

Preparing Citations for the Nomination of Examiners Form and Graduation at ECU

Citations communicate the key story, in research students' theses, in a popular style. The Citation should be understood by The Graduation Ceremony audience and also be useful in a CV used for a job application outside of the researcher's specialised field. A Thesis Topic can be developed if the Thesis Title is too complex for a Graduation audience (see the final section of this document). Usually jargon is avoided or at least explained.

ECU periodically updates the guidelines for preparing a Citation and they take precedence over this advisory document. Currently, the Citation should not exceed 75 words, excluding the Title or Topic (for the guidelines as at 1-3-2013, please see http://intranet.ecu.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/418528/CitationGuideline_130117_FINAL.pdf.) The draft Citation must be sent to the Faculty Research Writing Consultant (FSWC) by email as a WORD document well before you are ready to submit the Nomination of Examiners form, NoEf, (or just before if necessary) so that we can work on it constructively. The FSWC has only an advisory role. If the FSWC can reach agreement with the student, they forward it on to the Associate Dean (Research and Higher Degrees) for approval or suggested revision. Approval of the Citation does not imply approval of the NoEf and, conversely, approval of the NoEf does not imply approval of the Citation for Graduation purposes. The link to the NoEf is simply done to ensure that there is time to get the Citation in an appropriate state for Graduation purposes. The Graduate Research School is no longer involved in approving Citations although they remain interested in being informed about these excellent research projects by reading the approved Citations.

Writing the Citation

The standard approach in developing the story is: what did the researcher investigate and why; what did the researcher find; and, what is the potential importance of the research based either on immediate results or as a springboard for future research?

However, the best approach will vary depending on the project. For example, the methodology used may be important in some projects. Others may not have an immediate practical benefit. Sometimes it was a reasonable idea to test a new approach but the outcomes turned out to be disappointing; in such cases you place more emphasis on why the work was undertaken than on the importance of the results.

Examples of Citations

The draft Citations below were not based on ECU PhD projects but were adapted from projects that involved the RWC with his research students or research partners earlier in his career. This was done to avoid criticism of individual ECU research students' work.

1. An example of less applied research for FHES

Thesis topic: Can abalone host the high populations of gut bacteria needed to digest the fibre in their diet?

Citation: James' thesis re-examined the claim that the complex gut of abalone supports the very high populations of bacteria needed to digest fibre. The acidity levels he measured along the gut indicated that other researchers had estimated bacterial numbers in abalone gut contents held at unrealistically

favourable acidity levels. Microscopic descriptions of the gut also suggested that high bacterial populations could not be retained. Overreliance on high dietary fibre in abalone aquaculture feeds was not recommended. (75 words)

2. Another example of less applied research for FHES

Thesis topic: Exploring blood proteins, to assess how closely related crabs are, instead of using more traditional physical features.

Citation: Greg's thesis characterised the more abundant blood proteins, in numerous species of crabs within the same family, in terms of their mobility along a porous gel situated within an electric field. The aim was to assess whether these markers could provide new insights into how closely related these species are. He concluded that to be useful in replacing or complementing traditional physical characteristics, a wider array of proteins would need to be assessed. (73 words)

3. A more applied study of profitability of industries (FHES or perhaps for an FBL project).

Thesis topic: Estimating the longer term profitability of different Australian aquaculture industries and how predictable these outcomes are.

Citation: Rhonda's thesis estimated the profitability of twelve aquaculture industries based on farmer information obtained in focus groups and individual case studies. By using a range of values for major budget items, she was able to measure the likelihood of any particular profitability result. The effects of anticipated changes in technology and markets on profitability were also investigated. The research will allow investors to make more realistic assessments of each industry and estimate existing farm values. (75 words)

4. An applied project on government approval systems (FHES or perhaps an FBL project).

Thesis topic: Identifying the government approval requirements for aquaculture projects in New South Wales and facilitating preliminary agreement or rejection by multiple organisations.

Citation: Geoff's thesis involved interviews with a wide range of government authorities to assess whether land-based aquaculture farms would require an individual authority's approval and what information would be needed for at least preliminary assessment, for example, an archaeological survey of the site. Previously, resistance to licensing such farms occurred based on the absence of a defined approval system. He developed a highly comprehensive application form that met most authorities' needs for an initial assessment. (74 words)

5. An applied project for an integrated Regional Development project (FHES or a RPS project)

Thesis Topic: Evaluating a marron farm design, using ponds constructed by regional trainees, to trial summer harvesting of these freshwater crayfish

Citation: George's thesis used new marron ponds designed to minimise time out of water during harvests. These were constructed using trainees to enhance local skills. In a 2-year trial, ponds were drained each summer, rather than as usual in cooler months, for stock management and harvesting, respectively. Yields, including for single sex groups, met profitability projections but growth was disrupted after the year-1 drain-down. Commercial adoption of the pond design but not summer harvesting is likely. (75 words)

What information is needed for initiating approval of a Citation for Graduation?

1. Name
2. Student Number
3. Email address
4. Names of all Supervisors including their titles e.g., Professor
5. Thesis Title
6. *Thesis Topic (if the thesis title is too complex for a Graduation audience)
7. *Citation

(*The Faculty Research Writing Consultant, FRWC, can be more effective in helping research students if a draft Thesis Abstract is also provided.)

Key Problems with draft Citations

The major problem that the FRWCs encounter is use of jargon or other complex language. Sometimes the draft Citation does not “tell a story”. The standard approach highlighted above is one way of telling a concise story about your thesis. While ECU is keen for the Citation to include a sentence on the likely usefulness of the research, it is important that this claim be approached as objectively as the writing of the thesis. A grand claim can sound impressive but can it be justified based on the content of the thesis?

What is a Thesis Topic?

This is an alternative to the Thesis Title and is used with the Citation if the Title is written in a style that may be inaccessible to a Graduation audience. Thesis Titles are often written for a specialist audience which will understand the jargon included in the title. In contrast, a Thesis Topic makes no such assumptions and is written in a style that the audience should understand; jargon is avoided or, if that is not possible, it is briefly explained. An example of the two styles is given below:

Theses Title: The nature of the association between male violent offending and alexithymia

Theses Topic: The relationship between violent offending by men and alexithymia, an emotional condition

The challenge here is that there is no popular name for the condition known by psychologists as *alexithymia*.

Some Thesis Titles are self explanatory and can be used with the Citation without the need for a Thesis Topic, as in the example below:

Thesis Title: Social impact of unemployment: Rates of homelessness, divorce, imprisonment and suicide among coal miners. (NB. The nationality has been removed from this invented example.)

Document prepared by Dr Greg Maguire, Research Writing Consultant, FHES (Revised March, 2013)