WRITING PROPOSALS AND THESES IN EDUCATION
This booklet was developed by:

Dr Lynette Pretorius, Dr Anna Podorova, Dr Raqib Chowdhury, Ms Rosemary Viete, and Ms Sue March.

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FURTHER INFORMATION:

Academic Language, Literacy and Numeracy Development

Faculty of Education, Monash University

www.monash.edu/education/current-students/academic-language-literacy-numeracy-support
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Introduction

This booklet is designed to help you as you begin to write your research proposal and thesis. While you have already completed another degree, studying a research degree in the Faculty of Education at Monash University can be very different from your previous study experience. Additionally, everyone enters their degree with a variety of skills to help them succeed in their studies. You can use this booklet to build on the skills that you may have already developed in your previous studies.

PhD, MEd and coursework thesis students must write a proposal early in their candidature. We write research proposals to convince others that we have a research project that is worthwhile and that we have the skills and the strategies necessary to complete the project. All research students are required to present their research findings in a thesis by the end of their candidature. A thesis consists of an argument or a series of arguments combined with the description and discussion of the research that you have undertaken. In the case of a PhD, and to a lesser extent, in a Masters (research) thesis, the research is expected to make a significant contribution to the field of study. This does not mean that you need to revolutionise the field (though some PhDs may), it means that you are expected to extend the knowledge in your area. You do this by critically reviewing the available literature in the field and attempt to add an element of original research to it. This may simply mean that you adapt someone else's research framework for the situation you want to investigate; in this way you extend the knowledge about an area.

Your supervisor will advise you about a suitable research topic. Remember, your supervisor is your first point of contact for any questions related to your research. You should therefore discuss all aspects of your proposal and thesis with your supervisor(s) throughout your candidature.

If you need help with academic literacy issues, such as the mechanics of your writing (for example, cohesion and coherence, structure and transitions, voice and agency, referencing and citation), you may consult the Academic Language Advisor (www.monash.edu/education/current-students/academic-language-literacy-
numeracy-support). Please note that we do not provide proofreading or editing services. Help is also available from the Learning Skills Advisers and Librarians in the Library (https://www.monash.edu/library/skills/contacts), as well as from the English Connect Peer Support Facilitators (https://www.monash.edu/english-connect/academic-writing).

You should also consider coming to our monthly Graduate Research Seminars. These seminars are exclusively designed for graduate research students. More information about these seminars can be found on the Academic Language Development for Graduate Research Students in Education Moodle site that is available here: http://moodle.vle.monash.edu/course/view.php?id=35612

**Know your role as a researcher**

The general responsibilities of a PhD student and their supervisors are set out in the University’s Graduate Research Handbook (https://www.monash.edu/graduate-research/faqs-and-resources). Many of these responsibilities are also applicable to MEd students, other writers of theses and their supervisors. An important feature of these stated responsibilities is the expectation that a researcher will be fairly independent, and that they will ask for help when it is needed rather than expect the supervisor to infer this need. On the other hand, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to teach the beginning researcher how to develop a focus, conduct research and write about their research (possibly simultaneously). Remember, though, that your supervisor will not tell you exactly what to do all the time; their role is to guide you as you conduct your own research.

It is not easy to ask for help, especially when you are feeling surrounded by unachievable tasks and incomprehensible texts. Just remember that independence is related to expertise. No one can reasonably expect a beginning researcher to know all there is to know about research or about the field they are working in during their study. Nor can a supervisor guess when you feel like you are drowning in a sea of unknowns. You have to tell them that you need to know what the next step should be (and negotiate this with them), or ask them to help you identify the important areas or
theorists in a field. Your sense of independence will grow, and your questions will change as you progress.

Research students may find that an intensive schedule of consultations with the supervisor is necessary in the initial stages of their study. Supervisors may take a more dominant role at this point (usually because they feel they have to help you get things started). If you feel that you are losing a sense of this being your work, think carefully about the direction you would like it to take and discuss this with your supervisor as soon as possible.

You should meet your supervisor on average at least once a fortnight. Plan small, achievable tasks to complete between meetings, rather than huge assignments. Research students often feel disappointed with the amount of work they achieve in a given time, because their aims are overambitious, or because they do not realise how complicated research actually is. If you want to discuss something you have written with your supervisor, provide a copy of it at least three or four days prior to the meeting if it is a short piece, more for a longer piece.

**Get to know the software available to you**

For all students, it will be very important to know how to use a computer efficiently to access information and write the proposal or thesis. Workshops on the use of software are available in the University, and support is also available in the Faculty.

