

Standards for doctoral dissertations as “scientific monographs”

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LEGAL BASIS

Legal regulations concerning the standards for doctoral dissertations are available at: https://kompsych.pan.pl/images/Uchwa%C5%82y/STANDARDY_dla_rozprawy_doktorskiej_jako_monografia_2020.pdf.

GENERAL REMARKS

Doctoral students (who are enrolled in full-time or part-time doctoral programs) in the field of social sciences and the discipline of psychology are expected to submit a doctoral dissertation which, in the light of the Law on Higher Education and Science, is defined as:

- a) “a collection of published and thematically linked scientific articles” or
- b) “a scientific monograph”.

Design projects or implementation projects constitute a small proportion of the submitted doctoral dissertations.

Ad a. The standards for doctoral dissertations proposed by the working group and defined as "a collection of published and thematically linked scientific articles" have been approved by the Committee on Psychological Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences (KP PAN). A similar approach has been adopted by most scientific discipline councils authorized to grant doctoral degrees. Doctoral dissertations that are prepared in this form with the aim of expanding the existing body of psychological knowledge fulfill the criteria of intersubjective communicability and verifiability [KP PAN standards apply to articles published in JCR- and SCOPUS-indexed journals].

According to the KP PAN working group, a doctoral dissertation which is a collection of published and thematically linked scientific articles is the most appropriate type of a doctoral dissertation that meets international standards for educating psychologists at the doctoral level.

Ad b. A scientific monograph is a customary type of a doctoral dissertation (in particular in humanities and other social sciences) that has been also approved by the legislator. Monographs can differ in format, and they can comprise bound volumes of typed pages (sometimes hundreds!) or smaller volumes intended for publication in professional psychology journals.

MONOGRAPH VOLUME

There are no legal restrictions on the volume of a scientific monograph or the minimum number of publishing sheets (1 publishing sheet = 40,000 characters with spaces). Very long monographs (sometimes comprising hundreds of standard pages!) have become a considerable problem. Doctoral candidates can (and should) be expected to present their solutions to scientific problems in a concise manner without resorting to excessively verbose language that obscures the meaning. The ability to present one's scientific accomplishments in a succinct manner is a sign of maturity.

The volume of a doctoral dissertation should be also adapted to the complexity of the analyzed problem, the applied methodology or the collected empirical evidence. Experimental and quantitative papers require fewer pages, whereas qualitative papers, papers dealing with the history of psychological thought and theoretical papers can be expected to be longer.

The expected monograph volume is 80 to 140 standard pages.

EDITORIAL STYLE OF A DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

The Law on Higher Education and Science does not indicate whether a typed manuscript should be the final form of a doctoral dissertation. A dissertation can comprise a complete typed manuscript that has been prepared for publication as well as an isolated article/articles. A general editorial format

has not been prescribed. The specificity of a given field of study also plays a role in this context (e.g. experimental studies in social psychology, clinical psychology, cross-cultural psychology, developmental psychology, psychometrics, history of psychological thought, mathematical psychology, theory, meta-analysis).

Empirical dissertations (which are most common in psychological sciences) should follow the APA editorial style. The structure of a quantitative empirical monograph (based on APA style) is presented in **ANNEX A**, and the structure of a qualitative empirical monograph (based on APA style) is presented in **ANNEX B**.

Special attention should be paid to editorial style and format to eliminate both substantive and non-substantive errors (e.g. language, spelling) that can lead to rejection or to avoid the publication of positively reviewed dissertations that contain serious errors.

Presentation of the results of research conducted by a doctoral candidate, alone or in collaboration with other researchers.

The results of research studies that have been previously published in scientific journals can be presented in an empirical monograph, in particular if they have been re-analyzed and combined with new results. The fact that the presented results have been previously published should be clearly indicated in footnotes.

If a cited article has multiple authors, the candidate must obtain the remaining authors' consent to publish selected fragments or results of that study. The candidate's contribution to the study should be described by the remaining authors. A statement regarding the candidate's contribution should also be submitted by the author.

If the cited study was a part of a larger team project, a statement from the research team leader confirming the candidate's contribution, a statement from the doctoral supervisor/supervisors, and the candidate's statement describing his/her contribution to the project should be included in the dissertation. **The candidate's contribution should be indicated on a percentage basis as well as described.**

LANGUAGE

A doctoral dissertation does not have to be written in Polish. In our opinion, candidates should be encouraged to write dissertations in English. Young psychologists should not have any qualms about writing in English. English-language dissertations are also more likely to be reviewed by foreign scientists (similarly to grant applications submitted to the National Science Center).

