

chicago manual of style thesis formatting tips

chicago manual of style thesis formatting tips are essential for any graduate student aiming for a polished, professional, and accepted dissertation or thesis. Navigating the intricacies of academic formatting can be daunting, but understanding the core principles of the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) will pave the way for a successful submission. This comprehensive guide delves into the critical aspects of thesis formatting according to CMOS, covering everything from preliminary pages to citation styles and final manuscript preparation. We will explore specific requirements for title pages, table of contents, chapter organization, footnotes/endnotes, bibliographies, and the handling of figures and tables, all while ensuring your work adheres to academic rigor and CMOS standards. Mastering these details is not just about aesthetics; it's about presenting your research with clarity and credibility, demonstrating your attention to scholarly convention.

Table of Contents

Introduction to Chicago Manual of Style Thesis Formatting

Essential Elements of a Chicago Style Thesis

Title Page Formatting According to CMOS

Crafting an Accurate Table of Contents for Your Thesis

Chapter Structure and Manuscript Guidelines

Footnotes and Endnotes: Mastering Chicago Style Citations

Bibliography or Works Cited Page Construction

Formatting Figures, Tables, and Other Visual Elements

Appendix Preparation and Inclusion

Final Review and Submission Best Practices

Understanding Chicago Manual of Style Thesis Formatting Basics

The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) provides a widely accepted framework for academic writing and formatting, particularly in the humanities and social sciences. For thesis and dissertation writers, adhering to CMOS is crucial for ensuring consistency, clarity, and professional presentation. While specific departmental or institutional guidelines might exist, the overarching principles of CMOS offer a solid foundation for your manuscript.

This section lays the groundwork for understanding the fundamental principles that govern thesis formatting under the Chicago style. It emphasizes the importance of meticulous attention to detail, as even minor deviations can impact the perception of your scholarly work. We will cover general guidelines for margins, pagination, and typeface, which are the bedrock of any well-formatted academic document.

General Formatting Requirements for Theses

Before diving into specific sections, it's important to establish the general formatting rules that apply throughout your thesis. These are the invisible threads that hold your document together, ensuring a uniform appearance. Consistency is key; once a format is chosen, it should be applied uniformly to all similar elements.

The margins are a critical element. Typically, CMOS recommends one-inch margins on all sides of the page: top, bottom, left, and right. This provides ample space for binding and allows readers to hold the page comfortably without obscuring text. The left margin is sometimes specified as slightly larger by institutions to accommodate binding, so always double-check any institutional requirements in conjunction with CMOS.

Pagination is another vital aspect. The preliminary pages, including the title page, abstract, table of contents, and lists of figures and tables, are usually numbered with lowercase Roman numerals (i, ii, iii, etc.). The main body of the thesis, starting with the first page of the introduction or the first chapter, is then paginated with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.). The title page itself is counted as page i but does not display a number.

Regarding typeface, CMOS generally recommends a clear, readable font. Common choices include Times New Roman, Arial, or Georgia, typically in a 12-point size. Headings and subheadings should also maintain a consistent font size and style, often slightly larger or bolded to differentiate them from the main text. Avoid overly decorative or unusual fonts, as they can detract from the seriousness of your research.

Essential Elements of a Chicago Style Thesis

A thesis formatted according to the Chicago Manual of Style is a structured document with several essential components. Each part plays a vital role in guiding the reader through your research, from the initial overview to the detailed evidence and conclusions. Understanding the purpose and formatting of each element is crucial for a cohesive and professional submission.

These elements are not just arbitrary requirements; they serve to enhance the accessibility and understanding of your work. They provide context, summarize key information, and offer pathways for readers to locate specific content within your extensive research project. Proper formatting ensures that these components function effectively.

The Role of the Abstract in Your Thesis

The abstract is a concise summary of your entire thesis, typically ranging from 150 to 300 words. Its purpose is to provide a brief overview of your research problem, methodology, key findings, and conclusions. It should be informative and engaging, allowing readers to quickly grasp the essence of your work and decide if they wish to delve deeper.

The abstract page is usually numbered with a lowercase Roman numeral, following the title page. It does not have a chapter number. The heading "Abstract" is centered at the top of the page. The abstract itself is presented as a single, unbroken paragraph, without indentation. It should be written in clear, direct language and accurately reflect the content of your thesis.