- Endnote is a very useful program available to you to help you manage your references during your study. Find out how the software can help you to do tasks such as filling in citations, maintaining a consistent style, and completing your reference list.
- Learn how to use Microsoft Word effectively, particularly in relation to creating an automatic Table of Contents, using cross-referencing, and setting up master documents.
- NVivo, SPSS, GraphPad Prism, and other statistical programs are helpful for analysing qualitative and quantitative data, but you need to know how to use them well in advance of analysing your data (preferably before collecting data).
Look at examples of proposals and theses in the field

It is always useful to look at examples of proposals and theses to see how others have completed them. Ask your peers for samples of their work. Many hard copies of theses are available for your perusal in the Thesis Room of the Teaching and Learning Space (TLS) at Clayton. Theses are also available online in the University’s electronic repository. You can search for electronic theses in the Library’s catalogue (www.monash.edu/library).

In particular, you should look at the following main features:

- Organisation of ideas (abstract, chapter distribution, hierarchy of sections and subsections),
- Language use (discourse markers, cohesive devices, mapping, and signposting),
- Subsections and styles for the hierarchy of headings/subheadings, and
- Page numbering and font.

It will help you a great deal in the final stages if you have decided early in your candidature on the conventions, the font, as well as the style of headings and subheadings. Many programs, including Microsoft Word, can help you create and manage heading styles, and use these to later automatically generate your Table of Contents. Doing this manually is extremely painstaking and time-consuming.

Preparing applications for the Ethics Committee

As soon as you have worked out what you wish to do, you should establish whether or not you need to apply to the University’s Ethics Committee for approval of your research. If you are going to observe, talk to, consult or deal with living human beings (or animals) in any way, significant or minor, you must apply for ethics approval. Applications involve a detailed explanation of what you will do, so it is important to think about your methods at an early stage, and in particular to think about how any participants you work with will be protected from harm. Applications are completed online using a form that is available here: https://www.monash.edu/myresearch
The Committee may take some time to consider your application. It is well worth making your application a good one, so that it is not rejected. Rejection would mean further revisions and this can take a long time, stalling your research. Note that you are not permitted to undertake any research involving people or animals until you have approval from the Ethics Committee. It is therefore important to work on this application as early as possible.

It is possible to apply for ethics approval before Confirmation. While this risks resubmission based on changes suggested by the Confirmation panel, it also means that you can start collecting data straight after Confirmation without any delay. Please consult your supervisor regarding the best time for your ethics application.

Remember, the ethics application form can be a good thinking exercise and a checklist of items for you to consider. Make sure to check the types of questions that are in the application form, as these will provide you with useful things to consider when writing about your research.

### Purpose of a proposal

The purpose of the proposal is to help you to focus and define your research plans. These plans are not binding, in that they may well change substantially as you progress in the research. However, they are an indication to your faculty of your direction and discipline as a researcher.

The proposal is expected to:

- Show that you are engaging in genuine enquiry, finding out about something worthwhile in a particular context,
- Link your proposed work with the work of others, showing that you are acquainted with major schools of thought relevant to the topic,
- Establish a particular theoretical orientation,
- Establish your methodological approach, and
- Show you have thought about the ethical issues.
# Structure of a proposal

You can use the following table as a **checklist** of items that are required in proposals, as well as the order in which these items usually appear in proposals. The proposal is likely to contain most of the elements listed in the table below, although your supervisor may require the inclusion or omission of certain parts. Check first with your supervisor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Cover page</strong></th>
<th>Identifies the topic, writer, institution and degree.</th>
<th>Should be descriptive of focus, concise, and eye-catching. Should include your name, qualifications, department, university and degree.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Table of contents</strong></td>
<td>Lists sections of the proposal.</td>
<td>Use a hierarchy for titles and subtitles. Do not use more than four heading levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Glossary</strong></td>
<td>List of specialised terms or words used in your proposal and their meanings.</td>
<td>This is usually placed either just before or directly after the main text of the proposal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background</strong></td>
<td>Provides background information relating to the social/political/historical/educational context of the study.</td>
<td>Usually includes details about the context, the starting point for the study, and may also include the author’s personal motivation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationale</strong></td>
<td>Follows from the background to persuade the reader that the study is necessary, useful and interesting.</td>
<td>This section identifies the gap in the research literature. Importantly, this section problematises the issue under investigation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose and aims</strong></td>
<td>States clearly and succinctly the purpose of the study and outlines the key research questions.</td>
<td>This section should be expressed within the broader context of the study, making clear links between the background, rationale, aims, and research questions. There</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
should be only a few research questions, so that the project is reasonable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature review</th>
<th>Shows your supervisor and the Faculty that you are aware of significant research in the field. This section also demonstrates that you are able to carefully select relevant issues based on the literature.</th>
<th>This section is not expected to be extensive in your proposal, but will be much more extensive in your thesis. You should survey the key theorists in your field, demonstrating critical analysis and synthesis to establish your theoretical orientation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Outlines and describes the research plan (the way in which your research will be conducted).</td>
<td>This section should include your understanding of the nature of knowledge (your research paradigm) and how this affects your choice of research approach. You should also include the scope of your study in this section. This section describes your participants, methods of data collection and analysis, as well as procedures you will use to ensure ethical practice, validity and reliability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance/ Research outcomes</td>
<td>Predicts the significance of the study and the expected outcomes of the research.</td>
<td>This section explains to your reader why your research is important. While it is only a prediction, it should closely relate to your research aims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed thesis structure</td>
<td>Describes the sequence and focus of each proposed thesis chapter.</td>
<td>This section includes a proposed table of contents, as well as a short description of what will be included in each chapter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timetable</strong></td>
<td>Depicts the tasks proposed and the stages for their completion.</td>
<td>This section can take the form of a chart, timeline or flowchart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendices</strong></td>
<td>Displays other documents that are relevant to the main text, but whose presence in the text would disturb, rather than enhance, the flow of the writing.</td>
<td>This section usually includes documents such as pilot studies, interview or survey questions, and ethics documents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>References</strong></td>
<td>List of sources used in your proposal.</td>
<td>These references should be formatted according to the APA 6th style guide.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Components of a thesis**

