



Thesis, Dissertation and Culminating Project Formatting and Publishing Guide

Effective September 2025

Table of Contents

PART I- STUDENT AND FACULTY RESPONSIBILITIES	3
PART II- SAFETY AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY	5
PART IV- DOCUMENT FORMAT AND STYLE GUIDE	7
PART IV – DOCUMENT SUBMISSION TO DIGITAL COMMONS AND PUBLISHING	11
PART V – CHECKLIST	12
APPENDIX I. TEMPLATE LINKS	13

Executive Summary

This manual provides guidance on how to properly format and submit your thesis, dissertation or culminating project.

Part I- Student and Faculty Responsibilities

Students, faculty, and staff are required to comply with all applicable university, state, and federal policies and regulations, including those contained in this manual. Students should also review additional guiding documents available at the department or program level.

A. Graduate Student Responsibilities

1. Follow your departmental process for committee selection.
2. Communicate often with your Committee Chairperson until you graduate.
3. Check your WCU email daily. This is the official method of communication with you from WCU.
4. Obtain and complete [research compliance](#) by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) as needed.
5. Submit a protocol for review by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), if appropriate.
6. Register your thesis, dissertation or culminating project with The Graduate School as early as possible, preferably a semester before their intended graduation term. Students can find registration information on The Graduate School website.
7. Compose a clear and correct thesis, dissertation, or culminating project manuscript while working closely with the committee at every stage of the ~~composition~~ process. Follow your department's prescribed style manual (APA, MLA, ACS, etc.).
8. Work with your Committee Chairperson to fulfill all departmental obligations related to thesis, dissertation, or final project preparation.
9. Complete all [forms](#) required by the Graduate School.
10. Upload the thesis, dissertation, or final project to [Digital Commons](#) by the [appropriate deadlines](#).
11. Request that the Committee Chairperson submit a grade change form for all thesis or dissertation credits that have not received a letter grade, if necessary.

B. Committee Chairperson Responsibilities

The Committee Chairperson is expected to guide and counsel the candidate during thesis, dissertation or culminating project preparation. The counseling process involves the following specific responsibilities:

1. Communicate often with your student. If you have not heard from your student in a while, contact them.

2. Work with your student to select a committee.
3. Ensure that your student is progressing normally; intervene if you have information suggesting that a problem is occurring.
4. Be aware of the time limits for master's and doctoral students. All students have a maximum of six years to complete their degrees. Follow this [link](#) to the policy. Please review program and department specific policies in case of a different time limit.
5. Assist your student in submitting the protocols for the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) and/or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC).
6. Ensure that your student is working closely with the committee at each stage of the thesis, dissertation or culminating project process.
7. Ensure that your student has [corrected formatting](#), spelling, and/or punctuation errors in their thesis, dissertation, or culminating project.
8. Administer all departmental and college requirements such as the defense or presentation, and notify the Graduate Coordinator when requirements are completed.
9. Approve and sign the completed thesis, dissertation or culminating project signature page. Ensure that all other members of the committee have approved and signed before the document is given to the student to upload with their final paper to Digital Commons.
10. Remind your student to submit a copy of the final approved thesis, dissertation, or project AND the signature page for formatting review and publication to [Digital Commons](#). Questions should be sent to thesisdoc@wcupa.edu.
11. Process a change of grade form for all thesis/dissertation credits, as needed.

Part II- Safety and Academic Integrity

All research must be conducted in an ethical manner. Graduate students are required to follow the guidelines indicated below if research includes human or animal subjects, the use of copyrighted materials, and/or any print or media materials.

If there are concerns about another's conduct and a desire to discuss the matter with a university official or make a formal incident report, the appropriate contact is the Office of Student Conduct at 610-436-3511. Concerns involving sexual misconduct or sexual harassment, or any form of discrimination, should be reported to the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at 610-436-2433.

A. Animal Subjects in Research

WCU complies with federal regulations, and takes responsibility for the humane care and use of animals in research projects. If a student's research involves the use of laboratory animals or even the use of wild animals studied in their natural habitat, the student must have the research approved by the university's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). Students can obtain the protocol form from the [Office of Research and Sponsored Program](#).

B. Human Subjects in Research

WCU complies with federal regulations regarding the use of human subjects in research. Research sponsored by, supported by, or conducted by its faculty, staff, or students must not expose people who participate as subjects to unreasonable risk to their health, general well-being, or privacy. Student research projects that involve human beings as subjects must be conducted according to the university policy for the protection of human subjects. Students apply for [Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects \(IRB\)](#).

C. Plagiarism

Issues of misrepresentation of another individual or organization's work are serious offenses. As with copyrighted materials, students must acknowledge the work of others that they include in their own research. Students must follow the guidelines for citing other authors' work in the appropriate style guide in their academic field. For details on WCU's policy on academic integrity, including plagiarism, visit the [Graduate Catalog](#).

