



## Public Policy M.A. and Honors Thesis Guide

Writing an Honors or Master's Thesis is likely the most challenging academic project you have ever undertaken. The major components of a typical thesis include engaging with original quantitative research to answer a question of public policy significance using the analytical tools you have learned in the Program. Although some variation on the use of original quantitative research exists, the program does encourage you to consider data analysis as a key component of your work. Ultimately, the only evidence of what you have done, how you have done it, and why it matters is contained within your written Thesis. Therefore, it is extremely important that the writing be clear, precise, and grammatically correct. Even the greatest research ideas and findings may have little impact if they are buried in turgid or pretentious faux-erudite prose, disorganized charts and graphs, and

inconsistent notation. Writing is an excellent way to organize ideas. Therefore, writing (in the form of multiple drafts and revisions) should accompany your research.

### What is a Thesis?

As the name implies, your thesis must have a thesis - an argument, assertion, or contention. A thesis may be a proposed explanation of the relationships among or between phenomena - for example, "technological change has been the chief cause of China's recent growth." Alternatively, a thesis may be an assessment of a program or policy. In that case, the thesis is that the program or policy is or is not good policy, as you define it. A thesis is not an unguided missile reflecting the result of "data mining." Thought, literature review and hypothesis construction must precede quantitative analysis.

Your thesis adviser, writing specialist, Hume Writing Center tutors, librarians and others whom you consult will guide you through the process of research and writing. But don't be reluctant to explain your research to your friends and family. The more times you have to explain what you are doing and why it matters before a skeptical audience, the clearer idea you yourself will have of what you are doing and why. Only then will you be able to write clearly and effectively about what ought to be one of pinnacles of your education and a steppingstone to future success.

### Standards

It is essential that you reach an early, explicit agreement with your faculty adviser on what will constitute an acceptable thesis. Only your adviser can decide that you have finished and only your adviser can assign a grade to your work. However, your advisor may suggest that you have a "second reader" - another faculty member with relevant expertise to assist you and to help evaluate your work. You should expect to put in work roughly equivalent to the number of units you are earning. There is no program-wide standard for what constitutes a satisfactory Thesis, except that it must contain at a minimum the four elements described in the first paragraph above. There is no minimum length. Albert Einstein's paper on special relativity was 16 pages long, as published. Your empirical results need not support your thesis - negative results can be as important as positive. Probably the most important point is that your Thesis is a demonstration of your technical competence in using the tools of policy analysis.

## Style Guidelines

The following guidelines will help you with the formatting and final publication of your thesis. Please keep in mind that the Public Policy Program is interdisciplinary in nature. As such, your particular field may have style preferences and conventions that are more appropriate to your thesis. Please consult with your advisor, the Honors director, the program director, and/or the writing specialist for your specific style questions.

A thesis usually has at least seven sections:

1. **Title page** that identifies you and your thesis topic
2. **Introduction**, where you identify your question and its importance
3. **Literature Review**, in which you compare and contrast the relevant literature in the field
4. **Methodology or Model** that describes the analysis you will apply to your question
5. **Analysis**, in which you apply your methodology to the question (for empirical theses this usually involves separate Data Description and a Statistical or Econometric Results sections)
6. **Conclusion** that answers your question
7. **Reference List or Footnotes/Endnotes** that identify the all sources you have cited (and no others)

These are the basic sections of any social science (or legal) paper. Whether you announce the results in your Introduction and whether you summarize your thesis in your Conclusion is a question of personal style. Also, the Literature Review can devolve into a couple of sentences, as you will notice in many journal articles. (Also, given that your advisor is usually familiar with the literature, not all advisors require a literature review. However, writing a Literature Review will help you understand how other authors have addressed your question.)

### Formatting Details

- All pages after the title page should be numbered. The header should have your name, the date, and the page number.
- Font should be 12 point (anything smaller will lead to illegible subscripts and superscripts).
- Margins should be 1 inch (top, bottom, left, and right). Double space all text.
- Keep Roman numerals and Latin to a minimum. Use Arabic numbers to number sections, etc.
- For printed copies of the thesis, bind the manuscript with wire binding so that it lays flat when read.
- The thesis will likely not be accepted if it has not been spell checked (remember these are going on a web site for everyone in the universe to access, including future employers, Senate subcommittees, etc.) Use the grammar checker, but do not rely on your word processor to know the difference between “there,” “their,” and “they’re.” When in doubt, use spelling from *Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*.

