



Faculty of Arts and Education Higher Degree by Research

PhD by Publication

An alternative model, sometimes called "thesis by publications", is one in which the thesis comprises a series of papers, some or all of which may have been published by the time of submission. The thesis must include linking sections or chapters to explain how the papers constitute a coherent body of work. It is acceptable to include manuscripts submitted for publication, but not yet published as part or all of the publishable inclusions.

The University does not prescribe a minimum number of publications for this mode of thesis, because publication practices vary widely between disciplines. However, if individual schools or research centres choose to create their own guidelines they may do so, subject to approval by the Thesis Examination Subcommittee. In any case, the quantity and quality of publications assembled into a PhD thesis must demonstrate that the contribution made by the student constitutes a substantial original contribution to knowledge, and a Master's thesis must demonstrate a substantial piece of research executed with a high level of autonomy.

The thesis by publication model is perceived to have advantages for some students because it minimises the tension between preparing papers for publication and preparing the thesis for examination. It also has the significant advantage that examiners tend to be impressed by work that has already been peer-reviewed, as previously published papers would have been.

It is important that you discuss the proposed structure of your thesis with your supervisor early in candidature. If you decide to structure your thesis as a series of publications rather than a more conventional document, there are a number of important considerations.

1. Ultimately, the material you present for examination needs to be equivalent to that which would be presented in a conventional thesis. You need to demonstrate to the examiners that you have made a substantial original contribution to knowledge.
2. **Where to publish?**
You should only publish in refereed scholarly media. Journals with a high impact factor or Q1 or Q2 ([Scimago](#) rankings) are more likely to impress examiners (and potential employers)
3. **How many publications?**
There is no fixed answer, and expectations may depend on your discipline. This also needs to be balanced with the quality of the journals. As mentioned above, the requirement is for a substantial original contribution to knowledge.

4. **The length of the publication process**

The review process of some journals can be lengthy which could delay thesis submission. This is an important consideration given that you should be aiming to complete your PhD in 3 years full-time or 6 years part-time (masters students should be aiming at 2 years full-time or 3.5 part-time).

5. **What is the extent of your contribution?**

For multi-authored papers, you must obtain the written permission of all your co-authors to include the paper in your thesis, and you must specify your individual contribution to each of the publications. The examiners need to assess your ability to perform independent research, and as stated above, your total contribution needs to constitute a substantial original contribution to knowledge.

For each multi-authored paper, a copy of the [Authorship Statement](#) must be attached at the beginning of the paper. This statement needs to describe clearly the contributions made by you and by every other author, and must be signed by all authors. It is recommended strongly that you complete this statement for each publication and have it signed **at the time of publication**. There are several reasons for this: the publication and the relative contributions of each author will be fresh in their memory; you are still in contact with the other authors (this may not be the case a year or two later); and it will save you a potentially onerous task at the already busy time of thesis submission.

6. The thesis must be an integrated and coherent whole. It is not just a collection of papers. You need to consider your most important readers, the examiners. The thesis must include a critical introduction, a section which describes how all the publications are linked (possibly more than one such section), and a conclusion which provides a synthesis of all the material. The conclusion is important and needs to be of a very high standard. It is not just a summary of the thesis. This is your chance to really tell the examiners about the significance of your work, how it all fits together as a coherent body, how it demonstrates originality, and how it can lead to future research.
7. Journal papers tend not to include a thorough discussion of the literature. This may limit your ability to demonstrate a detailed understanding of the theoretical issues relating to your topic. The introduction to your series of publications and or the literature review are the best chapters to position your work within the field (key arguments/scholars/authors). Alternatively, the inclusion of theoretical or other appendices may be appropriate in some cases.
8. Journal papers generally do not include detailed evidence for all the methods or analytical procedures used, which means that you may not be able to show the examiners the full scope of your mastery of the topic. A methodology chapter may be needed in some theses or in others a technical appendix can address this issue.
9. Journal papers tend to exclude the things which did not work. In the sciences this could be the experiments which failed. In the social sciences it could be a poorly-designed questionnaire or an over-ambitious sample size. Examiners like to see the intellectual journey you have undertaken in which you have developed into an independent researcher with a mature appreciation of the breadth of your field and an understanding of how your research fits within it. There is another reason for including a description of methods that did not work, which is

that this can be of tremendous assistance to future researchers in your field (including subsequent PhD or Masters students). If they know, from reading your thesis, some of the things NOT to do, they will be saved from wasting time attempting to follow unproductive methods.

10. Be aware that published papers may include duplicated material which can be tedious for the examiners. The thesis should be structured to avoid or at least minimise this repetition.
11. There is a risk that by focusing on publication rather than research, you may be tempted to publish sections of your work prematurely and miss opportunities to fully capitalize on the significance of the work. Being conscious of this risk can help you and your supervisor avoid the pitfalls.
12. It is the University's preference that all completed theses be made available online as described under Lodgement of Final Thesis. If you elect to make your entire thesis available online there are a range of options for dealing with published papers. You should raise your intent to provide a copy on open access with the journal at an early stage, seeking their approval. If the journal is unwilling to approve the paper being made available online in the thesis, it may be appropriate to approach another journal. Alternatively, you could consider structuring the chapter on which the paper is based in such a way that the material is presented without having to reproduce the actual article. The examination copy would include the full article for the convenience of the examiners, but the version available for open access would require the reader to link to the journal publisher to obtain the article.

Despite these cautions, the thesis by publication format does have the significant advantages stated above, that most examiners will be impressed by a collection of peer-reviewed works, and it may save work by not having to reformat publications into thesis chapters. This is weighed against the extra work in writing additional "glue" sections (the introductory and concluding chapters that describe how the publications constitute a coherent body of work and a substantial contribution to knowledge).

Additional useful advice is provided on [copyright issues](#) and the [timing of publication](#) relative to thesis submission.

Last updated September 2019