D. Use of Copyrighted Material

Permission to use works in the public domain, (i.e., works on which copyright never existed and those on which the copyright has expired) is not necessary, but all works must be acknowledged. If the material has been published, or if an entire creation (e.g., a cartoon, a photograph, a test, or a completed form) is to be used, written permission from the copyright

holder must be obtained that allows the student to use the work in the thesis or dissertation. The purpose of a permission letter is to ensure that you are asking permission for the use of copyrighted material and to make sure that it encompasses the full scope of what you will be using the material for. The objective is to eradicate any ambiguities that could occur and make certain that your letter covers all of your needs in using/reproducing the copyrighted material.

Students should inform the copyright holder that the manuscript is being submitted to West Chester University of Pennsylvania and will be available as part of the University Libraries digital holdings in Digital Commons.

A copy of the permission must be provided in the appendix of the thesis or dissertation. Proper credit (as instructed in the permission) must be given in the text. More information about use of copyrighted material can be found on Digital Commons or on the website of the [Library of Congress](#).

WCU requires a signed publishing agreement upon submission to The Graduate School through Digital Commons. This agreement grants the WCU Libraries the right to publish your master's thesis or doctoral culminating project on the university's website. Students have the right to determine embargo periods or to have only the abstract published. WCU reserves the right to only publish abstracts. A student's thesis or doctoral project will not be published in its entirety without student consent. You are required to observe all applicable federal and state laws and university requirements regarding copyrighting and intellectual property. No copyrighted material should be submitted as part of a master's thesis or doctoral project unless all appropriate permissions have been granted with documentation to support its inclusion. Please see the following website for more guidance: [Copyright & Intellectual Policy](#).

Part IV- Document Format and Style Guide

Follow the guidelines in this section to create the layout and organize your thesis, dissertation or culminating project. We recommend that you format the document at the beginning of the writing process because making changes to fonts, margins, etc. later can be problematic.

A. Style

Thesis, dissertation and culminating projects at WCU adhere to standard scholarly styles. Your academic department/program will designate the style manual to use (APA, MLA, etc.) and this **style must be followed consistently throughout the entire document**, including the reference pages and appendices. **The only exception to this is the preliminary pages, which have the same standard formatting for all programs.**

B. Document Organization

You should organize your thesis, dissertation or culminating project as follows:

- Title Page*
- Dedication* (optional)
- Acknowledgements* (optional)
- Abstract*
- Table of Contents
- List of Tables (if required)
- List of Figures (if required)
- Text or body of Thesis/Dissertation
- Endnotes (unless incorporated at the end of each chapter) (optional)
- References (Works Cited, Bibliography)
- Appendices (Optional)

*Preliminary pages

C. Preliminary Pages

Preliminary pages include the following: title page, dedication, acknowledgments, and abstract. **ALL graduate programs must use the same standard formatting for the preliminary pages:**

1. Twelve (12)-point Font, even if the main document uses a different size or font
2. Double spacing
3. No use of bolds or italics
4. One (1)-inch margins with left-justification and ragged right margins
5. No numbers on preliminary pages
6. No running head on preliminary pages

Programs that need flexible formatting for the main body must still follow the guidelines for preliminary pages.

D. Title Page

The title page of the thesis, dissertation or culminating project must include all the following components:

1. The complete title centered between the margins. If the title of the document has multiple lines of text, they should be similar in length to each other and double spaced.
2. The statement: "A [Choose one: Thesis/Dissertation/DNP Project] Presented to the Faculty of the Department of [Insert Department Name] West Chester University West Chester, Pennsylvania. In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of [Insert Degree Name]." This statement should also be double spaced and centered in the middle of the page. See example below.
3. The degree name must be spelled out without abbreviations (e.g. Doctor of Public Administration).
4. Your full name, centered, at the bottom of the page. This is your legal name as it appears in MyWCU.
5. The month and year of graduation, centered, at the bottom of the page. **Do not use the defense or submission date.**
6. You may include a copyright at the bottom of the page. Use the copyright symbol ©, the year of first publication (same year as the author's graduation), and the name of the owner of the copyright (name of author).

|Title

A [Choose one: Thesis/Dissertation/Project]

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of Insert Department Name

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of

Insert Degree Name

By

Insert Name

December/May/August Insert Year

E. Abstract

Formatting for these pages must be consistent. Please adhere to the following guidelines:

1. The abstract **must be less than 250 words** and follow the formatting guidelines for preliminary pages. Key words listed count toward the 250 words.
2. No bold face or italics
3. Double Spaced

F. Table of Contents

Please adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Follow the style guide used for formatting
2. No number on this page (start page 1 on chapter 1)

3. All page numbers listed must match document

G. Main Body Font Size, Spacing and Page Numbers

Student should follow their style guide for main body formatting. The body of the main text must use a clear and readable **font set at the same size throughout the document**.

