



## Guide to Quality Standards in the Elaboration of Doctoral Theses

by doctoral students of the Multidisciplinary Doctoral School of  
SNSPA

The doctoral thesis represents the main product of doctoral studies, being the result of the scientific research carried out by the doctoral student during the doctoral internship. This must prove an original contribution in the field of social sciences, respectively in the specific field of the doctoral studies (communication sciences, political sciences, administrative sciences, sociology, management).

There are two **types of** doctoral theses approved within the Multidisciplinary Doctoral School of SNSPA, respectively:

**A.** *The classic model/monograph* - comprises 80,000 – 100,000 words and is structured in chapters coagulated around a central question, based on a detailed construction and development of the argumentation with the aim of making a relevant contribution in the chosen thematic area;

**B.** *The tutored model/collection of articles* - includes 50,000 - 60,000 words and is structured in 4-5 chapters of the consistency of publishable or already published studies by the author during the doctoral period, united by a common theme, answering specific research questions. Published works must make the object of some journals indexed in international databases recognized by CNATDCU in each domain.

The thesis type chosen by a PhD student is consensually established with the doctoral advisor and is validated by the guidance committee when approving the research project at the end of the first year of doctoral studies.

### Substantial criteria in the elaboration of the doctoral thesis

The doctoral thesis is organized starting from *clear research questions*, which investigate *topical issues*, specific to the targeted doctoral field. The thesis must demonstrate internal consistency at the content level and a natural integration of its parts. The organization of the work will be done in relation to *the research questions announced from the beginning of the thesis*, following the critical treatment of the chosen theme, in an analytical and synthetic manner alike. The thesis must cover at least two levels: the review of specialized literature in which the main theoretical models related to the chosen topic are debated, but also modern developments, from



recent and relevant studies, respectively the elaboration of some sections through which the doctoral student proves the ability to lead concrete research using specific research methodologies, adapted to the topic and the way in which the respective topic is approached in international reference studies. The work must be coherent, well structured and logically organized, and the argumentation of the ideas must be consistent.

The doctoral thesis must clearly and explicitly highlight *the elements of originality and the author's contribution* to the development of knowledge in the targeted field. The research questions proposed by the author represent pivotal elements of the doctoral thesis. The formulation, justification and clarification of the research questions from which the paper starts is the first important step in the construction of the studies carried out within the doctoral thesis.

The doctoral thesis must prove *a good knowledge of the specialized literature* specific to the chosen topic, as well as knowledge of the latest developments in the specialized literature (studies published in academic journals, in recent specialized works, relevant, current statistical data, etc.). The author must justify the choice the theoretical models used in the thesis, when presenting each study. Once the theoretical options are justified, the author must prove the knowledge of the presented theoretical models, of the current specialized literature relevant for the topic.

The choice and justification of the research methodology must be carried out in logical correlation with the research questions formulated at the beginning of the thesis and the hypotheses that will be formulated, specifically, for each study. The author must justify the choice of certain research methods and prove their appropriate use in empirical studies. The construction and methodological justification of a research tool must follow the rigors of scientific research specific to the chosen method and the particularities of the investigated universe (the researched population).

The presentation and analysis of the results will be carried out according to the research questions, respectively according to the formulated hypotheses. Each study presented will be accompanied by a discussion of the results in accordance with the specialized literature presented in the thesis and with other studies carried out on the same topic. Also, each study will include conclusions and implications that will synthesize the main results and how they contribute to the development of the field, to scientific knowledge, to the understanding of inter-human relations.

The final section of the thesis should include a brief presentation of the central elements of the thesis, while highlighting the main results obtained and the implications of these results for the knowledge of the field and for the community (for example, for the development of public policies or organizational strategies, programs, projects). The doctoral student must discuss the limits of the approach proposed in the thesis and the limits of the conducted studies and to suggest what research directions exist for continuing these studies.



### **A. Specific recommendations for the doctoral thesis as a *monograph***

The recommendations for the organization of the thesis content are mentioned below. The structure of the thesis must be logical and clearly highlighted by appropriately ranked titles and subtitles, in accordance with the rules for writing scientific texts.

#### **1. Summary**

It describes the research problem addressed, the objectives of the thesis and summarizes the main results obtained.

#### **2. Introduction**

There shall be presented at least:

- arguments regarding the choice of the topic - the relevance and novelty of the theme for the scientific discipline or field of specialization to which the work belongs;
- the current state of knowledge of the problem addressed (starting from the specialized literature and the results of research in the field);
- the research problem addressed;
- the originality and importance of the author's approach for the studied field;
- the perspective from which the topic and research objectives are analyzed;
- the general approach/methodology adopted;
- the structure of the work;
- the theoretical and/or practical contribution of the paper.

