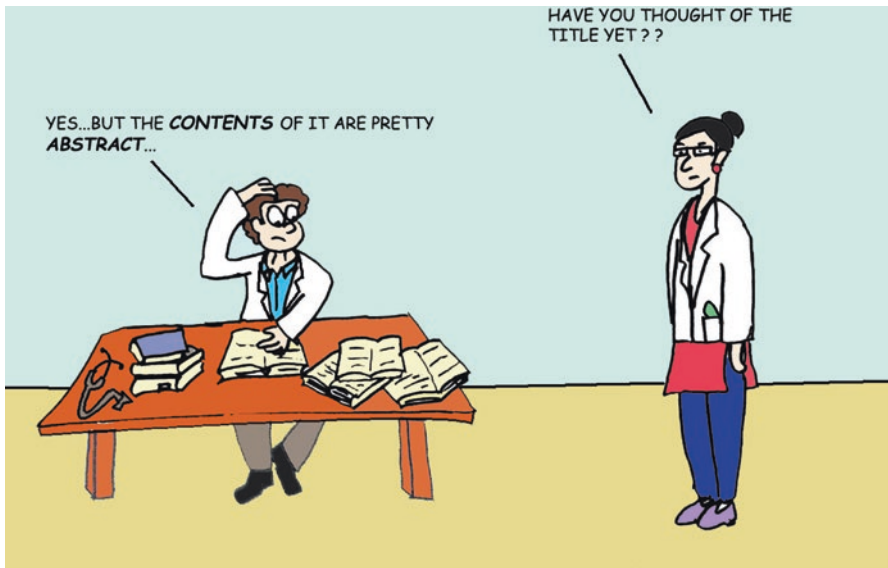


Preparing a Title Page, Abstract and Table of Contents Page

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A stunning first impression was not the same thing as love at first sight. But surely it was an invitation to consider the matter.—Lois McMaster Bujold



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Key Points

- The Title page, Abstract page and Table of Contents are the opening pages of a dissertation and therefore, essential to create a good impression on the reader.
- The first page of a dissertation should succinctly summarise your work.
- The abstract also called as the ‘executive summary’, follows the Title page and Declaration Statement and should encapsulate the essence of the dissertation.
- The Table of Contents lists the contents contained within the dissertation with pagination helping the examiners and readers to find the information easily.

Introduction

Writing and submitting a dissertation frequently involves months, if not years, of work that involves commitment, perseverance, and hard work. The initial pages should reflect the great effort that would have gone into writing the dissertation. The Title page, Abstract page and Table of Contents are the opening pages of your dissertation and it is, therefore, essential to create a good impression on your examiner and, later, any reader. These initial pages, however, are compiled in the final stages of writing the dissertation once all the chapters with relevant tables, figures and illustrations have been compiled. Most universities provide guidelines for writing these and readymade templates are available online. It is nonetheless essential for the researcher to understand the correct format and styles of writing these brief, but important parts of the dissertation. The universities also specify the format of the Title page, Abstract and the Table of Contents, and the specific recommendations are provided in relevant guidance documents and/or displayed on their websites. It is useful to look at previous dissertations submitted by researchers at the same university to gain an understanding of the formats used. These copies are usually available in the university libraries. There are online resources which provide useful guidelines and templates while writing these pages [1]. It is important that you format these pages well using Microsoft® Word or similar software (e.g., Mac OS X, Linux/Unix). The spacing and page alignment should be consistent across the documents.

Title Page

This is the first page of your dissertation and should succinctly summarise your work. It is considered to be the first page of the document though the page number does not appear on this page. There are sample templates of Title pages available online [2].

The title page should contain the following information:

1. The Title of the dissertation. The title should remain the same on all the documents. It should ideally be in typescript or black ink and in block letters.
2. Name of the author. This should include the first name, middle name and surname. This should match the name you have provided in the university records.
3. Previous academic credentials (qualifications) of the author. These are written in descending chronological order and each qualification is written in a single line. An example is shown below:
M.S (General Surgery), Pondicherry University, 2007
MBBS (Pondicherry University), 2003

However, in some universities, only the name of the candidate without academic qualifications is put on the title page.

4. The degree award title for which the dissertation is presented. This should be written in the form of a statement which reads as "...in partial fulfillment of..." (write the name of the course or degree)
For example:
Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctorate of Philosophy
5. The Institution or Department in which the work was carried out.
6. The month and year during which it is submitted for examination (or re-presentation in the case of a dissertation that is to be re-examined).
7. If there is more than one volume that is submitted, then the Title page should state the total number of volumes and the particular volume.
8. A Copyright Statement that should include your name, year and name of the university
For example:
© Dr Arvind Gupta, 2010, Pondicherry University

However, this is not mandatory in all the university guidelines.

