



DIRECTORATE FOR
RESEARCH &
POSTGRADUATE
SUPPORT

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Guideline – PhD Abstract for Inclusion in Graduation Booklet

Rev 0

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DOCUMENT CONTROL

Owner	Directorate for Research & Postgraduate Support (RPS)
Applies to	All graduating doctoral candidates at DUT
Related instruments	nil
Review cycle	This is a living document; review at least every three years or when national/institutional changes require.
Date of issue	August 2026

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Abstracts for inclusion in the Graduation Booklet need to comply with the following:

- Word Count – 200 minimum, 250 maximum.
- General public tone required:
 - No discipline-specific jargon
 - No citations, footnotes, or in-text references
 - Do not copy the Thesis document abstract
- No diagrams, images, abbreviations, or formulae
- Must be in English
- Must have the following components worked into a general narrative:
 - Context/problem of study
 - Approach/method used
 - Key findings
 - Significance/contribution to **society**

Approval flow: Student – Supervisor – Faculty Research Coordinator – Faculty Officer (for inclusion in booklet)

2. OVERVIEW AND PREAMBLE

The abstract submitted by each doctoral graduate for inclusion in the Durban University of Technology (DUT) graduation booklet is a distinct scholarly and public-facing document. It is not a shortened dissertation abstract and should not be lifted directly from the thesis document. It is the brief statement by which a graduate introduces their research to those present at graduation: family, friends, colleagues, and members of the public with little to no discipline-specific knowledge of the field being presented.

For most PhD graduates, the graduation booklet represents the broadest public exposure their doctoral research will ever receive. It is therefore essential that the novelty of the work and its societal significance are clearly and accessibly communicated to a lay reader.

This Guideline sets out the requirements, structure, and approval process for drafting an abstract for the graduation booklet. It responds to a recurring set of shortcomings observed in previously submitted abstracts, namely that they:

- appear to be lifted directly from the thesis document without redrafting for the intended audience;
- make extensive use of discipline-specific jargon;
- use terms and abbreviations only commonly understood within the discipline;

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- focus only on method and findings, while omitting impact, significance, or contribution;
- are not of an appropriate length, whether too brief or too long; and
- have not been properly checked for syntax and grammar prior to submission.

This Guideline applies to all doctoral candidates at DUT approaching graduation, and to the supervisors, Faculty Research Coordinators, and Faculty Officers responsible for reviewing and processing graduation booklet abstracts.

3. PRINCIPLES AND ALIGNMENT

The following overarching principles guide the drafting and review of graduation booklet abstracts at DUT:

- **Accessibility & clarity:** The abstract must be understandable to a general, non-specialist reader, consistent with its purpose as a piece of public scholarship.
- **Accuracy & integrity:** The abstract must be an honest and accurate reflection of the research undertaken and must be the candidate's own work, redrafted specifically for this purpose rather than copied from the thesis.
- **Consistency:** Guidelines are applied consistently across all faculties, while allowing for reasonable disciplinary variation in tone.
- **Public scholarship:** As the broadest public exposure most graduates' research will receive, abstracts should clearly convey the novelty and societal relevance of the work.

4. GUIDELINES FOR ABSTRACT CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

4.1 WORD COUNT

The abstract must be between 200 and 250 words. Submissions outside this range will be referred to the candidate for revision.

4.2 COMPONENTS

Candidates are advised to structure their abstract according to the following four-part benchmark:

Component	Guidance
1. Context/problem	Around 40–50 words. What gap, question, or issue motivated the research?
2. Approach/methods	Around 40–50 words. What did the candidate actually do (data, methodology, framework)?
3. Key finding(s)	Around 70–90 words. What did the candidate discover or conclude? This is typically the largest component of the abstract.
4. Significance/contribution	Around 30–40 words. Why does the work matter, or who benefits from it?

