

HEADINGS FOR THE FINAL CHAPTER OF YOUR PHD

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This guide to writing the final chapter of a PhD thesis was designed for theses in experimental psychology consisting of a number of related experiments. It is assumed that each experiment has been discussed at some length previously. Thus the role of the final chapter is to pull everything together. It should not be long, nor should it introduce new material into the work. A suggested length is between 12 and 24 pages of typescript where each page is assumed to have about 300 words. It can be adapted to other forms of theses fairly easily.

1. **Summary of Research Findings (2–3 pages)**

This should tie previously presented sections of the work together. Do not become repetitious. The examiner should be left with a clear impression of ‘where’ the thesis has trodden and the major findings. Avoid the temptation to go into detail here.

2. **Comparison with Previous Research (3–4 pages)**

Careful and detailed comparison of the outcome of individual studies does not belong here. The aim is to state how the research area stands with your contributions added to it. Point out major parallels and important differences. You should attempt to resolve differences with previous studies: At the end of this section the examiner should know how you believe your research stands amongst related studies.

3. **Theoretical Implications of Findings (3–4 pages)**

Having summarised your research and reconciled it with the area in general you should be in a position to take a global theoretical stance. Be careful to distinguish those areas where your research has provided critical evidence for or against certain theories from those in which it simply lends support or more weight to certain arguments.

4. **Limitations of the Study/Investigation (1–2 pages)**

Every study has limitations. You should demonstrate to the examiner that you are capable of taking a critical eye to your own work. Note that a litany of ways in which the study was less than perfect is not what is required: criticisms must be followed through. Far too often Psych I and PhD students list possible ‘problems’ that are inconsistent with the data that actually arose from the experiment. Keep to the broad or critical areas: point out problems that leave major questions open or less than securely answered.

5. **Future Research**

Anyone can think of a list of minor variations on the theme of what they’ve done that could be done next. This is likely to be a boring addition to the thesis. It must be more directed and purposive than that:

5.1 **Direct Extensions of the Study (1–2 pages)**

This section should say where you would go on from here and why. What sort of study should be contemplated now and what issues would it

resolve? Perhaps what you've done can be regarded as "an excellent opportunity for some-one" or the natural first step of something else, e.g., the first wave of a multi-wave study. Don't however assume that a longitudinal study starting from your cross section would be inherently good: explain what such an extension would add.

5.2 Broader Issues to be Covered in Future Work (1–2 pages)

This section can be a little more fanciful than 5.1. What type and scope of work is required to bring about advancement in this area generally? Perhaps clinical work now needs research in the general population to test its generalizability. Perhaps different methods of measurement are required.

6. Practical Implications of the Research (1–2 pages)

In many theses this section will be short. Don't include it if it would be ridiculous to do so.

7. Conclusion (1 page)

This should be a very brief and general statement (1 or 2 paragraphs) to summarize what has been found. Avoid going over things repetitiously again. Above all it should be uplifting: the examiner is racing to finish the thing and put out the light. Leave him or her with a warm impression of yourself!