

## Graduate School

### Guidelines for Incorporating Publications into Masters or Doctoral Theses

#### A. Summary

It is acceptable – and, indeed, encouraged – to include refereed publications within HDR theses, provided that:

- i) The thesis comprises a collection of published papers prefaced, introduced, linked and concluded in the manner outlined in section c (below).
- ii) The thesis includes individual refereed publications along with unpublished material prefaced, introduced, linked and concluded in the manner outlined in section c (below).

(NB in the following guidelines the term “refereed publications” refers to either published refereed material or material accepted by a refereed publication. It does not refer to material submitted for publication that has not been accepted nor to material intended for submission.)

#### B. Background

Southern Cross University supports postgraduate research students publishing their work during candidature. It demonstrates to examiners that the student’s work has been peer reviewed and that the research is deemed worthy of publication. It also maintains currency of the candidate’s work as it is completed and for students wishing to do postdoctoral work, having a publication record is essential. In the past most students have chosen to focus on writing the thesis and have found publications a distraction from that major task. More recently, given the pressures to publish, it has become increasingly common, particularly in scientific disciplines, to incorporate publications directly into the thesis as a series of standalone chapters with a connecting introduction and conclusion.

The advantages of this approach are considered to be:

- working towards publication produces a more focused and concise thesis ;
- it allows the candidate to engage with the broader scientific community in a way that validates and confirms their work along the way;
- the candidate can improve their thesis substantially from incorporating referees’ comments;
- the standards and expectations of published work are well-established, giving confidence that the candidate’s work is of high quality;
- the candidate will be competitive for postdoctoral fellowships and employment at the time of graduation with an established track record in publication;
- publication deadlines can contribute to a rigorous thesis milestone plan;
- it allows the candidate to develop the ability to accept critical comment and disseminate findings;
- some components of the thesis will be easier to defend from adverse examiners’ reports if reviewers have accepted the research as worthy of publication;
- it partially resolves the conflict between preparing the thesis for examination and preparing papers for publication;

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- it gives the candidate the opportunity to co-author papers with other academics, and
- it increases the opportunity for the candidate to present work at conferences.

However, there are also pitfalls and challenges that need careful consideration, for example:

- there is a risk that the thesis reads as disjointed and repetitive, without overarching coherence and integrity, and may not be acceptable to examiners without modification and reformatting
- (related to the above) examiners unfamiliar with the format can be unsympathetic even if provided with university guidelines;
- due to publication delays, the process can add to the time required to write the thesis;
- there is a danger that students will focus their research too narrowly;
- candidates may be tempted to publish sections of their work prematurely;
- skills generated through writing a thesis of book length may be sacrificed;
- things can go wrong without sound guidance early in candidature;
- it is more likely to suit candidates who have published previously; publication does not provide an unchallengeable guarantee of quality of the work;
- co-authorship may lead to uncertainty as to the contribution of the candidate to the research and to writing the thesis and/or may lead the examiners to judge that the students' input is not of sufficient weight and scope to merit their eligibility for award of Masters or Doctoral thesis.

The following guidelines have been developed to minimise the impact of these issues and to ensure that a thesis incorporating publications is of high quality.

- 1. Decide whether your project is suitable for this type of thesis format** (be aware that it is certainly not a quick or easy way to produce a PhD):
  - Does your topic lie within a discipline where publication is highly regarded?
  - Is it important to publish your results quickly to maintain currency of knowledge (particularly relevant in areas where a lot of research is being done and knowledge is changing fast, e.g. biotechnology)?
  - Does your research project involve several relatively discrete stages, topics or components that lend themselves to standalone papers that can be linked to form a coherent research project?
  - Does your supervisor support this format for your thesis?
- 2. Establish from the outset of candidature that you will use this format**, as it will influence how your and your supervisor organise your timelines and milestones. It may be too disruptive to decide on this later in candidature.
- 3. It is desirable to have some publication experience**, but not necessary. Getting articles accepted for publication can be time consuming and frustrating. However, reviewers' comments can be very valuable in improving your writing and argument.
- 4. Normally publications would be written during the period of your candidature**, but if you have published one or more papers previously that have direct bearing on the current project, it may be acceptable to include them. (Confer with your supervisor and Director of Research Training on this issue.)
- 5. There are no particular requirements for the number of papers that should be included. Normally three is considered minimum**, but you may only want to incorporate one or two papers, as long as such inclusion does not disrupt the flow of your thesis.

