

Alternative Format PhD Thesis Frequently Asked Questions for Students and Staff

This information is provided as supplementary guidance to the main University 'Presentation of Theses' Policy which you should consult before you start to write your thesis:

<http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/graduate/code/submissionandexamination/>

WHAT IS ALTERNATIVE FORMAT?

1. What is alternative format?

The alternative format thesis allows you to write sections of your PhD thesis in a format suitable for publication in a peer-reviewed journal whether solely or partly authored by you. These 'papers' do not have to be already published or even submitted. Indeed some may never be submitted if data are unsuitable or inconclusive. Not all projects will produce material suitable to present in this format.

The thesis should adhere to the basic principles of a traditional thesis i.e. it must still represent an original contribution to the field of research and it must be a coherent body of related work. You will still be required to sign a declaration that the thesis is your own work and that it has not been submitted for another qualification.

2. What are the advantages of alternative format?

- Presenting your research in the form of papers will help develop your skills in writing scientific papers. These skills will be essential for a career as an academic researcher.
- Results and figures can be written-up and prepared as you go along and it will avoid having to rewrite parts of your thesis to submit for publication at a later date.
- Reduces the potential conflict of interest between the drive to publish papers and timely completion of the thesis as both can be achieved simultaneously.
- Encourages early publication and enhances your research profile /career prospects.
- The contribution of individuals is more explicit
- Reduces the risk of self-plagiarism

3. Can I submit an MPhil / MD /professional doctorate in alternative format?

Yes; if it is appropriate to do so and your supervisor is in agreement. You will still be required to apply for permission to submit in alternative format.

APPLYING TO WRITE AN ALTERNATIVE FORMAT THESIS

4. When do I need to make a decision about submitting in alternative format?

The decision to submit in alternative format will be part of the planning of the research project and you should discuss the format of your thesis throughout your programme with your supervisor. You will also be asked to comment on these discussions as part of the eProg annual expectations form. It may be possible to identify papers that can be developed through the programme which will create the foundation of the thesis.

Depending on how the project develops, it may not be until year 2 or 3 that you feel you are in a position to use the alternative format. As with all aspects of your programme, planning the best approach for you, in conjunction with your supervisor, will be the most effective way to manage the alternative format.

You should discuss the idea with your supervisor early on in your programme as this will give you time to plan the structure and content of your thesis and also to set aside time to write the papers and prepare figures etc.

5. Do I need permission to submit in this format?

If you wish to submit your thesis in alternative format, you should first prepare a written request, giving an outline of the proposed thesis structure and rationale. This should be agreed with your supervisor and submitted to the appropriate Faculty/School Graduate Office for approval by the Chair of the Research Degrees Committee. This request must be submitted before the end of year two for full time students and the end of year four for part time students.

6. Why do I need permission to submit in alternative format?

If you wish to submit in alternative format, you will need to request permission to ensure that both you and your supervisor are clear that the alternative format thesis is the most appropriate format for your research. It is strongly recommended that you consider your options for thesis format at an early stage of your programme, so that you can prepare your thesis format as you progress with your research.

7. If my alternative format request is approved, will I be able to revert back to submitting a traditional format thesis at a later date?

There is nothing in the guidance to state that you cannot reverse this decision, but you would need to consider carefully the time it takes to put your thesis together and the impact it may have on being able to submit your thesis by the required date.

STRUCTURE/CONTENT OF ALTERNATIVE FORMAT THESES

8. Where can I find examples of other theses that have been submitted in alternative format?

Your Faculty/School Graduate Office will be able to give you details of other theses that have been successfully submitted in alternative format and are available to view in the Library or on eScholar. In addition, your supervisor should be able to refer you to any alternative format theses that they have supervised in the past. You may not find an example in your exact area so it is useful to look at a few examples to get an idea of how others have approached the format.

9. How should my alternative format thesis be structured?

Full guidance is provided in the [Presentation of Theses](#) policy, but your thesis should include a general introduction to set the context and hypotheses. This should also include the details of each paper contained within the thesis and a narrative of how these papers

constitute a coherent body of work. It is important particularly for the alternative thesis that your aims and objectives are written to emphasize how the body of work interconnects.

Each equivalent results chapter would be presented as a 'paper' with an abstract, introduction, materials and methods, results, discussion and references.

A final concluding general discussion chapter should bring the thesis together and set out ideas for future work.

10. How many papers should be included?

The number of papers included in the alternative format thesis may vary according to discipline and is not prescribed, but should reflect the quantity, quality and originality of research and analysis expected of a candidate submitting a standard thesis. There is no upper limit, but typically 3-5 'papers' or equivalent results chapters is about right; ultimately the examiners will judge whether the quantity and quality of the work, the critical analysis and originality of the research and the defence of your thesis in the viva, justifies the award of a PhD.

11. The presentation of thesis policy states that inserted journal articles must not be inserted in the pagination sequence of the submission. However it also states that numbered lists of all figures and tables should be included. How should their page numbers be identified if the pages are not part of the pagination sequence of the submission numbering?