Structuring the Table of Contents

The Table of Contents (TOC) acts as a roadmap for your thesis, listing all major sections and subsections with their corresponding page numbers. This allows readers to navigate your work efficiently and locate specific topics of interest. It's a critical component for demonstrating the organization and scope of your research.

The TOC should include all chapter titles, section headings, and any preliminary pages that are numbered. Subheadings are typically indented to show their hierarchical relationship to the main chapter titles. Ensure that the text in the TOC precisely matches the headings used within the body of your thesis, and that the page numbers are accurate. The heading "Table of Contents" is centered at the top of its page.

Lists of Figures, Tables, and Other Visuals

If your thesis includes numerous figures, tables, or other types of visual elements, CMOS requires separate lists for each. These lists, much like the Table of Contents, help readers quickly locate specific visual data within your document. They are placed after the Table of Contents and before the main body of the thesis.

Each list should have a clear heading (e.g., "List of Figures," "List of Tables"). For each entry, you will list the item number (e.g., Figure 1, Table 2), a concise description of the visual element, and its corresponding page number. Ensure consistency in the descriptions and accuracy in the pagination. Like the TOC, these lists are typically numbered with lowercase Roman numerals.

Title Page Formatting According to CMOS

The title page is the first impression your thesis makes, and its formatting under the Chicago Manual of Style is highly specific. It must convey essential information clearly and professionally, adhering to a prescribed layout. While institutions might have slight variations, the core elements remain consistent with CMOS recommendations.

This section will guide you through the precise placement and content of each element on your title page, ensuring it meets scholarly standards. A well-formatted title page signals attention to detail and respect for academic conventions, setting a positive tone for the entire document.

Essential Information for Your Thesis Title Page

The title page should contain the full title of your thesis, your name, the name of your department or program, the name of your university, and the date of submission. Each piece of information is carefully arranged to create a balanced and readable page.

The title of the thesis is the most prominent element and is typically centered and bolded, often in all capital letters or with initial caps. It should be placed in the upper half of the page. Your name follows, also centered, and usually in a slightly smaller font size than the title. Below your name, centered, you will list your department or program and the university's name.

Finally, the submission date (month and year) is placed at the bottom of the page, centered. It's important to note that the title page is considered page i but does not have the page number printed on it. All other preliminary pages will follow with lowercase Roman numeral pagination.

Variations in Title Page Requirements

While CMOS provides a standard, it's paramount to consult your university's graduate school handbook or your department's specific formatting guidelines. These institutional requirements often supersede or supplement CMOS, dictating specific wording, placement, or inclusion of additional elements like your advisor's name or degree type. Always prioritize your institution's directives when they differ from CMOS.

Crafting an Accurate Table of Contents for Your Thesis

The Table of Contents (TOC) is a critical navigational tool for your thesis. It provides a hierarchical overview of your entire work, allowing readers to quickly locate specific sections, chapters, and even subsections. Accuracy and clarity in the TOC are therefore paramount for both reader experience and the overall professionalism of your document.

This section will detail the process of creating a Chicago-style Table of Contents, ensuring it is comprehensive, correctly formatted, and accurately reflects the structure and pagination of your thesis. Following these guidelines will enhance the usability of your research for all readers.

Elements of a Chicago-Style Table of Contents

A Chicago-style TOC includes all major divisions of your thesis: preliminary pages (if numbered and deemed significant by your institution), chapters, and any major sections within chapters that warrant inclusion. Each entry in the TOC must precisely match the heading used in the body of the thesis.

- Chapter titles (e.g., "Chapter 1: Introduction")
- Major section headings within chapters (e.g., "1.1 Background of the Study")
- Subheadings within those sections (e.g., "1.1.1 Historical Context")
- Appendices and their titles
- Bibliography or Works Cited

The TOC itself is preceded by the heading "Table of Contents," which is centered at the top of the page. The entries are typically left-aligned, with chapter numbers and titles clearly presented. Subheadings are indented progressively to indicate their hierarchical relationship.

