GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING

RESEARCH PROPOSALS,

MASTER'S PROJECTS AND THESES,

AND DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS
_____

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INTRODUCTION

This guide has been prepared to assist graduate students in formatting research proposals, master's projects and theses, and doctoral dissertations. Please read and carefully follow these guidelines because all master's projects and theses and doctoral dissertations must be approved by the graduate school as well as by the student's graduate committee.

A master's project or thesis or a doctoral dissertation contributes to the body of knowledge or to informed practice within an academic or professional discipline. The theoretical complexity of a graduate research study differs for projects, theses, and dissertations and for the various academic and professional disciplines. In general, graduate research proposals and reports are characterized by a demonstration of the student's ability to analyze, interpret and synthesize information; a critical review of relevant literature; a conceptual framework that undergirds the research; and an accurate and coherent discussion of methods, findings, conclusions and implications for practice or further research.

Each graduate program at the university has established the specific elements it requires in proposals, reports, projects, theses, and dissertations. Students are responsible for ensuring that their work conforms to the standards of their respective programs.

STYLE MANUALS

There are several well known style manuals in the United States that have been developed to guide the writing of research papers, theses and dissertations and the preparation of manuscripts submitted for publication. Graduate research proposals, master's projects and theses, and doctoral dissertations are considered published documents, that is, the form in which they are presented by the student to the Office of Graduate Studies will not be changed by a publisher.

Each graduate program has adopted a style manual (see Table 1) that students in that program are required to follow. The three style manuals most commonly used at the university are the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th edition), the *Modern Language Association Style Manual* (2nd edition) and Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (6th revised edition). However, this guide sets forth exceptions to the style manuals selected by graduate programs at the university. The guidelines that follow, therefore, take precedence over the instructions in the style manuals in use by the various graduate programs. Students should not use previous theses and dissertations as a guide. Theses or dissertations may have been approved when a particular style or usage was in effect and do not establish a precedent for its continued use.

Table 1

Style Manuals Used by Graduate Programs at Grambling State University

Graduate Program	Style Manual
Master of Arts (Liberal Arts, Mass Communication)	MLA (9th ed.)
Master of Arts (Social Sciences)	
Master of Arts in Teaching (Elementary, Secondary)	APA (7th ed.)
Master of Education (Curriculum & Instruction, Special Education)	
Master of Public Administration	APA (7th ed.) or Turabian (7th ed.)[a]
Master of Science (Criminal Justice, Developmental Education, Sport Administration)	APA (7th ed.)
Master of Science in Nursing	APA (7th ed.)
Master of Social Work	APA (7th ed.)
Doctor of Education (Developmental Education)	APA (7th ed.)

Doctor of Philosophy (Criminology and Justice Administration)   APA (7th ed.)
_____
With approval of the faculty advisor or major professor, a student may select another style manual appropriate for the social sciences.

GRAMBLING STATE UNIVERSITY SPECIFICATIONS

Fonts and Font Sizes

Proposals, reports, theses, and dissertations should be prepared using a word processor in a 10- or 12-point, scalable, serif font. The same font and font size should be used throughout the document. Examples of a few appropriate 12-point serif fonts are:
- Palatino
- Times
- Times New Roman

A scalable font is one in which the computer can adjust the space allocated to each letter. The result is a printed appearance rather than the appearance of a typed document. For this reason, non-scalable fonts should not be used. For example, Courier appears to be typewritten. Scalable fonts take up less space and result in fewer pages in a document.

Margins

The left margin must be 1.5 inches, the right margin 1 inch, and the top and bottom margins 1.25 inches. The only printed material permitted in the margins is the page number. Right justified margins are not permitted. They result in unusual spacing between words that make a document unattractive and difficult to read.

All notes, tables and figures, including titles and legends, must conform to the margin requirements. Tables and figures may be photographically reduced or printed in a smaller font size to meet these requirements as long as all information in them is legible. However, table titles and figure legends may not be reduced. They must be the same font size as the text of the paper.

