

Editing your Thesis for Submission

A Checklist for PolyU Research Students

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Has your “*Notice of Intention to Take Thesis Examination*” (Form RDC/2B) been lodged with the Research Office? If so, this means that in about four months’ time you will be ready to submit your thesis! You are nearly at the finishing post, but not quite yet.

As well as evaluating the substance of your thesis, your examiners will be asked to rate and comment on the quality of presentation. This includes the written language and the consistency and appropriateness of presentation. **Do not ignore this!** Examiners often make critical comments concerning the poor English standard in some PolyU theses.

Appropriate *English Language Standard Expectations* are clearly outlined in your *Research Student Handbook* (Section P12.3). This Checklist aims to help you achieve these standards by asking questions that will help you as you edit your work.

Good Writing and Presentation Makes a Difference

Your examiners are busy people who face multiple demands on their time. They will quickly notice your writing and how well the work has been presented. Looking back over recent PolyU examiners’ reports, some students clearly did a good job with both their research and their writing.

<p>“This is an exceptionally good piece of work. The research questions are well-framed and firmly grounded in the literature, and the research design is clear and coherent. An added bonus is the fact that the dissertation is extremely well-written. This made it a pleasure to read.” (PhD External Examiner)</p>	<p>“Overall, the presentation of the thesis is excellent. Student X clearly organises the work into a meaningful progression of chapters. The introductory chapter provides important context for the reader, the two separate literature review chapters cover the essential subtopics for the research.... there are separate chapters which clearly document the three phases of the research...; and the conclusion provides a useful summary of the results as well as directions for future research. Student X writes with clarity and authority.” (PhD External Examiner)</p>	<p>“This is one of the best PhD theses I have read. It is mostly free from errors and contains (in most cases) only sufficient repetition to remind the reader of issues or concepts introduced in earlier sections. It is monumental work considering the complexity of the topic and has obviously involved an enormous effort by the candidate.” (PhD External Examiner)</p>
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Good writing and presentation will make it easier for your examiners to concentrate on your research. They do not want to be distracted or waste their time trying to make sense of poor writing. It has been known for examiners to return theses of poor editorial quality to universities without marking them. When this happens, examination is delayed by months while the student rewrites and another examiner is found.

Getting it Right

In checking whether your work is ready for submission, it is important that you anticipate a detail-oriented reader who will read what you have written line by line, scrutinise your references, be annoyed by spelling errors, and become frustrated when meaning is not clear.

Checking and rechecking are worth the effort. Get the bugs out before you give it to your supervisors for their final reading. They will appreciate your effort and will be more likely to send it forward for final examination. Your examiners will appreciate your effort too!

This checklist is not exhaustive, so make sure that you keep an eye out for other areas where you can improve your writing and presentation.

Cautionary Comments from Examiners	Questions to Ask Yourself
Signposts	
<p><i>“There is a mismatch between the title and the content. The candidate is strongly recommended to change the title.”</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the title reflect the content? 2. Do chapter/section titles match chapter/section content? 3. Does the table of contents match the titles in the text? 4. Is formatting consistent? For example, are you consistent in the way you set out your headings or use numbering systems throughout the thesis?
Use of English	
<p><i>“This thesis contains quite a lot of Chinese-English that can hardly be comprehended. The grammatical errors and writing style should be polished before submission.”</i></p> <p><i>“The introduction in Chapter 1 often uses the present tense where the past tense should have been used...”</i></p> <p><i>“Careless and imprecise writing is perhaps the</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Is English used accurately so that the meaning is clear? 6. Is the writing grammatically correct? 7. Are the tenses appropriate? 8. Is the punctuation correct?

