

Humanities Dissertation Template - MLA Format (9th Edition)

Complete MLA-formatted dissertation template for Literature, Cultural Studies, and related humanities fields.

TITLE PAGE

[Centered on page]

[Your Full Name]

[Advisor Name, Title]

[Department Name]

[University Name]

[Date: Day Month Year]

[Skip several lines - approximately 1/3 down page]

[Full Title of Your Dissertation:
Subtitle if Applicable]

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

COPYRIGHT PAGE

[Page number: ii]

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DEDICATION (Optional)

[Page number: iii]

[Centered on page]

For [dedication text]

ABSTRACT

[Page number: iv]

Abstract

[Write 250-350 words summarizing entire dissertation. Include: central argument, theoretical framework, primary texts/materials analyzed, methodology, key findings, significance. Single paragraph, double-spaced.]

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

[Page number: v]

Acknowledgments

[Express gratitude to dissertation committee, funding sources, archives/libraries, research participants, colleagues, family. Double-spaced. 2-3 pages typical.]

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List of Figures

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1. [Title]	[page]
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS (if needed)

[Page number: ix]

List of Abbreviations

[ABBR] [Full term]

[ABBR] [Full term]

INTRODUCTION

[Start Arabic numbering: Last Name 1]

Introduction

[Opening paragraph introduces central question, establishes significance, and previews argument. All text double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 12-pt Times New Roman. Last name and page number in header every page.]

The question of [topic] has preoccupied scholars of [field] for [timeframe]. From early studies focusing on [approach] to more recent work examining [contemporary focus], critics have debated [central issue]. However, as [Scholar] observes, “[relevant quote]” (qtd. in [Source] [page]). This dissertation intervenes in these debates by arguing that [your central thesis].

The Central Argument

This dissertation argues that [clear statement of central argument in 2-3 sentences]. By analyzing [primary texts/materials], I demonstrate that [what you’re showing]. This argument challenges [what previous scholarship claims] and reveals instead that [your intervention].

Research Questions

The dissertation addresses the following questions:

1. [Research question 1]

2. [Research question 2]
3. [Research question 3]

Theoretical Framework

This study employs [theoretical approach] to examine [topic]. Drawing on [theorist's] work on [concept], I argue that [how theory applies]. This framework allows for [what it enables understanding].

As [Scholar] argues, “[quote]” ([page]). Building on this insight, my analysis demonstrates [how you extend or complicate the theory].

Primary Texts and Materials

The dissertation analyzes [describe primary materials: novels, films, archival documents, cultural artifacts, etc.].

Primary corpus includes:

- [Text/Material 1] by [Author/Creator], [Date]
- [Text/Material 2] by [Author/Creator], [Date]
- [Text/Material 3] by [Author/Creator], [Date]
- [Continue listing primary sources]

These texts were selected because [justification for selection and scope].

Methodology

This dissertation employs [close reading/discourse analysis/archival research/cultural analysis/comparative analysis] to examine [what you're studying]. My approach combines [methodological approach 1] with [approach 2], allowing me to [what this enables].

I draw on [sources: archives, databases, collections] to [purpose]. The research involved [describe research process: archival visits, textual analysis, etc.].

Significance

This research contributes to [field] in several ways:

Literary/Cultural Significance. The dissertation reveals [contribution to understanding literature/culture]. By demonstrating [finding], this study [how it matters for the field].

Theoretical Significance. This work advances [theory] by showing [theoretical contribution]. The findings suggest [theoretical implication].

Historical Significance. [If applicable] This research revises understanding of [period/movement] by [contribution to historiography].

Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on [geographic scope, time period, genre, medium]. It examines [what's included] but does not address [what's excluded]. The research is limited by [constraints: archival access, language competency, scope decisions].

Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 examines [topic and argument].

Chapter 2 analyzes [topic and argument].

Chapter 3 explores [topic and argument].

Chapter 4 investigates [topic and argument].

Chapter 5 considers [topic and argument].

The **Conclusion** synthesizes findings and suggests future research directions.

CHAPTER 1: [TITLE]

[Last Name] 30

Chapter 1: [Descriptive Title in Title Case]

[Opening paragraph introduces chapter's focus and how it relates to dissertation argument.]