#### **3. Specialized literature**

Corresponds to the theoretical section of the paper and should address at least:

- the definitions of the key concepts of the work;
- the critical analysis of the paradigms and theories from the relevant literature necessary to substantiate the research;
- the presentation of the most relevant and recent bibliographic sources;
- the presentation of the main points of view, both convergent and divergent, regarding the models, theories, paradigms targeted in the work;
- the discussion of the results of other scientific researches representative of the topic addressed, which constitute a point of reference for the substantiation of the research;
- the operationalization of the targeted constructs and their measurements according to existing studies;
- the theoretical substantiation of the assumed specific relationships between the constructs that make up the research model.



#### **4. Methodology**

In the methodological section of the thesis, at least the following aspects must be presented:

- the research questions and/or research hypotheses;
- details related to the type of research – quantitative/qualitative/mixed, exploratory/confirmatory, etc. – and justification of the option;
- the research method or methods used, the description of the research instruments, of the scales (where applicable), the argumentation of their relevance and pertinence in the context of the research;
- presentation of the population, of the sample and of the research period;
- presentation of data processing techniques and statistical applications used (if applicable), arguing their relevance in the research context.

#### **5. Presentation and analysis of results**

It corresponds to the empirical part of the paper and involves the presentation of at least the following aspects:

- presentation/analysis/interpretation of data by referring to the research questions/hypotheses;
- in the case of opting for a quantitative research method, it is recommended to develop more advanced statistical analyses, which succeed the descriptive analysis of the collected data;
- in case of opting for a qualitative research method, it is recommended to analyze the data starting from the research questions, possibly using specialized software;
- in the case of a thesis that presents a case study, it is advisable to have an optimization/improvement proposal, starting from concrete data and not just narrative aspects. It is advisable that the study is based on complex comparative analyzes based on clearly identified research methods and models;
- it is necessary the results obtained to be referred to the conclusions of the existing studies on the respective research topic by highlighting areas of overlap and differences, as well as the practical implications of the research.

#### **6. Conclusions**

This section covers at least the following aspects:

- synthesizing the main results of the research by referring to the research questions/hypotheses and to the specialized literature presented in the theoretical section;
- highlighting the original elements of the doctoral thesis and the author's contribution to the specialized literature and to practice in the analyzed field;
- extensive discussion of the multidimensional implications (theoretical, practical, organizational, social, political, etc.) related to the ongoing investigations;



- presenting the limits of the conducted research and the results obtained;
- formulating recommendations for future research on the same theme (or on similar themes) and/or charting new research directions.

## **7. Bibliography**

- the bibliographic apparatus must highlight the existence of various, current, relevant bibliographic sources for the chosen research topic;
- it is recommended to include as many scientific articles published in journals in the main international stream, indexed in Web of Science or Scopus, books and book chapters published by publishing houses with international prestige;
- it is recommended to include references to reports and statistics published by national and international reference organizations for the field studied, but avoid generic sources (Wikipedia, DEX, etc.) or sources with difficult to prove credibility (blogs, online social networks, etc.).

## **8. Appendices**

- include supporting or explanatory materials for certain sections of the body of the paper;
- include tables, graphs, descriptive or explanatory figures, less essential, which were not included in the body of the paper;
- include research tools (interview guide, questionnaire, etc.), transcripts of interview responses, etc.

## **B. Specific recommendations for the doctoral thesis as a *collection of articles***

A doctoral thesis that takes the form of a collection of articles consists of at least four works, framed by a solid theoretical introduction highlighting their coherence and the theoretical background of the paper as a whole. This type of doctoral thesis finally contains a section of conclusions, in which there are discussed the research results from the works included in the theoretical context highlighted in the introduction, as well as the theoretical and practical implications of the analyses. If the papers are co-authored, the doctoral candidate must specify his / her contribution to each paper in the thesis (see the appendix). All co-authors must acknowledge this contribution statement. Signed contribution statements must not be included in the doctoral thesis, but must be submitted to the PhD Office. It is recommended that the doctoral student be the sole author of at least two papers, and the first author of the others.

For each paper included in the thesis, the doctoral candidate's contribution must be substantial and demonstrate independent mastery of the academic subject in accordance with the requirements for doctoral theses. In addition, co-authorship information should be included in a separate section at the beginning of the PhD thesis.



The doctoral thesis must include an introductory part, which briefly presents the theoretical background in which the works that are an integral part of the thesis are placed, the research objectives that led to the respective works, as well as possible research questions/general hypotheses of the work. This discussion of the current state of knowledge and the contributions of the papers to it must be written by the PhD student and must demonstrate his/ her ability to contextualize and reflect on the topics of the PhD thesis. The comprehensive discussion should link the individual papers and thus document the coherent framework of the PhD thesis project.