Title Page

The style guide to be used for the title page for a research proposal is shown in Figure 1. The style guide for the title page of a master's report, thesis, or dissertation is found in Figure 2.

Grambling State University

Office of Graduate Studies

Department of _____

Proposal for a Thesis (or Project or Dissertation)

TITLE ALL IN UPPER CASE. A TITLE THAT REQUIRES

TWO OR MORE LINES SHOULD LOOK LIKE

AN INVERTED PYRAMID

Student's Full Name

Date (Month and Year)

Approved:

_____   _____
Major Professor (or Advisor)   Committee Member

_____   _____
Committee Member   Program Director (or Department Head)

_____   _____
Committee Member   Executive Director of the Office of Graduate Studies

Figure 1. Format for title page of a master's project, thesis, or dissertation proposal.

Figure 2. Format for title page of a project, thesis or dissertation.

Approval Page

Master's projects and theses and doctoral dissertations that are approved must include an approval page following the title page. The style guide for the approval page is seen in Figure 3.

The student should take care to cite the correct, official title of the degree on the approval page, the abstract and the title page. Grambling State University awards eight graduate degrees: Master of Arts, Master of Arts in Teaching, Master of Public Administration, Master of Science, Master of Science in Nursing, Master of Social Work, Post Masters Certificate, Doctor of Education and Doctor of Philosophy. The graduate degree major only appears in three cases: Nursing, Public Administration, the Alternative Teacher Certification Program and Social Work because it is part of the official degree titles (Master of Science in Nursing, Master of Public Administration, Master of Arts in Teaching and Master of Social Work). Other master's degrees do not include the degree field in the title of the degree. For example, it is not Master of Arts in Liberal Arts or Master of Science in Sport Administration; it is simply Master of Arts or Master of Science.

Likewise, the Doctor of Education contains no reference to the degree major. It is not Doctor of Education in Developmental Education; it is simply Doctor of Education. **It is never Doctorate of Education.** One may have a doctorate in education, but the degree is a Doctor of Education. If you have questions about an official degree title, please consult the Office of Graduate Studies.

Grambling State University

Office of Graduate Studies

This dissertation (or *master's project or thesis*), *written under the direction of the major professor/chair of the student's doctoral committee* (or *the major advisor and the student's graduate committee*) *and approved by all members of the committee and by the director of the graduate program in the student's discipline, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, or Doctor of Education* (or *Master of Arts* or *Master of Social Work*, etc).

Date _____

_____

Executive Director

Doctoral (or *Graduate*) *Committee*

_____

Major Professor/Chair
(or *Major Advisor*)

_____

_____

_____

Program Director
(or *Department Head*)

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Figure 3. Approval page.

Abstract

Dissertations must include an abstract; master's reports and theses may include an abstract at the discretion of the specific graduate program. The style guide for abstracts for dissertations in found in Figure 4. ProQuest, the publisher of *Dissertation Abstracts International*, does not accept abstracts of more than 350 words. Therefore, the abstract must be limited to 350 words including the title, the names of the student and major professor, the date, etc.

Acknowledgements and Dedications

A project, thesis, or dissertation may include an acknowledgement section or a dedication section, but neither should be considered obligatory. Students who chose to include an acknowledgement or a dedication should refrain from effusive language and speak of persons in the third person. For example, if a person wishes to dedicate a thesis or dissertation to a spouse, , instead of writing "You have been an inspiration to me." they might say, "He (The person's name) has been an inspiration to me." Including the names of many individuals in an acknowledgement detracts from the relatively few individuals who were significantly helpful in the completion of one's research.