This chapter examines [topic] by analyzing [what you analyze]. I argue that [chapter's specific argument]. This argument supports the dissertation's larger claim that [connection to central thesis].

[Section Heading]

The scholarship on [topic] has largely focused on [previous approaches]. Early critics such as [Scholar] emphasized [approach], arguing that "[quote]" ([page]). More recent work by [Scholar] has shifted attention to [new focus], demonstrating that [finding] ([page]).

However, these approaches overlook [what's missing]. By examining [your focus], this chapter reveals [your contribution].

[Section Heading: Close Reading/Analysis]

[Begin detailed analysis of primary texts]

In [Text/Author's work], the representation of [element] reveals [interpretation]. Consider the passage where [context]: "[block quote of primary text]" ([page]). This moment demonstrates [analysis of what it shows].

The language here—particularly [specific textual element]—suggests [interpretation]. As [character/narrator/text] observes, "[shorter quote]" ([page]). This emphasis on [element] complicates [what it complicates].

[Section Heading]

[Continue building argument with additional evidence and analysis]

[Compare across texts, trace patterns, develop theoretical argument]

Summary

[Conclude chapter by summarizing argument and previewing next chapter]

This chapter has demonstrated [what you've shown]. By analyzing [materials], I have argued that [restate chapter argument]. This finding supports the dissertation's central claim that [connection]. The next chapter extends this analysis by examining [preview of next chapter].

CHAPTER 2: [TITLE]

[Last Name] 70

Chapter 2: [Descriptive Title]

[Continue developing dissertation argument with new evidence and analysis]

Building on Chapter 1's examination of [topic], this chapter investigates [new focus]. I argue that [chapter argument], which [how it advances overall thesis].

Historical/Cultural Context (if needed)

[Provide necessary historical, cultural, or biographical context]

To understand [text/phenomenon], it is essential to consider [context]. During [period], [relevant historical information]. As [historian/scholar] explains, "[quote]" ([page]).

[Section Heading]

[Detailed analysis of primary materials]

[Section Heading]

[Continue systematic analysis]

[Include close readings, theoretical application, comparative analysis]

Summary

[Synthesize chapter findings and transition to next chapter]

CHAPTER 3: [TITLE]

[Last Name] 110

Chapter 3: [Descriptive Title]

[Continue building argument]

The previous chapters established [summary of what's been shown]. This chapter turns to [new aspect], analyzing [materials]. I demonstrate that [chapter argument].

[Section Heading]

[Develop analysis]

Theoretical Application

[If applying theory significantly]

[Theorist's] concept of [concept] illuminates [how it applies to your materials]. According to [Theorist], "[quote]" ([page]). This framework helps explain [what you're analyzing] because [connection].

However, [how your analysis extends, complicates, or revises the theory]. The texts examined here reveal [your insight].

[Section Heading]

[Continue analysis with evidence]

Summary

[Conclude chapter]

CHAPTER 4: [TITLE]

[Last Name] 150

Chapter 4: [Descriptive Title]

[Continue developing argument]

[Section Heading]

[Analysis and argument development]

[Include comparative analysis across texts, historical developments, theoretical applications]

[Section Heading]

[Continue]

Summary

CHAPTER 5: [TITLE]

[Last Name] 190

Chapter 5: [Descriptive Title]

[Final analytical chapter or synthesis chapter]

This final chapter examines [topic], bringing together insights from previous chapters. I argue that [chapter argument], which demonstrates the dissertation's central claim that [thesis].

[Section Heading]

[Synthesize previous findings, analyze final materials, or extend argument]

[Section Heading]

[Continue]

Broader Implications

[Connect findings to larger questions in the field]

The analysis presented in this dissertation has implications beyond [immediate texts]. It reveals [broader insight about literature/culture/period]. This matters because [significance].

Summary

[Conclude final chapter, setting up conclusion]

CONCLUSION

[Last Name] 230

Conclusion

[Synthesize entire dissertation. 10-20 pages.]

This dissertation has examined [topic] through analysis of [materials]. Drawing on [theoretical framework] and [methodology], I have argued that [restate central thesis in new words].