<p><i>root cause of the deficiency of this thesis. There are simply too many ill-constructed sentences, wrong choices of words and grammatical errors throughout the thesis.</i></p> <p><i>"Spell check and grammar check the whole document."</i></p>	<p>9. Is common vocabulary used accurately?</p> <p>10. Is the spelling correct?</p>
<p>Writing for Understanding</p>	
<p><i>"There are no strong links between the two parts of the study."</i></p> <p><i>"The thesis is too long with many redundant and irrelevant descriptions."</i></p> <p><i>"Smaller paragraphs would improve clarity."</i></p> <p><i>"The experimental setup and conditions are not presented in sufficient detail."</i></p> <p><i>"Many terms or phrases are repeatedly used in the earlier chapters as though they are generally accepted or understood. In fact they are given meaning only in later chapters."</i></p> <p><i>"The main impression one gets when reading this thesis is that it is incredibly repetitive. While it is good to remind the reader of technical terms, it is unnecessary to repeat explanations over and over again – in some cases even in essentially the same words."</i></p> <p><i>"The abbreviations on p.vii should be listed in alphabetical order. On p.62, it seems that [ABCD] is not in the list of abbreviations at the beginning of the thesis."</i></p> <p><i>"Abbreviations of different versions should be introduced early on and be used consistently. It is now very confusing and inconsistent."</i></p> <p><i>"On p. 1, symbols are presented in different styles."</i></p>	<p>11. Does each paragraph contain a single idea and does the first sentence introduce that idea?</p> <p>12. Are paragraphs, sections and chapters logically ordered and linked?</p> <p>13. Are the paragraphs too long? Too short?</p> <p>14. Are there sufficient examples?</p> <p>15. Are explanations or descriptions sufficient? Necessary? Relevant?</p> <p>16. When terms are first used are they sufficiently explained?</p> <p>17. Is the writing unduly repetitive?</p> <p>18. Are abbreviations expanded early and are they used consistently?</p> <p>19. Are all abbreviations used included in the abbreviation list?</p> <p>20. Are the full names of symbols given?</p> <p>21. Are symbols used correctly? If, for example, <i>f</i> is different from <i>F</i>, do you ever get confused?</p> <p>22. When two terms are used to denote the same thing or idea, is this clear?</p>

Substantiation and claims	
<p><i>“Generally, it’s good to not ‘beg questions’ in the research; when the text says ‘not much work has been done’ then say something about that work.”</i></p>	<p>23. Are diagrams, flowcharts, etc., sufficiently explained in the text?</p> <p>24. Are claims sufficiently explained? For example, if you say that one position has been discredited, have you explained who has discredited it and how?</p> <p>25. Does the work go beyond description? Do you explain the significance or meaning of information you describe?</p>
Diagrams, tables, results	
<p><i>“Some Figures are not referenced. Some Figures are referred to in a disordered way. Figure 3.8 (b) is referred to for the first time in the text after 3.9, while Figure 3.8 (a) is not mentioned at all.”</i></p> <p><i>“In Essay 2, starting from p.97, many table numbers are wrong, making reading a problem and so I had to go back to re-read it again.”</i></p> <p><i>“The presentation is unnecessarily lengthy and repetitive. The student should make better use of appendices and charts, as the procedures are tedious.”</i></p>	<p>26. Are diagrams, flowcharts, etc., sufficiently explained in the text?</p> <p>27. Are diagrams of good quality?</p> <p>28. Does the information that is presented in tables cohere with what is written in the text?</p> <p>29. Is the labelling of graphs and tables unambiguous? Can labels be interpreted in only one way?</p> <p>30. Are results presented in the best form? For example, would text be better as a table, or a table better as text?</p>
Referencing	
<p><i>“On page 22, line 3, a reference ‘Decho, 1990’ is quoted. However no reference can be found in the reference list. In line 6 of the second paragraph, a reference ‘Sutherland, 1990’ is quoted. No such reference is found in the reference list...”</i></p> <p><i>“The work is weak on recent references. For example, I list below four references which I have found during a brief scan of the literature which are highly relevant to the project but have not been cited...”</i></p> <p><i>“The reference list has a number of irritating errors of a typographical nature, an inconsistency of presenting journal names, and occasionally inadequate information to locate a reference</i></p>	<p>31. Is the appropriate referencing convention used?</p> <p>32. Are works cited in the text included in the bibliography and vice versa?</p> <p>33. Are citation and reference styles consistent?</p> <p>34. Are references related to the work, or are they so tangential that the reader will wonder about their inclusion?</p> <p>35. Were references updated as the work proceeded? Have important developments</p>

<i>without inside knowledge.”</i>	<p>since the initial literature review been considered and referenced?</p> <p>36. If you have referred to any work arising from this research that you have already published, have you included the publications in your reference section?</p>
General	
<i>“Page 129 is missing from my copy.”</i>	37. Are the pages all there?

We hope that these questions help you in producing a well-written thesis.



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