9. Reuse Statement. This clarifies the terms of reproducing the work. The copyright usually rests with the author or the Department in which the work is carried out.
10. A Declaration Statement is usually placed in the page following Title page that outlines a statement signed by the candidate that states, "Except where indicated by specific reference within the dissertation, the work submitted for examination is the result of the candidate's own investigation and the views expressed are those of the candidate".
11. The Declaration Statement should also include a signed statement by the candidate that states, "No portion of the work presented in this dissertation has been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this university or any other university, nor is being submitted concomitantly in candidature for any degree or other award".

Abstract Page

The abstract follows the Title page (and Declaration Statement) and should encapsulate the essence of the dissertation. It is also called ‘executive summary’. Although it might appear to be a small part of the overall dissertation write-up, it is nonetheless a vital section as it gives the examiner and the reader an overview of the work. Examiners are often provided a copy of the abstract by the university prior to inviting them as formal examiners. If the abstract is not compiled in a proficient manner the examiners may choose not to examine a candidate. In a Ph.D. thesis, a brief summary of the thesis called as “Synopsis” is sent to the prospective examiners so as to get their concurrence for evaluation of the thesis.

It is important that you make the abstract concise and include all the salient features of your research. There is usually a word restriction for abstracts and it ranges between 300 and 500 words depending on the type of work. While writing Masters or Ph.D. dissertations, you presume background knowledge of the subject for the reader and it is not necessary to explain terminologies or scientific terms. Tables, images, illustrations and references are not included in the abstract. The verb tense should be in the past tense as you are describing what was done. The only section where you might use a future tense is when you outline the scope for further research or what this research might lead to. It is important to use the same structure as the main dissertation for the abstract and should include all the elements albeit in a condensed form. It is a common mistake to not dedicate enough space for the results in the abstract. At least half of your abstract should be about what you found and interpreting the results [3].

The key points to cover in the abstract include:

- What is the background to your research?
- What body of evidence already exists in the area studied?
- What was the question you were trying to answer?
- Was there a hypothesis and, if so, were you testing the null or alternative hypothesis?
- How was the research carried out, i.e., materials and methodologies?
- What were the results?
- How did you ascertain that your results were significant?
- What statistical tests did you use to come to a conclusion?
- How have the results of your research contributed to the area of the study?
- What are the future research prospects in this area?

The abstract is usually written at the end of writing the dissertation since it is a summary of the work. Summarising the dissertation in an abstract form adhering to the word count can be a challenge and frequently a number of drafts are required before the perfect, final version can be produced. It might be useful to look at other dissertations and their abstracts to get an idea. The information in the abstract should only be what is contained in the rest of the dissertation and no new information should be introduced. The abstract frequently form the first page of the dissertation

but the page number is written in lowercase Roman numeral. Likewise, the pagination for the information listed in the Table of Contents is also in lowercase Roman numerals. The pagination in Western-Arabic (also known as Hindu-Arabic) numeral will start only from the first chapter of the dissertation. Figure 1 shows how to prepare an abstract.

