Thesis and Dissertation Workshop

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Overview

- Compare & contrast theses and dissertations
- Discuss features of theses and dissertations
- Chapter overviews
- Identify writing resources: the rhetorical reading guides (RRGs), the School of Graduate Studies Guide to the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations, academic writing books, assignment calculator, writing log
- Discuss approaches to writing large documents
- Reflection activity
- Questions

Comparison of Theses and Dissertations

Similarities

- Each is considered a final project and is usually a requirement to graduate
- Both require expertise or near expertise (upon completion) on the subject of study
- Both require that students be skilled writers
- Plagiarism is strictly prohibited
- Both are used to defend an argument
- Both require analytical skills
- Both require the full writing process in order to be completed (brainstorming, multiple drafts and revisions)
- Both require document review (professor, grad studies dept, etc.)
- Both papers have fairly strict deadlines
- The structure and style requirements are determined by your discipline
- Both have chapters

Differences

- A dissertation is longer than a thesis
- A dissertation requires new research
- A thesis usually chooses a stance on an existing idea and defends it with analysis
- A dissertation usually has a longer oral presentation component

Genre: Academic Writing

Macro-level

- Front matter (title page, signature page, acknowledgements, abstract, toc, etc.)
- Chapters with chapter titles
- Multi-level headings (headings & subheadings)
- Figures and tables
- References
- Appendices

Micro-level

- Introductory paragraphs
- Strong, "road-mappy" topic sentences
- Moving from general to specific information
- Contains many references to other scholarship
- Complex sentences and a mix of long and short sentences
- Language that is explanatory and persuasive
- Academic "hedging" ("perhaps", "suggest", "indicates", etc.)
- Transitions ("furthermore," "however", "consequently," "in contrast," "for example," etc.)
- Concluding paragraphs

Chapter 1: "Introduction to the Study" or "Statement of the Problem"

- **Purpose:** give readers the rationale for everything that will be coming in subsequent chapters. You are essentially employing a CARS approach (**C**reating **A** **R**esearch **S**pace).
- **Typical content:**
  - Introduction to the topic
  - Researcher positionality
  - Statement of the problem/problem of practice
  - Research questions (RQs)
- **Writing moves:**
  - State why you are interested/invested in the topic under study (including a personal anecdote is an effective way to do this, but not the only way if that's not your style)
  - Identify the problem
  - Discuss your background as it relates to your reasons for engaging in this research. Also include your knowledge of and experiences with the topic
  - Define key terms/concepts
  - Provide context (using scholarly sources to support your claims) on the problem(s)
  - Use headings and follow typical academic order and presentation of information (strong topic sentences and ideas/content that move from general to specific knowledge)
  - Include your research questions

Chapter 2: "Review of the Literature" or "Literature Review"

- **Purpose:** present all the relevant literature that deals with the focus of the study while persuading readers that your research is significant
- **Typical content:** strands of literature related to your topic of study
- **Writing moves:**
  - Write your paragraphs using strong topic sentences and present information that moves from the general to the specific
  - Synthesize information by putting scholars in conversation with one another
  - Adhere to your style guide's preferred writing conventions (APA, MLA, etc.)

Chapter 3: "Methodology of the Study" or "Methodology" or "Methods"

- **Purpose:** This chapter deals with the procedures that were used to conduct the study. All the methods of data collection and data analysis would be discussed. The purpose of this chapter is to give the reader all the information necessary so that the reader could **replicate the study**.
- **Typical content:**
  - Theoretical framework
  - Study design
  - Participant profiles/description of study population
  - Location of study
  - Methods of data collection
  - Analysis
- **Writing moves:**
  - Provide rationales for your design and analytical choices (this is an explanatory kind of writing)
  - Use headings and multiple levels of headings as necessary
  - Be as detailed as possible regarding your research process (recruitment, participants, data collection, and analysis). I highly recommend having someone read over your methodology because they will give you a good indication as to whether or not they think they could replicate the study.

Chapter 4: "Results of the Study" (quant.) or "Findings of the Study" (qual.)