Ensuring Accurate Pagination and Alignment

Accurate pagination is perhaps the most crucial aspect of a functional Table of Contents. Each entry must be followed by its corresponding page number. To maintain a clean and professional look, CMOS often uses leader dots (a series of periods) to connect the entry title to its page number. These leaders should be consistently spaced.

The page numbers are typically right-aligned. When creating your TOC, especially if you make revisions to your thesis, it is imperative to update the page numbers accordingly. Many word processing programs offer automatic TOC generation features, which can be invaluable, but always double-check their accuracy after making any changes to your document.

Chapter Structure and Manuscript Guidelines

The main body of your thesis, comprising your chapters, is where your research is presented in detail. The Chicago Manual of Style provides guidance on how to structure these chapters for clarity and logical flow, ensuring your arguments are presented effectively. Adhering to these structural guidelines enhances the readability and impact of your scholarly work.

This section will explore the typical structure of thesis chapters and essential manuscript formatting that contributes to a professional and accessible presentation of your research findings. Consistency in how you present your arguments and data is paramount.

Structuring Your Thesis Chapters

While specific chapter breakdowns vary by discipline and research topic, a common structure includes an introduction, literature review, methodology, results/findings, discussion, and

conclusion. However, CMOS emphasizes logical progression and clear headings to guide the reader.

Each chapter should begin on a new page. The chapter number and title are typically centered at the top of the page. For example: "Chapter 1: Introduction." Following the chapter title, the main text begins. Within chapters, you will use headings and subheadings to break down your content into manageable sections. These headings should be consistently formatted throughout the thesis.

CMOS suggests using a clear hierarchy for headings. For instance, a main heading might be bolded and centered, a subheading might be bolded and left-aligned, and a sub-subheading might be italicized and indented. The key is to maintain a consistent system that clearly delineates different levels of information.

Manuscript Formatting for Body Text

The main body text of your thesis should be double-spaced, with a 12-point readable font. Paragraphs should be indented at the beginning, typically by 0.5 inches, except for the first paragraph after a heading or a block quotation, which is not indented.

Block quotations, which are longer than roughly 40 words (or more than four lines of prose), should be formatted differently. They are typically set off from the main text by a double space above and below, and then indented from the left margin without quotation marks. This visually distinguishes lengthy quotations and emphasizes their importance.

Consistency in spacing, indentation, and formatting of all textual elements is crucial. This uniformity contributes to a professional appearance and makes your thesis easier for committee members and future readers to engage with. Always ensure that your chosen formatting for headings and body text is applied without exception across the entire manuscript.

Footnotes and Endnotes: Mastering Chicago Style Citations

Correctly citing your sources is fundamental to academic integrity, and the Chicago Manual of Style offers two primary systems for doing so: footnotes and endnotes. Both systems are acceptable for theses, and the choice often depends on institutional preference or personal preference. The crucial aspect is consistency and adherence to the established Chicago format for citations.

This section will provide a detailed look at how to implement footnotes and endnotes according to CMOS, including their structure, content, and the proper way to cite various types of sources. Mastering these citation methods is vital for avoiding plagiarism and giving due credit to your intellectual predecessors.

Implementing Footnotes in Your Thesis

Footnotes are placed at the bottom of the page on which the reference is made. They are indicated in the text by a superscript Arabic numeral placed after the punctuation of the material being cited. For example: "This theory was first proposed by Smith (2020, p. 15)."¹

The footnote itself begins with the same Arabic numeral, followed by a space, and then the citation information. The first citation to a source in a footnote is usually a full citation, providing all necessary bibliographic details. Subsequent citations to the same source are typically shortened, often using the author's last name, a shortened title, and the page number. Superscript numbers in the text should be sequential and not restart with each page.

Implementing Endnotes in Your Thesis

Endnotes are collected at the end of the thesis, typically after the appendix and before the bibliography. Like footnotes, they are indicated in the text by superscript Arabic numerals. However, all endnotes for the entire thesis are compiled in a single list at the end.

The endnote list begins with the heading "Notes" or "Endnotes," centered at the top of its page. Each endnote is numbered sequentially with Arabic numerals, matching the superscripts in the text. The first citation to a source in the endnote list is a full citation, while subsequent citations are shortened. The advantage of endnotes is that they do not interrupt the flow of reading the main text as much as footnotes can.

