

Organizing an Honors Thesis
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1. Overview: Principles but no hard and fast rules

The **structure** of an honors thesis depends on many things. These include the subject or subfield, methodological approach, style of analysis, among other things. As you decide upon and finalize your thesis structure it will be helpful to consult these three resources.

- **Your thesis advisor** – As with most things related to your thesis, this should be your first stop.

- **Other theses in your field** – Seeing how other students have structured their honors thesis can give you a good idea of what you might want yours to look like. Looking at the library to find theses on topics like yours or that use methods like the ones you have used can give you models to consider. Have a look here at W&M: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses/>

- **Published work in your field** – Hopefully, you will aspire to try to get the research from your thesis published once you have defended it. If that is your goal, it would make sense now to start thinking of structuring your thesis like the articles or published reports that you've seen. Again, seek out work that comes from your field, that uses approaches like yours, or that speaks to the kinds of audiences you would like your work to address.

A related issue is the **length** of the thesis. How many pages should it be? This, again depends on several things and many options are available. Seeking your advisor's advice is crucial here. Some faculty who tend to produce articles in their research often direct their students to think of their thesis like a journal article. That kind of approach would suggest a thesis that runs around 40 pages, all inclusive of the abstract, text, any tables and figures or visuals, notes, and works cited. Other faculty who prefer to write books or short monographs might expect more pages than that. Many approaches are possible, so check with your advisor.

2. Suggested structure: Here is the structure that I suggest to students. It follows the article or report-type approach, with a few additional wrinkles.

Title and committee member signature page

Front matter – This will likely be fairly common across different fields of study

Table of contents

Acknowledgements

Dedication

Title, Abstract, and author byline

Heart of the thesis

Introduction

Main body of the analysis – here's where you'll see much variation across fields

<i>Empirical article common sections</i>	<i>Theoretical article</i>
Lit review / framework / hypotheses	→ Might have sections organized around different authors or key works and then sections that analyze or put those elements in dialogue with one another
Methods and data	
Results	
Discussion of results	

Conclusion

Works cited [if using the author-date system in the text]

Appendices