



# WSU Thesis and Dissertation Formatting Guidelines

Your thesis or dissertation is a scholarly publication reflecting the results of your academic studies and research at Washington State University. For this reason, your document should illustrate the high standards upheld by your program, college, and WSU. These formatting requirements are intended to ensure a base level of uniformity between WSU theses and dissertations across disciplines. The following sections describe a few key terms used throughout this guide and explain your responsibilities in formatting your document.

## **Thesis, Dissertation, and ETD**

At WSU, a “thesis” refers to the academic research paper written by a master’s student, whereas a “dissertation” refers to the same piece of writing from a doctoral student. In both cases, this research paper is submitted to the Graduate School in partial fulfillment of degree requirements. As all theses and dissertations are published electronically by WSU Libraries and ProQuest, they are collectively referred to as “electronic theses and dissertations” (ETDs).

## **Student Responsibilities**

Graduate students are responsible for producing a high-quality ETD that adheres to the formatting guidelines presented in this guide as well as the style guidelines of their discipline. Whereas the Graduate School reviews ETDs for correct formatting, the responsibility for proofreading remains with the student and their committee chair. Proofreading includes ensuring accurate spelling, punctuation, grammar, discipline-specific formatting, and obtaining approval to reuse copyrighted material.

## **WSU Formatting and Discipline Style Guidelines**

Students should follow the style guidelines for their discipline; however, the WSU Graduate School ensures a base level of uniformity between ETDs from WSU’s various graduate programs. Therefore, when in disagreement, the formatting guidelines in this document take precedence over individual discipline or style manuals. These guidelines include the definition of parts of the ETD, the order in which they appear, the content of prefatory pages, font, margins, spacing, and page numbers. Flexibility is provided wherever possible, as long as formatting is applied consistently throughout the ETD.

## **ETD as a Degree Requirement**

Having your ETD officially accepted by the Graduate School is a degree requirement for master’s students in a thesis program and for all doctoral students. Formatting your ETD to look professional, following WSU’s guidelines, and consistently applying style guidelines for your discipline are all key to approval. Dedicate ample time to formatting your document. Any revisions requested by the Graduate School are required to be addressed. ETD submissions (draft and final) should be in PDF format. This does not include any supplemental files (excel, images, GIS data, music composition, etc.).

## **Resources and Assistance**

For questions regarding WSU formatting, you can contact the Graduate School at [gradschool@wsu.edu](mailto:gradschool@wsu.edu) (a help ticket will be created). Questions regarding style guidelines for your discipline, as well as proofreading and copyright permissions, should be directed to your committee. Additionally, the [Graduate Writing Center](#) is a helpful resource, funded by your student fees, which can teach you to improve your writing and editing skills. Conversely, the [Professional Editing Service Center](#) offers fee-based proofreading and copyediting services (written approval from your committee chair is required to use this service). Of course, one of the best resources is your peers. Writing groups and proofreading one another’s work can be an excellent way to improve your writing and minimize errors while building bonds with your fellow graduate students.

## THESIS AND DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

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All ETDs should adhere to the following structure:

### Prefatory Pages (In Order):

1. Title Page<sup>1</sup> – Format specified for WSU.
2. Committee Page<sup>1</sup> – Format specified for WSU.
3. Abstract<sup>1</sup> – Format specified for WSU.
4. Acknowledgements (Optional) – Match your formatting choices for the body.
5. Table of Contents – Required, but there is not a specific format you must use. It should be clear, consistent, and professional.
  - a. Subsections may include Lists of Abbreviations, Equations, Figures, Graphs, Tables, Maps, etc. These must match the format of your Table of Contents.
6. Dedication (Optional) – Match your formatting choices for the body.

### Body Text:

1. Chapters must always start on a new page.
2. The format of chapter titles must be consistent across all chapters.
3. Follow the style manual for your discipline when structuring chapters, subheadings, etc. Be consistent with your choices across all chapters.
4. Follow the citation manual for your discipline for in-text citations, footnotes, endnotes, etc.
5. You may use journal articles or book chapters (previously published or written with the intent to publish) in place of standard ETD chapters. Please follow the formatting requirements detailed on page 7 of this guide.