Summary of Findings

Each chapter has contributed to this argument:

Chapter 1 demonstrated [summary of chapter 1's argument and findings].

Chapter 2 showed [summary of chapter 2].

Chapter 3 revealed [summary of chapter 3].

Chapter 4 analyzed [summary of chapter 4].

Chapter 5 established [summary of chapter 5].

Together, these chapters establish that [synthesis of findings].

Contribution to Scholarship

This research makes several contributions to [field]:

First, it revises understanding of [what aspect of scholarship] by demonstrating [your finding]. Previous critics have argued that [previous view], but my analysis reveals [your revision] ([page if citing]).

Second, it extends [theoretical framework] by showing [theoretical contribution]. This has implications for how scholars understand [broader concept].

Third, it opens new avenues for research on [topic] by [methodological, archival, or interpretive contribution].

Broader Significance

Beyond [immediate field], these findings have implications for understanding [broader issue]. The dissertation demonstrates that [wider significance about literature, culture, society, etc.].

As [relevant scholar] argues, “[quote]” ([page]). This dissertation confirms and extends that insight by [your contribution]. The texts analyzed here reveal [what they reveal about larger questions].

Limitations

This study has focused on [scope]. Future research might extend this analysis to [other texts, periods, contexts, or approaches not covered].

Future Research Directions

This dissertation raises several questions for future investigation:

- How does [finding] apply to [different context]?
- What happens when we examine [related texts/phenomena]?
- How has [pattern identified] changed in [different time period]?
- What would a [different theoretical lens] reveal about [topic]?

Concluding Reflections

[Final 1-2 paragraphs reflecting on significance]

Ultimately, this dissertation reveals that [key insight about literature/culture/meaning]. The texts examined here demonstrate [what they demonstrate]. By showing [your contribution], this research [how it changes understanding of the topic].

[Scholar] once wrote, “[relevant closing quote]” ([page]). This study both affirms and complicates that observation. [Final sentence providing closure and forward-looking perspective]

WORKS CITED

[Start new page]

[Last Name] 250

Works Cited

[Hanging indent, double-spaced throughout, alphabetical by author last name]

[Divide into Primary Sources and Secondary Sources, or keep unified depending on field conventions]

Primary Sources

[If dividing bibliography]

Author Last Name, First Name. *Title of Primary Work*. Publisher, Year.

Author Last Name, First Name. "Title of Poem/Short Story." *Title of Collection*, Publisher, Year, pp. page range.

[Continue with all primary texts analyzed]

Secondary Sources

[All scholarly books, articles, and critical works cited]

Books:

Author Last Name, First Name. *Title of Book: Subtitle*. Publisher, Year.

Author Last Name, First Name, and First Last Name. *Title of Book*. Edition, Publisher, Year.

Edited Collections:

Editor Last Name, First Name, editor. *Title of Collection*. Publisher, Year.

Book Chapters:

Author Last Name, First Name. "Title of Chapter." *Title of Book*, edited by First Last Name, Publisher, Year, pp. page range.

Journal Articles:

Author Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Journal Name*, vol. number, no. issue, Year, pp. page range. DOI or URL if online.

Dissertations:

Author Last Name, First Name. "Title of Dissertation." Dissertation, University Name, Year. Database Name, URL.

Archival Materials:

[Document Title]. [Date]. [Collection Name], [Box/Folder], [Archive Name], [City].

Manuscripts:

Author Last Name, First Name. Title or Description. Manuscript, [Date]. [Collection], [Library/Archive].

Interviews:

Interviewee Last Name, First Name. Personal interview. Day Month Year.

[Continue with all sources cited, alphabetically]

[Typical humanities dissertation: 150-300+ sources]

APPENDIX A: [TITLE]

[Last Name] 275

Appendix A: [Descriptive Title in Title Case]

[Supplementary materials: additional textual analysis, extended quotations, translations, archival documents, illustrations, chronologies, etc.]