Theses come in various sizes and shapes. The components of many theses are similar, although their functions and requirements may differ according to the degree for which they are presented. The components and their functions and characteristics are set out below. The most recent requirements for the thesis cover pages and declaration can be found here: [http://www.intranet.monash/graduate-education/exams/thesis-preparation](http://www.intranet.monash/graduate-education/exams/thesis-preparation)

**Cover page**

- Identifies topic, writer, institution, degree and date (year and, if you like, month).
- Title, candidate's name and qualifications, degree aimed at, faculty, university, month and year presented.

**Declaration**

- States that the material presented has not been used for any other degree, and that all sources are acknowledged.
- States that ethics approval was received and gives the reference number.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To thank anyone whose support has been important for your work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The supervisor generally receives the first vote of thanks. Do not forget your participants (though remember confidentiality). This section is the least bound by convention. You may speak from the heart.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lists all major divisions and subdivisions marked by numbers and indicates which page they are on in the thesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The titles and subtitles of sections should appear in a style and size consistent with their position in the hierarchy (see style manuals for help in selecting your system).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lists of Tables/ Figures/ Illustrations/ Appendices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lists all of these and the pages on which they appear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A separate section is used for each of these categories.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summarises the thesis, mentioning the aims/purposes, the focus of the literature review, the methods of research and analysis, the findings, and the implications of the results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orient the reader and presents the focal points of the thesis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction (may be given a more descriptive name to reflect the topic)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provides background information and rationale for the research, so that the reader is persuaded that it will be useful/interesting. It usually also serves as a frame within which the reader reads the rest of the thesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides background information related to the need for the research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builds an argument for the research (rationale) and presents research question(s) and aims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May present personal motivations behind research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May present a theoretical starting point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives an outline of subsequent chapters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Theoretical Framework (this may also appear after the literature review)**

- Presents an understanding of the philosophical framework within which you see your research and view knowledge (i.e., discusses epistemology of the research).
- Should describe the theories and concepts that are used in the thesis, and how these theories and concepts are used to analyse the data and explain the findings.

**Literature Review (this may consist of more than one chapter)**

- To show the reader/examiner that you are familiar with issues and debates in the field.
- To show the reader that there is an area in this field to which you can contribute (thus, the review must be critically analytical).
- This is the section where you cite the most, where your use of verb tense becomes most important in conveying subtle meanings, and where you must beware of unwarranted repetition. This is where plagiarism can become an issue if you do not effectively paraphrase and summarise.
- Remember to only discuss theory that is directly relevant to your research.

**Methodology (research design)**

- Presents a rationale for the methodological approach (using literature).
- Describes and justifies the methods of research and analysis (using literature).
- Reveals the boundaries of the research (the scope - this may occur instead in the Introduction).
- Describes what you did (past tense) for selection of site, participants, data gathering and analysis.
- It may include illustrations (e.g., a timeline depicting the research stages).
- Describes steps taken to ensure ethical research practice (shows you are a serious researcher who takes into account how your research may affect participants).
- You should discuss issues of validity, reliability and/or credibility here.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Results (presentation of data)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Presents the data and findings, ordered and analysed in ways justified earlier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Past tense is a feature here (usually).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Data in tables should be carefully set out, checked and discussed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Discussion (analysis of data)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Discusses findings, drawing out main achievements and explaining results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Makes links between aims, findings and the literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• May make recommendations – these could also appear in the Conclusion chapter.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Conclusion</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Draws all arguments and findings together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leaves the reader with a strong sense that the work you set out to do has been completed and that it was worthwhile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Summarises major findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Presents limitations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Presents implications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Suggests directions for future research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ends on a strong note.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Often the shortest chapter in the thesis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Appendices</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Provides a place for important information which, if placed in the main text, would distract the reader from the flow of the argument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Includes raw data examples and reorganised data (e.g., a table of interview quotes organised around themes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Appendices may be named, lettered or numbered (decide early).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>References</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Shows the reader which texts/materials you have consulted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Formatted in APA 6th style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is in alphabetical order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Should not include secondary references.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note that not all theses must contain all components. Consult with your supervisor and the regulations governing your degree to identify which components you need. A notable exception from the following format are theses that do not have an empirical element, and historical studies. The ways in which data are related to the literature can vary enormously, so that there may be no clearly defined differentiation of function amongst your chapters regarding literature and data presentation.