It is recommended that any figures/tables within any published papers in your thesis should be listed in the list of figures/list of tables and that in your list of figures you have 2 columns for page numbers- one for the thesis page number and one for the publication page number.

12. Can I only include papers that have already have been published?

No; you can also include draft papers that are ready to submit, but the idea of the alternative format is to present all your results in the style of a scientific paper. Your results may not be publishable for a number of reasons, but they can still be included. You are not precluded from presenting 'negative' results as long as they form a coherent part of your thesis.

13. Can only sole or first authored papers be used in an alternative format thesis?

No – though one of the major considerations for submitting in alternative format is the level of contribution that you have made to the journal papers to be included in the thesis (where published or submitted papers are used). It is expected that you will have taken the major role in ALL aspects of production of the papers including: data acquisition, analysis and writing the paper. Where you have collaborated or co-authored any papers, the level of your contribution must be made explicitly clear in the introduction of your thesis.

14. How can I include negative data or data from pilot studies in my thesis as they are not discussed in my journal papers?

Your thesis should include a general introduction to set the context and hypotheses. This should also include an explanation of your contribution to each of the papers contained within the thesis. Each equivalent results chapter would be presented as a 'paper' with an abstract, introduction, materials and methods, results, discussion and references. A final concluding general discussion chapter should bring the thesis together and set out ideas for future work. If not contained sufficiently within the 'papers', you may want to include supplementary information such as statistical data or a more detailed description of methods.

15. Should I have a separate methodology chapter as each paper will have its own brief methodology?

Your thesis should be laid out according to the guidelines on Alternative Format theses in the [Presentation of Theses Policy](#). You should therefore incorporate a chapter on methodology, detailing the methods employed during the research and a detailed critical analysis of those methods and the information they provided.

16. Can I amend papers that are in press or already published to include additional data or text?

Yes, it is possible to add information to papers which are already in press or published. If you significantly revise the content from a published paper you will need to reference the paper at all appropriate points, otherwise this could be considered as plagiarism.

17. Can I bind off-prints straight into my thesis?

There is no reason why you shouldn't bind off-prints straight into your thesis. However, consider reformatting if they are much smaller than A4 (or different sizes), as it might look a bit odd and detract from the overall presentational style of the thesis. You should also think about including any raw experimental data, controls or figures that might not have been used for the published paper. Remember that your thesis doesn't have the same space limitation or layout restrictions which are imposed by publishers.

18. Can I change the style of writing in a paper I am submitting as part of my alternative format thesis so that it fits my writing style and the rest of the thesis?

It may be necessary to review the writing style of published papers that you incorporate into your thesis. This may be as simple as making some revisions to the use of 'we' and 'our'.

19. Should figures be re-sized?

All figures should be legible and appear as close to the relevant text in your thesis as possible; this applies to both published and non published material that you include in your thesis. Sometimes images/figures in published papers are placed according to best space fit. Be mindful that the examiner will need to follow and read your thesis without the unnecessary distraction of searching for the appropriate figure. Some examiners can be a bit picky!

20. When or why should I include supplementary material?

If data is not contained in sufficient detail within your published ‘papers’ and is important to your thesis, it should be included and referred to within supplementary chapters e.g. statistical data or a more detailed description of methods. Remember that space restrictions do not apply to your thesis in the same way as restrictions on published work! Your examiners will still want to see evidence of the detailed thought processes that led to the experimental design and conclusions that you present.

21. How do I deal with different referencing styles?

As each paper will have a self-contained list of references and individual style depending on the journal requirements, you will need to consider making minor formatting / stylistic adjustments so that your thesis has consistency and will not distract the examiners when they read it. References associated with the introduction and concluding chapters should be presented in a logical format. One suggestion is to create a list at the end of the thesis, divided and numbered according to the section they belong to.

22. Should each chapter in journal format incorporate an abstract?

Yes.

IP / COPYRIGHT / PLAGIARISM

23. How should I acknowledge the contribution of others?

You will still be required to sign a declaration that the thesis is your own work and that it has not been submitted for another qualification. You should explain and fully justify the nature and extent of your own contribution and the contribution of co-authors and other collaborators in the introductory part of your thesis.

It is advisable to discuss your stated contribution to each paper with your supervisor and co-authors. Even if you are the first author, there may be issues about the way that your supervisor or others have contributed to the paper. In some cases, it may be reasonable for you to be asked to revise a paper in order to reflect your own contribution more directly.

Examiners will expect you to understand all of the work in any paper that forms part of your thesis, even if the work has been done (and acknowledged as such) by someone else.

24. Where should I set out my input and those of collaborators to the papers included in my thesis?

You should explain and fully justify the nature and extent of your own contribution and the contribution of co-authors and other collaborators in the introductory part of your thesis. If appropriate, you can also state your contribution in individual chapters relating to specific publications.

25. How should I acknowledge co-authorship or collaboration in chapters in publishable format but not submitted for publication?

You should acknowledge co-authorship or collaboration in exactly the same way as if the paper had already been published, by explaining and fully justifying the nature and extent of your own contribution and the contribution of co-authors and other collaborators in the introductory part of your thesis. If appropriate, you can also state your contribution in individual chapters relating to specific publications.

