



2022- 2023

Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

Thesis Guidelines

2022-2023

School of Psychology
QUB

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Structure of the Thesis Submission

As part of progression through the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology Programme, all trainees are required to submit a thesis for examination at a viva voce during the final year of the programme.

The thesis should be written in the English language and should not exceed 40,000 words (excluding references and appendices).

The layout for submission of the thesis should be:

Front Matter: Cover page (including the thesis title, the author's full names, degrees, School, the degree for which the thesis is offered, and the date of submission), Contents page, List of abbreviations used (where appropriate).

Section 1: An Extended Literature Review, prepared as a manuscript for submission to a named journal.

Section 2: The Large Scale Research Project prepared as a manuscript for submission to a named journal.

Section 3: Technical Appendix for the Extended Literature Review.

Section 4: Technical Appendix for the Large Scale Research paper.

Section 5: Reflective Appendix.

Section 6: A poster presentation detailing key information about the Large Scale Research Project.

Section 7: A copy of the instructions for authors from the named journal for the Extended Literature Review.

Section 8: A copy of the instructions for authors from the named journal for the Large Scale Research Project paper.

Section 9: Evidence of ethics and governance approval from the appropriate bodies.

Extended Literature Review

As part of their doctoral thesis trainees are required to complete an Extended Literature Review (ELR) that should be between 4000-7000 words. Along with the Large Scale Research Project (LSRP), the ELR will form a major part of the thesis. Both the ELR and the LSRP will constitute separate chapters of the thesis, and both will be examined during the *viva voce* examination.

The overarching purpose of this literature review is to: (1) Detail the evidence in the extant scientific literature regarding the thesis' subject area, (2) Critically evaluate and synthesize this evidence to provide an overall summary of what is currently known, and (3) identify needs and gaps in the literature which set the stage for the thesis project.

The literature review will be similar to introduction sections for peer reviewed journal articles in terms of structure and content with the key difference being the depth of analysis and detail that the thesis is expected to provide. In essence, the literature review is the trainee's opportunity to demonstrate to their examiners that they have an adequate understanding of the evidence base and a mastery of it that is sufficient to allow the identification of its critical needs. This review will allow the trainees to conduct a critical appraisal of the literature that is relevant to the background of their project.

Typically, the literature review will build on the literature review included in the trainee's LSRP Proposal. It will typically be a narrative summary of the research evidence using informal or subjective methods to collect and interpret the relevant studies. Efforts should be made to evaluate and integrate the material, rather than simply restate it. Reference should be made to the underlying theoretical perspectives that have guided the body of research evidence and how these theoretical underpinnings can be evolved moving forward.

Whilst the search of the literature needs to be comprehensive, unlike a systematic review it does not aim to be exhaustive. The methods used to identify the included research are not described in detail in the review and inclusion or exclusion criteria do not need to be specified. The replicability of the search process is not the focus, rather the author seeks to demonstrate their understanding and present their work in the context of what has preceded it. The conclusion of the extended literature review should aim to provide a fresh perspective on the research topic of interest and help justify the importance of the LSRP.

The ELR should be written in line with the guidance for submission to a peer-reviewed academic journal of the trainee's choosing. It should have a brief Introduction section that outlines the purpose of the review and a Conclusion section at the end that draws the key points together. A complete and correctly formatted reference section should also be included.

The following examples of narrative reviews relating to clinical health psychology are illustrative of the scope, depth and critical analysis that is expected of the extended literature review:

Wilshire, C. E., & Ward, T. (2016). Psychogenic explanations of physical illness: Time to examine the evidence. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 11(5), 606-631.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691616645540>

Carson AJ, Brown R, David AS, et al. (2012). Functional (conversion) neurological symptoms: research since the millennium. *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry*, 83, 842-850.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jnnp-2011-301860>

Guidance that may be useful for writing effective scientific reviews can be found across the published literature. Some examples include:

- The journal *Nature's* guide:
 - o <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-03422-x>
- The University of Michigan Library's Research Guide
 - o <https://guides.lib.umich.edu/c.php?g=283300&p=2915110>
- Pautasso's (2013) PLoS article on writing a literature review
 - o <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3715443/>

Large Scale Research Project

The large-scale project is to be written up in the format of a named journal paper, as intended for publication. You must name the intended journal and write your paper in line with the instructions or guidance for authors for that journal (a copy of the journal's guidance for authors is to be included in an appendix). Furthermore, all pages should be numbered and the left hand margin should be sufficient to allow for future binding. The named journal must be agreed with your Research Supervisors prior to writing of the paper.