REQUIREMENTS IMPOSED ON A DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

A doctoral dissertation should contribute original, significant and novel knowledge (not just any new knowledge) to a given subdiscipline of psychology

or to the overall body of psychological knowledge. This requirement is imposed by Article 187, section 2 of the Law on Higher Education and Science.

The novelty aspect is related to the formulated research problem (and hypothesis), the developed research project (theoretical framework, operationalization of variables, research plan, population sample, data analysis).

The extent to which the presented problem contributes to the overall body of knowledge can be determined when it is discussed in the context of the existing literature. For this reason, **a competent review of current international literature applicable to the theoretical and empirical framework of the presented problem (not the entire body of psychological knowledge!) is essential.** The analyzed problem should be analyzed in the context of the existing body of knowledge to enable a reviewer (a competent reviewer) to assess the originality and importance of a doctoral candidate's achievements.

In particular, a literature review should be: (1) **complete** (have any papers that significantly contribute to the problem been disregarded?) and (2) **significant** (does the author focus excessively on issues that are not highly relevant to the analyzed problem?).

Lastly, a doctoral dissertation should not aim to resolve research **problems that are trivial, even if new.**

SELECTION OF DOCTORAL SUPERVISORS AND AUXILIARY SUPERVISORS

Three modes of doctoral supervision are prescribed by Article 190, section 1 of the Law on Higher Education and Science:

1. Doctoral dissertation supervised by one supervisor,
2. Doctoral dissertation supervised by one supervisor and an auxiliary supervisor,
3. Doctoral dissertation supervised by two (or more, if approved by the university senate or the scientific discipline council authorized to grant doctoral degrees) supervisors of equal rank.

A solution involving two (or more) supervisors with an auxiliary supervisor is not a legally prescribed option. In the first option (one supervisor), the supervisor's responsibilities relating to the development of a dissertation plan and schedule (as part of an individual research plan pursuant to the provisions of Article 202 of the cited law) and supervision over the work conducted by the doctoral candidate are clearly defined, whereas the division of responsibilities in the second and third option requires a commentary.

When a doctoral dissertation is prepared with the assistance of a supervisor and an auxiliary supervisor, the competencies of all members of the supervisory team should be clearly defined. In most cases, the auxiliary supervisor is a younger member of academic personnel who specializes in a given type of work (e.g. data analysis, research studies involving specific methodology, etc.). However, a supervisor's and an auxiliary supervisor's competencies should not fully overlap. In particular, a situation where an auxiliary

supervisor does the actual supervisory work, and a supervisor merely approves the results is unacceptable. In our opinion, the division of tasks and competencies in the supervisory team should be clearly described in a separate document.

Before the last amendment to the cited law, a doctoral dissertation could be supervised by two supervisors (interdisciplinary paper) or the main supervisor with a co-supervisor (international paper). In the amended law, this solution was replaced by the third option (two supervisors of equal rank). Various combinations are allowed, and the supervisory team can consist of two or more domestic or foreign supervisors representing different disciplines. However, this solution applies mainly to interdisciplinary papers where the main discipline is difficult to identify.

Therefore, two (or more) supervisors are recommended for dissertations that combine research in psychology with other scientific disciplines. In this scenario, the members of the supervisory team should have more diversified competencies than in the option involving an auxiliary supervisor. **Supervisors should represent different scientific disciplines or significantly different methodological approaches.** In this case also, the division of tasks and competencies in the supervisory team should be clearly described in a separate document.

GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWERS

Reviewers play an important role in the process of approving a doctoral dissertation for publication. The reviewers' contribution has been clearly accentuated in the recent amendment to the cited law (Article 190, section 2). Firstly, the number of reviewers has been increased from two to three. Secondly, to ensure objectivity, reviewers may not be employed by the granting authority or the same university, institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences, research institute or international institute where the doctoral candidate is employed. This solution has been introduced to eliminate conflict of interest. A new provision of the amended law (Article 191, section 1) states that a candidate who has received positive reviews from at least two reviewers may be admitted to the doctoral defense examination.

In our opinion, **reviewers should focus on specific elements of a doctoral dissertation in the revision process.** Positive evaluations of those elements should lead to positive conclusions and, ultimately, approving a doctoral dissertation. The guidelines for reviewers are presented in **ANNEX C: Criteria for evaluating monograph-based doctoral dissertations – guidelines for reviewers.**

ANNEXES

- ANNEX A: Structure of a quantitative empirical monograph (based on APA style)

- ANNEX B: Structure of a qualitative empirical monograph (based on APA style)
- ANNEX C: Criteria for evaluating monograph-based doctoral dissertations – guidelines for reviewers

The full version of the document with annexes is available here: https://kompsych.pan.pl/images/Uchwa%C5%82y/STANDARDY_dla_rozprawy_doktorskiej_jako_monografia_2020.pdf.