



Yosemite National Park, California

English B2

IM259 *Lingua Inglese (PAri a livello B2)*

Lesson 12

The thesis or dissertation

In this lesson we are going to talk about the thesis or dissertation, which is the most important academic text a student must master in order to obtain his/her academic degree in a field of study.

Thesis

1. Definitions

A thesis or dissertation is a document submitted in support of candidature for an academic degree or professional qualification presenting the author's research and findings.

In some contexts, the word "thesis" or a cognate is used for part of a bachelor's or master's course, while "dissertation" is normally applied to a doctorate, while in other contexts, the reverse is true.

The term graduate thesis is sometimes used to refer to both master's theses and doctoral dissertations.

In reality both terms (thesis and dissertation) are interchangeable and their use is going to depend on a specific university's convention. The etymology of both words is quite clear, and we can observe that both words refer to the final stages of an academic career. "Thesis" refers to the concepts that underlay your academic work, and "dissertation" to the defense of those concepts.

1.1 Etymology:

The term "thesis" comes from the Greek **θέσις**, meaning "something put forth", and refers to an **intellectual proposition**.

"Dissertation" comes from the Latin *dissertātiō*, meaning "**discussion**".

Frequently institutions that offer high academic degrees also provide clear directions about the elaboration of a thesis/dissertation. Let us examine, for instance, the web page of The University of British Columbia. They offer the students clear guidelines about the process. Take a look at:

<https://www.grad.ubc.ca/handbook-graduate-supervision/graduate-thesis>

1.1.2. Required abilities

In the above webpage, you'll find recommendations and definitions worth exploring:

Your thesis will be the final product of your time in graduate school. You should be planning your thesis from the very beginning of your degree program.

A thesis is a substantial piece of scholarly writing that reflects writer's ability to:

- conduct research
- communicate the research

- critically analyse the literature
- present a detailed methodology and accurate results
- verify knowledge claims and sources meticulously
- link the topic of the thesis with the broader field

Furthermore, the page provides a clear difference between:

- thesis at the doctoral level
- thesis at the master's degree level

A thesis at the doctoral level is called a dissertation, but dissertations and theses are usually referred to collectively as **theses**. There are some differences between a master's and a doctoral thesis.

A **master's thesis** must demonstrate that the student knows the background and principal works of the research area and can produce significant scholarly work. It should contain **some original contribution** whenever possible.

A **doctoral thesis** must contain **a substantial contribution of new knowledge** to the field of study. It presents the results and an analysis of original research, and should be significant enough to be published.

As we can observe, a central difference between the two academic works is the quality and quantity of contribution to the field of study.

1.1.3 Situation in Italy

In Italy there are normally three types of theses associated with the following degrees:

- *Laurea* (equivalent to the UK Bachelor's Degree).
- *Laurea Magistrale* (equivalent to the UK Master's Degree).
- *Dottorato di Ricerca* (Ph.D.).

Thesis requirements vary greatly between degrees and disciplines, ranging from as low as 3 – 4 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits to more than 30. Thesis work is mandatory for the completion of a degree in Italy.

2. Writing your thesis.

According to [HarperCollins. Writing \(Collins Webster's Easy Learning\)](#) .
[HarperCollins Publishers. 2011. Kindle Edition](#), these are the main questions you have to address before writing your thesis:

1. Who is this writing for? **AUDIENCE**
2. What do I want to say? **CONTENT**
3. Why do I want to say it? **MOTIVATION**

Since we are not going to concern ourselves with *audience* and *motivation* here, let's talk briefly about content.

2.1. Thesis content

Most world universities use a multiple chapter format:

- a) An introduction, which presents the research topic, the methodology, as well as its scope and significance.
- b) A literature review, examining relevant literature and showing how this has informed the research issue;
- c) A methodology chapter, explaining how the research has been designed and why the research methods/ population/data collection and analysis being used have been chosen.
- d) A findings chapter, outlining the findings of the research itself.
- e) An analysis and discussion chapter, analysing the findings and discussing them in the context of the literature review (this chapter is often divided into two— analysis and discussion).
- f) A conclusion.

2.1.2.Examples

The best way to understand the structure of a thesis or dissertation is, obviously, reading or writing them.

Exercise:

In the following you'll find two examples of dissertations presented at the *Università di Trieste*. These, and similar documents are public and can be downloaded from the UNITS website. A good exercise would be to go through the table of contents of each one and examine the distribution of information. These two works are good examples of different styles of presenting your knowledge of the subject and exposing your contribution to the field of study. A full version of the theses is sent as different attachments.

Example 1:



Example 2:



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TRIESTE

XXIX CICLO DEL DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN

INGEGNERIA E ARCHITETTURA

STUDY OF A NEW SOLUTION TO REDUCE VIBRATION

TRANSMISSION THROUGH PILLARS ON BOARD SHIPS

Settore scientifico-disciplinare: ING-IND/02

PH. D. CANDIDATE
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PH. D. PROGRAM COORDINATOR
PROF. DIEGO MICHELI

THESIS SUPERVISOR
PROF. MARCO BIOT

Two handwritten signatures are shown, one above the other, each on a horizontal line. The top signature is for Prof. Diego Micheli and the bottom one is for Prof. Marco Biot.

ACADEMIC YEAR 2015/2016

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