### References, Bibliography, Works Cited, etc.

1. A list of all cited sources may appear at the end of each chapter, or you may gather them into one section at the end of the ETD. Be consistent in this formatting.
2. Follow the citation manual for your discipline regarding how you structure your citations.
3. If you must refer to online sources (not recommended but unavoidable, for example code repositories without an accompanying publication), then the citation should include the date and time at which you accessed the information. Wherever possible, associated publications should be cited additionally or instead.

### Appendix or Appendices (Optional)

1. Format should be consistent with your formatting for the body of your ETD.
2. An appendix is the appropriate location for CVs, compilations, data sets, surveys completed by research subjects, etc.

## GENERAL ETD FORMATTING

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The following general formatting requirements apply throughout your ETD:

### Fonts and Font Effects:

1. Your ETD should use one professional font family. Items such as figures, tables, graphs, equations, code, etc., may be in a different font, but consistency is key.
  - a. For example, avoid one font for a symbol in an equation but a different font for the same symbol in the text.
2. All text should be in black, as colored text does not always print clearly due to dithering and blending of inks. Other colored text is allowed as parts of figures, tables, etc., but fine details in figures should be in black for clarity.

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<sup>1</sup> These pages will be reviewed closely and should follow the provided sample pages as much as possible. Please compare your pages with the examples. Most formatting edits in an ETD (over 80%) are due to incorrect formatting on these pages.

3. Use font effects deliberately. For example, italics should be used for all words that are normally italicized in academic writing (e.g., scientific names, book titles). Bold, italics, and underlining may be used sparingly and are best reserved for subheadings.
4. The body font size may range between 10-point and 12-point, with the ideal size depending on the font, to balance information density and legibility.

**Margins:**

1. Margins on all pages must be a minimum of 1" on all sides for the main content of the ETD (e.g., text, figures, equations, tables). Exceptions include page numbers, running heads, and marginal notes.
2. The "absolute margin" should be a minimum of 0.5" on all sides. Nothing should extend into this region.

**Page Numbers:**

1. The title page is the only page to not include a page number.
2. Begin using lowercase Roman numerals (ii, iii, iv, etc.) on the committee page which is numbered as "ii". Continue lowercase Roman numerals throughout prefatory pages.
3. Use Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.) beginning on the first page of the ETD body (the page following your dedication). Restart your page count at "1". For example, in Microsoft Word, this formatting can best be accomplished by using a section break before the new numbering format.
4. Page numbers should be centered at the bottom of the page, 0.5 inches from the edge. Ensure your page numbers are consistently placed.

**Page Size:**

1. Use 8.5" x 11" for all page sizes.

**Spacing:**

1. Text in the body of the abstract, acknowledgment (if applicable), dedication (if applicable), and throughout the ETD body must be at least 1.5 spaced. Select one spacing format and use it consistently throughout these sections of your ETD.
  - a. We recommend double spacing.
  - b. You may choose to single-space text in charts, graphs, tables, captions, block quotes, etc. We recommend single spacing in these instances, but whatever you choose, be consistent.
2. For students using LaTeX/Overleaf: Line spacing should be between 120-145% of the point size of the text. At a minimum, the line spacing should be 1.2 times the font size.
  - a. You may choose to use a different line spacing (called "leading") in charts, graphs, tables, captions, block quotes, etc., where lines are shorter. Consistency in spacing is key.
  - b. Given the page-size and margin guidelines, the length of lines in your ETD body (called the "measure") can technically extend up to 6.5", but long lines can be difficult to read. You may wish to increase the size of your margins to ensure an average line length of 45-90 characters (including spaces). The optimal choice depends on the font, font size, line-spacing, etc. Use your eye as a guide and compare with professionally typeset books in your field.
3. Your committee may prefer a draft that has more space for commenting, but the final version should be spaced to facilitate reading.

**Links Within the PDF:**

1. You may create links within your PDF to help readers navigate your ETD. An example is clicking on an entry in the List of Tables to take the reader to that page of your PDF file. All internal links should be black to maintain consistency with the rest of the text.