This discussion should include the following points:

- presentation and analysis of the current state of knowledge in the chosen research field(s);
- explaining and discussing the research question(s) linking the individual publications;
- description and critical discussion of the chosen research approach, including the theoretical foundations and framework, as well as the methodological approach;
- the presentation of the works included, as well as the doctoral student's contribution to each work.

The doctoral thesis must also include a conclusion section that should cover:

- discussing the main research results in the context of the general research question(s);
- the research contribution to the academic debate in the relevant discipline(s).

All the points mentioned above need to be addressed in detail. This type of doctoral theses presented within the social sciences doctoral programs must aim at a discussion (divided into introduction and conclusion sections) comprising between 10,000 and 15,000 words (without bibliographic references), with the introduction having a minimum of 7,000 words, and the conclusions a minimum of 3000 words.

#### Formal criteria relevant in the elaboration of the doctoral thesis

The doctoral thesis must comply with the following formal criteria:

- the monograph type (without bibliography and appendices) must have 80,000-100,000 words while the collection of articles type must have 50,000-60,000 words;
- Times New Roman font, letter size 12, with diacritics (for the thesis written in Romanian);
- 1.5 line spacing;
- Indent 2 right/left.

Strict adherence to academic citation styles is based on three main reasons:

- to prove the reading of specialized literature and the understanding of authors, issues and relevant debates in the field, subfield or paradigm used;



- to clearly distinguish the informational content taken from the specialized literature from the author's original contribution (empirical data, ideas, arguments, concepts, etc.);
- to guide interested readers in the valorization of doctoral research (in order to deepen knowledge, to stimulate academic dialogue with the author of the thesis or to continue the author's research direction).

The citation must therefore be complete (no references are made to entire volumes without specifying the pages or at least the reference chapters), except in cases where the author addresses a central/general idea within a work. It is advisable to have a single bibliographic list structured alphabetically and not to divide the sources by categories (volumes, specialized articles, documents, etc.). It is also advisable to use the citation style most often used in academic journals in the research field concerned.

Common citation styles:

- APA Style (Seventh Edition) - <https://apastyle.apa.org/instructional-aids/reference-guide.pdf>
- Chicago Style - [https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)
- Harvard Style - <https://www.mendeley.com/guides/harvard-citation-guide/>

### Recommendations for writing the doctoral thesis

#### *Planning the thesis research/writing*

The doctoral student, under the supervision of the doctoral advisor, defines the research questions and/or hypotheses, carries out the research and presents the results, which will be evaluated during the doctoral studies and at the final defense of the doctoral thesis. It is recommended to choose the research theme and formulate some research questions and/or hypotheses that can be addressed satisfactorily within the time limits and with the existing resources in the doctoral program.

The research must be original in the empirical part, through the research results, which must be critically analyzed in relation to the specialized literature in the theoretical part of the thesis. It is necessary to avoid the strategy of the exhaustive inventory of specialized literature without a critical approach, in which the argued perspective of the author should be revealed.

#### *Structure of the thesis (chapters/subchapters, etc.)*

In the case of the thesis, dividing the text into chapters is not only a formal operation, but it must reflect a well-structured, logical and progressive sequence in the economy of the presented





arguments. It is advisable to have chapters that are relatively comparable in size: such a division reflects a cumulative and balanced structure of the argumentation.

For the thesis in classic format, the desirable structure includes: an introductory chapter, several theoretical chapters, a methodological chapter, one or two chapters dedicated to the presentation and analysis of the results (these representing the core of the original contribution) and a conclusion chapter.

Each chapter and sub-chapter/section should include introductory and concluding paragraphs. These paragraphs need to clearly indicate the current stage of the argument to guide the reader through the discourse.

In the case of the collection of articles type, chapters must be published, publishable or easy to be modified for the purposes of publication, in which case it is recommended that each chapter should not exceed 10,000 words (the requirements of most academic journals are between 6,000 and 9,000 words).

#### *Inclusion of materials published during the doctoral program*

The doctoral thesis may contain material that has been submitted or accepted for publication or that has already been published. The publication of research results carried out during the doctoral program is encouraged. For the publications and presented works that are included in a doctoral thesis (both in the case of the theses that take the form of the monograph and in the case of the collection of articles), the following pieces of information must be included in a separate section at the beginning of the thesis:

- publications – complete bibliographic information about the publication;
- manuscripts accepted for publication - date of acceptance letter;
- manuscripts sent – date of confirmation of receipt.

The material accepted for publication before the start of doctoral studies cannot be included in the doctoral thesis.

#### *Independent contribution*

Doctoral theses must demonstrate that a doctoral student is able to independently master academic subjects. Therefore, the inclusion of papers that are written by the doctoral student as the sole author is encouraged.

