Writing Your Thesis:

Dance Macabre
Writing your thesis will probably be the biggest challenge that you ever encounter.
Today we will consider

• What should be in a thesis & practical aspects of writing theses
  – Structure: “traditional” versus “paper”
  – Writing timetable
  – Writing strategies: meetings & drafts
  – Key components: referencing, abstract, indices, acknowledgements, figures & tables, photos?
Today we will consider

– Software skills: styles, templates and long documents
– Management: stress, procrastination, guilt
– Conclusions
Requirements

- Minimum requirements for theses and dissertations are set by the university & specified in the university calendar.
- Individual institutes, sections or individual supervisors have differing requirements; consult your supervisor.
- Get the library guide to theses.
- Library doesn’t require copies of honours & dip dissertations.
Types of theses

- Traditional thesis
- “Paper thesis”
Traditional Thesis

Chapter 1: Intro & review of literature

⇒ Background to the study; the problem
⇒ Logical argument leading up to experimental objectives
⇒ Select important references; don’t try to include all
⇒ Some sections may require reference only to review papers, but sections relating to your specific research will require references to all the relevant original papers
Traditional Thesis

Chapter 2: Materials and methods
⇒ Experimental subjects, design, protocols, assays, statistical analyses (All sources referenced)

Chapter 3: Results
⇒ Results only - no discussion (no bias)
Chapter 4: Discussion & Conclusions

⇒ Interpret results and compare and contrast them with previously published results. Make conclusions and suggest further work.

References

Appendices

⇒ Data or information that you want recorded but superfluous to previous sections
Introduction (literature review)

Chapter 1 Paper 1

Chapter 2 Paper 2 \ little or no speculation

Chapter 3 Paper 3

Chapter 4 Discussion & Conclusions

References (full list for all papers)

Appendices
Plan writing timetable

• Discuss with supervisor
• Set dates for each chapter (draft and final versions)
Meetings

Have regular meetings with your supervisor to discuss

♦ results
♦ interpretation (take notes or recorder)
♦ what to write
Drafts

• Rule 1: Keep at least 3 up-to-date copies
  – (2 on different hard disks - 1 on portable storage
  – In different buildings
• Rule 2: - keep to the due dates you set
• Rule 3: - when you break rule 2, set new dates
• Rule 4: never break rule 1
Drafts

- Write first draft as if it were the final draft – don’t hand in rubbish
- Don’t fear to start writing – remember it is a draft
- Concentrate on the argument, making all associations clear
- Paragraph structure is essential to clear logic
Drafts

- Expect lots of red pen. Now you are writing “real science” - projects are a thing of the past.
- Drafts 2-12 - hang in there! Allow for changing mind. Keep old drafts as backup
- Make changes as soon as possible after discussion, while ideas are fresh
Drafts

- Allow time for supervisor turnaround. You should be top priority, but keep the pressure on. Use co-supervisors
- Establish a work pattern and keep the pressure on!
Referencing

- Keep full details of all references from the start. Establish a system.
- Use the format of a chosen journal (discuss) from the start.
- Allow time - referencing is very time consuming.
- Check references thoroughly!
Photographs

• Keep photographs to a minimum
• Do you really need it?
• Professional approach
  – Conventions of your discipline
Figures &Tables

• Must stand-alone
• Reference all sources
• Refer to all in the text
• Create list of figures (and list of tables) as you go (or use software to do so)
• Lists do not need all the details such as units, abbreviations etc.
Acknowledgements

• Keep a list from the beginning
  – Easy to forget who helped.
  – Start your list now if you don’t have one
• This is one of the most read pages of your thesis
• No need to specify the affiliations of all people acknowledged.
Abstract

• Often written last, this task is harder than you ever thought possible
• It is hard to condense months of study into less than one page of concise text.
• EVERY point seems vital to you – hard to cull
• Allow two days at least. Try writing your abstract first, before you write your thesis, then update it as you go.
Abstract

- Use funding and ethics applications, as these often use the broad approach required for an abstract
- Include the full reference for your thesis, but no other references
- Write one paragraph
Index

Worth the effort! Design it for your use. Consider using several

- subject
- author
- specific subject
Styles & templates

• A style defines the font, size, colour, line spacing, tab settings, page size etc.
• Templates record the styles in a file with name extension .dot

• Decide on the styles you want for your thesis and save the template
Long documents

- Thesis too big for one file
- Separate files create problems for page numbers, index, table of contents
- Learn to use master documents and subdocuments
- LaTeX - 8 September (Daan Vink)
Thesis management

- Manage and control your stress
- Avoid procrastination at all costs
- Guilt! Make it work for you - don’t allow it to reduce your effectiveness.
- Plan your work schedule and stick to it.
- Allow yourself respite
- Get the T-shirt
- Support each other
Publication

• Plan to publish
• When is the next suitable conference for you to present your work?
• Use your institute colloquium as preparation for a real conference
• strictly professional approach
Conclusions

- Decide on the type of thesis you will write
- Manage your thesis (don’t let it rule you)
- Plan contents and process (update)
- Security is vital
- Learn & understand the common errors so that you can avoid them (proof-reading)
Conclusions

- Learn to use styles and templates
- Use spelling & grammar checks
- Plan to publish
- Start looking for a conference (funding often available for student’s first conference)
- Societies have prizes for young members