University of New Haven
Criminal Justice Department
Honors Thesis Guidelines for Qualitative Research

When writing the thesis, students who conduct an empirical study must adhere to the formatting guidelines presented in the current (7th) edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2020). The information provided below is a brief summary of the requirements for each component of an APA-formatted paper. As such, everything that students may need to know will not be included. Thus, students are expected to refer to the manual to determine the correct formatting. **They are discouraged from referring to online sources other than the APA website (https://apastyle.apa.org/), as they are not always accurate**. The APA website provides detailed information about how to format a paper as well as samples.

The thesis will consist of at least eight components:
• Honors Thesis Title page (separate page; Honors Program Requirement) • Title page
• Table of Contents (separate page; Honors Program requirement)
• Abstract (separate page)
• Introduction
• Method
• Analysis
• Conclusions
• Reference page (separate page)

In addition, theses may include Footnotes, Tables, Figures, Appendices, and other graphic forms of presenting information (each starting on a separate page). Footnotes appear after the end of the discussion section and before the references begin. Next, present Tables, then Figures, followed by Appendices. For Figures, include a caption on the page.

The APA manual is very specific (e.g., where the title is located on the title page, how many words can be included in the abstract, how to cite references in the text, how to format numbers) and students are expected to adhere to all requirements. Guidelines on the structure and content of the main components of the paper are described in Chapter 2 of the APA manual. A tutorial is also available at: https://extras.apa.org/apastyle/basics-7e/?_ga=2.233827613.2026613414.1588116008-110464740.1588116008#/.

Title Page
- Be sure to include:
  - Page number (page numbers appear on all pages)
  - Title (a meaningful description of the main issue under investigation in the paper)
    - For example, in the title "The Effects of Nicotine on Body Weight in Female and Male Rats," both independent and dependent variables are identified, and it is clear what issue is under investigation.
    - The title should be no more than **12 words**

Abstract

The abstract must include three key pieces of information: the objectives/purpose of study, a description of the method, and a summary of the results.

- The abstract is a brief summary (**150-250 words** in length) of the purpose and content of the paper.
- The abstract is typed in **block form** (a single paragraph with no indentation), left justified, and is written last, after the paper is finished.
- Readers use the abstract to decide whether to read the entire paper. Therefore, each sentence should be accurate and maximally informative.
- First, state the general problem under investigation, the purpose of the study, and research question(s).
- Next, provide information about the participants, including sample size and relevant demographic information.
- Then summarize the methodology (how the study was conducted).
- Briefly summarize the findings.
- Finish with a statement about the implications of the expected results (e.g., how can they be applied).
- At the bottom, include three to five **keywords**, which are terms that individuals would use when conducting a search for articles on your topic.
- Although not prohibited, it is best to avoid citing references in the Abstract.

Introduction

Initial paragraphs

• Explain the problem under investigation by defining it and then establishing the importance of studying it. The goal here is to introduce the general topic to your readers so they can place the information that you are about to describe in greater detail into some kind of context. Devote paragraphs to introducing the problem and establishing the importance of studying it. The length of this section will vary depending on the topic.

Literature review

- After introducing the problem, begin your review of the literature. This is where you summarize the relevant research on your topic. The purpose of this section is to review what research has already been done and to provide justification for your research question(s) and study.
- The recommended approach is to review the literature by themes or topics. For example, if 10 studies have investigated one aspect of a problem, review those articles in one section. Note that, in some cases, another approach will be more appropriate.
- When reviewing research studies, briefly describe the purpose of the each one, participants, procedure/methods, and findings that are relevant to your study.
- Because the literature review is typically lengthy, including subheadings that correspond to the different themes or topics is recommended.

Things to keep in mind:

- **Quotations.** Limit your use of quotes from your sources. You are expected to paraphrase instead of using direct quotation. It is recommended to include no more than five direct quotes.
- **Plagiarism.** You need to read the articles (not just the abstracts) carefully and describe the content in your own words (i.e., paraphrase). Failing to properly cite material and insufficiently paraphrasing an author's words both constitute plagiarism. See below for more information on plagiarism and tips on how to avoid it.
- **Transitions**. Include transition sentences between paragraphs, including those describing the studies. This can be achieved by linking the studies through comparing and contrasting the focus and/or findings of the studies.
- **References**. Expect to cite at least **20 sources** in your thesis. Your sources should be scholarly (e.g., from peer-reviewed journal, a government report) and can include research articles, literature reviews, policy analyses, and theoretical papers. Textbooks are not acceptable sources of information for a thesis. Avoid using websites as a source of information for your thesis. Note that there may be some exceptions (e.g., citing information provided on a government website). When possible, obtain and read all sources you want to reference in your paper. That is, do not rely on another author's summary of a source, as it may be incorrect.

