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# Thesis and dissertation writing: an examination of published advice and actual practice

Brian Paltridge <sup>1, 2</sup>

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## Abstract

This article explores the extent to which published advice on the organisation and structure of theses and dissertations concurs with what happens in actual practice. The study examines guides and handbooks which focus on thesis and dissertation writing and postgraduate research. The sample texts examined were master's and doctoral theses written in a number of different study areas at a major research university. The study found that only a few of the books examined devoted a substantial amount of space to this topic. It also found a wider range of thesis types than the guides and handbooks would suggest occurs. The study identified four main kinds of thesis: 'traditional: simple', 'traditional: complex', 'topic-based' and 'compilations of research articles'. The article argues for teaching materials which show students the range of thesis options they might have, highlight the kind of variation that occurs in

actual texts, and consider the rationale for the various choices they might make.



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## Keywords

Academic writing; Theses and dissertations; Graduate education

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<sup>1</sup> Present address: School of Languages, Auckland University of Technology, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1020, New Zealand

<sup>2</sup> [brian.partridge@aut.ac.nz](mailto:brian.partridge@aut.ac.nz)

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