Although these components appear approximately in the order in which they are often presented in a thesis, they may appear in quite different orders (especially the sections of the body of the thesis). Moreover, you are very likely to write them in a completely different order. For example, the introduction is often written late, and is certainly revised in conjunction with the conclusion, and the abstract should be written last. Also, your chapter and section names do not have to be generic. You can choose a more descriptive name. When in doubt, consult your supervisor!

### Academic writing

This section describes ways in which you can improve the quality of your academic writing. It is divided into the following sections:

- Conceptualising your ideas,
- Searching for good quality information,
- Effective reading and note taking,
- Writing academically, and
- Referencing.

### Conceptualising your ideas

Before you read too much, it is a good idea to do as much thinking and planning around the topic as you can. The benefit of this approach is that right from the start you can
begin to get a sense of how your writing will be structured. It also means you can be more strategic in your reading, rather than collecting a large amount of material that may ultimately have limited relevance to your writing. There are many ways you can put your ideas together, and you should use whatever way works for you. Some examples of effective brainstorming techniques can be in the table below and in this video: https://youtu.be/r-xe5HunJFI.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Stream of consciousness</strong></th>
<th>Writing whatever comes to mind down on a sheet of paper or the computer – almost like a dialogue with yourself. This works really well for people who learn by listening or talking.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bullet points</strong></td>
<td>Writing down your ideas in bullet points on paper or on the computer to organise your ideas. This is very useful for people who learn by reading and writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mock presentations</strong></td>
<td>Put bullet points on slides and reorganise as required. This is useful to help structure your overall argument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Matrix clustering</strong></td>
<td>Organising your ideas in a matrix/table. This is useful to structure arguments within a particular paragraph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mind maps</strong></td>
<td>Visually representing and organising information. This works really well for people who are more visual learners.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Searching for good quality information**

After you have your keywords and your ideas, you can start searching for information. This can take you quite a bit of time, as you often have to search through many records until you find a sufficient number of sources to get a comprehensive understanding of a topic. Always make sure to check with your supervisor to gauge their academic expectations.

**Evaluating the reliability of sources**

It is important to choose good quality sources for your writing. This is because your sources are your evidence for the claims you are making. Therefore, the better your evidence, the stronger your argument as shown in the example on the next page.
Imagine I want to say that "the sky is green". By looking outside the window, you will very quickly realise that this statement is not a very good argument, because clearly the sky is blue. How can I make my argument stronger?

- I could say: "The sky is green" with a reference to Wikipedia. This is not very convincing, since Wikipedia is publicly editable so the information is suspect.
- I could say: "The sky is green" with a reference to Einstein. This starts sounding more convincing, because Einstein was a well-known scientist.
- I could say: "The sky is green" with references to Einstein and seven other very famous scientists, each of whom have independently and conclusively proven the sky is green. This argument is much stronger and may make you wonder why you still think the sky is blue.

In each case, I have made the exact same claim. However, because of the quality of my evidence, my argument is much stronger at the end than it was at the start.

In order to determine whether a source is good quality, you need to evaluate:

1. The content of the source: Is it an in-depth examination of a specific topic and does it have data to support the claims made in the text?
2. The authors of the source: Are they subject-matter experts in the field and are they affiliated with an accredited academic or professional institution?
3. The language of the source: Is the language specialised, using technical terms and an academic writing style?
4. The publisher of the source: Has the source been published by appropriate academic or professional institutions?

More information about evaluating these four concepts to determine the reliability of a source can be found here: https://youtu.be/TTlz_00-xww. You can also further develop your skills about evaluating the reliability of sources by completing this online tutorial: http://bit.ly/evaluating-sources-tutorial.
**Searching Education databases**

You will need to do a comprehensive search of the academic literature on your topic, so you will need to search an Education database. The most commonly used databases in Education are ERIC, A+, and Scopus. There is more information about these databases and some searching tips in the Education Library Guide (http://guides.lib.monash.edu/education/databases). There are also excellent tutorials on searching the Education databases here:


If you cannot find the information for your writing, you can ask a Librarian for help. The Library holds regular drop-in sessions that allow you to go and see a Librarian to help you with searching for information. Details about the days and times can be found here: [https://www.monash.edu/library/skills/resources/programs/drop-in](https://www.monash.edu/library/skills/resources/programs/drop-in).

**Effective reading and note taking**

After you have found your sources, you need to read them effectively and take good quality notes. This can be very time-consuming. Remember to read with a purpose – know what it is you want to get out of the article you are reading. Make sure you will be able to search your notes several days or even weeks later and still find what you need.

**Reading critically**

The best way to read critically is to imagine the text as a conversation between yourself and the person(s) who wrote the text. Consider the following things about the source:

1. Identify the main claims of the text. What are the authors trying to convince you of by writing this source?
2. Identify how the authors have made these claims. In what order have they placed their ideas and why? A good way to do this is to look at the headings of each section and the topic sentences of each paragraph.