Final paragraph

- The last paragraph of the introduction must explain your approach to addressing the problem under investigation and state the research question(s). What is the problem you are exploring and what is the gap in the literature that you plan to address?
- Begin the final paragraph by stating the purpose of your study followed by a very brief description of the guiding theories, principles, and processes you took to address the phenomenon you are studying (detailed information about the method does NOT belong in the introduction). Clearly state your research purpose and questions.

Method (or **Data and Methods)**

Provide a detailed explanation of your chosen methodology (Qualitative Interviews, Focus Groups, Participant Observation, Content Analysis, Discourse Analysis, etc).

- Identify the method
- Explain what the method is (if interviews, were they structured, unstructured, etc.)
- Justification: Explain why this is the best method to explore the research questions that you have (why interviews over focus groups, or why is a critical discourse analysis needed for your research).

Sample

- Explain how you got access to your data or population. How were participants, documents, etc. obtained? How did you recruit people to your study? Did you use one

method or many? How many people were recruited through each method? Did you have issues getting access? If yes, describe. If analyzing documents, articles, or images, how did you choose which ones to analyze? How did you obtain them?

- What was your selection criteria (must be 18 years of age or older, must be a Criminal Justice major, etc). For content or discourse analysis what documents did you analyze, how were they chosen, which were excluded and why)? Who/what were you looking for to participate in the study? Who/what did you exclude from the study? Justify this exclusion.
- Describe participant incentives that were provided (e.g., course credit, money), if any
- Provide a detailed description of the sample
  - Indicate the number of participants
  - Include the following demographic information about your participants:
    - Sex
    - Age
    - Race
    - Any other demographic information that is relevant to your study

Data Collection Process

- Describe the data collection process. For interviews, how did you develop your interview guide. What kinds of questions did you ask (do not simply list all questions asked, rather give an example or two and explain what you were trying to elicit from participants by asking such questions). Why did you make these choices? Did you ask the same questions for each participant or was the interview more like a conversation? Explain this choice. For discourse analysis on published articles what did you look for in each article, how did you conduct your analysis, what were your considerations when looking for themes?
- Be sure to provide a copy of the interview guide in the appendix if applicable. Refer readers to each Appendix as you mention it in the text.
- Approximately how long it took for participants to participate (average length of interview, time researcher was in the field observing, etc).
- How and where was data collected from? (i.e. in-person interviews, zoom, phone or documents obtained from an achieve, or articles obtained online).
- How did you record your data (recording interviews, notes/observations, transcripts of proceedings, photographs?)
- Describe how informed consent was obtained, if applicable to your study. Indicate that the Institutional Review Board approved all procedures.
- Are you studying a particular organization or setting? Describe that organization or setting in detail under a subheading "setting." Assign the organization a pseudonym.

Data Analysis Process

- What form was the data in before analysis (i.e. did you transcribe interviews, collect images, documents, etc)
- Describe the data analysis process. How did you code your data (by hand, using qualitative analysis software such as Nvivo, etc.).

- Did you do a content analysis, thematic analysis, or discourse analysis or other?
  - Content Analysis: categorizing and discussing the meaning of words, phrases and sentences
  - Thematic Analysis: coding and closely examining the data to identify broad themes and patterns
  - Discourse Analysis: studying communication and meaning in relation to to social context
- What was important to you while coding your data? How did you go about finding themes for analysis? (were you interested in participants motivations, identities, choices, perceptions of a certain issue?) Explain.
- How did you move from initial codes to themes for analysis (did you memo, did you look for the code that had the most quotes/data). What methods did you employ to identify these themes/categories?
- Explain attempts at confidentiality. Do all participants have a pseudonym, for example? Did you remove identifying information? Explain.

Positionality and Ethical Issues

- Write about how your position as the researcher shaped the data analysis. How do your identities, values, and assumptions shape data collection and analysis. Many people will write about their social identities (i.e. sex, race, age) and how this shaped interactions with participants. How do the participants perceive you in your role and how might this shape their answers to your questions? You should also include if you are an insider or an outsider to the population under study. If you study the military, are you a service member or a civilian and how does this shape data collection and/or analysis?
- Did any ethical issues come up during data collection? Explain them and how you addressed them. (i.e. sensitive topics, breaches of confidentiality, etc).

