Thesis Chapter Feedback Framework

This document provides a series of thesis chapter descriptions and criteria for assessing chapter drafts. While no single assessment structure can be applied uniformly to theses in all fields and programs, this set of criteria attempts to capture elements that are valued across disciplines. Individual advisors, fields, and departments may require, prefer, or emphasize different elements and qualities in theses. Because of this variation, this document is designed to be downloaded and accommodates adaptation for individual use.

The packet includes details about expectations for the following chapters or sections:

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| Chapter or Section | Length | Placement Notes | Purpose |
| INTRODUCTION | 5–20 pages | First chapter | Describes the project, its significance, and its findings. |
| BACKGROUND | 2 para to 10 pages | Included in first chapter or as a separate chapter | Provides the most relevant information needed to understand the problem, its context, and significance. |
| LITERATURE REVIEW | 4 para to 10 pages | Included in first chapter or as a separate chapter | Synthesizes and analyzes related previous research, what it found, and where there are agreements and disagreements. |
| METHODOLOGY or RESEARCH DESIGN | 2 para to 10 pages | Included in first chapter or as a separate chapter | Describes how the research was conducted, what data and sources were used, and limitations and important decision points. |
| ANALYSIS  Common in qualitative/social science work. | 3­–10 pages | Included as a separate chapter or included in final chapter (Conclusion) | Presents analysis of data and what it means for answering the research question. |
| RESULTS/FINDINGS  Common in technical/scientific work. | 3­–10 pages | Included as a separate chapter, or combined into one chapter with Discussion. | Provides the data that resulted from experiments, calculation, or modelling. |
| DISCUSSION  Common in technical/scientific work. | 3­–10 pages | Included as a separate chapter, or combined into one chapter with Results/Findings. | Presents interpretation of data and what it means for answering the research question. |
| CONCLUSION | 3­–10 pages | Last chapter | Summarizes study and results; identifies implications, applications, and recommended future work; may include policy recommendations resulting from findings. |

Introduction:

Summarizes the project, its significance, and findings.

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| Element | Description | Element present? | Comments and Next Steps |
| Problem statement | Clearly presents and describes the problem or knowledge gap to which the project responds. |  |  |
| Findings | Clearly identifies what was discovered in doing the research. |  |  |
| Significance of the research | Discusses and/or demonstrates the motivation for conducting the research.  Makes clear how the research offers new perspective and/or contributions in terms of practical application and new knowledge. |  |  |
| Literature Review | A literature review may or may not be included in the first chapter. There is a separate section below for literature reviews. |  |  |
| Research question(s) | A reader can clearly identify the research question (there may be more than one). |  |  |
| Research design | Makes clear the essential elements of the research design or methodology.\* May include: scope and limitations; hypotheses; variables and how they will be measured and analyzed; tools, materials, data sources; frameworks, models, or theories; case studies and analytical criteria.  If research closely follows an approach used in others’ research, clearly discusses the similarities and differences. |  |  |
| Chapter overview | Succinctly describes how the thesis is organized, and what the chapters that follow provide. |  |  |

\*A full discussion of methodology may occur in a later chapter. There is a separate rubric for methodology chapters.

Background:

Provides the most relevant information needed to understand the problem, its context, and significance.

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| Element | Description | Element  present? | Comments and Next Steps |
| Introduction | Provides an orienting paragraph that identifies the chapter’s content, purpose, and basic organization. |  |  |
| Effective organization | Demonstrates logical organization and makes effective use of headings and subheadings.  Paragraphs are cohesive and of appropriate length (about 150–250 words). |  |  |
| Relevant content | Provides relevant contextual information and makes clear how this information will benefit the reader later in the document.  Depending on the topic, this information could be:   * Historical background * Overview of key terms, elements, and concepts * Discussion of key frameworks or models that structure inquiry |  |  |

Literature Review: Synthesizes and analyzes related previous research, what it found, and where there are agreements and disagreements.

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| Element | Description | Element  present? | Comments and Next Steps |
| Introduction | Provides an orienting statement that identifies what the literature review contains, how it is organized, and its main findings. |  |  |
| Effective organization | Demonstrates logical structure that is easy for the reader to perceive and navigate. Organization is well matched to the thesis topic and approach.  Makes structure clear through use of headings and subheadings.  Some options for structure:   * Chronological: development of trends in research on the topic or related topics over time * Thematic: selected key themes or theories from other studies * Methodological: work that has applied similar methods. |  |  |
| Appropriate breadth and scope | Reflects a thorough, comprehensive process of reviewing literature.  Includes multiple perspectives and types of material. It does not rely too heavily on any document type, point of view, or area of expertise.  Identifies and describes where authors differ or disagree. |  |  |
| Clear relevance to thesis | Makes clear the relevance of selected literature to the focus of the thesis.  Selected literature is timely and not out of date. |  |  |
| Shows gap or need | Gaps or areas for further study revealed by existing research are clearly identified and clearly connected to the focus of the thesis. |  |  |

Methodology: Describes how the research was conducted, data and sources used, limitations and important decision points.