3. Identify the evidence the authors have used to make their claims. Is the evidence convincing?

4. Identify the theoretical ideas that underpin the claims made in the text.

5. Determine whether there are any assumptions that the authors have made.

6. Investigate the implications of the information from the article. How does it fit with other literature in the field? How does it relate to your experiences?

You can take notes from your sources in whichever way works for you, but make sure to always distinguish between your ideas and the ideas of others. Also, always make sure to take note of the full reference details of your source in your notes. More information about reading critically can be found here: https://youtu.be/nMJLBIIC_1g.

**Thinking critically**

In order to do well in your proposal or thesis, it is important to think critically. This means that you should identify strengths and weakness of a text. The process of critical thinking and an example are shown on the next page.

**Writing academically**

**Writing quality sentences and paragraphs**

It is important to make your writing as clear as possible to ensure that your reader can clearly understand your content. In order to do this, it is important to write good quality academic sentences and paragraphs. Sentences should include both a subject and a verb, and should only have one main idea. Short sentences are easier to read than long ones, but you should vary your sentence lengths. Try to not have sentences more than 25 words long (approximately 2.5-3 lines of text), as sentences that are too long can become confusing to read.
Figure 1. The critical thinking process.

**Example of critical thinking components in a text**

[...] Extensive research has demonstrated that participation in a learning community is linked with improved educational outcomes, likely indirectly mediated through increased student engagement (Rocconi, 2011). [...] While this type of collaborative learning is common in various other areas of education, encouraging this type of learning in traditionally isolated doctoral training programmes is still considered novel (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014). One area that has received considerable interest in recent years is the establishment of doctoral writing groups as a type of doctoral learning community. Doctoral writing groups are designed to help students develop their academic writing skills and to provide pastoral support throughout doctoral candidature (Haas, 2014). Usually these doctoral writing groups are focussed on a central topic of interest (particularly the development of academic writing skills), and involve the provision of constructive feedback from peers and the group facilitator (Aitchison, 2014; Haas, 2014). This practice can be considered as analogous to the peer review process (Aitchison, 2014).

(Cahusac de Caux, Lam, Lau, Hoang, & Pretorius, 2017)
Paragraphs should have at least three (preferably more than three) sentences. Short paragraphs often do not have sufficient substance, while long paragraphs can lack structure. A well-written academic paragraph follows the TEEEL structure, as demonstrated below. More information about TEEEL paragraphing can be found here: https://youtu.be/V6BPBGqGezs.

![TEEEL Structure Diagram]

Figure 2. TEEEL structure of paragraphing.

**Writing good quality academic arguments**

While the physical structure of your writing is important, the most important part of academic writing is your use of evidence to build an academic argument. A well-supported academic argument is the feature of all high quality writing.

The features of academic arguments (see this video: https://youtu.be/1FJK74tpr4w):

- A clear and unambiguous statement of position,
- Use of appropriate academic evidence to support this position,
- Consideration of contrary arguments,
- Convincing demonstration of the validity of the stated position,
- A clear line of reasoning, and
- Referencing → your evidence for the claims you are making.

**Guiding your reader through your writing**

It is important to guide your reader through your proposal and thesis. The first step is to determine your audience. It is useful to imagine your audience as an educated person who is not an expert in your particular field of study. This is not to say that you can get away with presenting inaccurate statements, but rather that you need to explain ideas or concepts and arguments clearly to your reader. You cannot assume that your reader always knows everything, nor should you feel that it is insulting to explain specialised concepts. Your reader wants to see how well you understand the issues you have chosen to discuss.

It is also important to make sure that your proposal or thesis contains clear signposts – words that guide your reader through your document. You can do this in different ways:

- Using headings and subheadings that indicate what you will focus on in each section of your proposal or thesis. Be careful not to overuse headings and subheadings. As a guide, you should have at least two or three paragraphs in a section before you add a new subheading.
- Using cross-referencing statements such as “As previously discussed…” or “The next section will explain…”
- Using discourse markers to indicate the flow of ideas. Examples of words you can use in your writing can be found below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To add ideas together</th>
<th>In addition, again, further, moreover</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To compare ideas</td>
<td>Similarly, likewise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Developing an academic writing style

You should also complete your writing in an academic style. To make your writing more academic you should include the four basic features in your writing shown below. Examples of each of these four features of academic style can be found in this video: https://youtu.be/MULsUj34hNw.

- Impersonal language, except in instances of reflective writing (e.g. when you discuss your experiences that have influenced you as a researcher),
- Nominalisation (using nouns instead of verbs),
- Formal and precise vocabulary, and
- Cautious language (also sometimes called hedging). The Library has a useful online tutorial with examples of tentative language that you can use in your writing. The tutorial is available here: https://www.monash.edu/rlo/research-writing-assignments/writing/features-of-academic-writing/tentative-language.

