis or dissertation author bears ultimate responsibility for meeting departmental, college, and graduate school requirements. Such procedures as paying the thesis or dissertation fee, activating the intent to graduate, meeting deadlines for submission and correction, and obtaining faculty signatures for the signatory page, if not carefully attended to, can present problems.

Key Points: Thesis or Dissertation Requirements

- This manual covers the university's thesis or dissertation format requirements and approvals process.
- You should follow the specific conventions for scholarly writing in your academic field.
- You should follow the general conventions for correct, effective scholarly writing.
- You, the author, bear ultimate responsibility for meeting all requirements.