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| Element | Description | Element  present? | Comments and Next Steps |
| Introduction | Provides an orienting statement that identifies what the chapter contains and how it is organized. |  |  |
| Effective organization | Demonstrates logical organization and makes effective use of headings and subheadings. |  |  |
| Identifies approach | Clearly describes and justifies the methodological approach of the research. Acknowledges and explains limitations. |  |  |
| Tools and techniques | Identifies and justifies the selection of tools and techniques used in the research. Acknowledges and explains limitations. |  |  |
| Data collection | Provides detailed and well-organized discussion of how data was collected (surveys, experiments, modelling, interviews, literature, existing data set). Acknowledges and explains limitations.  Provides relevant information about timing, sequence, and instruments. |  |  |
| Data analysis | Provides detailed and well-organized discussion of how collected data was analyzed.  Describes relevant details of how raw data was cleaned or prepared for analysis. May include discussion of software, statistical tests, and/or steps of qualitative analysis. |  |  |

Findings/Results and Discussion:

More often found in technical/scientific theses. Findings/Results provides the data resulting from experiments, calculation, or modeling. Discussion interprets the implications of the data for answering the research question.

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| Element | Description | Element  present? | Comments and Next Steps |
| Introduction | Provides an orienting statement that identifies what the chapter contains, how it is organized, and (if Discussion is included) its main findings. |  |  |
| Effective organization | Demonstrates logical organization and makes effective use of headings and subheadings.  Shows clear demarcation between presentation of findings/results and the discussion that interprets their meaning. These may be presented in two separate chapters. |  |  |
| Neutral presentation of findings/  results | Presents the results of the analysis neutrally and objectively. Does not begin to interpret findings before Discussion. |  |  |
| Well-scoped content | Thoroughly describes results, but does not introduce data or findings that are irrelevant to research objectives. |  |  |
| Tables and figures | Includes useful tables and figures when appropriate. Tables and figures are legible, consistently formatted, and well-designed. |  |  |
| Discussion  \*May be a separate chapter | Clearly addresses the connections between the research question, hypotheses, data, and conclusions.  Shows a sophisticated understanding of the bearing of the results on the research objectives.  Acknowledges the limitations of the study and how they may affect the results. |  |  |

Analysis: More often found in qualitative/social science theses. Presents analysis of data and what it means for answering the research question.

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| Element | Description | Element  present? | Comments and Next Steps |
| Introduction | Provides an orienting statement that identifies what the chapter contains, how it is organized, and the key findings.  Chapter introduction may respond directly to the research question. |  |  |
| Effective organization | Demonstrates logical organization and makes effective use of headings and subheadings.  Organization is well matched to research elements (cases, grounds for comparison, hypotheses, variables). |  |  |
| Clear criteria | The criteria and/or grounds for analysis are clearly applied. The relationship between the research question, hypothesis, and the chapter discussion is evident. |  |  |
| Evidence | The analysis includes well-selected, representative, and persuasive examples and data to illustrate and support points. |  |  |
| Careful language | Careful, precise language illustrates nuance and clarifies meaning.  The discussion does not oversimplify the issues being discussed.  Unexpected results or limitations to the explanatory value of the data are acknowledged and discussed. |  |  |

Conclusion: Summarizes study and results; identifies implications, applications, and recommended future work; may include policy recommendations resulting from findings.

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| Element | Description | Element  present? | Comments and Next Steps |
| Introduction | Provides an orienting statement that identifies what the chapter contains and how it is organized; often reorients reader to research question/problem and key findings. |  |  |
| Effective organization | Demonstrates logical organization and makes effective use of headings and subheadings. |  |  |
| Summary of results and implications | Clearly captures how the results of the research and analysis respond to the research questions and any hypotheses introduced in Chapter I.  Makes clear the implications of these findings, often both practical and theoretical, in light of the research significance described in Chapter I. |  |  |
| Recommends action | If relevant, makes recommendations for how the findings can and should be applied. Makes clear any assumptions shaping the recommendations. Notes limitations or challenges to applying recommendations. |  |  |
| Identifies areas for future research | If relevant, makes logical recommendations for follow-on research. |  |  |