## FORMATTING THE TITLE, COMMITTEE, AND ABSTRACT PAGES

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You are responsible for ensuring that your thesis or dissertation is written in an acceptable style for your discipline and meets WSU's formatting requirements. Formatting for the three required "common pages" is described below:

### Title Page Instructions:

1. All text on the title page must be centered.
2. Do not use bold or underline font effects on this page.
3. The title page is the only page of your ETD without a visible page number.
4. Title of your ETD should be in capital letters, double-spaced.
  - a. You may use italics in your title for genus, species, etc.
5. Next is your name as you would like it to appear throughout the document.
  - a. Add several blank lines above and below your name to give extra space between your title, your name, and the additional information below.
6. Additional information includes the requirements phrase for your degree (master's/doctoral), single-spaced:
  - a. "A thesis submitted..." for master's students.
  - b. "A dissertation submitted..." for doctoral students.
  - c. Example:

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of
7. Add a blank line, then the name of the degree in capital letters:
  - a. Doctoral degrees do not include the discipline: "DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY" or "DOCTOR OF EDUCATION".
  - b. Master's degrees include the discipline; for example: "MASTER OF SCIENCE IN CHEMISTRY".
8. Add two blank lines, then the university name in capital letters, single-spaced with the name of your department, school, or another degree-granting unit.
9. Add a blank line, then the month and year of your graduation, in capital letters; for example: "DECEMBER 2025".
10. (*Optional*) Add two blank lines, then the copyright elements:
  - a. Copyright symbol followed by year of your graduation and your name exactly as it appears above on this page.
  - b. On a second, single-spaced line, the phrase "All Rights Reserved".
  - c. Example:

© 2025 Butch T. Cougar  
All Rights Reserved

### Committee Page Instructions:

1. Do not use any font effects (bold, italicized, underlined, etc.) on this page.
2. Double-space all lines on this page.
3. On a left-justified line, type "To the Faculty of Washington State University:"
4. Indent the first line of the acceptance paragraph.
  - a. This paragraph must capitalize the "C" in "Committee".
  - b. Refer to the degree associated with this ETD – "the thesis of" or "the dissertation of".
  - c. Include your name exactly as it appears on your title page.
5. Right-justify the names of your committee, starting with your chair. Include the faculty member's full name and the abbreviation of their highest degree (e.g., Ph.D.).
  - a. For the committee chair, follow the degree abbreviation with "; Chair".
  - b. If your committee has co-chairs, use "; Co-Chair" for both.
6. The committee page is the first page of your ETD to feature a page number. It must be numbered as " ii " in lowercase Roman numerals.

**Abstract Instructions:**

1. You may not use bold or underlined font effects on this page; however, you may use italics in your title and abstract body for genus, species, etc.
2. Copy the title from your title page and paste it to the first lines of this page. This ensures your titles match exactly (down to the first word of each line of your title).
3. Add three or more blank lines and the word “Abstract” in Title Case. Adding the lines ensures your reader does not confuse “Abstract” as part of your ETD title.
4. Add a blank line, then your name as it appears on the title page, followed by another line with “Washington State University”, and a third line with the month and year of graduation.
  - a. All three lines should be single-spaced and in Title Case.
  - b. Insert a comma and the abbreviation of your newly earned degree after your name. For example, “Butch T. Cougar, Ph.D.”
5. Add a blank line, then the name of your committee chair without their degree abbreviation. Use “Co-Chairs” and list both names if your committee has co-chairs.
  - a. Single chair example: “Chair: Tammy D. Barry”.
  - b. Co-Chair example: “Co-Chairs: Tammy D. Barry and Arvin Sahaym”.
6. Add a blank line, then begin the body of your abstract. There are no minimums nor length limitations for your abstract.
  - a. Your abstract will be published in a text only format; therefore, you may not use charts, graphs, images, figures, etc. in the abstract body.
  - b. Abstracts are read out of context from the rest of your ETD, so ensure that you explain any abbreviations, new terms, etc.

**FORMATTING THE BODY OF YOUR ETD**

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Whereas the Graduate School prescribes formatting for three pages (title, committee, and abstract), and for a few elements of the ETD (font, margins, spacing, etc.), we do not require any specific formatting or styling guide requirements for the remainder of the document. You should follow the citation, formatting, and style requirements of your field of study as well as the guidance of your advisory committee. The Graduate School will review the body of your ETD to ensure compliance with our required elements, but our focus will be to check that your formatting choices, whatever style is chosen, look professional and are applied consistently throughout your ETD.