Analysis

- Briefly give an overview of your findings and how they relate to one another. Summarize the themes and how they connect to your broader point.
- Identify all themes with a subheading.
- After your brief overview, introduce theme 1
- Briefly introduce the theme, then provide data that support the themes. If you are using interview data introduce the participant who said the quote.
- After you provide the quote, analyze it. In the analysis section you should rely on your own interpretation of what the quote/data is saying and explain it to the reader. Be careful NOT to simply summarize the data/quote. You want to tell us what the meaning is behind the data/quote. You MAY use existing literature here to contextualize your analysis but do not over-cite in this section.
- In general you should have 3 pieces of data/quotes for each theme that show related but distinct aspects of that theme. That is, each piece of data should relate to the subheading but illuminate a different aspect of the at subheading. Analyze each piece of data after you include it in the paper. It is really important not to over-use data here either. If more

than one piece of data makes the same point (and they should) pick one of them to analyze.
- After all data is included for the theme, summarize the theme in 3-4 sentences and transition to the next theme.
- Aim to have 3-4 main themes in the Analysis section that all follow this format. These themes should be related to one or more central points that brings them all together. Weaving the themes together will be the focus of the conclusion section.

Conclusion

- In the first paragraph of the conclusion section, briefly restate the purpose of the study and summarize your themes/codes/etc.
- Describe the central point or points that your themes make together. What is the larger picture that these themes illuminate? Be sure to cite literature in this section.
- Broaden out even further. How can your main idea/broader point be used by future scholars? How could your findings be useful beyond the context in which you studied them? Be sure to cite literature here.
- How do your findings relate to and the literature that you cited?
- Are there any policy implications? Explain them
- Next, identify the limitations of your study. No research is perfect; every research design has its limitations. Researchers are obligated to acknowledge the limitations in the studies they conduct. Therefore, you will devote **at least two** paragraphs to identifying the limitations of your proposed study. These limitations should focus on substantive issues such as the methodology. Explain what your data could not possible include because of your chosen methods.
- The next task is to provide the reader with directions for future research:
  - Describe **at least two** things that can be done to further research on this important topic, beyond simply correcting the problems with your proposed study
  - Tip: Review the research articles you obtained to see how they formulated their suggestions for future research and use a similar format.
  - Tell the reader what needs to be done as the next step in this field of research and why it is important to continue studying this topic.
- Provide your reader with closure. Do not end your discussion abruptly and leave your reader without a take-home message.
- As with the Introduction, it is helpful to include subheadings (e.g., Limitations, Recommendations for Future Research).

Reference Page

In this section, you will list all sources cited in your thesis. Be sure to follow APA's specific guidelines for formatting your references.

Tables and Appendices

APA has specific guidelines for different types of tables and appendices so be sure to refer to the manual in order to format them properly. <u>Do not simply paste SPSS or Excel output into your tables</u>.

General Formatting Requirements:

Your <u>entire</u> paper must adhere to the following general formatting requirements:
- 12-point Times New Roman font (required by Honors Program)
- 1.5" margin on the left side, 1" margin on the right (required by Honors Program)
- Double-spaced (not including Appendices, Tables, Figures and block quotations)
- All type left justified (creating an uneven right margin)

Other Matters

Spelling and grammar

Proofread your paper (reading it out loud can help you identify phrasing that is not clear) and have someone else proofread it before you turn it in to your advisor. Microsoft Word also has a useful Spelling and Grammar tool that can be utilized.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious ethical infraction and, thus, you need to cite your sources properly. The APA manual provides guidance on properly citing sources and avoiding plagiarism. Quotation marks should be used to indicate the exact words of another, and proper citation should be used each time another author is paraphrased (i.e., when summarizing a passage or reordering a sentence and/or changing some of the words.

Use Turnitin to check to make sure you have sufficiently paraphrased your sources. **A final report from Turnitin.com must be provided to the Thesis Coordinator with your final paper on November 16, 2022 (for Fall 2022 graduation) or April 14, 2023 (for Spring 2023 graduation).**

Writing well. You are encouraged to read Chapter 4 of the APA manual, titled "Writing Style and Grammar" It provides excellent suggestions for writing well.

Reference

American Psychological Association (2020). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (7th Ed.)*. Washington, DC: Author.

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