

Zegras' Thesis Guidelines Version 1.0

(or, how to write a thesis without causing either of us lots of headaches)

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This document provides a long-overdue, ad-hoc set of recommendations (rules) based on my 10 years of thesis advising. If you have any doubts, bring them up as early in the process as possible.

1. Writing Style. Whenever possible, write with the Active Voice. Find the right balance between active and passive, but do not be afraid to insert yourself in the narrative. You will write more clearly and concisely, and probably less boringly. Nathan Sheffield summarizes it nicely (see the link below for the full argument):

“Generally, I prefer active voice, but I think the passive voice has its place in scientific writing. The best thing to do is use a mix of the two. Use passive when necessary to maintain cohesion. When you do, make sure the actor is not ambiguous, be careful to check for dangling modifiers, and avoid abusive nominalizations. Make sure your passive sentences are intentional and not habitual. More important than the active vs. passive debate is the structure of your writing. Make your writing flow, connecting one sentence to the next, and it will be understandable.”

https://cgi.duke.edu/web/sciwriting/index.php?action=passive_voice

2. Software. Use Microsoft Word. I know many prefer LaTeX these days, but I am not going to learn a new software for reading theses....For better or worse, MSWord is the global currency of exchange as far as I am concerned. It has numerous features which you **MUST** use:
 - a. Styles features. You can create your own styles to suit your preferences, but using styles (for headings, captions, etc.) is great for keeping all formatting (fonts, spacing, etc.) uniform and easily creating tables of contents, etc.
 - b. References features. Most specifically, use the “Insert Caption” function to insert Table and Figure Captions and even Equation captions. Again you can modify these to your preferences. This automates numbering which will save you plenty of headaches later. Within References, also use the “Cross-reference” feature; that is, when you are referring to, say, a Table, use cross-reference, choose Table, and insert reference to “Only label and number” and choose the caption. Note, you can do this for different numbered sections, different equations, figures, and even footnotes and endnotes. This will make your life easier, allowing you to say in the text: “Table 6 shows”
 - c. Master Document Function. Learn how to use it, and, use it. You can write and edit and cross-reference different chapters independently. And send the Chapters to me for edits/comments, independently. Figure it out, you will be happier in the end and I won't be stuck reading 200 pages of unstable .docx.
 - d. Tracking and Comments [Review features]. I will make edits to your drafts using track changes and the comment function. I might ask you to track your own changes in responding to my edits, comments.
3. Citations. Use the Chicago-Style or APA Style. I don't care about the specific reference style, as long as it's established; choose one and stick to it; this includes proper citations to web-based material. And, please don't cite Wikipedia; go to the source. Also, don't cite newspaper/magazine articles

unless they provide specific evidence of something (say, a political event that occurred), a specific opinion about something, or specific original research (say, sponsoring a survey or analyzing data in a certain way).

Cite your references appropriately in the text. Examples:

Rich households live in the suburbs (Richman, 2010).
According to Richman (2010), rich households live in the suburbs.

When quoting someone directly, use quotes and include the page number, e.g.: Some argue that “all rich households live in the suburbs” (Richman, 2010; p. 23). Please, also, see Point 9.

4. Footnotes. Use footnotes for clarifying details that interrupt the narrative and/or otherwise provide more detail than necessary for every reader to care about.
5. Appendices. Use for details you judge to be not necessary for full comprehension of the content (e.g., survey instruments; data tables; etc.). Also, include code when relevant (see Point 7).
6. Figures and Tables. Make your figures large enough to be legible; anything on a Figure needs to be readable, otherwise it shouldn't be there. Try to minimize use of color, unless absolutely necessary (shades work well). You can layout large figures and tables on a horizontal page (insert a section break and choose page layout horizontal). Try to get every table on a single page or be creative in making them easily readable across pages).

Do not refer to Tables and Figures by their relative location in the draft. Use the Word Reference features (see 2.b) to refer to the specific Figure/Table Number. For a reasonable example of proper table formatting see Point 7, Table 1.

7. Models. If you are running statistical models or similar, you should include your code in a Technical Appendix. Send your model codes and outputs to me with your draft model results chapters so that I can review the actual specifications, etc.

That said, your model results Tables should not be copy and pasted from your software. Table 1 provides a reasonable example.

Table 1: Relationship Between Nothing and Something: OLS versus Spatial Models

Model Variable	OLS		SPATIAL LAG		SPATIAL ERROR		SPATIAL LAG+ERROR	
	Coeff.	t-Stat	Coeff.	z-Stat	Coeff.	z-Stat	Coeff.	z-Stat
Intercept	1090.947	28.457	1937.137	12.728	946.918	19.679	1576.111	6.718
Income	0.449	30.528	0.510	25.422	0.512	33.580	0.511	30.850
W (lag)			-0.454	-5.815			-0.286	-2.965
lambda (s.error)					0.552	23.494	0.728	20.504
R-squared		0.428						
Spatial R-squared				0.446		0.429		0.447

N=1,220. Source: Derived from the Ether, 2015. Models run in: My Mind (www.mymind.nw)

8. Other stylistic and grammatical tidbits.

- a. e.g.= for example. i.e = that is.
- b. data = pl. datum=singular. This etymologically and logically correct. Okay, call me a stickler;¹ yes, languages evolve. But, you are writing your thesis; be precise.
- c. Methodology = or ≠ Methods? This seems similar to data/datum. Merriam-Webster defines methodology as:
 - i. “a body of [methods](#), rules, and postulates employed by a discipline: a particular procedure or set of procedures;
 - ii. “the analysis of the principles or procedures of inquiry in a particular field.”

If you look at the structure of the word (-ology), methodology is the science of methods or the study of methods. Methods are the tools; Methodology encompasses more, the combination of theory and methods underlying a field of inquiry, guiding the specific tools. You can thank Eran Ben-Joseph for turning this into a pet peeve of mine. If you have doubts, look at the Wikipedia entry (but don't cite it...): <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methodology>.

9. Finally, DO NOT PLAGIARIZE. You will be caught and nobody will be happy about it. If you take notes from readings electronically (i.e., copying and pasting directly from other electronic sources) – do so in a way that you will be able to know, in retrospect, precisely what information comes directly from which source and which page number. Put quotations around it at that note-taking point. Then you won't confuse yourself later when you are pulling from your notes into your draft. Keep very precise record of what information comes from where and cite appropriately. If you have any doubts, refer to:
- a. <https://integrity.mit.edu/handbook/what-plagiarism>
 - b. <http://web.mit.edu/academicintegrity/handbook/handbook.pdf>
 - c. <http://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center/avoiding-plagiarism/>

¹ See: <http://english.stackexchange.com/questions/6904/is-data-considered-singular-or-plural>; and see, also, Point 8.c)