Key Elements of a Chicago Style Citation

Whether using footnotes or endnotes, the content of the citation follows specific rules. For a book, a typical full citation includes the author's full name, the title of the book in italics, the place of publication, the publisher, and the year of publication. For journal articles, it includes the author, article title in quotation marks, journal title in italics, volume and issue numbers, date, and page range.

- **For a Book:** Author Last Name, First Name. *Title of Book*. Place of Publication: Publisher, Year.
- **For a Journal Article:** Author Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Title of Journal* Volume, no. Issue (Year): Page range.
- **Subsequent Citations:** Author Last Name, Shortened Title, Page Number.

It is vital to consult the latest edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* for the most up-to-date and specific guidelines for citing different types of sources, including websites, dissertations, and other

less common materials.

Bibliography or Works Cited Page Construction

The bibliography, or "Works Cited" page, is a comprehensive list of all the sources you have referenced in your thesis. It's an indispensable part of your academic work, demonstrating the research foundation upon which your arguments are built and allowing readers to explore your sources further. The Chicago Manual of Style provides clear guidelines for its construction.

This section will outline the format for creating a Chicago-style bibliography, ensuring it is accurate, organized, and complete. Proper construction of this page is essential for academic rigor and the overall credibility of your research.

Formatting the Bibliography Page

The bibliography is typically placed at the very end of your thesis, following the appendices. The heading "Bibliography" is centered at the top of the page. Unlike preliminary pages or chapters, the bibliography page is usually numbered with Arabic numerals, continuing the pagination from the main body of the thesis.

Entries in the bibliography are typically arranged alphabetically by the author's last name. Each entry should be formatted consistently according to CMOS guidelines. The first line of each entry is flush with the left margin, and subsequent lines are indented (a hanging indent). This formatting makes it easy to scan the list for authors.

Content and Order of Bibliographic Entries

The content and order of information within each bibliographic entry are crucial. CMOS follows a specific pattern for books, journal articles, websites, and other sources. While the exact details can vary slightly depending on the source type, the general principle is to provide enough information for a reader to locate the source.

- **Books:** Author Last Name, First Name. *Title of Book*. Place of Publication: Publisher, Year.
- **Journal Articles:** Author Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Title of Journal* Volume, no. Issue (Year): Page range.
- **Websites:** Author Last Name, First Name (if known). "Title of Web Page." Name of Website. Last modified or accessed Date. URL.

It's important to note that the bibliography lists all sources consulted, even if they were not directly cited in the text. However, if your institution specifies a "Works Cited" page, this would only include sources that were actually cited in your thesis. Always confirm your institution's preference.

The primary difference between a bibliography and a "Works Cited" list lies in their scope. A bibliography is more comprehensive, encompassing all materials used in the research process, while a "Works Cited" list is strictly limited to those sources explicitly referenced. For thesis formatting, always adhere to the specific directive from your graduate school or department.

Formatting Figures, Tables, and Other Visual Elements

Visual elements such as figures (images, graphs, charts) and tables are integral to many theses, providing data and illustrations that enhance understanding. The Chicago Manual of Style offers clear guidelines on how to format and present these elements to ensure clarity and consistency within your document.

Proper formatting of visuals not only makes them easier to interpret but also maintains the professional appearance of your thesis. This section will cover the placement, titling, and captioning of figures and tables according to CMOS standards.

Presenting Tables in Your Thesis

Tables are used to present data in a structured, row-and-column format. According to CMOS, each table should have a number (e.g., Table 1, Table 2) and a title. The table number and title are typically placed above the table. The title should be concise but descriptive, clearly indicating the content of the table.

The table itself should be clear and easy to read, with appropriate headings for each column and row. Horizontal lines are generally used to separate the title from the table body and to delineate sections within the table. Vertical lines are used more sparingly, often only to separate columns if necessary for clarity. The table should ideally fit within the standard page margins.

If a table is too long to fit on a single page, it should be continued on the next page. The continuation page should repeat the table number and title, often with the word "continued" added. The column headings should also be repeated on the continuation page.

Formatting Figures in Your Thesis

Figures encompass a wide range of visual materials, including photographs, line drawings, charts, and graphs. Like tables, each figure must be numbered sequentially (e.g., Figure 1, Figure 2) and accompanied by a title or caption. The figure number and caption are typically placed below the figure.