26. What about copyright and IP issues?

Generally, unless you have signed over your IP or copyright to a third party, you own both. However, it is expected that you obtain permission from all authors for any paper that you include in your thesis. You should seek copyright permission from the publisher for any published work included in your thesis that isn't published in an 'open-access' journal.

If you have any concerns about IP, discuss it with your supervisor in the first instance. UMIP also offer advice on IP and copyright regulations.

<http://www.ls.manchester.ac.uk/business/intellectualproperty/>

27. Do I need permission from the publisher to include published papers in my alternative format thesis?

Most publishers request that you sign over your copyright of any of your published material when the material is published. If this is the case, you will need to request the publisher's permission to include the published papers in your alternative format thesis.

28. Do I need permission from collaborators / co-authors to include published papers in my thesis?

This depends on who owns the copyright. If at the point of publishing the paper, you collectively signed over the copyright to the publisher (this is normally the case), you will need to obtain permission from the publisher to incorporate the paper in your alternative format thesis. Under these circumstances you would not therefore need permission from collaborators/co-authors. However, if you did not sign over the copyright to the publisher, you will need to request permission from the collaborators/co-authors as you will collectively own the copyright for that paper.

29. I have written papers from my thesis project but am not submitting in alternative format. Can I just use sections of my papers in the thesis write up or is this self plagiarism?

Any sections which are copied from any published materials must be referenced appropriately, otherwise you will be plagiarising material, even if you were the original author of this material. If you use sections of your own papers without the appropriate references this will be considered as self-plagiarism.

EXAMINATION OF ALTERNATIVE FORMAT THESES

30. Once I have submitted my alternative format thesis, can the examiners request that it is resubmitted in traditional format?

Examiners do have the option of requesting that a thesis is re-submitted in the traditional format if they wish to use it. However as long as you have gained permission to submit using the alternative format method and have closely followed the guidance of the University and your supervisor, there should be no reason why you will be asked to re-submit.

31. Can the examiners request changes to the chapters in journal format in my thesis even if they have been published?

Yes they can. The entire thesis is subject to scrutiny, peer-reviewed work included. The examiners are effectively another set of peer reviewers who are looking at the published papers in the context of the whole thesis. There are often examples where peer-reviewed work contains mistakes and so the student will still be required to correct, supplement, or explain all work presented for examination.

32. Do examiners like the alternative format thesis?

Many students have successfully submitted as alternative format. Most examiners have found the format easy to examine and generally like the style. However, not all have been happy. The most common criticism from examiners is around the lack of fundamental detail, control data and description of methods – often a consequence of the space restrictions placed on the manuscript in order to comply with the particular requirements of a target journal.

33. How can I ensure my thesis will be acceptable to the examiners?

The most important thing is that the examiners can follow and understand your thesis as a coherent body of work. Put yourself in the examiner's shoes.

- Avoid presenting a thesis that lacks a full explanation of technical detail and consideration of controls because it is in publication style format. The examiners will expect your thesis to demonstrate rigour in all aspects of your research training.
- Include supplementary information and background information where appropriate. For example, inclusion of a general appendix at the end of the thesis to cover general experimental methods and results would help to cover minor details which were missed out due to the 'paper format' of the thesis.
- Make sure that your thesis is not weakened by lack of continuity and reasoning between chapters or by the separation of figures and legends from the text they refer to.

34. Will the examination process be different?

No, the examination process will be exactly as for a traditional thesis. The examiner will be informed that your thesis has been presented as alternative format and he/she will be provided with the University guidance and policy documents.

35. Can my examiners request changes to a paper which has been published in a journal and been through a peer review process and several iterations?

Yes.

36. I have papers that are yet to be submitted in my alternative format thesis – will making my thesis open access in eScholar affect the chances of journals accepting my papers?

Possibly yes – you should discuss your ‘publication strategy’ with your supervisors from early point in your programme. You would need to consider the journals that you would target for publication of your papers and review their position on prior publication of work. Many publishers do view work that has appeared in a thesis as ‘prior publication.’

37. Can a thesis in alternative format that includes published work be made open access in eScholar?

If you do not own the copyright of any work, you need to obtain permission from the owner of that copyright (in most cases with published papers the copyright will be owned by the publisher).

38. Do I need permission from collaborators / co-authors to set my thesis to open access in eScholar?

This depends on whether the copyright is owned by the publisher or by the co-authors. If you do not solely own the copyright of the paper (in most cases with published papers the copyright will be owned by the publisher), you need to obtain the permission of the owner of that copyright.

NEXT STEPS?

39. What do I need to do next?

- Plan ahead
- Discuss with your supervisor whether this format is suitable for your PhD project
- Read the University of Manchester [‘Presentation of Theses’](#) Policy:
- You may wish to see an example of an alternative format that has been successfully examined or a good example of a thesis outline – contact the appropriate Faculty/School Postgraduate Research Office.
- Obtain approval from the Chair of the Research Committee – a form is available from the appropriate Faculty/School Postgraduate Research Office
- Your application must be approved in advance of submitting your *‘Notice of Submission’* form i.e. before your examiners are nominated.