TITLE ALL IN UPPER CASE. A TITLE THAT REQUIRES

TWO OR MORE LINES SHOULD LOOK LIKE

AN INVERTED PYRAMID

Mary Jane Scholar, MSN

Grambling State University, 2004

Major Advisor (or Professor): Florence R. Nightingale, PhD

The abstract should summarize the purpose of the study, methods and procedures, and major findings and conclusions. Total length of the abstract, including the title of the study, author's name, etc., cannot exceed 350 words.

Figure 4. Sample abstract.

Table of Contents

The table of contents follows the abstract and the acknowledgements and dedication, if such are included. The style guide for the table of contents can be found in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Sample table of contents.

List of Tables

If tables are used, a list of them follows the table of contents. The style guide for the list of tables is in Figure 6.

List of Figures

If figures are included in the document, a list of them follows the list of tables. Figure 7 is a style guide for the list of figures.

Pagination

All pages in a proposal, master's project or thesis, or dissertation are numbered. The title page, approval page, abstract, acknowledgements (if used), dedication (if used), table of contents, list of tables, and list of figures are numbered sequentially using lower case Roman numerals (*i.ii.iii, iv,* etc.). Although the title page is page *i*, the number should not appear on the title page. Page numbers on all other preliminary pages (those preceding [before] Chapter I) should be centered 1 inch from the bottom of the page.

The body of the document, references, and appendices are numbered sequentially in Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.) beginning with the first page of the body (the first page of Chapter I) and concluding with the last page of the last appendix. All pages are numbered. Page numbers on pages with major headings (e.g., first page of a chapter, references, appendix, vita) should be centered 1 inch from the bottom of the page. On all other pages the Arabic numeral should be placed 1 inch from the top and 1 inch from the right edge of the page.

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Figure 6. Sample list of tables.

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Figure 7. Sample list of figures.

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Headings

All style manuals dictate the levels of headings that may be used. Because proposals, reports, theses, and dissertations are treated like published documents, levels of heading that a style manual indicates are underlined should instead be italicized.

All levels of heading will be bold faced and should be preceded by double-double (i.e., quadruple) spacing to make it easier for the reader to see the beginning of new sections. Chapter and major section titles (e.g., List of Tables) must begin a new page.

The style for chapter headings is shown in Figure 8. The word chapter will be all upper case and will be followed by an upper case Roman numeral (e.g., CHAPTER II). The chapter title will be upper and lower case (e.g., Review of Related Literature).

CHAPTER II

Review of Related Literature

After an expanded definition of high-risk students, this chapter reviews the current scholarly literature on predictor variables on retention and academic achievement and intervention strategies for high-risk students. In particular, this chapter focuses on tutoring and SI and reviews the related research on reasons high-risk students do not voluntarily chose to participate in such interventions. Finally, this chapter presents two proposed strategies to increase high-risk students' attendance in academic support programs: SM and verbal prompts.

High-Risk Students

Postsecondary institutions have implemented special programs to enhance student retention and academic success within the last 20 years. A subpopulation often targeted for retention efforts is high-risk incoming freshmen. High-risk students are those who have poor records of past academic performance, low scores on standardized achievement tests, and generally poor coping skills in traditional educational structures (Chickering, 1974; Cross, 1971). These students may also lack requisite background knowledge, learning and study skills, social support, and self-management strategies needed for succeeding in postsecondary settings (Weinstein, 1994). In a description on high-risk students, Friedlander (1980) stated:

> High-risk students are more likely than their more academically successful peers to have experienced failure repeatedly in school situations, to have had difficulty in performing traditional educational tasks, to have received insufficient positive feedback or encouragement from teachers or classmates on their efforts to overcome their academic deficiencies, and to have been in the bottom third of their high school graduating class. These negative school experiences lead us to predict that disproportionate numbers of high-risk students, as compared to traditional students, will fail. (p. 16)

The decade of the 1990s continued to bring an influx of at-risk students to four year institutions throughout the country. A number of researchers have chronicled their increasing numbers and their changing characteristics. In

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Figure 8. Style for chapter headings.