Academic English also does not contain phrasal verbs (verbs that have a preposition after them such as “look up”). You should replace phrasal verbs with single word verbs in order to make your work more academic. The table on the next page provides some words you can use to replace common phrasal verbs in your writing.
| Carry out | Undertake, conduct |
| Figure out | Understand |
| Go over | Review |
| Look back on/think back on | Remember, reflect |
| Look into | Investigate, examine, address |
| Look up | Research, explore |
| Make up/made up of | Comprise, involve, entail |
| Take part | Participate, engage |
| Talk about | Discuss |
| Think about | Consider |

**Verb tense usage in academic writing**

Verb tense in academic writing may exercise a greater influence on your reader’s interpretation of your text than you think. Past tense can give more than a time perspective; it can distance the reader from the ideas being expressed. The present tense on the other hand is often used to make generalisations – you need to be sure you wanted readers to feel this was a generalisable point. The descriptions below show a simplified description of the uses and possible effects of tense on the meaning made.

**The past tense** is used to report or describe the content, findings or conclusions of past research. The specificity of the study is thus emphasised. Past tense can be used in your methodology chapter of your thesis, for example, to describe what you have done (rather than to describe reasons behind your methodological choices, which should use present tense).

**The present tense** is used for generalisation (in overviews, statements of main points), a statement which is generally applicable or which seems relevant, a statement made by you as writer, or to report the position of a theorist/ researcher to which you feel some proximity, either in time or allegiance (e.g. Piaget (1972a) outlines...).
The present perfect tense is used to indicate that research into the specified area continues, to generalise about past literature, or to present a view using a non-integral form of referencing (the name of the author does not appear in the text of the sentence; it appears only in the subsequent parentheses).

The future tense is often used in the methodology section of a proposal or the future directions section of a thesis. In your proposal, you are stating what you aim to do in the future. In the future directions section of a thesis, you usually state what should be done now that your research is complete.

Referencing
Good quality academic writing includes appropriate referencing. More information about referencing can be found here: https://youtu.be/logOez348II.

There are four main reasons why you should include references in your proposal or thesis:

- Firstly, and most importantly, your references are the academic evidence you use to support the claims you make in your proposal or thesis.
- Secondly, you show respect for other people's work by referencing them appropriately.
- Thirdly, accurate referencing helps your reader locate the sources you used.
- Finally, appropriate referencing helps you to demonstrate academic integrity in your work, as you are always distinguishing between your ideas and the ideas of others.

The Faculty of Education uses the APA 6th referencing style (published by the American Psychological Association in 2010). The Monash University Library maintains an up-to-date library guide that shows you how to format various types of sources correctly. The Citing and Referencing Library Guide for the APA style can be found here: http://guides.lib.monash.edu/citing-referencing/apa.
**In-text citations**

In the main text of your proposal or thesis, you should reference the source by indicating the author and year of publication before the full stop in the sentence. There are two types of in-text referencing:

- **Author prominent citations** include the authors’ names in the sentence:
  - Pretorius and Ford (2017) state that…

- **Information prominent citations** put the authors’ names at the end of the sentence in brackets:
  - It is stated that… (Pretorius & Ford, 2017).

APA 6th referencing has different styles for in-text citations depending on how many authors wrote the source. Templates for information prominent and author prominent in-text citations in APA 6th style are provided below. More information about formatting in-text citations in the APA 6th style can be found here: [https://youtu.be/weD9a-ZL0AY](https://youtu.be/weD9a-ZL0AY).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>One author</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vygotsky (1978) or (Vygotsky, 1978)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Two authors</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretorius and Ford (2016) or (Pretorius &amp; Ford, 2016)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Three to five authors</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| First citation: Cahusac de Caux, Lam, Lau, Hoang, and Pretorius (2017)  
  or (Cahusac de Caux, Lam, Lau, Hoang, & Pretorius, 2017) |
| Subsequent citations: Cahusac de Caux et al. (2017)  
  or (Cahusac de Caux, Lam, Lau, Hoang, & Pretorius, 2017) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Six or more authors</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ford et al. (2015) or (Ford et al., 2015)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**In-text citations for ambiguous citations**

When you are citing multiple sources from the same author that were published in the same year, it is important to distinguish one source from the author. In APA 6th style you do this by adding an alphabetical letter after the year, as shown below.

Piaget (1972a, 1972b) or (Piaget, 1972a, 1972b)

Sometimes, you may want to reference more than one source that was published by two different authors that both have the same surname. In order to distinguish these two references in the text, you should include the author’s initials in all in-text citations, as demonstrated below.

R. Smith (2005) and E. Smith (2005) or (E. Smith, 2005; R. Smith, 2005)

**In-text citations for quotes**

When you are quoting the direct words from a source, you should use double quotation marks and also include the page number from that source as part of your in-text citation. You can place the page number after the author and year, or after the quote, as demonstrated in the examples below.

