

# Preparing your thesis and examiners

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<https://www.griffith.edu.au/griffith-sciences/school-environment-science/research/phd-thesis-styles>



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# How many papers?

- No hard and fast rules about the number of papers (or the proportion of prepared/in press/published)
- Different disciplines have different expectations ~4 papers in Sciences
- Remember the difference between core papers, side papers and post-HDR papers
- Remember that the award of a PhD requires that thesis makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge and understanding in the relevant field of study.

# What examiners say about papers in thesis

Sharmini, S., Spronken-Smith, R., Golding, C., & Harland, T. (2015). Assessing the doctoral thesis when it includes published work. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 40(1), 89-102.

[doi:10.1080/02602938.2014.888535](https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2014.888535)

Survey completed by 62 examiners:

- 48% of examiners found they were easier to assess
- 85% were 'highly influenced by publications in top-ranked journals and international peer-reviewed journals'
- 26% wanted more guidance on how to examine them
- Concerns raised by examiners included:
  - The HDR candidate's intellectual input into co-authored papers
  - Thesis coherence

# Keeping track of your progress

Chapters	# pages	Paper?	Designed	Data collection	Analysis	Draft	Supervisor feedback and further drafts	Done/ Submitted
1. Introduction						Confirmation		
2. 1 <sup>st</sup> paper								
3. 2 <sup>nd</sup> paper								
4. 3 <sup>rd</sup> paper								
5. 4 <sup>th</sup> paper								
6. Discussion								

# How examiners assess the thesis

- Spend ~3-4 days full time on the examination, spread over 2-3 weeks
- Reluctant to fail a thesis (~3% failed)
- Most read the abstract, then the introduction, then the final chapter, check the references, and then read the thesis cover to cover
- First impressions count
- Publication of work from the research is good
- but the candidate's contribution must be clear

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‘It’s a PhD, not a Nobel Prize’:  
how experienced examiners assess  
research theses

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Australia*

Mullins, G., & Kiley, M. (2002). ‘It’s a PhD, not a Nobel Prize’: How experienced examiners assess research theses. *Studies in Higher Education*, 27(4), 369-386. [doi:10.1080/0307507022000011507](https://doi.org/10.1080/0307507022000011507)

# The importance of a cohesive structure

Whatever the format, the thesis must present as a coherent and integrated body of work in which the research objectives, relationship to other scholarly work, methodology and strategies employed, and the results obtained are identified, analysed and evaluated.

# Examination requirements

- Theses with papers have the same examination criteria as traditional format thesis
- Examiners can still request amendments to material even if its already published
- Inclusion of papers may negatively impact examination where:
  - Papers within the thesis is not accepted practice in discipline area
  - Co-authorship makes it difficult for examiners to establish independent and originality of candidate's work
  - The thesis does not appear to the examiner as an integrated whole
  - There is too much repetition in the thesis, and examiners view this as a weakness