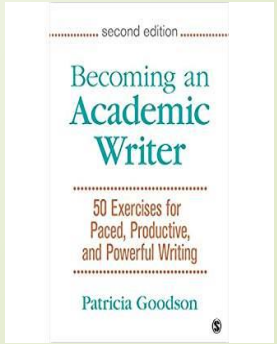
- **Purpose:** Report the results of the data that were collected. Findings are essentially major themes derived from your rigorously analyzed data. Findings center on your research questions, and while they don't necessarily have to "answer" your RQs (sometimes findings aren't as straightforward as that), they need to connect to them.
- **Typical content:** the study's findings or results
- **Writing moves:**
  - Write findings statements at the beginning of each of your findings sections (ideally, this would be the first sentence of the first paragraph for that finding…Ex: *What became clear from this study was that students, in verbalizing their perceptions of feedback, discussed it in terms of their prior experiences, most of which took place in a school setting or were school-related, and furthermore, these experiences and attitudes influenced their current experiences with feedback.)*
  - Use headings and multiple levels of headings as necessary (this helps to guide readers)
  - As you discuss your data, remember to include your reflection on it (e.g., if you use quoted material, be sure to explain it and how it connects to the finding)
  - You should reference other scholarly literature as it pertains to your findings, but you don't want to overdo it. This section/chapter is where you feature your own voice as it relates to scholarship. Remember, in this instance, readers want to read about YOUR study, not someone else's.
  - Include sentences that identify the "so what" of your finding. You should do more than just identify the finding by going one-step further and saying what it means to the phenomena under study.
  - Try not to discuss implications of your findings (this is hard to do). You will discuss these in chapter 5/section (Discussion)

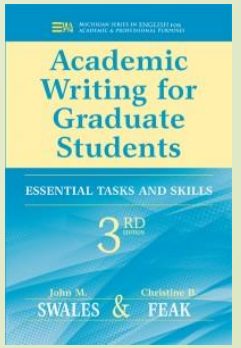
Chapter 5: "Discussion and Conclusion" or "Discussion"

- Purpose: This is the section where the results are discussed and conclusions are drawn. It is here that you will look back to the Review of the Literature chapter to either support or contradict what the collected data indicate. Recommendations for future study would also be presented in this chapter.
- Typical content:
  - References to scholarship in the context of your findings and implications (how does your study "sit with" the scholarship?)
  - A deeper, more nuanced discussion of your findings
  - Significance/contributions of your study
  - Practical implications
  - Suggestions for future research
  - Conclusion
- Writing moves:
  - Briefly summarize the study
  - Address how and why your study is significant
  - Use headings and multiple levels of headings as necessary (this helps to guide readers)
  - Consider your audience. Knowing who you are making suggestions to will inform what suggestions you make.
  - Reference other scholarly literature to help situate your study (Questions to consider: does it contribute to the established scholarship on your topic? Is it in opposition to the scholarship on your topic? How is it similar to, or different from the existing scholarship on your topic? What makes your study/findings unique and/or significant?)