1. **Twelve (12)-point font** is recommended. Choose the font carefully depending on your final distribution plans. Serif fonts (e.g., Times New Roman) are easier to read on paper. San serif fonts (e.g., Arial) are easier to read in electronic format.
2. Different font sizes can be used for tables, figures, or captions, but usage must be consistent throughout the document and conform to the appropriate style manual. This means that if choosing to make a table's font size smaller or bigger than the document's font size, ALL tables must have the same font size.
3. The use of bold, italics, capitalization, or any other writing convention should be consistent throughout the document and should follow the appropriate style manual.

H. Main Body Margins and Justification

Margins (top, right, and bottom) should be 1 inch all around and consistent throughout the entire document. All pages should be left-justified with ragged right margins unless a creative work requires a different format.

I. Pagination

Beginning with the first page of the main body, following the preliminary pages, you should number every page consecutively throughout the manuscript with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.), including the reference list and the appendices. Placement of page numbers should be consistent throughout the manuscript and should match the pages numbers in the Table of Contents. Page number placement should be consistent throughout the document.

J. Chapters and Divisions

The manuscript should remain consistent throughout the work. Chapters are the most common division with sub-headings within as dictated by the style manual used. Each chapter should begin on a new page. Sub-headings typically do not begin on a new page. Please consult your style manual for further guidance.

Part IV – Document Submission to Digital Commons and Publishing

When the committee approves a thesis, dissertation, or culminating project, students must submit the final document and the signature page within 30 business days to [Digital Commons](#).

The signature page should be uploaded to Digital Commons without the Graduate Dean's Signature. The Graduate School and WCU Library will conduct a review of metadata information and general formatting to ensure consistency with the guidelines specified in this manual. The Graduate School or WCU Library will notify students by email if the manuscript formatting is accepted or if edits are needed for publication. For a timely publication, students must make edits within 30 business days. After the Graduate School receives all edits, the Graduate Dean will sign off for official acceptance.

WCU publishes all theses, dissertations, and culminating projects on Digital Commons through the master's thesis and doctoral culminating project collection. Students have the right to determine embargo periods (i.e., period of time when manuscript can not be viewed) or to have only the abstract published. WCU reserves the right to only publish abstracts. A student's thesis, dissertation or doctoral project will not be published in its entirety without student consent.

Please follow these instructions to submit your manuscript to Digital Commons:

Digital Commons Metadata Information (e.g., entry fields when submitting)

- a. Complete all prompts
- b. Include all committee member names as Name, Degree(s) (e.g., Lisa Calvano, Ph.D.)
- c. Include abstract from document. Abstract must be less than 250 words.
- d. Include keywords in the prompt, not in the abstract
- e. Check the box indicating that you are uploading is the final version of your thesis, dissertation, or culminating project as approved by your committee/program.
- f. Check a box to upload document, then upload document
- g. Check the box to upload your signature page
 - NOTE: On the next page you gain the availability to upload the signature page and unclick the "show" box
- h. Click "submit"
- i. Upload signature page and unclick the "show" box

Part V – Checklist

- ☐ Use one consistent style manual (APA, MLA, etc.) throughout EXCEPT preliminary pages

Pages must include the following and be in order:

- ☐ Title page*
- ☐ Dedication Page (optional)*
- ☐ Acknowledgements*
- ☐ Abstract*
- ☐ Table of Contents
- ☐ List of Tables (if required)
- ☐ List of Figures (if required)
- ☐ Main Document
- ☐ References
- ☐ Appendices

Preliminary Pages Formatting Checklist

- ☐ Consistent margins all around
- ☐ Left-justified with ragged right margins
- ☐ Size 12 font
- ☐ Double spaced
- ☐ Title Page looks EXACTLY like template
- ☐ Spelled out degree name (no abbreviations for degree)

Document Numbering Checklist

- ☐ No numbering on preliminary pages
- ☐ Page 1 starts on the 1st page of the manuscript after the tables and figures
- ☐ Each chapter starts a new page
- ☐ Table of Contents correct pagination

Other Items

- ☐ References come BEFORE appendices
- ☐ Convert Files to PDF
- ☐ No artwork

Digital Commons

- ☐ Uploaded document to Digital Commons
- ☐ Abstract <250 words
- ☐ All committee member names
- ☐ Committee names listed as Name, Degree (e.g., Lisa Calvano, Ph.D.)
- ☐ Signature Page uploaded

*Preliminary Pages

APPENDIX I. Form and Template Links

[Graduate Thesis, Dissertation, & Project Formatting Guide](#)

[Graduate Thesis, Dissertation, & Project Publication Submission Process Guide](#)

[Graduate Thesis, Dissertation, & Project deadlines, templates, and forms](#)