APPENDIX B: [TITLE]

[Last Name] 285

Appendix B: [Descriptive Title]

[Additional materials]

FORMATTING CHECKLIST

General Format

- ☐ 12-pt Times New Roman or similar readable font
- ☐ Double-spacing throughout entire document
- ☐ 1-inch margins on all sides
- ☐ Last name and page number in header (top right)
- ☐ First line of paragraphs indented 0.5 inches

Header Format

- ☐ Last name and page number on every page
- ☐ Header 0.5 inches from top of page
- ☐ Right-aligned
- ☐ No punctuation between name and number

Title Page

- ☐ Centered on page
- ☐ Contains: Name, Advisor, Department, University, Date
- ☐ Title approximately 1/3 down page
- ☐ Title case (capitalize major words)
- ☐ No bold, italics, or underlining on title
- ☐ No page number on title page

Pagination

- ☐ Roman numerals (ii, iii, iv) for front matter pages
- ☐ Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3) starting with Introduction
- ☐ Last name precedes page number: [Name] 1

Chapter Format

- ☐ Each chapter starts on new page
- ☐ Chapter title bold, centered or left-aligned
- ☐ Consistent heading hierarchy throughout
- ☐ No extra spacing between paragraphs

In-Text Citations

- ☐ Parenthetical format: (Author page)
- ☐ No comma between author and page
- ☐ For direct quotes: always include page number
- ☐ Multiple authors: (Smith and Jones 45)
- ☐ Three+ authors: (Smith et al. 45)
- ☐ No author: ("Shortened Title" page)

Block Quotes

- ☐ Used for quotes 4+ lines of prose or 3+ lines of verse
- ☐ Indented 0.5 inches from left margin
- ☐ No quotation marks
- ☐ Double-spaced
- ☐ Citation after final punctuation: (Author page).

Works Cited

- ☐ Starts on new page with header
- ☐ Title "Works Cited" centered, not bold
- ☐ Hanging indent (0.5 inches)
- ☐ Alphabetical by author last name
- ☐ Double-spaced throughout
- ☐ All in-text citations have Works Cited entries

Titles in Text

- ☐ *Italics* for: books, journals, films, plays, long poems, albums
 - ☐ “Quotation marks” for: articles, chapters, short stories, poems, episodes, songs
 - ☐ No formatting for: websites as containers
-

TYPICAL LENGTH

Humanities PhD Dissertation (MLA): 200-350 pages

Chapter breakdown (varies by field): - Introduction: 15-30 pages - Chapter 1: 30-50 pages - Chapter 2: 30-50 pages - Chapter 3: 30-50 pages - Chapter 4: 30-50 pages - Chapter 5: 30-50 pages (or fewer if synthesizing) - Conclusion: 15-25 pages

Literature/Cultural Studies: Often 250-350 pages

Comparative Literature: Often 300-400 pages

Works Cited typically 15-30 pages

NOTES ON MLA FOR DISSERTATIONS

Primary vs. Secondary Sources

Many literature dissertations divide Works Cited into: - **Primary Sources** (literary texts, films, artworks analyzed) - **Secondary Sources** (critical/theoretical literature)

Check your department's preference.

Author-Page Citations

MLA uses **author-page** format: (Morrison 45)

No year required, no “p.” or “pp.” abbreviation.

Literary Present Tense

When discussing literary texts, use **literary present tense**:

“In *Beloved*, Morrison explores...” (not “explored”)

Archival Citations

Format varies. Common MLA format:

[Document Title]. [Date]. [Collection Name], [Box/Folder], [Archive], [City].

Close Reading Conventions

- Introduce quotes with signal phrases
- Analyze after quoting—never drop quotes without commentary
- Use strategic ellipses for long quotes: [...]
- Use brackets for clarification: “He [Morrison’s character] demonstrates...”

Chapter Titles

Can be descriptive and creative:

“‘The Weight of Memory’: Trauma and Narrative in Morrison”

OR more straightforward:

“Trauma and Narrative in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*”

DEFENSE PREPARATION

Typical Format: - 20-30 minute presentation summarizing dissertation - 2-3 hours Q&A with committee - Possible revisions required after defense

Prepare For: - “What is your intervention?” / “What’s new here?” - “Why these texts and not others?” - “How does [Chapter X] connect to your thesis?” - “What are the limitations of your approach?” - “Where does this research go next?” - Questions about theoretical framework - Questions about specific interpretive claims

Template Complete. Adapt to your field and department requirements. Good luck!