

Department of Psychology – Bachelor’s Thesis

(updated March 2024)

The Bachelor’s Thesis is a formal scientific manuscript that serves as the culmination of a student’s independent research. It must be completed as part of a student’s participation in the Psychology Honors Program, the Psychology Capstone Program, or through at least three semesters of faculty-supervised research. Students in the Honor’s or Capstone programs, or those who have participated in three semesters of faculty-supervised research, must be enrolled in PSYC 494: Advanced Research in Psychology during the semester they submit their thesis to the department. The thesis, along with a Letter of Support from the student’s faculty research advisor, is submitted to the department’s Undergraduate Studies Committee. The committee determines if the thesis meets the requirements for earning a bachelor’s degree with Distinction in Psychology.

Distinction in Psychology

Students whose thesis is approved by the Undergraduate Studies Committee are eligible for one of the following categories of distinction:

Highest Distinction – available to students who complete the Psychology Honors Program and have an overall GPA at graduation of at least 3.5.

High Distinction – available to students who complete the Psychology Honors Program and have an overall GPA at graduation of at least 3.0.

Distinction – available to students who complete the Psychology Capstone Program with an overall GPA at graduation of at least 3.0; also available to those who have completed three semesters of faculty-supervised research (including their final semester in PSYC 494) with an overall GPA of at least 3.0.

Guidelines for the Bachelor’s Thesis

1. The thesis document and a Letter of Support from the student’s research advisor (both in pdf format) must be submitted by the posted deadline (see below). This should occur via email attachment sent to: psych-thesis@illinois.edu. Any thesis received after the deadline or without a Letter of Support will not be reviewed by the Undergraduate Studies Committee. Faculty advisors may submit their letters directly to the psych-thesis email address.
2. There is no specific minimum length for the thesis, but it should be a comprehensive document; most are more than 20 double-spaced pages in length. The style should follow accepted professional standards for the student’s subdiscipline of Psychology. The thesis must be written so that it is understandable by any Professor in Psychology or related field.
3. The thesis must contain the following elements, in a single document, presented in the order given below. A sample thesis that earned Distinction is available for review here: [Psychology Bachelors Thesis Information](#)

Title page

The title should describe your thesis clearly, capture the reader’s attention, and do this in as few words as possible. You must follow the LAS formatting requirements, which can be found in the thesis template file here: [Psychology Bachelors Thesis Information](#)

Table of Contents

The Table of Contents provides the page numbers where different sections of the thesis can be found. It should appear on its own page and be labeled at the top of the page.

Abstract

The abstract should appear on its own page, with a label on the first line of the page. It should present a short synopsis of the thesis that includes these elements: (a) background and purpose of the research, (b) methods used in the study, (c) summary of key results, and (d) conclusions. The abstract should be 300 words or less. At the end of the abstract, provide a list of 3-5 keywords (separated by commas) that describe the main themes of the thesis.

Acknowledgments

This page follows the Abstract page and should be labeled Acknowledgements. It can be used to acknowledge others who have influenced you in the completion of the thesis. Some suggestions for writing this section (copied from [Scribber](#)): (a) Write in first-person, professional language; (b) Thank your professional contacts first. Include full names, titles, and roles of professional acknowledgements; (c) Include personal or intangible supporters, like friends, family, or even pets; (d) Mention grant funding bodies that supported any aspect of the thesis.

Introduction

This section begins on a new page right after the Acknowledgments and should be labeled Introduction. It describes the topic and scientific questions that your thesis addresses, reviews the relevant scientific literature, and describes the objectives of the research. In essence, the introduction should make clear to the reader what hypothesis or question your research addresses, why it is important, and how your research will provide an answer.

Methods

This section follows immediately after the Introduction (no page break) and should be labeled Methods (or Materials and Methods). It conveys how the research was conducted so that others can evaluate, and potentially replicate, what was done. It should include a description of the study design, details on how the study was conducted, and details of what statistical or qualitative analyses were performed on the data.

Results

This section follows immediately after the Methods (no page break) and should be labeled Results. It describes in detail the findings from the study. Experimental data should be shown in graphs, figures and/or tables. Tables and figures are often included in-line with the text of the Results section, but may also appear after the References section. Students should check with their advisor(s) to determine the preferred approach for their thesis.

If the experimental results are quantitative, then the appropriate statistical analyses must be used. For qualitative research, the Results section must provide support (e.g. verbatim; narrative; interpretation) for warranted conclusions and describe the efforts employed to ensure rigor through attention to both the specific approach and qualitative standards. Research that consists of an individual case study is NOT acceptable.