The caption should be clear and informative, explaining what the figure depicts and providing any necessary context. If the figure is derived from another source, it must be properly cited in the caption, following the same principles as in-text citations. For example: "Figure 3. Economic growth in the United States, 1990-2020 (Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021)."

Figures should be placed as close as possible to the text that refers to them. If a figure is too large to fit within the page margins, it may be necessary to reduce its size or present it as an appendix. Ensure that all images are of sufficient resolution to be clearly visible when printed.

Notes and Sources for Visuals

Below the table or figure caption, you may include notes to provide additional explanatory information or to cite the source of the data. General notes apply to the entire table or figure, while specific notes refer to particular entries or parts of the visual. Source notes indicate where the information was obtained, and they must follow the citation style used in your footnotes or bibliography.

It is crucial to ensure that all visual elements are referenced within the main text of your thesis. For example, you might write: "As shown in Figure 1, there was a significant increase in..." This directs the reader's attention to the relevant visual and integrates it into your narrative. A consistent approach to numbering, titling, and captioning will greatly enhance the overall clarity and professionalism of your thesis.

Appendix Preparation and Inclusion

The appendix section of your thesis is reserved for supplementary material that is too extensive or tangential to include in the main body but is still relevant to your research. This can include raw data, survey instruments, detailed statistical analyses, interview transcripts, or lengthy code. The Chicago Manual of Style outlines how to prepare and present this material effectively.

Properly formatted appendices ensure that valuable supporting information is accessible without disrupting the flow of your core argument, contributing to a more complete and robust presentation of your research.

Structuring and Numbering Appendices

Appendices are typically placed after the bibliography or works cited page and before the index (if one is included). The first page of the appendix section should be a general appendix title page, which may simply read "Appendix" or list the specific titles of all appendices. Each individual appendix is then presented on its own page or series of pages.

Each appendix should be clearly labeled. The most common method, following CMOS, is to label

them with capital letters: Appendix A, Appendix B, Appendix C, and so on. If there are many appendices, you can also use Appendix A.1, Appendix A.2 for subsections within a larger appendix.

The heading for each appendix should be centered at the top of its page, for example, "Appendix A: Survey Instrument." If an appendix contains multiple sections, each section may also have its own subheading. Ensure that the appendix titles are descriptive and accurately reflect the content within.

Content Guidelines for Appendices

The content of appendices should be material that directly supports or elaborates upon your thesis research but would interrupt the narrative if placed in the main text. This could include:

- Raw data sets
- Questionnaires or interview protocols
- Detailed statistical tables or outputs
- Transcripts of interviews or focus groups
- Source code for computational models
- Photographic documentation
- Permissions to use copyrighted material

It is crucial that the material included in the appendix is relevant and directly contributes to the understanding or verification of your research findings. Avoid including extraneous information.

Furthermore, any appendix material that is not your own original work must be properly cited. If you are including lengthy quotes or reproduced figures/tables from other sources, ensure they are clearly attributed and follow copyright guidelines. Like other parts of the thesis, appendices should be paginated. Typically, the pagination continues from the main body of the thesis, using Arabic numerals, with the first page of Appendix A being the next numbered page.

Final Review and Submission Best Practices

The final stage of preparing your thesis for submission is a rigorous review process. Attention to detail at this juncture is paramount to ensure that your work meets all formatting requirements and is free from errors. Adhering to best practices for the final review will significantly increase the likelihood of a smooth and successful submission and defense.

This section will guide you through the essential steps of a final review, focusing on catching any lingering formatting issues, errors, and ensuring compliance with both CMOS and your institution's specific guidelines. A thorough final check is your last opportunity to polish your work before it is evaluated.

Thorough Proofreading and Editing

Before submitting your thesis, it is imperative to conduct a comprehensive proofread and edit. This goes beyond checking for basic grammar and spelling errors; it involves meticulously reviewing every aspect of your document.