## 1. Title Page

The title pages should include:

1. A title that announces the question you are addressing in your thesis
2. The date of the draft
3. Signature lines for you, your advisor, and the Honors Director
4. Your name and email address
5. Your advisor and department
6. An abstract of 100-200 words identifying your question, how you are addressing the question, and your main findings

The Title Pages of your final draft should also include acknowledgements and, because your thesis will be on a Stanford website, keywords that help web searchers find your thesis. (Keywords will not be words directly taken from your title or your abstract, but words that someone looking for your thesis might put in a search engine; for example, if the word “Chinese” appears in your title, a keyword might be “China.”) See the sample signature and title page at the end of this document for more details.

## 2. Using Quotes

For quotes shorter than three lines: Use double quotation marks to surround a direct quote. If a quotation appears within a quote, use single quotes. Always include punctuation inside the quotes. (This can be confusing because the British use a different system; see *The Economist*.) When editing a quotation, use an ellipsis “. . .” (note there is a space between each period) to fill in for words that have been cut. If a direct quote is longer than three lines, indent the quotation, use single spaced text, and do not use quotation marks. All quotes must have page numbers. (Therefore, record these in your annotations.)

## 3. Citations

The following provides one citation style example from the field of economics. If you choose a different style, aim for consistency to ensure that you are following the conventions of your discipline.

*The American Economic Review* cites all sources using the author (date) style. For example,

This theory was first presented in Arrow (1962).

Learning has been the subject of economic theory for at least four decades (Arrow 1962).

“Learning is a product of experience” (Arrow 1962, p.155).

For more than three authors use the first author and “et al.” (there is no period after et; there is a period after al.) in the text only. (**Never** use et al. in the reference list; all authors **must** be identified.) For multiple references, separate them with a semicolon: (Arrow 1962; David 1975). If you cite multiple works from the one author (or set of authors), list the publications as 1999a, 1999b, etc. For institutional authorship and references with unknown authors, e.g., newspaper articles, use a minimum identification in the text so that the reader can easily find the complete reference in the Reference List. Use the name of the institution or newspaper as the author.

#### 4. Mathematical Equations

Equations should be on a separate line and numbered consecutively in the left-hand margin. Use *italics* for parameters and scalar variables. Use **bold** for vectors and matrices. Keep Greek letters to a minimum (they do not always translate well from computer to computer).

#### 5. Tables and Figures

Tables and figures should appear in the main body of the thesis where you first mention them. They should be numbered consecutively with Arabic numerals. Do not use vertical lines to separate columns; horizontal lines can be used to separate titles or sections of a table. Place a zero in front of the decimal point (e.g., 0.1, not .1). Table footnotes should be designated with lower case letters, starting over with each table. Identify the source of the information under each table and figure.

#### 6. Words

Some words or phrases are overused or used incorrectly. These include “As,” when used as “because,” should be replaced with “because.” “Certain,” as in “certain scenarios,” should be replaced with “specific scenarios;” the word “certain” should be reserved for references to probability statements. “Impacted” refers to teeth, therefore replace with “affected” or “influenced.” “In order to” can be reduced to “to” in most cases. “Means,” as in “This result means,” should be replaced with “shows;” the word “means” should be reserved for references to averages. “Regression” usually refers to the use of a member of the Ordinary Least Squares family to calculate parameter values; use “estimation” with Maximum Likelihood Estimations. “Very” can only be used once in your paper; you decide which one you want to keep. “Which” should be replaced with “that” in most cases, except for clauses. For others, see McCloskey (1985).

#### 7. Reference List

You might think that it will be easy to find the references once you know which ones you will cite, but in the rush of completing your final draft, the last thing you will want to do is track down page numbers in the library. So, keep track of your references (you can annotate them as you read) by using your own bibliography or online citation management tool. Some popular citation management tools include RefWorks, Mendeley, and Zotero. These tools will help you organize and keep track of all your sources for creating the final Reference List for your thesis. If you are following the Economics citation style, this list should be placed at the end of the thesis (after all appendices, tables, figures, etc.), so the reader can find it easily. Your Reference List should include all cited references and no others (this is not a bibliography). List references in alphabetical order according to the authors’ last names. (If the author is unknown, use the publisher.) If you have more than one reference from the same author, list the earliest publication first. For more than one citation in a year, order alphabetically by the first word of the title. (When in doubt, order as your computer would order the references.) The following is adapted from the American Economic Review Style Guide for Accepted Articles. (Differences from the AER Style Guide include (1) the year has been moved after the author because this determines ordering and aids the reader in finding the reference and (2) book titles are capitalized to be consistent with journal titles).