**Decorative Elements:**

1. Decorative elements like drop caps are not common in academic writing and require specialized knowledge to use correctly. It is recommended not to use such elements in your ETD.

**Figures, Tables, Graphs, etc.:**

1. Organize your figures as appropriate for your discipline. This could be “Figure A, Figure B, etc.” or “Figure 1.1, Figure 1.2, etc.” or some other structure.
2. Some figure captions may be very long. You do not necessarily need to include the entire caption as part of the entry in your List of Tables. For example, you could list “Figure 1.1: Smart Home Wiring” as an abbreviated title instead of the full-length caption.
3. Whenever possible, format your writing so that a figure, table, graph, etc. is on the same page as its caption or explanatory text.

**Fonts:**

Students often ask which font they should use. WSU does not require a specific font. You may select any font family with a professional appearance for your ETD. There are many choices available, so here are some suggestions:

Baskerville Old Face	Georgia
Calibri	Merriweather
Century	Palatino + Euler (Good for math)
Computer Modern (LaTeX and good for math)	Times New Roman

When choosing a font, keep in mind:

1. Consistency is key. Use the same font throughout your main text.
2. For mathematical or scientific writing, choose a font with good support for equations and symbols.
3. Ensure your chosen font is legible in both digital and print formats.

#### **Headings and Subheadings:**

1. Structure your document as appropriate for your discipline. Your reader should not need to guess your structure – be clear and consistent.
  - a. However you decide to structure your ETD, it should be reflected in your Table of Contents. Be consistent in using terms like “Chapter” or “Section”.
2. We suggest reserving font effects for subheadings to make these stand out against your other text. Ensure your reader can easily tell a subheading apart from other text.

#### **Large Tables and Graphs:**

1. Large tables, graphs, maps, etc. cannot enter your margins and must be resized or otherwise adjusted to fit onto the page.
  - a. If you plan to print your ETD then text in tables, graphs, etc. must be large enough to read in your printed copies.
  - b. If your ETD will always be in electronic format, your reader may be able to zoom in to read smaller text.
2. You have several options – be consistent in your approach. Keep in mind whether you will print your ETD and how your choices will look when printed and bound.
  - a. Rotate large tables, graphs, etc. on the portrait-oriented page. Be consistent with the direction of rotation.
  - b. Break up the tables, graphs, etc. over multiple pages in a way that makes sense to your readers.
  - c. Move large tables, graphs, etc. into a supplemental file, which will be uploaded into ProQuest with your ETD as a separate file. It will be provided to your readers.
  - d. Rotate the page into landscape orientation. As noted above, be mindful of your page numbers and how it will look if printed and bound. For example, in Microsoft Word, you can use section breaks around a landscaped page to achieve the rotation and changes in page numbering location.

#### **Miscellaneous Content:**

1. Some dissertations include additional content, which could be nearly anything from genetic sequencing, a screenplay, or sheet music to GIS data or computer code.
  - a. Decide whether it is best to place this content directly into the text of your ETD or if it would be better presented as a supplemental file.

#### **Page Numbers:**

1. We recommend you use the same font for your body text and for page numbers. Having multiple fonts in your ETD can make it look disjointed, but doing so is not formally required.
2. We recommend having 0.5 inches of space around your page number, so it is legible and clearly set apart from your text.

**SPECIAL FORMATTING:  
USING PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED ARTICLES (OR ARTICLES WRITTEN WITH THE  
INTENT TO PUBLISH) AND OTHER COPYRIGHTED MATERIALS IN YOUR ETD**

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Reusing any intellectual property you do not own within your ETD requires written permission from the copyright holder. Work with your committee to understand and follow all applicable U.S. copyright laws in the context of academic writing and Fair Use. You must avoid plagiarism (accidental and intentional).

**Copyright Permission Documentation:**

1. For those reusing material, you must upload a copy of your written permission into ProQuest.
2. This permission upload is due along with your final ETD file ten business days after your final examination.
3. For materials published via open access or creative commons, be sure you read the license terms carefully to understand your obligations. Some licenses still require documentation. You are responsible for correctly using these materials.