A typical format for a research paper includes each of the following sections: TITLE, ABSTRACT, INTRODUCTION, METHODS, RESULTS, DISCUSSION, REFERENCES.

As noted earlier, this may vary. It may for example, be appropriate to include a "Comment" / "Discussion" of your results in stages, followed by a final "Conclusions" section (for example if there are several discrete parts/questions addressed by the study), rather than presenting all your results together. This may especially be the case if there are lots of results - the reader will have forgotten/lost sight of what they were by the time they get to reading your interpretation of them. Similarly, dividing your Method section into participants/design/ apparatus/materials /procedure may not be appropriate for all methodologies. The format and structure is there to facilitate, not constrain, understanding of the substance of your research.

Title and Abstract

The title should inform the reader, simply and succinctly, of what your paper is about. It should include keywords, such as the issue addressed / key variables manipulated / participants etc.

The abstract is crucially important. Not only does it create the first impression of the quality of your paper and research, but it inspires (or fails to inspire) interest in the paper and offers the framework on which to hang the ensuing details. It is often easy to "lose sight of the wood for the trees" in a paper, and the abstract offers a very explicit picture before proceeding forth!

In a few sentences the reason for the research should be made clear. The nature of the procedures/methodology should be indicated. The results should be clearly summarised (without means, statistics etc.) or overviewed, and the nature of the interpretation/ meaning indicated or foreshadowed. You must follow the length, style and structure of abstract as indicated in your named journal.

Introduction

Many people confuse an Introduction with writing an essay review of an area. This is not appropriate, as the reader is launched into a method section without any clear idea of what particular questions are being asked, or the rationale behind them, in the case of your specific research project.

The primary function of an introduction is to introduce your research; the review of previous research is only important in so far as it helps in this. Essentially, in this section you need to make explicit the questions/hypotheses addressed by your paper, and the rationale behind them. It is in offering the rationale behind your research questions (e.g. testing a theory, exploring an association between some variables in a given population, evaluating the outcome of an intervention) that a synthesis of the research and knowledge base which has informed your hypotheses should be offered. It may also be important to justify and offer the rationale behind the methodology employed at this stage (especially if it is novel, untried, has a relatively brief history, or is not commonly familiar). The synthesis of the knowledge base should be succinct. Refer the reader to other review papers of an area/theory/ if

necessary and only review and critique those parts of the knowledge base which are specifically pertinent to your project.

Method

The method section tells the reader how you actually examined/tested the questions addressed by your paper. It essentially serves two purposes. Firstly, it allows the reader to judge whether, and to what degree, the results and conclusions reached are valid, or whether they need to be tempered by some limitations in methodology. Secondly, the method section should provide enough information to allow a replication of the study. In addition to these considerations, any ethical issues may also need to be delineated in this section. The method section often varies in structure, but should include information on the following:

- i Participants - sex, age, educational/social/marital status, inclusion and exclusion criteria, method of recruitment, informed consent etc.
- ii Material/Apparatus - questionnaires used (describe nature of, reliability, validity etc. but put actual questionnaires in an appendix), equipment (make and model etc.), interview schedule (in appendix)
- iii Design - some examination of design used - qualitative, quantitative, control (e.g. pre-post; waiting list control; comparative treatment etc.) dependent and independent variables, how subjects assigned to groups, the type of analysis conducted on the data may be relevant here, and should logically follow from your study design
- iv Procedures - usually a chronological account of what actually happened from the beginning to end of a data collection session (paraphrase precise instructions unless of particular importance). Ethical issues and how you have considered and addressed them should be integrated here naming the research ethics committee giving approval. (Copies of letters of approval from research ethics committees need to be placed in an appendix in your research portfolio).

This section may not need to be structured according to these particular subsections - it all depends on your particular design, although some sub-sectioning can facilitate comprehension. Refer to the guidelines for authors from your named journal for further information.

Results

If there are many results and analyses to present, then it may be helpful to subsection this part of your paper (perhaps along the lines of the main questions/hypotheses addressed by each subsection). The main thing to bear in mind is that the structure is there to facilitate comprehension, and you should not feel bound by a traditional and rigid structure. Let the content dictate the structure, not vice versa. Further, specific requirements may be imposed by your named journal.

