

School of Psychology

Article Format for DPhil Thesis

D.Phil theses in the School of Psychology may be structured according to a series of (usually 3-5) distinct articles (which need not have been submitted to journals) together with an overview. Theses written in most European countries follow this format rather than the traditional British format of one long monograph.

The overview provides a literature review and a discussion of how all the work links together to tell a coherent story; in other words it consists of material that would normally be in the first and final chapter of a traditional style thesis. The overview will usually be about 10,000 words. This section should not only introduce the general issue(s) that the thesis addressed, and explain how the empirical work was designed to address those issues, it should also include a discussion of how the results bear on those issues and point to future work. The function of the overview is to demonstrate both scholarliness on the part of the student, and also the coherence of the thesis as a whole.

If you intend to submit using the articles format you should agree this with your main supervisor as early as possible to facilitate the early writing of papers. It is then the supervisor's responsibility to explain the structure to the internal and external examiners prior to their appointment (it is not common in British psychology). Your external examiner will be sent a copy of these notes prior to your *viv-voce* examination.

Articles format theses must of course still follow University regulations. For example, all pages should be consecutively numbered in your thesis (one would not just put e.g. three publications in with the journal page numbering, but they would all need to go into one large document).

The number of articles to include is an academic judgment the student should reach in discussion with the supervisor. There is no set rule about this, as it depends on research area and amount of work represented by each article. The supervisor must judge what constitutes an amount of work that is equivalent to a British-style thesis, and student and supervisor must judge how best to structure that work into articles.

Advantages:

1) The structure aligns the assessment of a D.Phil with its learning aims. If the aim of a D.Phil is to train the student to be a research academic, then D.Phil assessment should require the same sort of output as research academics produce. The articles structure more closely matches assessment with learning aims than the traditional structure does.

2) The articles structure encourages more actual publications. The traditional British psychology thesis is a large and thorough document rarely read by more than three people. If the research contained within it is to be published, it would have to be re-written into a journal format, and this often involves some considerable work. For the articles structure, writing up papers is simultaneous with writing up the thesis. Often when D.Phil students leave

academia, their work, even though good, never sees the light of day, because the supervisor is too busy to do the necessary restructuring. Both supervisor and student then lose out. If the student stays in academia, getting publications is easier to achieve sooner by using the articles structure.

Disadvantage:

The articles structure may motivate people other than the student to contribute more to the work than they would have done using the traditional format. The work presented in a thesis must represent an original contribution by the student, regardless of the form of the thesis. Where a person other than the candidate is, or would be, “first” author on a paper serious consideration should be given as to whether it is appropriate to include the paper in the thesis. Where a paper contains authors other than the supervisor, their contribution may be problematic if the paper is simply included without comment. In these cases, and also where a supervisor has made more than expected contributions to a paper, a different version of a paper (to one submitted for publication) may be included so that the paper better reflects the student’s own contribution. Alternatively, if the contribution of other people can be simply stated in a way that the contribution of the student is easy to judge, such papers could be included together with a statement of the student’s actual contribution.

Zoltan Dienes, November 2010.