Toronto Metropolitan University

Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies

Guidelines for Manuscript-Style Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations

UPDATED NOVEMBER 2, 2026

The culminating scholarly work required in a research-based graduate program is designated as a **thesis** at the master's level and a **dissertation** at the doctoral level. As an alternative to the traditional monograph format, a **manuscript-style** thesis/dissertation comprises a collection of scholarly outputs the student authored or co-authored. These outputs must be thematically integrated and presented as a cohesive body of work. Very often, a manuscript-style thesis/dissertation is a collection of peer-reviewed scholarly works[1] that are published or of publishable quality.

A **manuscript-style thesis/dissertation** may allow students to publish their research sooner, streamlining the path from graduate research to publication, and giving them a head start in building their scholarly records. At the same time, maintaining overall cohesion while using published articles and managing new article submissions will add complexity. Furthermore, some research projects are not suited to this format.

Program-specific requirements

Not all programs accept a manuscript-style thesis/dissertation. Graduate students who wish to complete a manuscript-style thesis must first consult their program to ensure that this is permitted. Programs are encouraged to formalize their acceptance of a manuscript-style thesis/dissertation through a formal motion of the Graduate Program Council, and clear communication to students on the program website. Where permitted, programs may also have their own program-level guidelines, which are consistent with but supplemental to those outlined by the Yeates School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. Program-level guidelines can account for disciplinary norms and expectations and may include specific requirements for the number of articles, the length of each article, a process for documenting formal approval, and/or restrictions on co-authorship, among other elements of the thesis/dissertation.

In graduate programs that permit a manuscript-style thesis/dissertation, the decision to proceed must also be made in consultation with the supervisor(s) and/or supervisory committee and should be made as early as possible, typically at the proposal stage. If needed, the graduate

[1] These guidelines use the term "articles" to refer to peer-reviewed scholarly works, including (but not limited to) journal articles and book chapters.

student and/or supervisor may consult with the Graduate Program Director and subsequently, the Vice-Provost and Dean of the Yeates School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

Any subsequent change to the agreed-upon thesis/dissertation style constitutes a significant change to the project; such a change must be approved by the supervisor(s) and/or the supervisory committee.

Specific requirements

The following must be considered and adhered to when writing a manuscript-style thesis/dissertation:

1. Content and authorship of a manuscript-style thesis/dissertation:

a) Normally, a master's thesis will contain at least one article, and a PhD dissertation will contain at least three articles.
b) In cases where an article has multiple authors, it is expected that the graduate student will have made the most substantial contribution to the manuscript. This should be reflected by the student being listed as the first author, or through an author contribution statement prescribed by the publisher.
c) The thesis/dissertation must also include introductory and concluding chapters.
    i) The introductory chapter provides context for the research, introduces the key research question(s), theoretical framework(s) and method(s), and situates the contribution within the field more generally. It may also include background knowledge needed by a general audience that would not be included in articles published in narrow-scope journals.
    ii) For theses/dissertations with more than one article, the general introduction must emphasize the relationships among the manuscripts and provide a coherent theme or narrative for the overall thesis/dissertation.
    iii) Include a concluding chapter that ties together the articles' topics and themes and points toward future work.

2. Formatting of a Manuscript-Style Thesis/Dissertation

a) Each article will correspond to a separate chapter. Manuscript-style theses/dissertations must follow the YSGPS thesis and dissertation submission guidelines, except that they must include a statement of co-authorship as a preface to each manuscript chapter or part of the general introduction. While such statements may vary by article, they will often include details of each author's contributions to project conceptualization, methodology, data collection, data analysis, writing (original draft and revisions), data visualization, project administration, and any relevant funding acquisition.