Focus on:

- **Consistency:** Ensure consistent formatting of headings, subheadings, font styles, spacing, and punctuation throughout the entire document.
- **Citations:** Double-check that all in-text citations correspond to entries in your bibliography or notes, and that both are formatted according to CMOS. Verify the accuracy of page numbers and publication details.
- **Pagination:** Confirm that all pages are correctly numbered, with preliminary pages in Roman numerals and the main body in Arabic numerals, and that the Table of Contents accurately reflects these page numbers.
- **Visuals:** Ensure all figures and tables are clearly labeled, numbered, captioned, and cited, and that they appear in the text or appendix as intended.
- **Word Choice and Tone:** Review for clarity, conciseness, and a consistent academic tone.

It is highly recommended to have multiple people proofread your thesis. Fresh eyes can often catch errors that you might have overlooked due to familiarity with the text.

Checking Institutional Guidelines

While this guide focuses on the Chicago Manual of Style, it is absolutely essential to cross-reference your thesis against your university's specific graduate school or departmental formatting requirements. These institutional guidelines often contain specific mandates that may differ from or add to CMOS standards.

Common institutional requirements include:

- Specific margins for binding purposes.

- Mandatory inclusion of certain preliminary pages (e.g., acknowledgments, abstract).
- Preferred citation style if it differs from CMOS.
- Formatting for the title page, including specific wording for degree names or university departments.
- Submission deadlines and procedures.

Failure to comply with institutional guidelines can lead to delays or even rejection of your thesis submission, regardless of how well it adheres to CMOS. Always download and carefully review your institution's official thesis formatting manual.

Final Submission Procedures

Understand the submission process for your thesis. This typically involves submitting a digital copy (often as a PDF) and sometimes a physical bound copy. Familiarize yourself with the required file formats, naming conventions, and submission portals.

Ensure that your PDF is generated correctly, preserving all formatting, fonts, and image quality. Test the PDF by opening it on different devices or software to confirm it displays as intended. If your institution requires bound copies, use a professional binding service that meets their specifications. Submitting a well-formatted, error-free thesis is the culmination of your hard work and a testament to your scholarly diligence.

Q: What are the primary differences between CMOS footnote and endnote citation styles?

A: The primary difference lies in their placement. Footnotes appear at the bottom of the page where the citation occurs, indicated by a superscript number in the text. Endnotes are compiled in a list at the end of the document, also indicated by superscript numbers in the text. Both systems follow similar rules for content and formatting of the citations themselves.

Q: How should I format my thesis title page according to the Chicago Manual of Style for a thesis?

A: The title page should be centered and contain the full thesis title, your name, the department, the university, and the submission date. The title is the most prominent, followed by your name, then institutional information, and finally the date at the bottom. The title page is counted as page i but has no number printed on it.

Q: Can I use a font other than Times New Roman for my thesis?

A: Yes, CMOS generally recommends a clear, readable 12-point font. While Times New Roman is common, other acceptable choices include Arial, Georgia, or Garamond. The key is legibility and consistency. Always check if your institution has a mandated font.

Q: How do I handle block quotations in my thesis according to CMOS?

A: Block quotations, typically longer than four lines of prose or roughly 40 words, should be set off from the main text. This involves a double space above and below the quotation, and then indenting the entire block from the left margin without using quotation marks.

Q: What is the recommended margin size for a thesis formatted with the Chicago Manual of Style?

A: CMOS generally recommends one-inch margins on all sides of the page (top, bottom, left, and right). However, it's common for institutions to require a slightly larger left margin (e.g., 1.5 inches) to accommodate binding. Always verify your institution's specific requirements.

Q: When should I use a bibliography versus a "Works Cited" page in my thesis?

A: A bibliography, as per CMOS, lists all sources consulted during your research, even if not directly cited. A "Works Cited" page, on the other hand, lists only those sources that are explicitly cited within the text of your thesis. Your institution will typically specify which one is required.

Q: How should figures and tables be numbered and titled in a Chicago style thesis?

A: Figures and tables are numbered sequentially using Arabic numerals (Figure 1, Table 2). The figure number and caption are typically placed below the figure, while the table number and title are placed above the table. Both should be clear and descriptive.

Q: Is it necessary to include a Table of Contents for my thesis if it's short?

A: Yes, a Table of Contents is a standard and essential component of any thesis, regardless of length. It serves as a navigational tool for readers and demonstrates the organization of your research. It should include all chapter titles and major section headings.

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