A doctoral thesis in the form of a monograph must be a unitary whole and present a coherent argumentation based on the candidate's own research. If individual chapters of the doctoral thesis or sections thereof are written in collaboration, the PhD candidates must state their contribution to each of them.

All co-authors must complete a contribution statement that should be further sent to the PhD Office. For all co-authored work included in the thesis, the doctoral candidate's contribution must





be substantial and demonstrate independent mastery of the academic subject in accordance with the requirements for doctoral theses. For the collection of articles type, it is advisable to include at least two articles in which the doctoral student is the sole author.

### *Writing, style, processing of the thesis text*

It is recommended to decide on the format of the doctoral thesis (monograph versus collection of articles) early in the research process. Changes to this decision should be communicated to the PhD Office and highlighted as such at the colloquium at the beginning of the second PhD study year and in the annual progress reports.

Writing is a constitutive part of the research process. Writing the thesis for a "last stage" at the end of the doctoral studies is to be avoided. The PhD thesis is part of a communication process, where PhD students go out in public to present their ideas/expertise (at academic conferences, symposia, etc.). Doctoral students must continuously pursue to obtain the most specialized feedback possible, and presenting fragments or chapters from the thesis at conferences is one of the best ways to progress and develop the doctoral research activity.

It is necessary to avoid excesses that give a false impression of competence, such as heavy hyper-specialized jargon or overloading with tables, graphs, etc. In the text, only those data absolutely necessary for the argument must be present; the complete empirical material can be made available to the reader in appendices or on data storage devices.

It is recommended to write the text in the form of compact paragraphs, as an argumentative text and to avoid the use of bullets in order to ensure argumentative coherence and consistency. The use of tables and figures in the body of the paper is intended to provide additional information or to provide a synthetic, illustrative view of the arguments presented. Redundant presentation of synthetic data (e.g. both as a graph and as a table) is recommended to be avoided.

### *Aspects of an ethical nature*

The PhD thesis must contain sufficient detail and references to allow others to replicate the research design and empirical investigations carried out. Knowingly fraudulent or inaccurate statements constitute unethical behavior and are unacceptable.

The author must ensure that the argumentative structure and content of the thesis are original, and that the ideas taken from other sources have been properly cited both in the case of taking a segment of text as such and in the case of paraphrasing.

It is forbidden to translate the content of published sources into another language and to take over the respective ideas in the doctoral thesis without proper citation. All primary sources cited in the text must be consulted directly by the author. In the situation where the author has identified a relevant source cited in another studied article, this aspect will be indicated as such in the text of the doctoral thesis, using the wording "X, 2011 cited in A & B, 2022, p. 17)". It is recommended,



however, to avoid such situations (use them only in exceptional situations, when there is no access to the primary source) by directly consulting the majority of sources used in the thesis.

Doctoral students have the responsibility to declare the use of any type of artificial intelligence in the writing of the doctoral thesis, to specify exactly the applications used and the result of the use, and to justify the rationale/necessity of their use, if applicable.

Doctoral students must comply with the legislation in force and the ethical regulations of the SNSPA Charter.

### *Recommended bibliography*

Gandhi, P., & Chadha, NK (2022). *Thesis Writing: A Complete Guide to Research and Ph.D. Journey*. The Readers Paradise.

Nygaard , LP, & Solli , K. (2020). *Strategies for Writing a Thesis by Publication in the Social Sciences and Humanities*. Taylor & Francis.



### Appendix. Co-authors contribution statement

This statement specifies the doctoral student's contribution to papers, chapters, or sections written in collaboration with co-authors. This form must be completed for every individual work, chapter or section.

<b>The title of the paper, chapter or section written in collaboration with the co-authors</b>

Contribution of PhD student to the paper, chapter or section	A/B/C/D
	A= total contribution (100 %) B= primary contribution (100 %-70 %) C= main contribution (70 %-30 %) D= minority contribution (30 %-1 %) E= no contribution (0 %)
CONCEPT (the idea for the research or manuscript, framing the research question or hypothesis):	
DESIGN (planning the theoretical approach and methodology/ methods to generate results):	
SUPERVISION (oversight of and responsibility for the organisation and course of the project and the manuscript):	
DATA COLLECTION/PROCESSING (responsibility for gathering empirical material, organising and reporting data):	
ANALYSIS/INTERPRETATION (responsibility for interpreting and presenting the results):	
LITERATURE SEARCH:	
WRITING (responsibility for creating and revising all or a substantive part of the manuscript):	
CRITICAL REVIEW (reworking the content of the manuscript before submission, not just spelling and grammar checking):	
OTHER:	

<b>Names of co-authors, the signatures</b>



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# **DOCTORAL THESIS**

The title of the doctoral thesis: .....

Doctoral advisor: .....

Author: .....

Bucharest  
2023



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## **The title of the thesis**

Doctoral advisor: .....

Author: .....