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5. TONE AND AUDIENCE CALIBRATION

Graduands are to note the following regarding tone and audience in preparing their abstract for the graduation booklet:

- Booklet abstracts are read by family, friends, and members of the general public, not only by academics; the tone must be appropriate for this audience.
- Field-specific jargon and acronyms should be avoided altogether. For example:
 - *With jargon*: "This study employed a mixed-methods triangulation approach to interrogate epistemological assumptions underpinning pedagogical praxis."
 - *Without jargon*: "This study combined several research methods to examine how teachers' underlying beliefs shape the way they teach."
- The abstract must be written in English.
- Abstracts should not open with throat-clearing phrases (e.g. "This dissertation is about..."); they should begin directly with the substantive content.

6. FORMATTING CONVENTIONS

Graduands are to note the following regarding formatting in preparing their abstract for the graduation booklet:

- Third person or passive voice is standard (e.g. "This study examines..." rather than "I examined...").
- Present tense is used for general claims, and past tense for what was specifically done (e.g. "This dissertation argues X. Using Y method, the study found Z.").
- No headers, subheadings, or bullet points should appear within the abstract itself; it should read as a single flowing paragraph (occasionally two).
- The title, author's name, and supervisor names are inserted separately by the booklet template and must not be repeated within the abstract text.

7. COMMON REFERRAL REASONS TO AVOID

Draft abstracts exhibiting any of the following will be referred back to the candidate for revision prior to approval:

- falling outside the 200–250 word range;
- including citations or bibliographic references;
- opening with throat-clearing phrases instead of substantive content; and
- ending without a clear takeaway or contribution statement.

8. APPROVAL PROCESS

The graduation booklet abstract follows a sequential approval process, requiring sign-off at each stage before progressing to the next:

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Stage	Responsible Party	Action
1	Candidate	Prepares the draft abstract in accordance with the requirements in Sections 4–6 of this Guideline.
2	Main / DUT Supervisor	Remains responsible for ensuring the draft complies with this Guideline (word count, tone, no jargon, structure) and is accurate and suitable for a general readership, and approves or returns it to the candidate for revision.
3	Faculty Research Coordinator	Conducts a final check of the supervisor-approved abstract for overall acceptability for inclusion in the booklet, and approves or refers it back for revision. Detailed feedback to the candidate remains the supervisor's responsibility at Stage 2.
4	Faculty Officer	Receives the Coordinator-approved abstract and processes it for inclusion in the graduation booklet.

9. REFERENCES:

Please note that the following documents contributed towards this guideline:

Binghamton University, USA, 2026. *The Graduate School Manual – Theses and Dissertations*, Binghamton, New York: Binghamton University Graduate School.

Columbia University, USA, n.d. *Formatting Guidelines and Dissertation Template*, New York, New York: Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS).

Louisiana State University, USA, 2022. *Thesis and Dissertation Handbook: Pre- and Post-Defense Preliminary Review*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana: LSU Graduate School.

Northwestern University, USA, n.d. *Dissertation Formatting Requirements*, Evanston, Illinois: The Graduate School.

Stellenbosch University, South Africa, 2025. *Formatting and Layout Guidelines for your Thesis or Dissertation*, Stellenbosch, South Africa: Postgraduate Office, Doctoral Office.

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, 2015. *Guidelines for Presentation of Masters and PhD Theses/Dissertations*, Durban, South Africa: College of Health Sciences.

University of South Africa (UNISA), South Africa, 2026. *Abstract – Formatting Your Dissertation (or Thesis)*, Pretoria, South Africa: UNISA Library.

University of Texas at Dallas, USA, n.d. *Dissertation and Thesis Formatting Guide*, Richardson, Texas: Office of Graduate Education.

Vanderbilt University, USA, n.d. *Thesis & Dissertation Guidelines*, Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Graduate School.

Wayne State University, USA, n.d. *Format Guidelines – Dissertation and Thesis*, Detroit, Michigan: Graduate School.

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