

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING THE MASTER'S DEGREE THESIS

INTRODUCTION

The thesis (hereafter, "the thesis"), in addition to expressing the student's work as the conclusion of their course of study and as the author of a personal project, must allow for accessible reading and present relevant information in accordance with the general norms of scientific communication.

Organization of the thesis

It is suggested that the following general guidelines be followed:

- keep within the page limit set by the Thesis Regulations
- print double-sided
- use 1.5 line spacing
- set margins between 2.5 and 3 cm
- indent paragraphs, generally by one tab
- adopt, according to personal preference, one of the most commonly used fonts (e.g., Times New Roman, Arial, etc.), ensuring good readability

It is recommended that each part of the work be appropriately organized into sections and subsections, each with its own title, avoiding overly long chapters.

Footnotes should be avoided as much as possible, except for essential clarifications.

The title page of the thesis must include:

- the name of the University (Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca)
- the name of the Department of Psychology
- the name of the degree program
- the title of the thesis
- the student's first and last name and student ID number
- the first and last name of the supervisor
- the first and last name of the co-supervisor, if any
- the academic year

THESIS STRUCTURE

1. The **Table of Contents** is placed at the beginning of the thesis. It includes the opening page and the titles of all chapters and subchapters, including the summary, the reference list, and any appendices.

2. The Summary (in Italian) and the Abstract (in English, mandatory) allow the reader to understand the content of the work in a few lines (ideally no more than 150–200 words).

a. In the case of a bibliographic and theoretical thesis, the central scope of the study will be briefly outlined, followed by a mention of one or more salient aspects addressed in the various chapters and the conclusions reached.

b. In the case of an empirical thesis, emphasis will be placed on the project, briefly stating the core of the research, the participants, the procedure, and the essential findings of the study (see, for example, abstracts in the international literature and those in the "PsycINFO" database).

3. The **theoretical Introduction** prepares the reader for the discussion of the topic that will be developed in the main body of the thesis. First, the topic addressed should be historically contextualized, although the systematic presentation of the literature related to the chosen topic may generally be placed in a separate chapter. The topics to be covered in the chapters that make up the structure of the thesis will then be introduced.

When writing the introduction, it is important to convey to the reader the significance of the thesis within contemporary literature, briefly illustrating the theoretical and methodological perspective adopted, as well as the broader research aims pursued in the study.

3.1 *The main body of the introduction* will be developed differently depending on whether the thesis is a bibliographic/theoretical review or an empirical study.

3.1.1. *A bibliographic and theoretical thesis* (a review, critical analysis, and discussion of the literature on a given topic) will identify the lines of development of research dedicated to the chosen topic, its possible articulation into different strands, the results achieved, and the problems that have emerged or remain open. Particular emphasis may then be given to an aspect that, during the critical reading of the most recent research, proved particularly relevant — either because it has not yet been sufficiently addressed or because it is the subject of lively discussion and controversy. In presenting a critical discussion of the existing literature, the student may contrast different points of view on the topic and argue for the validity of the opposing positions.

3.1.2. *An empirical thesis clearly explains:*

a) the aims of the research

b) the characteristics of the research participants, specifying, as much as possible, participants' socio-demographic data (in addition to sex and age, and their variability, other important factors may include socio-economic and cultural background, family situation, birth order, ethnicity, etc.)

c) the procedure used, the description of data collection, any equipment used for data acquisition, and the qualitative/quantitative methods employed for data analysis.

4. The Results section must be clear and intelligible. In line with the competencies acquired during the degree program, the student presents results using tables or figures (see, for format, those published in the most well-known journals), using the most appropriate software. Tables and figures should not be unnecessarily redundant in content (excessive information compromises readability), and their number should be limited to what is necessary. Simpler data may be presented in the text rather than in tables or figures. Tables and figures included in the body of the text must be numbered progressively within each chapter, using the label “Table” for tables and “Figure” for figures (e.g., “Figure 3.1” for the first figure in Chapter 3), and accompanied by a brief caption explaining the data presented. More extensive documentary material (in any case limited to the essential) may be included in an Appendix, after the reference list (e.g., detailed descriptions of instruments, tests, or questionnaires used, analytic tables of data for each subject examined, etc.).

For a detailed description of how to report statistical results, please refer to the document “How to Report Statistical Results in the Thesis.”

5. The Discussion of results (optional) is written when it is possible to distinguish it from the more general conclusions. It contains a concise commentary on the data presented in the Results section.

6. The Conclusions or General Discussion. Many well-written theses lose value because their conclusions are inadequate, often too brief, sometimes merely a descriptive summary of the results obtained. The conclusion is not a summary of results already presented, but a critical evaluation and interpretation of what has been observed in the study (theoretical or empirical), and must address the theoretical or applied implications arising from the results obtained.