Tables and Figures

If at all possible, tables and figures should be prepared on the computer. If they cannot be computer generated, they must be submitted in camera-ready form. Each should be numbered consecutively (1, 2, 3, etc.) throughout the text and appendices. They should be numbered sequentially in the order in which they are mentioned in the text (i.e., the first table referred to in the text must be numbered 1, the second table mentioned must be numbered 2, etc.). Multi-line table titles and figure captions must be single spaced in the tables and figures.

Some style manuals indicate that tables and figures should be placed after the references or bibliography. **At Grambling State University, however, a table or figure will be inserted into the text at the earliest opportunity after it is first mentioned in the text and at a point where it will not be separated on two pages.** Every effort should be made to keep tables and figures to no more than one page in length, including a reduction in font size or use of landscape page orientation (i.e., lengthwise on the page). If font size is reduced for a table or figure, titles and captions must remain in the same font and size as the rest of the document. If landscape orientation is used, the table title or figure caption is also landscaped, and the top of the table or figure is at the binding (left) edge. When a table or figure is landscaped, the page number remains in the top right-hand corner (portrait page orientation) like other pages in the text.

Quotations

Long, direct quotations (40 or more words) should be single spaced and should not be surrounded by quotation marks (See your particular style manual for further direction). Directions regarding indention and reference citations for long quotations in the style manual selected by the student's program should be followed.

Short quotations should be surrounded by quotation marks. The student should use smart quotation marks (" ") and apostrophes (') rather than feet and inch marks.

Using Copyrighted Materials

Students should avoid violating copyright protections when quoting the work of others. They must be able to certify that all copyrighted material used in their work beyond the limits of *fair use* is with the written permission of the copyright owner. Detailed explanations of fair use can be found in several style manuals. Stated simply, fair use of copyrighted material is paraphrasing portions of the material or quoting directly from it (with quoted material being set off in quotation marks) with proper credit in all cases being given to the source in a footnote (please consult the appropriate style manual for your program for the appropriate use of footnote) ~~of~~ or in-text reference citation, as dictated by the style manual being used.

Use of copyrighted materials, including tables, figures, diagrams, theoretical models, measurement instruments, photographs, maps, charts and art work—**should be used only with**

written permission from the copyright holder. Acknowledgment of permission to use copyrighted material should be noted in a footnote, in-text reference citation, or a note to a table or figure. Specific instructions in the style manual being used about the wording of the acknowledgment of the permission granted by the copyright owner must be followed. Copies of letters of permission must be included in an appendix or appendices.

References or Bibliography

Depending on the style manual selected by the student's graduate program, the list of books, journals, and other published and unpublished materials that are cited in the manuscript may be called *references* or *bibliography*. **In either case, sources cited must be included in the references or bibliography, and items not cited in the manuscript should not be included.** The title of the section of cited works should appear in all upper-case letters, that is, REFERENCES or BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Because proposals, projects, theses, and dissertations are viewed as published items, elements in the references or bibliography that a style manual indicates should be underlined should be italicized instead. Items in the references or bibliography should be single spaced with double spacing between items. A left hanging indent should be used for each item. Style manuals differ greatly in the style of citations in the references or bibliography. The student should follow the directions in the style manual used by his or her program except for the instructions in these guidelines. An example of a reference list is found in Figure 9.

