Stages of a thesis (in order)

Abstract

Write this last. It is an overview of your whole thesis, and is between 200-300 words.

See writing abstracts for honours theses for what to include in your abstract or see some example abstracts.

Introduction

Usually longer than an abstract, and provides the following:

- background to the topic;
- brief review of current knowledge (Can include literature review in some schools);
- indicates gap in knowledge, states aim of your research and how it fits into the gap;
- can include hypotheses; can include an outline of the following chapters.

See thesis introductions exercises for more information.

Literature review

Often part of the Introduction, but can be a separate section. It is an evaluation of previous research on your topic, where you show that there is a gap in the knowledge that your research will attempt to fill. The key word here is evaluation.

See literature reviews for more information and examples to get you started on your literature review.

Methods
Often the easiest part of the thesis to write. Outlines which method you chose and why (your methodology); what, when, where, how and why you did what you did to get your results.

Here are some sample methods.

**Results**

Outlines what you found out in relation to your research questions or hypotheses, presented in figures and in written text.

Results contain the facts of your research. Often you will include a brief comment on the significance of key results, with the expectation that more generalised comments about results will be made in the Discussion section. Sometimes Results and Discussion are combined: check with your supervisor and with highly rated past theses in your School.

Here are some suggestions for writing up results.

**Discussion**

The Discussion section:

- comments on your results;
- explains what your results mean;
- interprets your results in a wider context; indicates which results were expected or unexpected;
- provides explanations for unexpected results.

The Discussion should also relate your specific results to previous research or theory. You should point out what the limitations were of your study, and note any questions that remain unanswered. The Discussion CAN also include Conclusions/Future Research. Check with your supervisor.

See our theses in discussion page for more information or try these exercises.

**Conclusions**

Very important! This is where you emphasise that your research aims/objectives have been achieved.

You also emphasise the most significant results, note the limitations and make suggestions for further research.

Conclusions can include Future Directions. Check with your supervisor.

For more information see conclusions in honours theses or sample conclusions.