**For Books:** Author(s) or Editor(s). Year. *Title*. Place of publication: Publisher.

Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. 1988. *Flow of Funds Accounts*, Fourth Quarter 1987. Washington, DC: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System.  
 Chenery, Hollis B. and Clark, Paul. 1959. *Interindustry Economics*. New York: Wiley.  
 Council of Economic Advisers. 1986. *Economic Report of the President*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.  
 U.S. Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce. 1960. *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

**For Journal Articles:** Author(s). Year. "Title of Article." *Journal*, month of issue *volume* (and issue number) in Arabic numerals, inclusive page numbers. Specify if volume is part of title (*volume 2*) or not (Vol. 2).

Baily, Martin Neal. 1981. "Productivity and the Services of Capital and Labor." *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, (1): pp. 1-50.  
 Binmore, Kenneth; Rubinstein, Ariel and Wolinsky, Asher. "The Nash Bargaining Solution in Economic Modeling." *Rand Journal of Economics*, Summer 17(2): pp. 176-88.  
 Ostroy, Joseph M. 1973. "The Informational Efficiency of Monetary Exchange." *American Economic Review*, September 63(4): pp. 597-610.  
 Van Ypersele de Strihou, Jacques. 1967. "Sharing the Defense Burden Among Western Allies." *Review of Economics and Statistics*, November 49(4): pp. 527-36.

**For Unpublished Papers:** Author(s). "Title." Working paper or discussion paper (including number if any), institutional affiliation, date. (This includes theses and dissertations.)

McCallum, Bennett T. 1995a. "Inflation Targeting in Canada, New Zealand, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and in General." Working paper, Carnegie Mellon University.  
 Siow, Aloysius. 1987. "Coordinating Hours of Work." Mimeo, Columbia University.  
 Svensson, Lars E. O. 1993. "The Simplest Test of Inflation Target Credibility." National Bureau of Economic Research (Cambridge, MA) Working Paper No. 4604, December.  
 Tsai, Shu-Ling. 1983. "Sex Differences and Stratification." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin.

**For Chapters in Edited Volumes:** Author(s). "Title," Editor, *Volume Title*. Place of publication: Publisher: inclusive page numbers. Specify if volume is part of title (*volume 2*) or not (Vol. 2).

Chenery, Hollis B. 1958. "The Role of Industrialization in Development Programmes," in A. N. Agarwala and S. P. Singh, eds., *The Economics of Underdevelopment*. Bombay: Oxford University Press: pp. 450-71.  
 Rosen, Sherwin. 1979. "Wage-Based Indexes of Urban Quality of Life," in Peter Mieszkowski and Mahlon Straszheim, eds., *Current Issues in Urban Economics*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press: pp. 74-104.

**For Newspaper or Magazine Articles:** Author(s). Year. "Title." *Source*, Month, Day: pages.

The Economist. 2003. "On the Rebound?" *The Economist*, August 30: p. 12.

Krugman, Paul. 2003. "Another Friday Outage." *The New York Times* (National Edition), September 2: p. A23.

For web pages: Author(s). Year. "Title." Last update date. address, access date.

American Economic Review. "*American Economic Review: Style Guide*." Last updated 2016.  
<https://www.aeaweb.org/journals/aer/submissions/accepted-articles/styleguide>,  
accessed September 3, 2016.

*SAMPLE SIGNATURE AND TITLE PAGE*

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Prof. (or Dr.) Your Advisor

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Thesis Advisor

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Gregory Rosston  
Director, Public Policy Program

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at  
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**ABSTRACT**

Update the abstract. It should be no more than 200 words.

*Keywords:* (These are words that online users might use that could be slightly different than those in your title or abstract, e.g., if Chinese is in your title, include China here. **In the beginning**, keep track of the best online search words you are using to find references.)

**Acknowledgements:** Mention all the people who have helped you, particularly those that supply your data and any grants.