

Supplemental Material: The Publication Process

Converting the Thesis or Dissertation Into a Journal Article

The purpose of theses and dissertations, as well as the nature of the reading audience (professors or committee members), may dictate variations from the requirements for manuscripts submitted for publication.¹ Turning a thesis into a publishable manuscript requires work on length, selectivity, writing style (editorial and expository), and interpretation of data. By giving attention to these features, you will increase the chance of having your manuscript accepted for publication.²

How Dissertations and Theses Differ From Journal Articles

As a first step, familiarize yourself with the ways in which theses and dissertations differ from journal articles. Chapter 2, “Manuscript Structure and Content,” provides detailed guidance on how journal articles are typically written, with a focus on meeting standards for reporting results. Dissertations and theses often differ from journal articles in the following ways.

Abstract length. The maximum length for a dissertation abstract submitted to *Dissertation Abstracts International* is 350 words and 120 words for a master’s thesis, which is longer than the range of 150 to 250 words for most abstracts in journals.

Introduction. The introduction in a thesis or dissertation is similar to that in a journal article (see section 2.03), except that the author of a thesis or dissertation may be expected to demonstrate familiarity with the literature by developing the background more comprehensively. Students writing laboratory reports are often permitted to cite material from secondary sources with appropriate referencing. This practice is not encouraged in journal articles, theses, or dissertations.

Discussion. The discussion section of graduate theses and dissertations are typically longer than this section in journal manuscript submissions. Students may be asked to interpret results more thoroughly, thereby demonstrating their understanding of their data, and to engage in more speculation, thereby offering committee members more opportunity to understand future research directions that interest the student.

References. Only references cited in the text are included in the journal article reference list. However, an occasional exception to this rule can sometimes be found in dissertations or theses. For example, committees or

¹ For practical guidance on planning for and completing dissertations and theses, see Cone, J. D., & Foster, S. L. (2006). *Dissertations and theses from start to finish: Psychology and related fields* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

² These guidelines were adapted with permission from Calfee and Valencia’s (2007) *APA Guide to Preparing Manuscripts for Journal Publication*, which can be found at <http://www.apa.org/journals>.

departments may require evidence that students are familiar with a broader spectrum of literature than that immediately relevant to their research. In such instances, the reference list may be called a bibliography, or the student may be asked to provide a bibliography along with the reference list.

Appendices. Although space and content requirements may limit the use of appendices in journal articles (with the exception of supplemental material placed in supplemental online archives; see section 2.13), the need for complete documentation often dictates their inclusion in undergraduate and graduate papers.

Reframing for Journal Publication

Compared with a dissertation, a journal article requires a tighter theoretical framework, a more succinct review of the literature, a more controlled presentation of methodology, and a more restrained discussion of results.

Trimming the length. Articles derived from dissertations are often longer than other manuscripts. In dissertations there is a tendency to say everything about the research problem under investigation. Trimming the length effectively is not a matter of “cutting and pasting” but of selecting and rewriting. The substance must be preserved while cutting the extraneous detail that is important for the dissertation but irrelevant for the journal article.

The following approaches often help with selectivity and brevity:

- If the dissertation covers several distinct research questions, narrow the focus to a specific topic—be selective in presenting the problem.
- Try to bring the results under control. Often the dissertation reports everything, including “almost significant” results. These results are briefly mentioned in journal articles and detailed in supplemental materials.
- Try to avoid the common presentation pitfalls of many novice writers. These include, for example, reporting that the data were analyzed with a certain computer package or presenting significant findings in the Discussion section.
- Certain conventions in dissertations do not lend themselves to the presentation format for journal articles. For example, as Carver (1984) advised, “do not include a ‘Definitions’ section. . . . This section is popular in doctoral dissertations but it is often a sign of naivete in research reports” (pp. 22–23).³
- Be selective in the references that are reported in the literature review. Dissertations often have an exhaustive number of citations—choose the most salient when revising for a journal article.

Writing style. Many theses do not follow APA Style for tables, figures, references, and organization of sections. Failure to attend to APA Style often signals stylistic problems throughout the manuscript. Pay particular attention to the quality of expository writing. Strive for clarity; delete extraneous words; avoid excessive reporting and repetition; be explicit, but not overly detailed; use the active voice; and, of course, use correct grammar.

Interpretation of data. A common problem in a poorly prepared manuscript derived from a dissertation study is overinterpretation of the data. Inexperienced researchers tend to have unbridled faith in the strength of their results. Problems of overinterpretation in dissertations are not unexpected, given that the candidate has invested much time and energy in an academic undertaking. Thus, going beyond the results may come out of a sense of ownership and pride. Nevertheless, show restraint in forming your conclusions.

In closing, remember that reviewers and editors easily recognize a manuscript that has been carelessly converted from a thesis or dissertation. The harder a new member of the profession works to alleviate some of the more obvious and fixable problems that distinguish a thesis from a journal article, the easier the path to publication will be.

³ Carver, R. P. (1984). *Writing a publishable research report in education, psychology, and related disciplines*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.