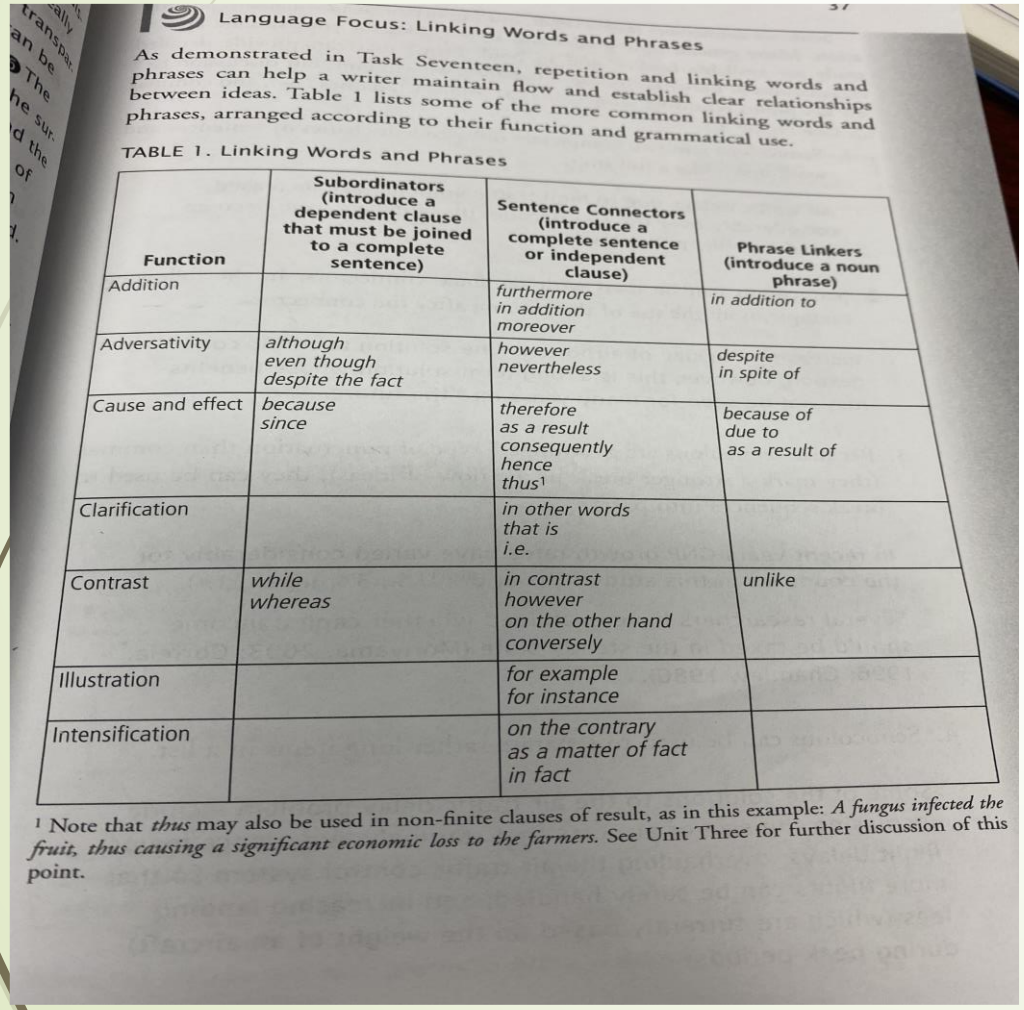
Writing Resources

- Graduate Writing Center: https://wwwcp.umes.edu/grad/graduate-writing-center/
- Rhetorical Reading Guides (RRGs): documents that contain comments in the margins about the writing moves that are being made and why. The pov shifts between reader and writer. https://wwwcp.umes.edu/grad/writing-resources/
- School of Graduate Studies Guide to the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations Handbook: https://wwwcp.umes.edu/grad/writing-resources/
- *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills 3rd Edition* by John M. Swales & Christine B. Feak
- *Becoming an Academic Writer: 50 Exercises for Paced, Productive, and Powerful Writing (2nd edition)* by Patricia Goodson
- Assignment Calculator: https://www.lib.umn.edu/services/ac
- Writing log: https://wwwcp.umes.edu/grad/writing-resources/





An example from Swales & Feak: Linking Words and Phrases AND Punctuation Usage Chart



Language Focus: Linking Words and Phrases

As demonstrated in Task Seventeen, repetition and linking words and phrases can help a writer maintain flow and establish clear relationships between ideas. Table 1 lists some of the more common linking words and phrases, arranged according to their function and grammatical use.

TABLE 1. Linking Words and Phrases

Function	Subordinators (introduce a dependent clause that must be joined to a complete sentence)	Sentence Connectors (introduce a complete sentence or independent clause)	Phrase Linkers (introduce a noun phrase)
Addition		*furthermore* *in addition* *moreover*	*in addition to*
Adversativity	*although* *even though* *despite the fact*	*however* *nevertheless*	*despite* *in spite of*
Cause and effect	*because* *since*	*therefore* *as a result* *consequently* *hence* *thus*[1]	*because of* *due to* *as a result of*
Clarification		*in other words* *that is* *i.e.*	
Contrast	*while* *whereas*	*in contrast* *however* *on the other hand* *conversely*	*unlike*
Illustration		*for example* *for instance*	
Intensification		*on the contrary* *as a matter of fact* *in fact*	

[1] Note that *thus* may also be used in non-finite clauses of result, as in this example: *A fungus infected the fruit, thus causing a significant economic loss to the farmers.* See Unit Three for further discussion of this point.