REFERENCES

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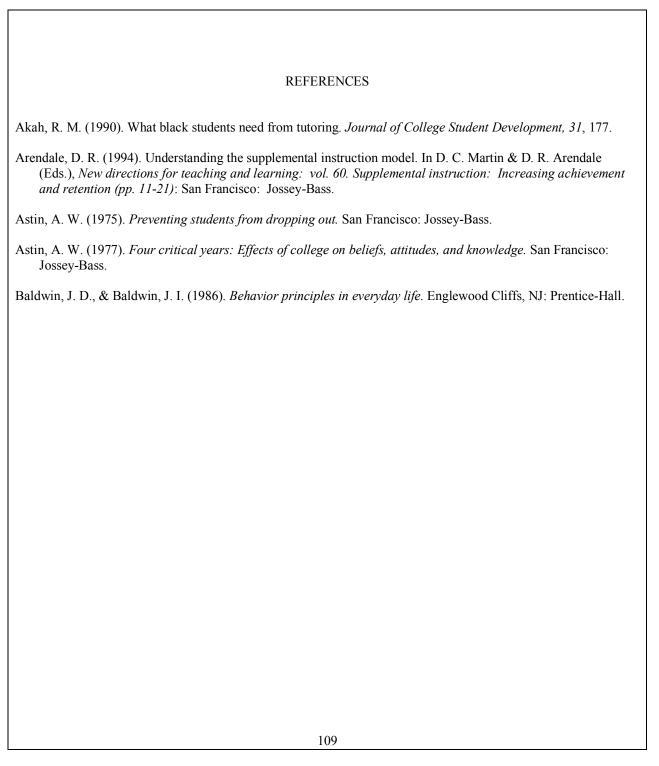
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Figure 9. Sample reference list.

Appendices

Appendices follow the references or bibliography. They may contain surveys, questionnaires, measurement instruments, etc. Each appendix has a title page (see Figure 10). Appendix titles are lettered sequentially (A, B, C, etc.) in the order in which they are mentioned in the text of the document. Thus, whatever appendix is mentioned first becomes Appendix A, the second becomes Appendix B, etc. Each appendix title page is numbered. Each page of material in the appendix is counted but it is not necessary to show the page numbers.

Vita

A brief (one- or two-page) vita is the last element in a project, thesis, or dissertation. It should be double-spaced, written in narrative form and in third person. The vita is neither a curriculum vitae nor a résumé for a job application. It should tell a bit about the author and his or her previous academic and professional experiences. The author may choose to say a few words about his or her immediate family. It is permissible to end the vita with information about the author's permanent address.
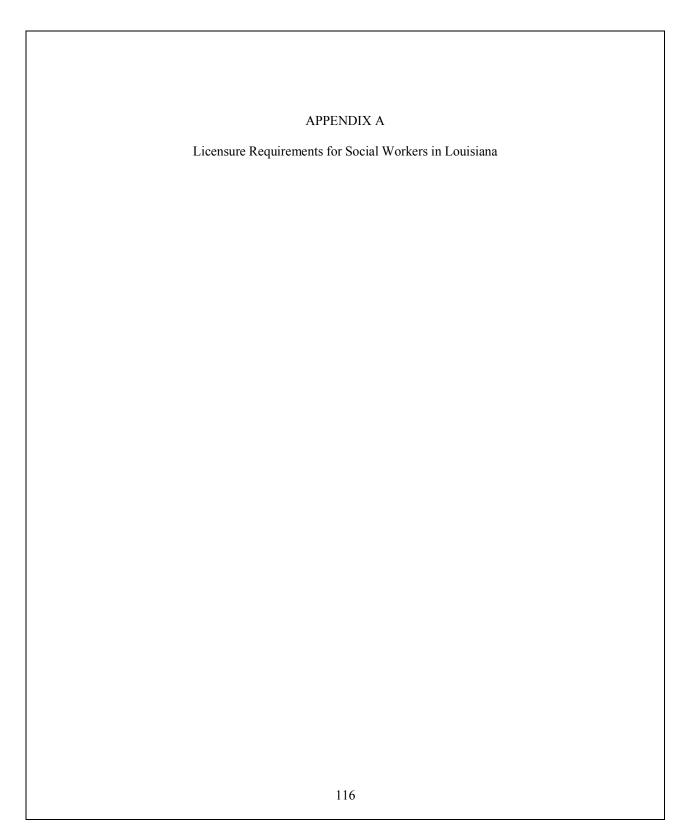
APPENDIX A

Licensure Requirements for Social Workers in Louisiana

Figure 10. Sample appendix title page.

