

General Advice on Writing a Thesis or Dissertation at UMass Amherst with Microsoft Word

1. Know the rules in the Graduate School's Guidelines for Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations.
2. You also need to know and use the style guide for your discipline/department. Do NOT make assumptions about stylistic features such as bold face or italics, how to do references or whether to indent block quotes from both margins or left margin only.
3. Know your word processor. People who are self-taught often don't discover the best way to accomplish something and make their life needlessly difficult.
4. Ask the Office of Degree Requirements questions early if you aren't sure how to handle something.
5. Dissertations must be submitted electronically. Masters Theses may still be submitted on paper. Decide early on whether you will submit your thesis on paper or electronically; this decision will affect how you meet some of the guidelines.

Paper for laser printers is often not really 8 1/2 by 11 inches any more; you need at least 1 1/2 inches of white space for the left margin, and 1 inch for top, bottom, and right. Test: create a couple of pages using the margins you plan to use, print it on the printer you plan to use, and measure carefully.

6. Fonts: use 10 or 12 point proportional (Times Roman or Helvetica suggested or 10 or 12 pitch non-proportional font (Courier).
7. You may use left- or full-justification. Be sure to be consistent. Left-justification is recommended because it does not leave large gaps between words on a line.
8. Do not use the automatic hyphenation in Word. The rules used by Word are often not Standard English, and may split words in ways that are not acceptable. Let Word bump the whole word to the next line. If you occasionally have a very long word that results in a lot of blank space at the end of a line, wait until you are completely sure the contents of the chapter are set and then hyphenate it manually.
9. Use tabs not spaces for columns etc.
10. Use Word's leading dots feature in Table of Contents, list of figures, etc. where you need dots connecting text and page numbers. Do not attempt to type the dots yourself! Especially with a proportional font it messes up the alignments.
11. Widows and orphans are not allowed. Word can prevent them from happening.

12. In bibliographies, do not break entries across pages. Word has a feature for keeping an entire paragraph on the same page.
13. The Graduate School permits three different formats of headings and Table of Contents entries. Our workshop tutorials include example files and templates for the two most commonly used formats (the second and third examples in the Graduate School's Guidelines).
- People make fewer mistakes with the simple format.
 - The numeric format is often used in the sciences.
 - It is easier to use the simple format if you are able to put all Tables and Figures at the end of the thesis or dissertation.