## Catherine's recommendations: preparing examiners supervisors

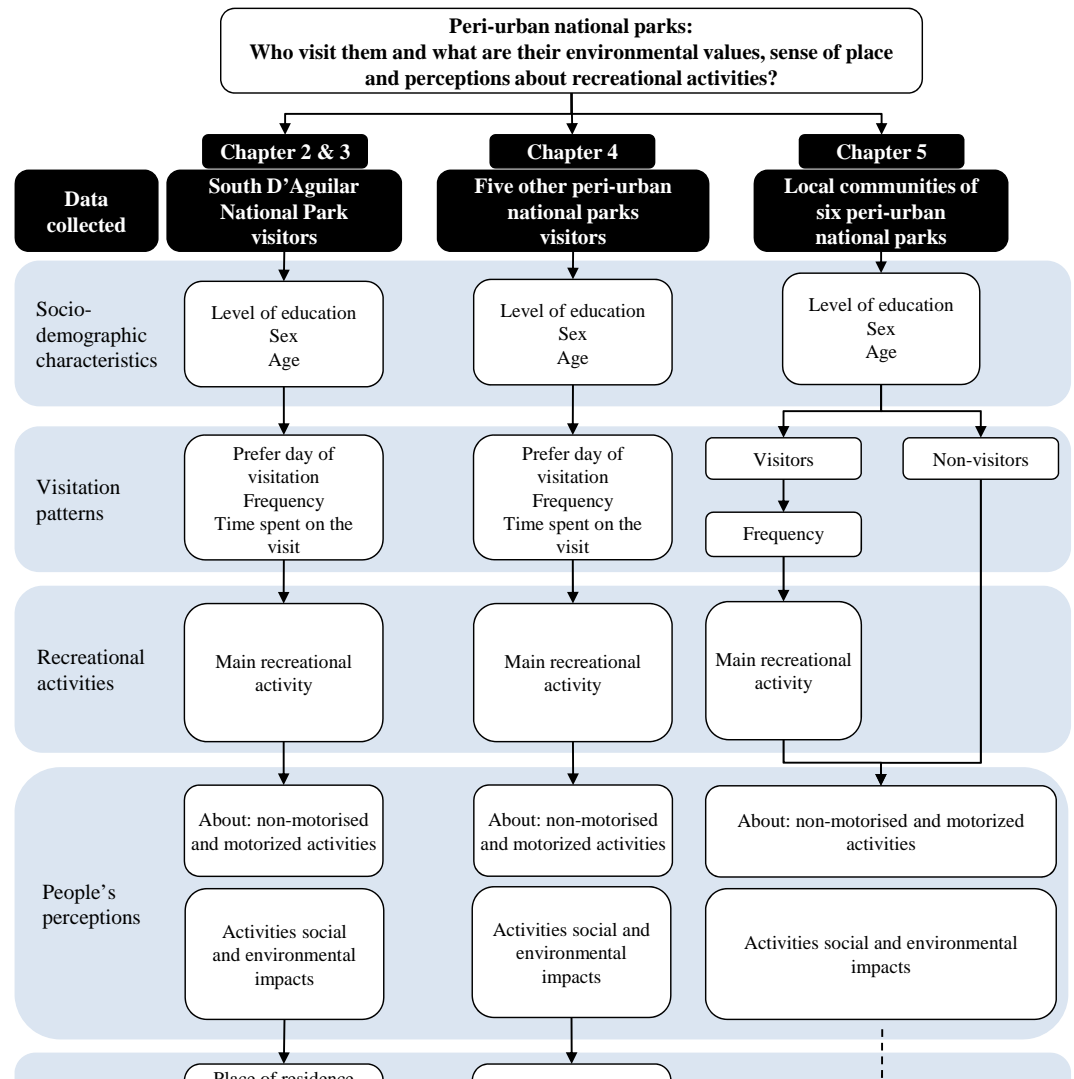
- When nominating examiners, check that they are familiar/comfortable with this style of thesis
- Make sure the candidate addresses issues to do with authorship of papers
- Make sure the thesis makes a clear overall contribution to the discipline and the papers are integrated via the introduction, linking pages and discussion.



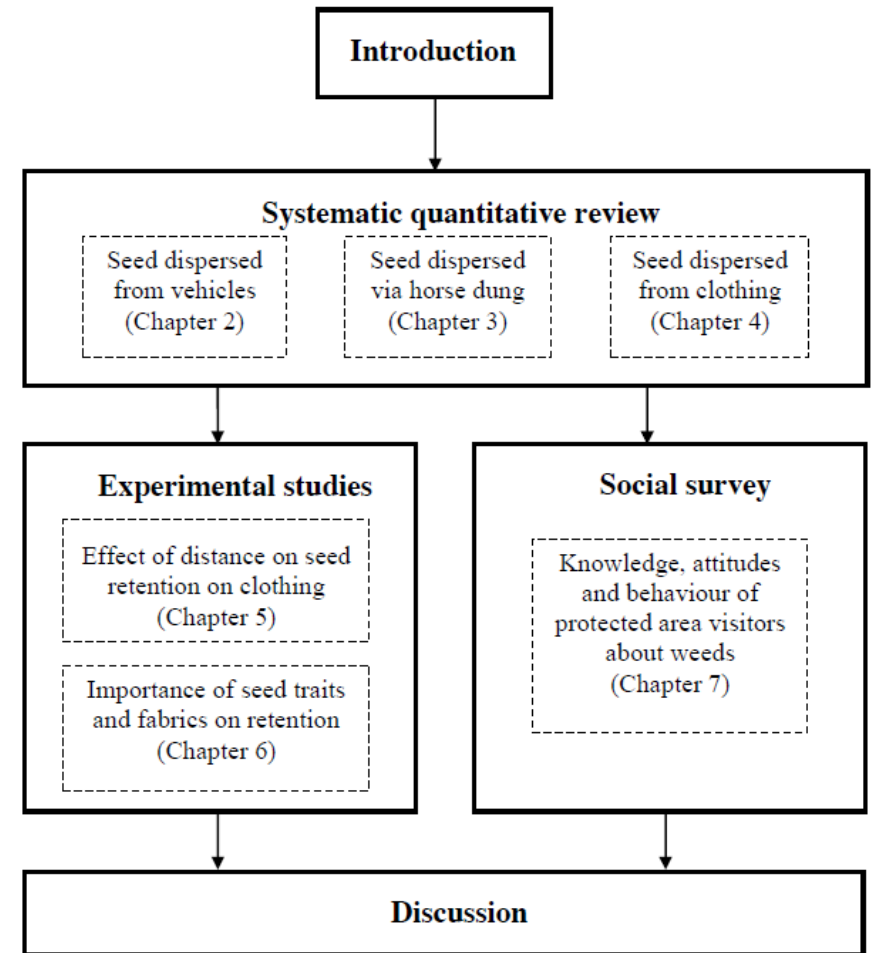
## Catherine's recommendations: when finished the papers then...