Human Subjects

A growing body of federal law protects the rights of human subjects in scholarly research. Grambling State University has an Institutional Review Board (IRB) that must review and approve all projects and thesis and dissertation proposals, in accordance with federal guidelines, before data collection can begin. Information about legal requirements and an application for approval of a research protocol may be obtained from the Office of Graduate Studies webpage and the IRB portal. Prior to submitting an IRB application, the candidate must complete required CITI training. An official IRB approval letter or exemption determination must be included, as an appendix, in the study proposal before it is submitted to the Executive Director of Graduate Studies for his or her approval. All proposals— even historical studies and ex post facto studies in which the researcher does not know the identity of human subjects—must have the approval of the IRB.

Plagiarism

Master's projects, theses, and doctoral dissertations must meet accepted scholarly standards of authorship, including appropriate citations, and references to the work of others. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense with serious penalties at this university.

Plagiarism is the appropriation of the ideas or words of another and the presentation of them as one's own. The advice of Madsen (1992, p. 86) in *Successful Dissertations and Theses* may prove helpful: "Surely no one needs to be reminded that words copied verbatim from another's work must be surrounded by quotation marks." He goes on to point out that careless note taking can result in unintentional plagiarism. For example, if in note taking a student fails to put quotation marks around a direct quotation that he or she has copied on a note card, he or she will probably not remember that it is a direct quotation and then copy it directly into his or her paper. "However innocently done," Madsen continues, "plagiarism is inexcusable; even when it is unintentional, it is still plagiarism" (p. 86).

But, it is not only the appropriation of direct quotations that constitutes plagiarism. Madsen is again instructive.

Equally reprehensible are the less obvious types of plagiarism, such as piecing together several sentences, or changing a few words in a paragraph, or paraphrasing without citation. Sometimes the subtleties of such distinctions may leave them open to scholarly debate. However, you will do well to avoid any practice that is even slightly questionable. At all times, therefore, you should attribute direct quotations to their source; acknowledge the ideas of others; avoid using the terms of others unless they are placed within quotation marks; acknowledge with proper citations your debt to any source; and, keeping the reader constantly in mind, include page numbers, footnotes, and other guides that will make it easy to trace material back to its original source. (p. 86)

Plagiarism carries severe academic consequences, including possible course failure, academic suspension, or expulsion. Beyond damaging your academic record, plagiarism undermines your educational development and violates academic integrity standards. Students should maintain academic honesty by properly citing sources, submitting original work, and seeking faculty guidance when citation questions arise.

To assist students in understanding plagiarism more fully—and especially how to avoid it—the university recommends each student do the following before completing a proposa:

Participate in an online tutorial on plagiarism. The University Libraries of The University of Southern Mississippi has an excellent website titled Understanding Plagiarism located at http://lib.usm.edu/plagiarism_tutorial/ . Begin with What is Plagiarism and then work through the study material, the two quizzes and the test at the end of the tutorial. If you do not score 100%, you may read through the tutorial again and retake if necessary-until you score 100.

Generative AI and Machine Learning Tools

"The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in academic work is an evolving area that requires careful consideration" (Claude -3.5 Sonnet, 2024)**.** Therefore, students who use generative AI or other machine learning tools to create submitted work do so at their own risk. While students are free to use AI tools for initial information gathering, generating ideas, or checking grammar, any submitted work, including projects, theses and dissertations, will be subject to the plagiarism policy.

Using AI tools with similar prompts often produces similar results, and any similarity with another student's submitted work could result in a plagiarism inquiry. Specifically, if you submit AI created content as your own work, you should expect the plagiarism policy to apply, with AI tool usage considered as unauthorized assistance from others. Just as you would cite sources, if you do use AI to create any portion of your submitted work, you are required to acknowledge the AI source per APA formatting rules in both the in-text citation and in the reference list.

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