b) There may be occasions when a manuscript chapter differs from that submitted or published. This is often due to revisions required by the examination committee before the thesis/dissertation is accepted. Any changes to a published manuscript must ensure that the student complies with any copyright conditions. If there are substantial changes to a published manuscript, the choice of a manuscript format for the thesis/dissertation should be reconsidered.
c) Avoid redundancy in the individual introductions of each chapter. To avoid redundancy, content from individual articles may be included in the thesis/dissertation's introductory or concluding chapters.
d) To ensure logical flow, connecting text should be included to bridge each chapter to the previous and next chapters. Alternatively, the first chapter of the thesis/dissertation may provide an overview of how each manuscript is connected to the others.
e) Cross-references, figures, and tables must be renumbered to correspond to the appropriate chapter of the thesis/dissertation.
f) Use a single bibliography, and renumber citations in each manuscript chapter accordingly.

3. Copyright Considerations

a) It is essential for students to consider copyright before submitting an article to a journal.[2]
b) While many journals allow inclusion of an accepted manuscript in a thesis or dissertation, it is the graduate student's responsibility to verify and adhere to any journal-specific copyright policies.
c) Publishing an article open access under a CC BY licence provides the most flexibility for students, allowing their work to be freely shared, reused, and adapted with proper attribution. Article Processing Charges (APCs) for open-access publication may be waived for certain journals if an agreement exists with TMU Libraries, and students can check the Sci-Free Library database to see whether the journal in which they plan to publish is covered by an existing agreement.
d) In all cases, students shall ensure they:
    i) Request permission from the journal publisher (if required by the publishing agreement) to include the article in their dissertation.[3]
    ii) Use the accepted (post-peer review) manuscript unless approved changes have been made.
    iii) Publishers rarely object to including modified articles in a manuscript thesis; however, check your specific CTA language, and if in doubt, email the publisher's permissions department, as they typically respond quickly and usually grant approval.

[2] See the Copyright page at the School of Graduate Studies at University of Toronto for relevant information on copyright.
[3] For guidance on requesting permission, see Submit and Publish Your Thesis - Research Guides at University of Toronto and Thesis content and article publishing | Scholarly Communications - MIT Libraries.

iv) Include the following statement on the first page of the chapter: “This chapter is based on the following published article: [full citation; Creative Commons licensing information if required].”

e) Students can seek support for copyright questions at copyrt@torontomu.ca.

4. Examination of a Manuscript-Style Thesis/Dissertation

a) A manuscript-style thesis/dissertation will be evaluated in accordance with all procedures outlined in Policy 170(B). Procedures Sections 19, 21, 23, and 24 are particularly relevant.

b) There is an expectation that the articles contained within the thesis/dissertation will be published or of publishable quality. Programs may set their own guidelines for the publication status of individual articles, which may include consideration of how the program will support students who are unable to successfully publish their research. It is the manuscript chapters that are included in the thesis/dissertation document that are evaluated by the examination committee, in accordance with Policy 170(B), Procedures Section 23.

5. Comparison of traditional to manuscript format

Similarities

Criteria	Traditional (monograph)	Manuscript (journal articles)
Purpose	Demonstrate ability to conduct original research and make a scholarly contribution to the field	
Supervision and review	Supervised by a faculty supervisor and evaluated by a committee in accordance with Policy 170b	
Scholarly rigor	Must meet all disciplinary standards and adhere to ethical research standards.	

Distinctions

Criteria	Traditional (monograph)	Manuscript (journal articles)
Authorship	Single-authored by the student	May include co-authored articles when the student has led the work and is the primary author.
Time to publication	Publication normally occurs after defence, although portions of the research may be published already	Program requirements may vary, but publication of one (or more) articles is normally expected prior to defence.

Comparison of Structure

Criteria	Traditional (monograph)	Manuscript (journal articles)
Introduction	Provides context for the research, introduces the key research question(s), theoretical framework(s) and method(s), and situates the contribution within the field more generally	
Literature review and methodology	Normally included as separate chapters within the monograph	Included within each individual article
Research findings	Included as a single chapter or series of chapters within the monograph	Included as a section within individual articles
Conclusion	Summarizes key findings, suggests areas of further consideration	