- Use aims from each chapter/paper to formulate a set of overarching thesis aims. Then include these in introduction and final chapter and explicitly outline the structure of your thesis in these chapters.
- Consider including a conceptual model and/or structural diagram in introduction (the conceptual model can be repeated in the final chapter with the results shown)
- Remind your examiner how your thesis is structured and fits together using linking pages between papers/chapters that include:
  1. Paragraph(s) to explicitly link the previous chapter to the next one
  2. A statement about the publication (including it's publication status)
  3. A statement about your contribution to the paper

# An example of conceptual model of the thesis



# An example of a structural model of the thesis



**Figure 1.3** Schematic overview of the content and structure of the thesis.

## An example statement about the thesis structure for the introduction

The thesis consists of six chapters: a *General Introduction* (Chapter 1) & *Discussion* (Chapter 6) & four results chapters (Chapters 2-5). The results chapters are in the form of manuscripts formatted to meet the requirements of the peer reviewed academic journals where they have been submitted/published. The thesis was prepared in accordance with Griffith University policy (Appendix 1). As a result, there is some repetition among the results chapters, including in the descriptions of study sites & reference lists. There are also detailed literature reviews at the start of each results chapter in accordance with the requirements of journals.

# Examples of linking statements/pages

The previous chapter provided xxxx. It found xxxx. This results chapter does xxxx. It specifically examines xxxx.

Chapter 2 is currently under review by the Journal xxxx and has been formatted to that journal style. The citation is as follows: Author 1, Author 2,. (status). Title paper, Journal.

The co-authors of this manuscript are my thesis supervisors, xxxx & xxxx. My (your name) contribution to the manuscript involved: initial concept and experimental design, data collection & analysis & preparation of the manuscript. Signed by:

xxxx (Corresponding author)

xxxx (Co-Principal Supervisor)

xxxx (Co-Principal Supervisor)

# The final chapter – bringing it all together

Potential structure:

- Introduction – a short summary reminding the reader of the importance of the topic, plus a statement that the thesis includes papers and that this final chapter synthesises results from all the papers in relation to the broad literature
- Aim 1: what was found + link to existing literature
- Aim 2: what was found + link to existing literature
- Aim 3: what was found + link to existing literature
- Contributions to knowledge – include big picture thinking about issue expanding beyond the immediate results of the thesis
- Contributions to methods and practical implications of research
- Research context and further research directions

# What happens with examination of these thesis?

- Much faster to examine
- Much faster to revise after get feedback
- Examiners tend to comment about unpublished parts of thesis (often only the abstract, Introduction and final chapter)
- Therefore these chapters need to be of very good quality
- Issues with how to deal with comments to published papers
- What happens if reviews provide comment on papers vs examiners during examination process
- Updating the final thesis that goes online – final copyright issues

# If want to know more?

check out:

- <https://www.griffith.edu.au/griffith-sciences/school-environment-science/research/phd-thesis-styles>
- There are links to key papers and lots of examples of thesis there using this format, recommendations about how to structure the thesis and links to policies and key papers