Use tables, graphs and figures where appropriate. Your text should highlight important aspects of the tables/figures, but not replicate information already therein. In this section especially, the reader can get “lost” (especially if there is a multitude of results to present), so be very clear, explicit and succinct. Presentation of results does not need to mirror the procedural order of the research, and are best presented in order of importance, in terms of outcome or questions addressed.

Quantitative Analyses

You should check the assumptions underlying any statistical tests you intend to use and have available the evidence to demonstrate that these assumptions were met. When reporting the results of a statistical test you should report: the test value (t, F, r, etc); the degrees of freedom (df), where appropriate; the significance (p) value; and the effect size. When statistical tests are conducted it is not sufficient to present only the probability (statistical significance) values and you should not rely solely on these values when interpreting the results of the analyses. Rather, attention must also be paid to effect sizes. The effect size should assist you in making sense of the clinical significance of your findings in addition to the statistical significance. You should also consider the possible effect of multiple testing and whether some correction (such as the Bonferroni correction) should be applied.

Qualitative Analyses

When dealing with qualitative data, the research findings are sometimes presented in conjunction with a discussion of these findings. In most qualitative analysis, the interpretation and discussion of the data is an integral part of the analysis. To separate these for the purposes of conforming to a report style more suited to quantitative analysis is pointless and could result in some loss of the richness of the information provided. In qualitative papers, interpretation of the findings is usually supported by direct quotes from participants. Participants are normally given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity but to allow quotes from the same individual to be identified.

The analysis of qualitative data is tied to the study design. Data analysis should be informed by the theoretical approach in the same way as the data collection, thereby ensuring a consistent approach to addressing the aim of the study. Therefore, to some extent, the data analysis procedure will be determined by the specific method chosen. Nevertheless, there are some general principles that apply.

The data analysis procedure should be transparent and, in particular, the process by which the data was reduced to themes/categories and conclusions should be made explicit. There should be examples of data that led to certain conclusions and examples that help to illustrate the analytic process, to evidence that conclusions are grounded in the data. During the analysis process it is important to continue the process of reflexion on how the conclusions are influenced by personal assumptions and biases, with a view to ensuring, among other things, that premature analytical closure is avoided. This occurs when you notice patterns in the data at an early stage in the analysis process and then interpret subsequent data in a way that fits with these early interpretations. Remember that the point of qualitative research is not to summarise individuals' responses into an average but to represent the diversity and complexity of responses in a digestible format.

Discussion

This section may follow the order of the results, or perhaps more preferably, address each of the questions/issues posed in your introduction, drawing from the results as appropriate. Essentially, you will want to highlight results found, interpret their meaning in the light of the questions addressed, and raise any qualifications to these conclusions if appropriate (e.g. with reference to limitations in methodology). It is often useful to "follow on" from your own research re. implications for practice or future research, but avoid the temptation to go beyond your data and get drawn into a grandiose treatise on "how things now should be".

Avoid getting caught up in convoluted and spurious explanations or discussion. If results go counter to your hypothesis, don't necessarily try to knock them down or rationalise them away. It may be pertinent to reformulate (as in clinical practice) and rethink the focus of your discussions (it may even be well worth doing some extra review of the literature at this stage).

Do not devote a large portion of your discussion section to highlighting limitations in the study. It is appropriate to discuss how the design of your study might limit generalisations of the findings or might explain contrary findings to previous research. However, highlighting shortcomings in your design because of lack of forward thinking is not appropriate for the discussion section of the “paper” and should be included in the reflective appendix as appropriate.

References

The organisation, citing and listing of references should follow the guidance for authors in your named journal.

Appendices

The following appendices should be included:

- A technical appendix for the Extended Literature Review if required.
- A technical appendix for the Large Scale Research Project, which contains statistical analyses and methodological procedures too detailed for a paper format. This may be especially pertinent when procedures are novel or too involved (e.g. some qualitative procedures) to be discussed in the paper, but which provide important information for trainee evaluation purposes.
- A succinct reflective appendix which reflects on the skills and experiences accrued in the course of the Large Scale Research Project should be included (e.g. own thoughts about strengths and weaknesses of the methodology in this context, personal strengths and weaknesses, appraisal of developmental research competencies in context, any ethical issues raised, implications for personal future research etc.).
- A poster presentation detailing key information about the Large Scale Research Project. This should include the title, the trainee’s name and the names of the supervisors. The poster can be structured using the following headings: INTRODUCTION, METHODS, RESULTS, DISCUSSION, KEY REFERENCES. Trainees will have the opportunity to present their posters at the annual DCPNI conference. The poster should be created using MS PowerPoint. It should be saved as an image file and be copied and pasted into the thesis document. The following resources will be helpful for creating the poster:
<https://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/learning/FileStore/Filetoupload,628278,en.pdf>
<https://blogs.qub.ac.uk/digiknow/2022/03/14/creating-posters-in-powerpoint/>
- A copy of the instructions for authors from the named journal for the Extended Literature Review.
- A copy of the instructions for authors from the named journal for the Large Scale Research Project.
- A copy of the approval of the research governance and ethics applications.

