

Organizing Your Thesis

Dr. Emily Nye, Associate Professor of English
New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology

Enye@nmt.edu

February 7, 2001

Here's what it says about organizing your thesis in the Graduate School Thesis/Dissertation Manuscript Requirements:

A thesis can be broadly separated into four parts: preliminaries, text, reference materials, and other appendices. The preliminaries present information to help a reader find information in your thesis. The text is the written presentation of your work. Reference materials are the references actually cited in your thesis. Appendices typically include the basic data obtained during your research. Some departments might ask you to use a different organization, but any deviation from this basic pattern requires the prior approval of the Graduate Dean. It is important that all of your research, methods, and basic data are presented so that they are accessible to readers. <http://www.nmt.edu/~grad/studentinfo/manuscript.html>

Some tips about organizing your thesis:

Writing a thesis is a huge project. Try not to feel daunted by the huge amount of information you will be collecting, analyzing, and presenting to your department. Take it in smaller pieces.

Dr. Borchers (Mathematics) has his students begin with a thesis proposal that explains:

- The problem to be solved
- A review of previous work on the subject (including a bibliography)
- A discussion of what the student plans to do to solve the problem
- Any preliminary results.

His students present the scope of the problem (“to make sure the project isn’t too big or too small”), a literature review (“to make sure the student knows what has already been done on the problem”) and a plan (“to make sure the student can clearly express his plan for solving the problem”).

I suggest:

- Ask your advisor for appropriate models of good theses. Study these models closely.
- Write a 1-paragraph statement of the problem you are trying to solve. Be as clear and focused as possible.
- Force yourself to create a tentative title

- ❑ Make an outline, however rough
- ❑ Create an annotated bibliography
- ❑ Develop the annotated bibliography into a literature review
- ❑ Although it's important to have an outline, an overall plan, it doesn't matter where you start writing. **Start anywhere.** Write the sections of your thesis in pieces, if you want to. Share each section with a colleague or your advisor as soon as possible so that you'll have plenty of time to revise.
- ❑ Keep careful notes of all your sources.
- ❑ Keep several copies of your thesis in backup locations.

Please contact me if you'd like some help with your writing, or if you'd like me to help you find an editor.

Emily Nye, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of English
NM Tech
Enye@nmt.edu
(505) 835-5468