

MINOR THESIS: STRUCTURE

Your minor thesis (sometimes called a research report) is a description of your research project based on your research question(s) and/or problem(s). Your thesis tells the story of your research questions/ problems and how you found answers to them. This tip sheet gives an overview of the traditional structure of a minor thesis, variation can occur depending on your field of study and research methodology.

What is the purpose of a minor thesis?

Although it may make a contribution to your broader academic field, the main purposes of a minor thesis or research report are to demonstrate:

- a critical awareness of the previous work in your field exploring some additional questions (a minor thesis may reproduce a previous study in a new context or with modifications)
- an understanding of basic research theory and techniques.

Who is the audience?

You need to imagine someone who is well-educated in your broad area but who does not know about your specific research. You will need to define and clarify some terminology and concepts.

When should I start writing?

Begin your writing early. The more work you've done at the proposal stage the easier it will be. Set up folders that will contain separate documents for each chapter or major section. Add to these as you develop your ideas. The order in which you write about your research is often not the same as the order of the finished chapters or sections. Discuss and work out a draft for organising your chapters with your supervisor.

Using questions to guide your structure

Here are some questions to help you think about some sections you might include in your minor thesis. The suggestions on the right follow a 'traditional' thesis structure, but there are other ways of structuring your thesis.

What is the research about?	Introduction
What is already known in this area?	Literature review
What do you want to find out about?	Research question
How did you go about your research?	Methodology
What did you find?	Results/Findings
What do the results/findings mean?	Discussion
So what!? What is the significance and what are the contributions?	Research significance
What are the recommendations?	Recommendations

Major parts of your thesis or report

Not all of the sections listed previously need to be written as discrete sections. In some areas, where the review of the literature is short, this section might be embedded in the Introduction. Conversely, there may be two or more Literature Review chapters dealing with different aspects of the research project, and in many theses, it can be appropriate to combine the Results/Findings and Discussions sections. In some types of qualitative research, sections can be structured under themes, rather than using 'traditional' headings.

However, in all theses you need to introduce the thesis, identify what is already known about your topic through the literature, let the reader know what methodology you used, state, discuss analyse the results, and identify the significance of your research findings in your conclusions.

The main sections in more detail

The following order of sections is used for most science-based discipline areas as well as some arts-based areas.

Abstract (sometimes called a Synopsis or Summary):

This should be a very brief overview of the whole report covering four main areas:

- What you did (the topic)
- How you did it (methodology)
- What you found out (major results only)
- What was the significance (conclusion/recommendations).

The abstract is generally about 300 words.

Introduction:

The introductory section should:

- provide contextual information to the research questions/problem, briefly indicating the gap in research in this area
- introduce the objectives
- identify the specific research questions/problem.

The following are optional (check what is generally done in your discipline area):

- introduce how the objectives will be achieved (methodology, briefly)
- introduce the main findings and conclusions
- indicate the structure of the rest of the report.

Literature review:

- Review previous work relating to research problem/questions (to define, explain, justify), and show the gap that the present research will fill.
- This section:
 - should be structured thematically
 - may have a number of sub-sections to identify themes
 - should integrate and combine the literature, highlighting areas of similarity and difference.
- Review previous work relating to methodology (to define, explain, justify). Note: It may be more appropriate to put this in the Methodology section.
- Review previous work relating to results (particularly reliability, etc.) Note: As above, this may be more appropriate in the Methodology section.

Methodology:

- Perhaps discuss your epistemology and theoretical perspectives (this may depend on your area and style of thesis).
- Use the literature (theory) to help you justify why you chose your methodology (if not done above). E.g. If you are using phenomenology, explore the theory and its appropriateness to your research.
- Explain how data was collected/generated.
- Explain how data was analysed.
- Explain any methodological problems or limitations, and their solutions or effects.

Results:

- Present the results, using graphs, tables, etc. where appropriate.

Discussion:

- Interpret and discuss the results.
- Compare with results of previous research (link to the Literature Review).
- Discuss any effects the methods used had on the data obtained.
- Discuss the shortcomings of the research or the research methodology as it relates to your results.

Conclusions and recommendations:

- Return to the research questions or problem(s) and indicate to what extent they've been answered or resolved.
- Return to the objectives and indicate whether they've been achieved.
- Indicate what has been learnt from the study and how it can be applied.
- Maybe indicate improvements for the research and future possibilities.

Example of a Table of Contents

The example below illustrates some typical features of a table of contents; note the comments on the right.

Title: Oztop stock inventory management: A new system		
Contents		
Abstract	(i)	<i>Roman numerals for preliminary pages</i>
Acknowledgements	(ii)	
Declaration	(iii)	
List of figures	(iv)	<i>Lists of figures and tables</i>
List of tables	(v)	
Chapter 1. Introduction	1	
1.1 Overview of Oztop Company	5	<i>Standard page numbering for main body</i>
1.2 Project objectives and research questions	7	
1.3 Project scope and limitations	9	
1.4 Project benefits	10	
Chapter 2. Literature review	11	
2.1 Introduction to inventory management	14	<i>Thematic ordering of literature into sub-headings</i>
2.3 Pareto analysis	16	
2.3 Material requiring planning	19	
2.3.1 Planning input	23	
2.3.2 Planning output	27	
2.4 Safety stock	29	
Chapter 3. Methodology	39	
3.1 Inventory management methodologies	40	<i>Consistent numbering system for headings and sub-headings</i>
3.1.1		
3.1.2		
3.2 Company survey		
3.3 Data collection		
	52	
Chapter 4. Findings and discussion	72	
Chapter 5. Conclusions and recommendations	75	
References	79	
Appendices		

The order of the pages

The pages of your thesis usually have the following order:

- Title page which states:
 - the full title of the thesis
 - the full name and degrees of the candidate
 - the name of the School associated with the research (and RMIT University)
 - the month and year when the thesis is submitted
- A declaration stating that:
 - except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is your own
 - the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for other assessment
 - the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program
 - any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party, including Study and Learning Advisors is acknowledged
- Acknowledgements, if any
- Table of contents and, where applicable, lists of tables and figures
- Abstract (summary) of the research – usually around 300 words
- Main text of the thesis, divided into chapters
- Reference list conforming to the style common to your discipline
- Appendices (if appropriate).

Other stylistic features

- Figures and tables must carry a number and a caption and be fully referenced if from other sources.
- Heading styles and numbering systems should be consistent throughout, matching those of your Contents page.
- Each chapter should begin on a new page.
- Italics are usually used for foreign language words and genus or species names.
- If you use footnotes for extra information, they must be on the same page as the information to which they refer. Alternatively you could use endnotes, which generally should be placed at the end of each chapter. Remember to use a consistent footnote numbering system.
- Your thesis title should be well thought-out and concise, generally no more than 20 words, and should make the topic and research field clear to the reader.
- Headings should use parallel structures (the same grammatical form).
Example:

Parallel (all noun structures)

Effectiveness of treatments
Management of side effects
Costs

Not parallel (mixed structures)

Effectiveness of treatments
How to manage side effects
What are the costs?