Thesis Structure

You should discuss the organisation and level of information in your methods section with your supervisor. For further information about what goes into a Methods section and in what order, go to Sample table of contents.

The following are brief extracts from Methods sections of Honours theses.

Under the heading ‘Exercise for methods’ below, the direction is “click the submit button for feedback” but it is your choice how to provide feedback. Since this thesis is going to be at the top, it technically becomes Thesis A, but you might think of a way around having to re-label the other sample texts.**

In summary the methods section outlines which method/s you have used and why that particular method was most appropriate for your study.

Key questions can be: what, when, where, how and why you did what you did to get your results.

Sample text from the School of Geography

**Thesis title: The effects of Fluoride on the reproduction of three native Australian plant Species.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What (introductory overview) and Where (samples were gathered)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The major objective of this study is to look at the effects of fluoride on the reproduction of native plant species found in the vegetation surrounding the Tomago Aluminium Smelter. This has been done by measuring several reproductive characteristics of selected species and undertaking a study of the soil seed reserve along a fluoride gradient…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why (the research was done using a particular approach)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By keeping other environmental variables constant, it was anticipated that these sites would illustrate the relationship between fluoride and plant reproduction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How (specific details of collection and treatment of samples)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From each of the replicate sites in the high, low and background fluoride zones a Y2 cone with follicles was collected from 10 randomly selected plants. The follicles from the cones were opened by placing them in an oven, heated to 120o C for one hour, and seeds were removed (Wrigley &amp; Fagg,1991). When follicles failed to open…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What (specific details of techniques and tests used)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For the Bossiaea heterophylla, regression analysis was used to determine which of the other characteristics, if any, had a significant linear relationship with the number of pods produced per plant. A one-factor ANCOVA was then performed using…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exercise for methods

What do you know about methods? Take the quiz and find out.
Exercise: a reflection on style

The choice of which verb tense to use in your methods section is very important. Will you use:

- present tense (is conducted)
- future tense (will be conducted)
- past tense (was conducted)

Read the examples and see which tense is used in each

**Thesis A: Model Testing**

Model testing was conducted to determine the various parameters relating to the roll motion of vessels Y164 and Y177. It involved measurements of parameters from the equations of motion for rolling and the comparison of roll angles with that specified by the IMO Severe-Weather Criterion (Andrewartha 1999, p.54).

**Thesis B: Viral RNA Extraction**

RNA was extracted from sera using the QIAmp Viral RNA extraction kit (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany) according to the manufacturer’s instructions. A negative extraction control was included which consisted of water in place of serum. Its purpose was to confirm any positive result and rule out any contamination. The 60ml of eluted RNA was stored at −800°C (Oon 2005, p.13).

**Thesis C: BN Solid Source Preparation**

Twelve in-situ, p-type planar, boron nitride (BN) solid source slices were purchased for this thesis. The BN solid sources used in the experiments were PDS Products boron nitride wafers Grade BN-1250, purchased from Saint Gobain Advance Ceramics (see Appendix A). The composition of the BN solid sources was 40% BN and 60% SiO2. The BN solid source slices were divided into two sets of six, and only one set was used in the initial experiments (that set of BN solid source slices broke later in the thesis after too much abuse, and the remaining set of six was prepared to continue the experiments). The other set of six BN solid source slices were stored in a clean N2 box (Chen 2003,.p.3-5)

**Question**

Now that you have read the examples, which tense is used in all of them?

- Future
- Present
- Past

See Answer

---

**Sample Methods**

Document Version Date 14/01/2014
UNSW CRICOS Provider Code: 00098G
https://student.unsw.edu.au/sample-methods