Cahusac de Caux et al. (2017, p. 464) define reflective practice as “the ability to purposely explore personal experiences, beliefs or knowledge in order to increase understanding, promote personal growth and improve professional practice”.

Pretorius, van Mourik, and Barratt (2017) define metacognition as “the students’ ability to engage and monitor the cognitive processes involved in their learning” (p. 390), noting that several strategies can be considered as metacognitive.
When you are quoting from a website, you should reference the paragraph number, as websites do not normally have page numbers. An example of a quote from a website can be found below.

The Department of Education and Training is committed to “ensuring we are giving our kids the education that industries will need, and the skills that employers will expect them to have” (Department of Education and Training, 2017, para. 1).

**Discussing in-text citations in your proposal or thesis**

The words you use to describe your references in your proposal or thesis are very important as they indicate what you think about the information contained in that reference. Information prominent citations are used to focus on the content, while author prominent citations are used to also place emphasis on the fact that a specific author made that claim. You should use both types of in-text citations in your writing. The following example was developed by Swales (1990) and shows different sentences containing either author prominent or information prominent citations. Take particular note of the underlined words. These reporting verbs change the meaning of a sentence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author prominent</th>
<th>Brie (1988) showed that the Moon is made of cheese.</th>
<th>According to Brie (1988), the Moon is made of cheese.</th>
<th>Brie’s theory (1988) contends that the Moon is made of cheese.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information prominent</td>
<td>Previous research has established that the Moon is made of cheese (Brie, 1988).</td>
<td>It is currently argued that the Moon is made of cheese (Brie, 1988).</td>
<td>The Moon may be made of cheese (Brie, 1988; but see also Rock, 1989).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reporting verbs**

A list of useful reporting verbs that you can use when you want to talk about someone else’s ideas or words can be found below. You can choose to use reporting verbs in either present or past tense, but you should be consistent in your proposal or thesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporting verbs indicating a positive stance or position (sometimes also accompanied by adverbs such as clearly, convincingly, or persuasively)</th>
<th>Accentuate, affirm, agree, concur, convince, demonstrate, emphasise, establish, highlight, satisfy, show, stress, support, underscore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reporting verbs indicating a neutral stance or position</td>
<td>Add, advance, advocate, argue, articulate, assert, assess, believe, claim, comment, consider, contend, declare, debate, describe, determine, discuss, evaluate, examine, explore, expound, express, hold, hypothesise, investigate, maintain, note, profess, point out, propose, propound, reason, recommend, remark, report, state, suggest, support, think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting verbs indicating a negative stance or position</td>
<td>Alleg, challenge, contradict, differ, disagree, discard, dismiss, dispute, dissent, doubt, object, question, refute, repudiate, remonstrate, scrutinise, speculate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting verbs to discuss an argument</td>
<td>Based on, embedded in, founded on, grounded in, underpinned by</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Journal articles**

To correctly reference a journal article using the APA 6th style, you need to include the following components:

- Author surnames and initials
- Year of publication
- Title of the article
- *Name of the journal in italic font*
- *Volume number in italic font*
- Issue number (if available)
- Page number
- Digital object identifier (doi) or URL (note that the URL is not hyperlinked in the list of references)

Three examples of correctly formatted journal article references are shown below.


More information about referencing a journal article in the APA 6th style can be found here: https://youtu.be/tpVzWA6_39g.
**Books and book chapters**

To correctly reference a book in APA 6th style, you need to include the following components:

- Author surnames and initials
- Year of publication
- *Title of book in italic font*
- Place of publication
- Publication company name

An example of a correctly formatted book reference is shown below.


To reference a chapter in an edited book, you need to include the following additional details:

- Title of chapter
- Book editors (initials then surname)
- Page numbers of the chapter

An example of a correctly formatted book chapter reference is shown below.


Curriculum documents and websites

Curriculum documents are often published online as a webpage. It is important to remember that you can use information you found on a website, as long as the source is of good quality (such as government websites). To correctly reference information found on a website in APA 6th style, you need to include the following components:

- Author surnames and initials (often an institution or government body)
- Year of publication (usually it is the year next to the copyright symbol ©)
- Title of website in italic font
- URL (note that the URL is not hyperlinked in the list of references)
- Optional: In APA 6th style you can include the date you accessed the material online, but this is optional. If you do include the date, you should include it in the following format: dd/mm/yyyy (for example 13/07/2017).

Three examples of correctly formatted references for information obtained from a website are shown below.


More information about referencing sources such as curriculum documents from a website in the APA 6th style can be found here: https://youtu.be/7zQbnGZecng.
**Translated sources**

If you are able to understand a publication that has been written in another language, you are able to use that reference in your proposal or thesis. You reference these types of sources in the same way you would reference other journal articles or books in the APA 6th style. The difference is that you also need to include the following extra detail in your reference:

- Translation of the title in English between square brackets

Two examples of correctly formatted translated works are shown below. Take particular note of how the original language is used in the reference, with the English translation in square brackets after the title.