**Using Articles/Chapters (Previously Published or Written  
for Submission to an Academic Publisher) Within Your ETD:**

WSU allows you to use your journal articles or book chapters – previously published or written with the intent to publish – in place of standard ETD chapters. These pieces of writing are referred to as “manuscripts” in this document. You must fulfill all the following to use these manuscripts within your ETD:

1. Manuscripts in an ETD must be based upon research conducted at WSU.
2. Master’s theses shall consist of at least one manuscript, whereas doctoral dissertations shall consist of at least two manuscripts.
  - a. In both cases, the ETD must also include an introduction and/or conclusion written specifically for the thesis or dissertation.
  - b. A dissertation with only one manuscript must include additional chapters of original material to constitute enough work for a dissertation.
3. The ETD must include prefatory pages as well as an overall title and abstract for the ETD.
4. Manuscripts must follow WSU margin and page number requirements.
  - a. Renumber (and reposition, if necessary) the manuscript’s page numbers to be consistent with the ETD.
5. Manuscripts may be formatted according to the publisher’s requirements, or they may be reformatted to be consistent with your ETD body.
  - a. Figures, captions, graphs, etc. must be renumbered to integrate with the ETD.
6. It is your responsibility to avoid plagiarism by citing a manuscript’s original source and recognizing the contributions of any co-authors. Include the following information on the first page of the manuscript chapter:
  - a. For published manuscripts: Provide the full citation of where the article/chapter was originally published.
  - b. For manuscripts not yet published: Instead of a citation, include the statement, “Prepared for submission to an academic journal.” This statement applies to articles not yet submitted, submitted but not yet accepted, and accepted but not yet published.
  - c. For manuscripts with multiple authors: In addition to the citation or statement described above, you must include an attribution section where you describe the contributions made by each co-author.
    - i. The phrase “equal contribution” is insufficient.
    - ii. You must be a major contributor and writer of the manuscript for it to be eligible for use in your ETD.

Decide how you will format to meet the requirements above and be consistent. Remember that the required information needs to be on the first page of the manuscript chapter. Here are two examples for how you might present this information for a previously-published manuscript with multiple authors – the first places the information in a footnote, and the second places it into the body text:

CHAPTER FIVE: WARPED HISTORY:

A TIME TRAVELLER'S TAKE ON PRESIDENTIAL SPEECHES<sup>1</sup>

**Begin text of the article...**

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<sup>1</sup> Cougar, Butch T., and E.L. Brown, "Warped History: A Time Traveler's Take on Presidential Speeches." *Fake Journal of History* 54, no. 4 (2022): 106-118. doi: 314159265358979323. **Attributions:** Butch Cougar used the experimental equipment to interview several locals. He also compiled data and wrote the article's text. E.L. Brown developed the equipment used in this research and assisted in writing the article.

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## USE OF AI/LLMs, ETC.

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The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, including Large Language Models (LLMs), can be valuable for certain aspects of the ETD writing process. For instance, these tools can assist with copy editing, improving grammar, spelling, and clarity. They can also be useful for brainstorming ideas or exploring different ways to articulate complex concepts.

However, it is essential that the core content, ideas, and phrasing in your ETD remain your own. Although LLMs can enhance the presentation of your work, they should not replace your intellectual contributions. When using AI tools, ensure that they are employed in a way that maintains the originality and integrity of your writing. Proper attribution is recommended if these tools significantly influence the final text.

### Recommended Guidelines:

1. Copy Editing and Grammar: AI tools can be used to correct grammatical errors and refine language. However, ensure that the edits do not alter the intended meaning or the originality of your ideas.
2. Brainstorming and Concept Development: LLMs can help generate ideas or explore different approaches to your arguments. Use these suggestions as a starting point but ensure that the final articulation of ideas is your own.
3. Attribution: If AI tools significantly shape the final version of your text, consider acknowledging their use in your work, similar to how you would cite other forms of assistance like proofreading.

The University provides additional [Guidelines for Using AI-LLM](#).

## PRINTING GUIDELINES

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For printed copies of your ETD, you may choose either single-sided or double-sided printing. If using double-sided printing, ensure that the title page, committee page, abstract, chapter title pages, and other major sections begin on right-hand (odd-numbered) pages.