

Thesis structure

There is no single thesis structure – the structure of your Masters or PhD thesis will depend on a range of factors, such as your discipline, your topic, the type of research, the formal requirements of your faculty, and your own style and preferences.

This resource is designed to help you start thinking about structures that best suit your disciplinary and research framework.

1. Typical thesis features

Even though thesis structures vary, all theses 'tell a story'. To do that, your thesis should:

- Set out a research problem
- Explain why this problem is worthy of research
- Use literature and theory to provide context and rationale
- Explain your research design
- Present and analyse the data you have gathered
- Discuss your findings and their implications
- Draw conclusions and make recommendations

2. Thesis/dissertation sections

Most Lincoln University theses and dissertations conform to this general structure

Preliminary components ¹

Title page
Declaration
Abstract & keywords
Acknowledgements
Table of Contents
Lists of Tables, Figures and/or Illustrations
Abbreviations / Glossary (if needed)

Main body components

(The main body may be organised in a variety of ways. See over page for more detail.)

Introduction section (e.g. context, literature, rationale)
Approach or method section
Results section
Discussion/interpretation section
Conclusion section

Supplementary components

References or bibliography
Appendices (e.g. surveys, data sets, copies of published papers)

¹NB Some theses contain other sections; for example, there may be a list of publications in a preface.

3. Typical thesis body structure

Three styles of organising **main body** components are common at Lincoln University:

- **Single study** style: reports the research as a single study. This style is common among Masters theses in the sciences and social sciences, and in social science PhDs.
 - **'Simple' single study** uses a traditional empirical report format of Introduction, Literature Review, Method, Results, Discussion.
 - **'Expanded' single study** has multiple introductory and/or analysis chapters, often with thematic titles (for instance, a results chapter titled 'The importance of social networks').
- **Multiple studies** style: reports several distinct, but related, studies. This is common in PhDs in the sciences. Each study is reported in a separate chapter with a thematic title. Often, some or all of the studies have been published as peer reviewed manuscripts, or are under submission or in press (i.e. **'thesis with publications'**). Usually, information on publications and co-authorship is provided in a Preface and copies of the published papers may be included in Appendices.
- **Thematic** style: similar to a book; includes introductory chapter(s), a series of chapters focused on analytical themes, and a conclusion. This style is occasionally found in the social sciences.

<i>Single study</i>	<i>Multiple studies</i>	<i>Thematic</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ 1 or more introductory chapters (e.g. Introduction, Literature Review, Context, Model, Theoretical Framework)◆ Methodology chapter◆ 1 or more Results chapters or combined Results/Discussion chapters◆ Discussion and/or Conclusion chapter(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ 1 or more introductory chapters, providing an overall introduction and literature review◆ Methodology chapter◆ Several chapters, each reporting one study (Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion)◆ Overall Discussion and/or Conclusion chapter(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ 1 or more introductory chapter(s), including a brief review of literature◆ Several chapters focused on analytical themes, including data gathering, analysis and interpretation based on literature and theory◆ Conclusion chapter

4. Deciding on the body structure of your thesis

Every thesis is different and you need to choose the structure that best suits **your** project. To help decide,

- Talk to your supervisors about what they expect
- Read the Lincoln University House Rules and your Faculty guidelines.
- Read some recommended theses and dissertations in your discipline. Your supervisor, or the LTL Learning Advisors, can suggest examples. (However, don't try to simply mimic an example.)

More resources:

Visit <http://ltl.lincoln.ac.nz/>

You could start with ...

[Manag your thesis/dissertation journey](#) (House Rules; resources)

[Writing a thesis/dissertation](#) (proposals, literature reviews, for-matting templates & more)

[Resources for thesis writers](#) (print & online resources in the LTL collection)