7. Keywords. Three keywords should be indicated, referring to the main topics of the thesis. For example, for the thesis “The Effect of Participant’s Age on the Müller-Lyer Illusion”: Visual Perception, Developmental Psychology, Visual Illusions, Illusions of Length, Müller-Lyer Illusion, Ageing.

8. The Reference list must include, in a single list at the end of the work, all sources (articles, books, book chapters, etc.) referred to in the thesis; this includes not only works actually consulted but also texts known indirectly that are of particular relevance to the topic addressed. Secondary citations should be limited to sources that could not possibly be consulted directly (e.g., a volume available only in a North American library).

In any case, all works cited in the thesis must appear in the bibliography, and vice versa.

8.1. In-text citations contain the authors' surname(s) and the year of publication. It is recommended to adopt the American Psychological Association (APA) format (www.apastyle.org), which is widely used in the field of psychology. According to the APA manual (6th ed.), the way a work is cited varies depending on the number of authors, as described below.

- Works with a single author: the author's surname and year of publication, e.g.: “This type of behavior has been referred to as compensatory behavior (Halliday, 1975),” or “stereotyped images of individuals during development have been studied by Ponzo (1974).”
- Works with two authors: both surnames should always be cited, e.g.: “Warmth is the most important dimension considered when evaluating others' behavior (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007).”
- Works with three, four, or five authors: the first time the work is cited, all surnames should be reported, e.g., “Kisangau, Lyaruu, Hosea, and Joseph (2007) found that...”; if the same source is cited again elsewhere in the thesis, only the first author's surname followed by “et al.” should be used, e.g., “Kisangau et al. (2007)...”
- Works with six or more authors: only the first author's surname followed by “et al.” is used, from the very first citation, e.g., “Cuddy et al. (2009) conducted a cross-cultural study aimed at...”

Finally, when several works by the same author share the same year of publication, lowercase letters of the alphabet are used to distinguish them, e.g., (Battacchi, 1985a), (Battacchi, 1985b), or Battacchi (1985a, 1985b).

One may choose to reproduce a small portion of a text verbatim (a direct quotation) because it is particularly significant or precise (as in the case of the definition of a construct). In such cases, quotation marks must be opened at the beginning of the quotation and closed at the end, followed by the name of the author(s) (as indicated above), the year of publication, and the page number on which the quoted passage appears. For example: “Formal and informal norms present in the school environment should be strongly oriented toward promoting integration among people regardless of their ethnic and national origin” (Vezzali & Giovannini, 2014, p. 55).

It is advisable to keep the number of direct quotations to a minimum.

Finally, it is important to stress that omitting bibliographic citations means presenting someone else's work as one's own, which constitutes plagiarism.

8.2. The Reference list contains all cited entries, listed in alphabetical order, always beginning with the author's/authors' surname and initial(s), followed by the original publication date and title; for a journal article, the journal name, volume number, and page numbers follow; for a book, the place of publication (city, country/state) and the name of the publisher follow.

Several bibliographic formats exist. As noted above, the APA format (www.apastyle.org) is recommended.

- a) *Journal article*: list, in order, each author's surname, first-name initial, year of publication, article title, journal name and volume (in italics), and article page range, with punctuation as in the examples below:

Baddeley, A. (1992). Working memory: The interface between memory and cognition. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 4, 280–288.

De Renzi, E. (1968). Sull'utilità del concetto di schema corporeo nella patologia corticale. *Il Lavoro Neuropsichiatrico*, 23, 1395–1406.

Plomin, R., & McGuffin, P. (2003). Psychopathology in the postgenomic era. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 54, 205–228.

Schacter, D. L., Chiu, C.-Y. P., & Ochsner, K. N. (1993). Implicit memory: a selective review. *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, 16, 159–182.

- b) Book:** list, in order, each author's surname, first-name initial, year of publication, title (in italics), edition number if applicable, city of publication, and publisher, with punctuation as in the examples below:

Hays, W. L. (1988). *Statistics*. New York: Holt.

Kanizsa, G. (1980). *La grammatica del vedere*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Boring, E. G. (1950). *A history of Experimental Psychology* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Howard, I. P., & Templeton, W. B. (1966). *Human spatial orientation*. London: Wiley.

- c) Book translated into Italian:** list, in order, each author's surname, first-name initial, year of publication of the original, original title (in italics), edition number if applicable, city of publication, and publisher; (in parentheses, the Italian translation of the title, the Italian city of publication, the Italian publishing house, and the year of publication of the Italian edition). For example:

Langer, J. (1969). *Theories of Development*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston (Italian transl. *Teorie dello sviluppo mentale*. Firenze: Giunti & Barbèra, 1973).