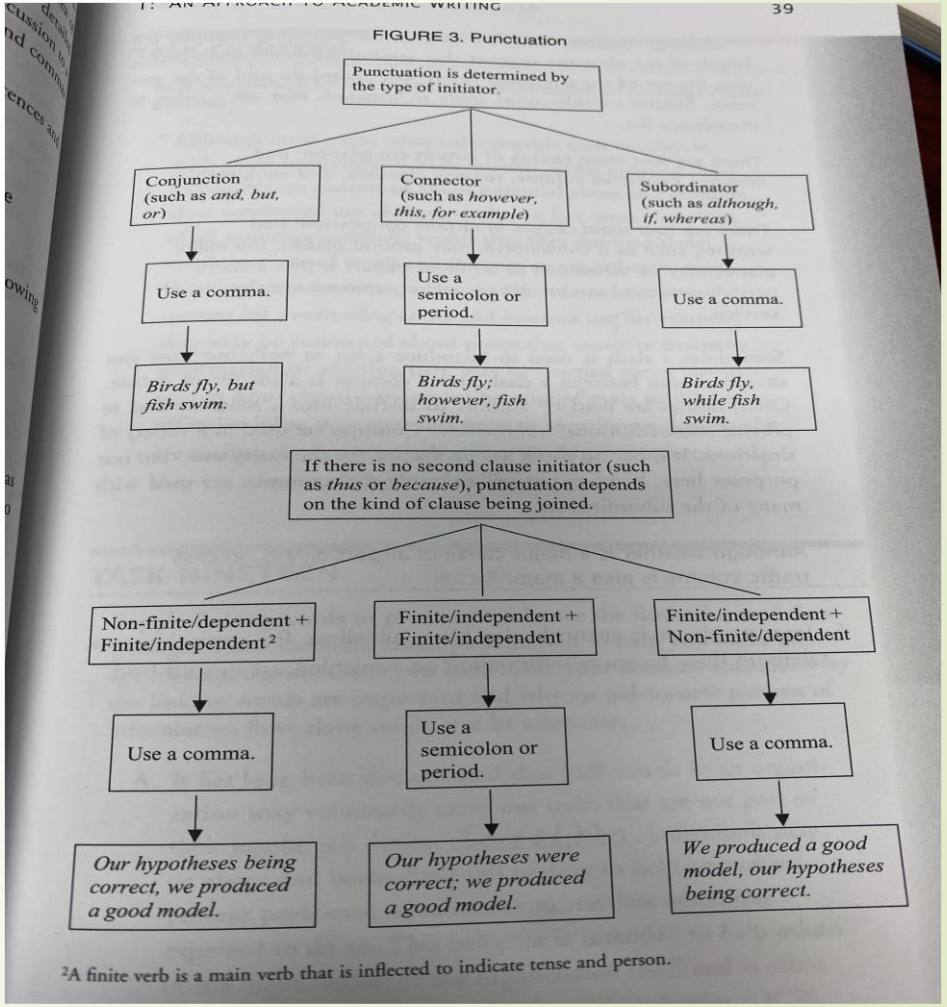


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FIGURE 3. Punctuation

Punctuation is determined by the type of initiator.

- Conjunction (such as *and, but, or*) → Use a comma. → *Birds fly, but fish swim.*
- Connector (such as *however, this, for example*) → Use a semicolon or period. → *Birds fly; however, fish swim.*
- Subordinator (such as *although, if, whereas*) → Use a comma. → *Birds fly, while fish swim.*

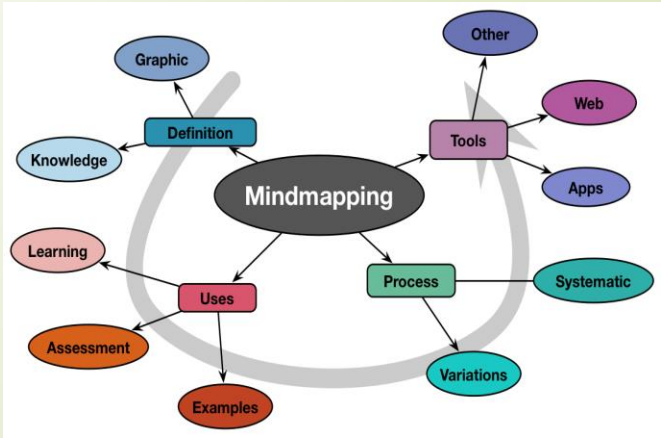
If there is no second clause initiator (such as *thus* or *because*), punctuation depends on the kind of clause being joined.

- Non-finite/dependent + Finite/independent[2] → Use a comma. → *Our hypotheses being correct, we produced a good model.*
- Finite/independent + Finite/independent → Use a semicolon or period. → *Our hypotheses were correct; we produced a good model.*
- Finite/independent + Non-finite/dependent → Use a comma. → *We produced a good model, our hypotheses being correct.*

[2] A finite verb is a main verb that is inflected to indicate tense and person.

Approaches to Writing Lengthy Documents

- Outlining
- Mind maps
- "Chunking": writing the document in chunks or sections
- Write every day, or most days/week. Use a writing log.
- "Trick" yourself into writing (ex: stop mid-sentence so you have to come back to it)
- Take a break from the writing, even if you only have time for a short one, and come back to it.
- Leave yourself notes about where you left off and where you'd like to start next.
- Consider your writing environment—is it working for you?
- Don't feel like you have to start at the beginning, unless of course you have to.
- Be gentle with yourself—writing is hard work.
- You are writing to learn.
- Writing, even academic writing, is identity work.



What's Your Next Step?

- What writing project are you working on right now?
- When is it due?
- What needs to be done in order to submit it?
- What is your writing goal for today? Tomorrow? Next week?
- How will you achieve that goal(s)?
- What writing strategies/tools do you already use?
- What strategy/tool do you think you would be willing to try?

Questions/Contact Information

- Dr. Kelsie Endicott, kjendicott@umes.edu
- https://wwwcp.umes.edu/grad/graduate-writing-center/