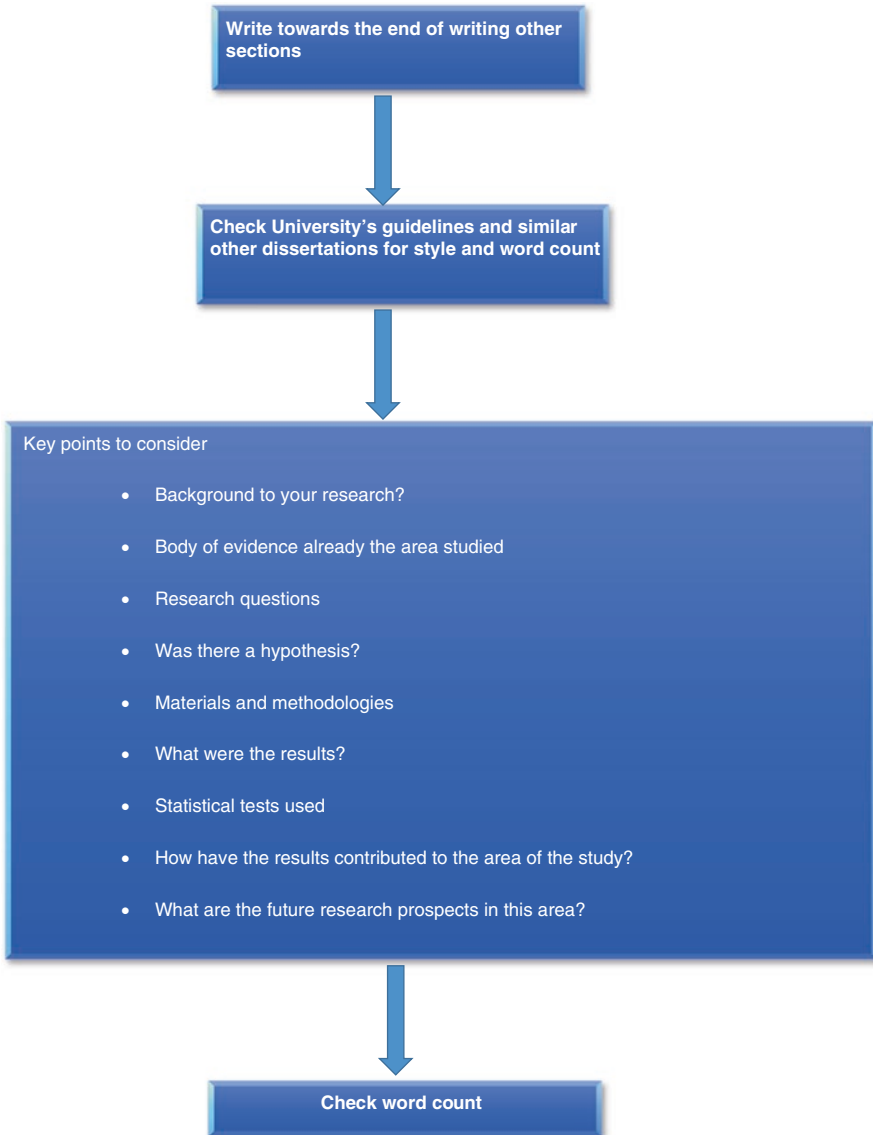


Fig. 1 Flow chart showing how to prepare an abstract

Table of Contents

The Table of Contents lists the contents contained within the dissertation with pagination. It helps the examiners and readers to find the information easily. There are several templates for these available from online resources. It can also be formatted in Microsoft® word, Mac OS X or Linux/Unix using one of the available standard templates. The Table of Contents page frequently follows the Abstract page and Acknowledgements. As such, the pagination for the Table of Contents will start at lowercase Roman numeral ‘ii’ or ‘iii’.

The usual sequence for the Table of Contents page is as follows:

1. Abstract (page i)
2. Personal Statement and Acknowledgements (page ii)
3. List of Contents (All subsections of the dissertation including chapter titles and sections) (pages iii—any relevant number)
 - (a) Chapter 1 and subsections listed as 1.1., 1.1.1, 1.1.2 etc
 - (b) Chapter 2 and subsections listed as 2.1., 2.1.1, 2.1.2 etc
 - (c) Chapter 3 and subsections listed as 3.1., 3.1.1, 3.1.2 etc
 - (d) Chapter 4 and subsections listed as 4.1., 4.1.1, 4.1.2 etc
 - (e) Chapter 5 and subsections listed as 5.1., 5.1.1, 5.1.2 etc
 - (f) Chapter 6 and subsections listed as 6.1., 6.1.1, 6.1.2 etc
 - (g) Any further chapters as relevant
4. List of Tables
5. List of Figures
6. List of Illustrations
7. List of Videos
8. List of any other Accompanying Material
9. Abbreviations
10. Appendices
11. Bibliography
12. Index

This sequence is only a guide and can vary between different universities. If there are no specific guidelines the candidates may discuss with their supervisor for advice.

If the dissertation has more than one volume, then the Table of Contents are written separately for each volume although pagination is continuous for all the volumes. The Title page is the first page of the dissertation but the page number is not listed. The pagination, therefore, starts from the abstract page as described earlier.

In summary, these three sections, which form the initial part of the dissertation, are important as they create the first impression on the reader. It is important to be aware of the formatting guidelines of individual universities while preparing these.

Case Scenarios

1. You are writing the Title page for your dissertation. Which amongst the following will you not include in the Title page?
 - (a) Your surname
 - (b) Your academic credentials
 - (c) Your membership with professional bodies
 - (d) The Institution in which the work was carried out
 - (e) The month and year during which it is submitted for examination
2. You are preparing an abstract for your Ph.D. dissertation. Which of the following sections will you not include in the abstract?
 - (a) Background of your research
 - (b) Research question
 - (c) Methodology
 - (d) Results
 - (e) Key References

References

1. <https://learn.solent.ac.uk/mod/book/view.php?id=2744&chapterid=1272>
2. <http://www.graduateschool.colostate.edu/documents/Dissertation-Title-Page.pdf>
3. <https://www.sfu.ca/~jcnesebit/HowToWriteAbstract.htm>