- d) Chapter in an edited book:** after the information relating to the contribution considered (author and title), list the initial(s) and surname of each volume editor ("Ed." or "Eds." in parentheses), the title of the volume (in italics), the volume number and edition if applicable, the city of publication, the publisher, and the first and last page numbers of the contribution considered. For example:

Battacchi, M. W. (1985). Metodologia generale della ricerca in psicologia dell'età evolutiva. In M. W. Battacchi (Ed.), *Trattato Enciclopedico di Psicologia dell'Età Evolutiva* (Vol. 1, pp. 27–34). Padova: Piccin.

Morton, J. (1970). A functional model for memory. In D. A. Norman (Ed.), *Models of human memory* (pp. 203–254). New York: Academic Press.

Roediger, H. L., & McDermott, K. B. (1993). Implicit memory in normal human subjects. In F. Boller & J. Grafman (Eds.), *Handbook of neuropsychology* (Vol. 8, pp. 63–131). Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Weiskrantz, L. (1968). Some traps and pontifications. In L. Weiskrantz (Ed.), *Analysis of behavioral change* (pp. 415–429). New York: Harper & Row.

- e) *Theses, internal reports, unpublished works, or other private documents.* The nature of these sources will be specified after the title. For example:

Di Giovanni, F. (1999). *Effetti del comportamento materno sullo sviluppo del gioco simbolico*. Undergraduate thesis, Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, Università degli Studi di Milano.

Corsi, P. M. (1972). *Human memory and the medial temporal region of the brain*. A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. McGill University, Montreal.

Pavesi, R. (2002). *La qualità dell'attaccamento nei bambini diabetici*. Department of Psychology, Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca. Internal report.

Giaccio, P. E. (2003). *La memoria e la pittura del ricordo*. Unpublished manuscript (courtesy of the author).

9. Literature Search Guidelines

The thesis supervisor, or whoever takes on the task of guiding the student, indicates some key bibliographic references on the topic and the most relevant specific publications. An essential task of the student is to carry out a branching search through keywords, trying to select what is most relevant in relation to the chosen topic. One may start from the bibliographic references of a recent publication on the topic (article or book). Reviews on a given topic are particularly useful for this purpose. Since most international scientific publications in psychology are in English, proficiency in written English is essential.

The literature search should make full use of the potential of the Web, starting from what is available at the Library of the Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca (www.biblio.unimib.it), identifying the most relevant databases: PsycINFO, Web of Science, Periodical Contents Index, MEDLINE, ERIC (for issues concerning education), Social Service Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts (for topics related to the social sciences), and the numerous psychology journals available in full-text electronic format. The university's website contains links to those of other Italian universities, which in turn provide information about their respective libraries. In northern Italy, the libraries best equipped with psychology journals and volumes are those of the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan (www.unicattolica.it) and the Università degli Studi di Padova (www.unipd.it).

Abstracts of publications can be found on the APA website (<http://www.apa.org/psycarticles/>).

Students must learn to master these tools.

10. Other guidelines for writing the thesis

The following should generally be avoided:

- a) exclamation marks, ellipses (...), abbreviations such as “etc.,” the definite article before proper names (e.g., “the Bowlby”), and foreign words when a corresponding Italian term exists;
- b) autobiographical, emphatic, journalistic, and colloquial expressions, unless there is a specific reason related to the topic of the thesis;
- c) terms used must be defined the first time they appear in the text: for example, in the case of terms such as “Self,” the theoretical construct being referred to must be explained; in the phrase “according to psychoanalysis,” it must be made clear which particular psychoanalytic theory is being referred to;
- d) acronyms must be spelled out the first time they appear in the text, e.g., STM (short-term memory).

11. Reminders for the oral defense of the thesis

It is useful to plan the presentation of the thesis within the allotted time (generally, 10 minutes for the presentation and 5 minutes for discussion), as suggested by the supervisor. Without such planning, there is a risk that the oral presentation of the work will be incomplete, or that too much time will be devoted to minor points at the expense of more central ones. The time required for the presentation of slides should also be calculated precisely. It is helpful for the student to rehearse the oral presentation several times, and to practice it with fellow students before the defense.

12. Recommended Software

When writing the thesis, it is advisable to use widely available, PC/Mac-compatible software, e.g., Word or an equivalent open-source program.

13. Essential references

1. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2009), Sixth Edition.
2. Eco, U. (1998). *Come si fa una Tesi di Laurea*. Milano: Bompiani.
3. Petter, G. (1995). *La tesi di Laurea in Psicologia*. Firenze: Giunti-Barbèra.
4. Sternberg, R. J. (1995). *The psychologist's companion*. Cambridge: University Press.