You must have data to write the Results section, with computational work or systematic meta-analysis also constituting data in this context. Only in rare cases will the Undergraduate Studies Committee consider a thesis for Distinction if it has no data. In these cases, a letter from the faculty mentor must explain the challenges that prevented the student from collecting data, and the Results section must include how you would have analyzed the data and what you predicted the data would show.

Discussion

This section follows immediately after the Results (no page break) and should be labeled Discussion. It provides your evaluation of the results of your study. You should discuss what the results mean, what their implications are in the context of the available scientific literature, what the limitations and/or unanswered questions are, and what the future directions of the research might be. The findings and their importance should be put in context for your field and clearly convey the contributions of your work to your field of study. You should show that you have carefully thought about the results and their implications, and that you have done so with some independence.

References

This section starts on a new page after the Discussion and should be labeled References. It lists all the citations referenced in the text of the thesis (and should not include literature not cited in the text of the thesis). These citations should be formatted in the style used by a well-accepted scientific journal in your area of psychology (current APA standard is always acceptable).

Tables (if included) and Figures (if included)

As noted above (see *Results*), tables and/or figures may appear within the text of the Results section or following the References section. Each table or figure should be labeled appropriately and in sequential order; they should also include a caption (table) or legend (figure) that provides sufficient information to the reader so they can understand what is shown.

If the tables and/or figures are provided after the References section, tables should appear first followed by figures. Each table and/or figure should appear on its own page. Figure legends can appear just beneath the figure, or figure legends for all figures can appear on a page before the individual figures.

4. Formatting requirements

- a. Use 12-point Times New Roman, 1-inch margins and double-spaced text.
- b. Pages should be numbered at the center of the top or bottom of each page, or at the upper right-hand side at the beginning of the margin of each page. The Title Page should not be numbered; the Table of Contents begins numbering as page 2.
- c. There may be additional formatting norms for your subarea of Psychology. Consult with your research advisor(s) for guidance (current APA standard is always acceptable).

Deadlines for thesis submission – Note these deadlines are firm and no extensions will be granted

Date of Graduation	Submission deadline*
January	First Monday in December
May	April 15
August	First Monday in July

*Please note – Submissions must be emailed by 5pm on the deadline date. These are firm deadlines; no extensions will be granted.

Submission process and evaluation criteria for approval of a Bachelor's thesis

Within three weeks of a complete submission (thesis and letter of support), students will be notified via email if the Undergraduate Studies Committee has made the determination that the thesis meets the requirements for graduating with Distinction in Psychology. This email will contain information about the process for finalizing the submission with LAS via the [Thesis & Capstone Projects Submission System](#).

The final submission of a department-approved thesis to LAS requires the inclusion of a Thesis Certification Form. The form can be downloaded here: [Psychology Bachelors Thesis Information](#). This form requires signatures (in ink, not digital) from the student's faculty advisor and an executive officer in the Psychology Department (usually the Department Head or the Director of Undergraduate Studies). To facilitate timely submission of these documents to LAS, it is recommended that students obtain their advisor's signature around the time of thesis submission to the Department. Once approval of the thesis from the Undergraduate Studies Committee has been confirmed via email, students will take the form to the Undergraduate Studies office to secure the remaining signature needed for submission to LAS.

The Undergraduate Studies Committee will use the following criteria in determining whether the thesis meets the requirements for earning a bachelor's degree with Distinction in Psychology:

- Does the Introduction sufficiently address the currently available literature, put the current study in the context of that literature, and motivate the research question(s) and/or hypotheses that are being addressed?
- Does the Methods section describe the procedures in sufficient detail for the reader to understand exactly what the research entailed and how the study was designed to address the research hypotheses/questions?
- Are the data described and analyzed appropriately with statistical and/or qualitative methods that are generally accepted by the relevant subarea(s) of Psychology?
- Does the Discussion section describe how the results do, or do not, support the hypotheses and does it explain how the findings fit into the broader literature?
- Is the interpretation and discussion of the results and analyses consistent with what the research results show, and does the thesis convey the limitations of those results and their interpretation?
- Is the paper well written and carefully proofread?
- Does the faculty advisor's Letter of Support convey the student's independent role in the project, their level of contribution to the data collection and/or analysis, and the advisor's support of the student earning Distinction?