Submission and Viva Voce Assessment

It is anticipated that most DClInPsy viva examinations will take place in June, it is hoped that this will ensure that trainees have sufficient time to complete the programme along with any corrections (if applicable) prior to the end of the training contract. If after discussion with their supervisors, the trainee is of the opinion that they will not be ready by the submission date, a later viva can be arranged. A later viva cannot guarantee completion of the programme prior to the end of training contract.

Before submission

Trainees will need to complete the 'Intention to submit' form on QGIS at least three months in advance of the viva, the trainee should email dclinpsy@qub.ac.uk when they have done this. The course team will then complete nomination of examiners so the exams office can accept the trainee's thesis. The title of the thesis must match the title given in the intention to submit. This title should be agreed in advance with the research supervisors.

The trainee will submit the draft thesis to the DClInPsy admin team who will upload the draft to a University-recognised similarity checking service (such as Turnitin). A report will be generated and used for feedback purposes, prior to the submission of the thesis.

Prior to submitting a thesis, trainees must sign a statement that:

- i. The thesis is not one for which a degree has been or will be conferred by any other university or institution (unless otherwise permitted under an approved collaborative research degree agreement).
- ii. The thesis is not one for which a degree has already been conferred by this University.
- iii. The work for the thesis is the trainee's own and that, where material submitted by the trainee for another degree or work undertaken by the trainee as part of a research group has been incorporated into the thesis, the extent of the work thus incorporated has been clearly indicated.
- iv. The composition of the thesis is the trainee's own work.

Submitting The Thesis

Pre-viva submissions continue to be electronic. Details of the process are available here:

<https://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/srecords/Examinations/Postgraduate-Research/SubmissionProcess/>

The Examination Process

There shall be two examiners, one internal and one external examiner. The internal examiner shall be appointed from amongst the current professors, readers, senior lecturers or lecturers (but not lecturers on probation) of the University.

The examiners shall each prepare an independent report on the thesis before the oral examination.

There shall be an oral examination attended by the internal and external examiners and independently convened by an independent Chair.

The trainee may not communicate with the examiners about the thesis before the oral examination.

At the end of the examination, the trainee (and their supervisor if present) will be asked to withdraw while the examiners reach their decision. In normal circumstances, the examiners will then ask the trainee to return to the examination room and will provide an informal and verbal indication of their performance in the viva.

Trainees will then be informed in writing of the final decisions made by the examiners. The examiners, via the School, will prepare a joint report which includes one of the following decisions regarding the outcome of the viva:

- i. The Doctoral degree be awarded as the thesis stands.
- ii. The Doctoral degree be awarded subject to corrections* being made to the thesis that must be completed within three months.
- iii. The Doctoral degree be awarded subject to corrections being made to the thesis that must be completed within six months.
- iv. The thesis be revised and re-submitted for the Doctoral degree at a later date. Trainees are only permitted to revise and re-submit a thesis once, not counting corrections outlined in ii or iii above. When making this decision, examiners may also propose one of v, vi, or vii below as a possible alternative. The trainee must confirm the preferred option.
- v. A Master's degree be awarded as the thesis stands.
- vi. A Master's degree be awarded subject to corrections being made to the thesis that must be completed within three months.
- vii. A Master's degree be awarded subject to corrections being made to the thesis that must be completed within six months.
- viii. The thesis be revised and submitted for a Master's degree at a later date.
- ix. No degree be awarded.

Final Submission of the Approved Thesis

Once a trainee's thesis has been finally approved it should be submitted by the trainee as an e-copy via *QUB Pure*. Further details about this process are available here:

<https://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/srecords/Examinations/Postgraduate-Research/SubmissionProcess/#final-thesis-pure-submission-981508-2>

Electronic copies of the final thesis should also be made available to the research supervisors.