6. It is expected that you would **target high quality or high impact journals**, but this may depend on your discipline. It may also be appropriate to include refereed book chapters or conference proceedings, but this is less likely to impress examiners. Again, this may depend on your discipline, so be guided by your supervisor and Director of Research Training on this one.
7. **Publications need to be at least reviewed and accepted to be** included in the thesis as standalone chapters. Articles you have written but have not yet been submitted or accepted would not be appropriate to include as full chapters. However, you could integrate substantial parts of those papers into thesis chapters.
8. **If any of your papers are co-authored, ensure that you make your own contribution very clear.**
9. **The following format provides a guide for structuring your thesis.**

### C. Thesis Format Guide

- **Title page.**
- **Thesis declaration.**
- **Abstract** of no more than 400 words.
- **Acknowledgements:** as well as acknowledging supervisors, technicians, other resource people and peers who have assisted the research, also acknowledge journal reviewers and editors whose comments have assisted the writing of papers.

**List of publications included as part of the thesis:** include full citation details; statement that papers have been refereed (with evidence included in an appendix); and statement that copyright permission has been obtained (evidence in appendix). For instance the statement may say: *"I warrant that I have obtained, where necessary, permission from the copyright owners to use any third-party copyright material reproduced in the thesis (e.g. questionnaires, artwork, unpublished letters), or to use any of my own published work (e.g. journal articles) in which the copyright is held by another party (e.g. publisher, co-author)."*

- **Statement of contribution of others:** The purpose of this statement is to summarise and clearly identify the nature and extent of the intellectual input by you and any of your co-authors. The statement must be signed by you and your supervisor. A written statement from each of the co-authors should be included as an appendix in the thesis.
- **List of additional publications by the candidate** relevant to the thesis but not included in it (including conference papers).
- **Table of contents**
- **Introduction/overview:** The Introduction must establish a coherent and logical framework for the research.
- It should contain succinct statements describing the research problem investigated, overall objectives and specific aims of the study and an account of research progress within which the papers are situated. It should explain the design of the research project and how the papers are linked. This is important to provide continuity for the reader. You need to critically place any published works used in the body of the thesis in the context of current knowledge in the appropriate field of study and in the context of the thesis as a whole. It is best to choose the format that tells the academic argument in the most coherent way so that the contents of the thesis are established as a substantial and significant body of work, but without unnecessary repetition. The introduction should be your own work, be of a very high standard, not exceed 15,000 words and not have been submitted for publication.
- **Literature Review:** If your published papers include a comprehensive coverage of the relevant literature, then a short section within the introduction chapter which overviews (and references) key ideas from the literature will be sufficient. If the published papers together provide a more limited or piece-meal literature review (perhaps because of journal page limits), then a more substantial literature review will be required to demonstrate that you have broad knowledge of the field.
- **Methodology**

- If your published papers include a comprehensive coverage of your methodology, then a short section within the introduction chapter which overviews (and references) your research design will be sufficient. If the published papers together provide a more limited coverage of your methods (again because of journal page limits), then a more substantial methodology chapter may be required – this requirement may vary between disciplines.
- **Published papers:** Papers can be included as separate chapters within a thesis. Direct reprints from journals can be included if they are resized to A4. It is also acceptable to reproduce them in the same format as the rest of the thesis (see guidelines in the Postgraduate Student Handbook). It is necessary to include an introduction to each chapter that positions the paper within the overall argument of the thesis.
- **Discussion/Conclusion/Synthesis:** This section should integrate and synthesize the significant findings of the thesis. Depending on the discipline, it may also identify the limitations of the research and highlight future directions. This section should not include a detailed reworking of the discussions from individual papers within the thesis and should not have been submitted for publication.
- **Appendices:** Appendices may include statements from co-authors, evidence supporting refereed status of publications such as conference papers, and documentation of acceptance of papers which have not yet appeared in print. They can also include detailed data and methods descriptions not included in papers.
- **References:** This should be a list of all references cited in all papers included in the thesis as well as from the Introduction and Literature Review. (NB it is not acceptable to spread reference sections across disparate chapters and/or appendices.)