

Economics PhD Thesis Guidelines

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A PhD thesis is a significant original body of work produced by a student during their studies as a PhD student. An acceptable thesis in Economics must be thoroughly researched, demonstrate rigorous critical thinking and analysis, present a detailed methodology and accurate results with rigorous verification of knowledge claims.

Thesis Structure

The decision about the structure of the student's doctoral thesis should be made by the supervisor and advisory committee members and be informed by the student's academic and professional goals. The thesis format must also adhere to the formatting requirements outlined by Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs.¹

- **Article-based thesis:** The norm in Economics is an article-based thesis comprised of independent chapters that are thematically related. A chapter is defined as a piece of scientific standalone work that is consistent with the scope and quality of a peer-reviewed publication in a scholarly economics journal. Typically, three article-style chapters are included, in addition to introductory and concluding chapters. However, the number and nature of chapters may vary somewhat given the nature of research that is undertaken by a student and should be approved by the student's research advisor and advisory committee.

Each chapter of an article-based thesis will include a list of all co-authors and their contributions to the work. Each chapter should also contain a statement regarding publication status (e.g., published or accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed outlet, submitted for publication, not sent out for publication, an expanded version of published/accepted for publication work).

- **Monograph-style thesis:** A much less common thesis format in Economics is the monograph-style or book-style. This format is organized as a single narrative describing the research problem, the context of the research, the methods used, the findings, and the conclusions. After doctoral studies are complete, a monograph-style thesis will typically be revised into a number of research articles, but the form in which it is presented for the final oral exam is not itself intended for publication.

¹ Outlined on the GSPA website: <https://uwaterloo.ca/graduate-studies-postdoctoral-affairs/current-students/thesis/thesis-formatting>

Key Criteria of the Doctoral Thesis

Regardless of the format of the doctoral thesis, certain criteria must be met. An acceptable thesis must do the following:

- Demonstrate how your research makes an original contribution by advancing knowledge in your field
- Show a thorough familiarity with the field and an ability to critically analyze the relevant literature
- Display a mastery of research methods and their application
- Offer a complete and systematic account of your scholarly work
- Present the results and analysis of your original research
- Document your sources and support your claims
- Locate your work within the broader field or discipline
- Write in a style that respects the norms of academic and scholarly communication

Other Considerations Relevant to the Thesis

The student should be the major contributor of work that is presented in the thesis and dissertation. If a student is considering pursuing a career in academia, it is recommended that at least one thesis chapter be sole authored.

If the thesis or dissertation contains previously published work, the student may be required to obtain permission from the copyright holder, in which case this permission must be acknowledged in the document (e.g., in the preface or appendix). For more information regarding copyright, consult Library and Archives Canada (<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/services/theses/Pages/search.aspx>) and relevant thesis regulations at the University of Waterloo (<https://uwaterloo.ca/graduate-studies/thesis/thesis-regulations/copyright>). Tables and figures that have been published elsewhere need to have “Reprinted with permission of ...” in the captions unless this is handled by the copyright acknowledgement (e.g., as noted in the preface or appendix). Previously published work must be appropriately cited in the document and should conform to formatting standards at the University of Waterloo (<https://uwaterloo.ca/graduate-studies-postdoctoral-affairs/current-students/thesis/thesis-formatting>)

Prior publication, or acceptance of publication, does not supersede the university’s evaluation of the work. In other words, a committee may request revisions to an article that has been published elsewhere.

For any articles to be included in the thesis, authorship arrangements should be discussed early on in the research, ideally in the planning stages. In Economics, common practice is that authors are ordered alphabetically. If other manuscript authorship arrangements may be desirable, these should be discussed openly between the student and the other potential authors at the earliest possible convenience, ideally even during the initial planning stages of the project. It is recommended that there be a footnote explaining how the authors are listed for each chapter, if applicable.