→ Note that if you are citing a work written in a non-Latin script (such as Chinese, Greek, Japanese, or Russian), the reference must be transliterated into the English alphabet. This also includes the author of the reference.

The in-text references for these types of sources are referenced in the same way as all other sources, indicating the author and the year. The correct formatting of the in-text references for above-mentioned sources are shown below.

Guimard and Florin (2007) or (Guimard & Florin, 2007)

Yasuda (2016) or (Yasuda, 2016)
Reference lists

The reference list is placed at the end of the document with the heading “References”. Some important notes to remember about reference lists in APA 6th style:

- You should only include references in the reference list if you have specifically cited them in your proposal or thesis.
- You should organise the reference list alphabetically by the first author’s surname. Remember to keep the authors’ names in the order they were on the source.
- Each reference list entry should have a hanging indentation.

An example APA 6th-formatted reference list is included below.

References


More information about formatting a reference list in the APA 6th style can be found here: https://youtu.be/uq7hYWh0Xdg.

**Identifying errors in your writing**

It is important to carefully edit and proofread your work throughout your research training. This will help you to improve the quality of your writing. Additionally, editing and proofreading throughout your studies will reduce the amount of time you need to spend to fix your thesis at the end of your degree. You can use the Academic Language Feedback Guide on the next page to guide you when you are editing and proofreading your work.

- Editing focuses on the overall structure and organisation of your writing. You should check your work in terms of the organisation of your ideas (clarity, coherence, and quality of arguments), as well as your academic style and voice.
- Proofreading is focussed on finer details. You should check your work for errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, and the mechanics of referencing.

**Common errors in academic writing**

Below are examples of some of the most commonly confused words and expressions in academic writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Errors in plurals and singulars</th>
<th>Datum (singular) and data (plural)</th>
<th>Phenomenon (singular) and phenomena (plural)</th>
<th>Focus (singular) and foci (plural)</th>
<th>Criterion (singular) and criteria (plural)</th>
<th>Curriculum (singular) and curricula (plural)</th>
<th>Research (an uncountable noun – no plural)</th>
<th>Information (an uncountable noun – no plural)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

35
ACADEMIC LANGUAGE FEEDBACK GUIDE

English language use

- Apostrophe
- Vocabulary
- Punctuation
- Spelling
- Other less common issue(s)

Grammatical elements
- Verb forms
- Tenses in regards to time markers
- Parts of speech
- articles (a/an/the)
- Plural/singular word forms

Sentence structure
- Word order
- Sentence length
- Fragmented phrases
- Parallel structures

Academic literacy

- Mechanics of referencing
  - Consistency of in-text referencing
  - Accuracy of the list of references

- Style and voice
  - Appropriate formal style and non-biased tone
  - Using literature as evidence
  - Distinction between writer's voice and others' ideas

- Organisation and development of ideas in response to the task
  - Introduction establishes main themes and structure
  - Clear transitions between ideas and sections
  - Quality paragraphs and topic sentences
  - Conclusion provides a sense of unity and logical ending


The electronic version of the Academic Language Feedback Guide can be found here: http://alf-tool.monash.edu/
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confused spelling</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Affect and effect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o When these words mean influence, <em>affect</em> is used as a verb and <em>effect</em> is used as a noun.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o When the words mean something different from influence they are used differently grammatically. To <em>effect</em> (verb) something is to successfully complete it, while a person’s <em>affect</em> (noun) refers to their feelings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Practice and practise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o In Australian spelling, the verb uses the “s” and the noun the “c”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Its and it’s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o <em>Its</em> is used when you are talking about something belonging to the thing you have already mentioned. <em>It’s</em> is a contraction or a shortened form of “It is”. Remember that contractions should be avoided in academic writing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confused usage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• That and which</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Both these words introduce information that is related to a word or phrase that appeared earlier. <em>That</em> is used when you wish to specify more closely the defining characteristics of the word or phrase (the word or phrase that appeared earlier). <em>Which</em> is used to provide extra information rather than to specify or define.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parallel structures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parallel structure (or parallelism) means using the same pattern of words or phrases to express two or more similar ideas in a sentence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o A common parallel structure error in academic writing occurs when listing many items in a sentence (for example “She likes physics, art and doing mathematics”). Make sure that the verbs or nouns match in terms of grammatical form (i.e. “She likes physics, art and mathematics”).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References used in this booklet


### Additional useful resources

**Videos to help you improve your academic literacy and language use**
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6iYFgJMOjH8dJ1gJIYxXnA

**Academic Language Resources Bank Moodle site**
http://moodle.vle.monash.edu/course/view.php?id=35611

**Face-to-face and online support for academic literacy and language**

Academic Language, Literacy and Numeracy Development, Faculty of Education
www.monash.edu/education/current-students/academic-language-literacy-numeracy-support

Monash University Library Research and Learning Skills
https://www.monash.edu/library/skills

English Connect
https://www.monash.edu/english-connect
**Expression**


**General Writing Guides**


Construction of the thesis


*Improvements in English language use*


