

# EDUCA593/594 (90/120 points) Education Thesis Guidelines

**Te Kura Toi Tangata**  
**School of Education**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

## Overview

These guidelines are for students who are undertaking thesis research in the field of education in their Masters degree, and for supervisors of Masters thesis students.

A thesis consists of a significant piece of research on a specific topic completed under the guidance of an academic supervisor. It provides the student with the opportunity to deeply engage in a particular research issue, problem, topic or question, and to write a comprehensive thesis in which an argument is made based on relevant literature and evidence from data sources. The student will develop an understanding of and skills in:

- critical review of relevant literature;
- an appropriate research methodology; and
- analysis and presentation of data.

## Definition of terms

1. 'Programme Leader' means the Programme Leader for the student's Masters degree.
2. 'Postgraduate administrator' means the Programme Administrator Postgraduate and Research.

## Time allowed

A thesis has individual start and finish dates. This means a student may begin their enrolment on any Monday during the academic year subject to agreement with their supervisor and full approval being given for their thesis research.

## Three-paper vs four-paper theses

A student may choose a three-paper (90 points) or four-paper (120 points) thesis depending on the number of points required to complete their degree. The difference between the two options is in the size and scope of the research and the time allocation.

	Three-paper thesis	Four-paper thesis
Points value	90 points	120 points
Duration (part-time)	78 weeks (18 months)	104 weeks (24 months)
Duration (full-time)	52 weeks (12 months)	52 weeks (12 months)
Word limit	30,000 words*	40,000 words*

*\*The word count excludes references and appendices.*

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## First steps

Entry into the thesis normally requires:

- a B+ average or higher across a student's prior papers in the qualification;
- completion of an approved research methods paper;
- approval by the proposed supervisor; and
- approval by the Programme Leader and the Director of Postgraduate Research and Programmes.

Entry to the thesis is subject to the School's ability to provide appropriate supervision for the student's proposed research project. Academic staff with a Masters degree or above with research experience in the general field of the thesis are eligible to supervise.

- A student should begin by checking their academic eligibility for entry to the thesis with the postgraduate administrator at [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz)
- If eligible, a student should consider what they would like to research and start to develop their ideas in a research proposal (see next section).
- A student will then work with a supervisor to create a fuller research proposal. As finding a supervisor can take time, students are encouraged to start the process of finding a supervisor a few months before their intended thesis start date.

There are several ways to find a supervisor:

- A student may have already identified a supervisor or approached academic staff they know. A supervisor should establish whether a student is adequately prepared for independent research before agreeing to supervise.
- If a student does not have ideas about a supervisor, they should send their research proposal or research ideas to the postgraduate administrator at [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz). The postgraduate administrator will then liaise with the appropriate Programme Leader.
- The Programme Leader can help a student determine their research question, prepare their research proposal and find a supervisor. They may contact possible supervisors on a student's behalf, suggest academic staff for them to contact, or make an open call to all eligible academic staff via the School of Education email.

## The proposal (three pages, references additional)

It is expected that the thesis, as the research component of the degree, focuses on the specific area related to the qualification. The proposal should contain:

- a working title
- a statement about the significance of the research
- a brief overview of key literature on the topic
- research question(s)
- outline of methodology
- forms of analysis proposed
- consideration of ethical issues
- a timeline
- a reference list

## Enrolment process

- The student submits a research proposal (see above) and a completed EDUCA593/EDUCA594 Education Thesis Application Form to the potential supervisor.
- The student applies online for EDUCA593 (90 points) or EDUCA594 (120 points) Education Thesis.
- The supervisor agrees to supervise the student and signs the EDUCA593/594 Education Thesis Application Form.
- The supervisor sends the form and proposal to the postgraduate administrator at [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz) to obtain final approval and complete online processing.
- Both the supervisor and student are advised when formal approval for enrolment has been granted.

## Moodle support

There is no direct teaching through Moodle for the thesis but students and supervisors will have access to the Moodle site 'FEDU Research Master's Thesis Students & Supervisors' through which resources and notifications about workshops and other events are disseminated.

## Re-enrolment

As a student who is enrolled in a thesis on a part-time basis can only be enrolled for a maximum 60 points/52 weeks at a time, they will need to re-enrol for the remaining points and time period, and pay the balance of the fees before the end of their initial enrolment. They should contact the postgraduate administrator at [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz) at least three weeks before the end of their current enrolment. Masters thesis students are required to be enrolled continuously for the entire period of their thesis.

## Research ethics approval

- Research projects that involve human participants must have ethical approval. This means that if the student intends to send out questionnaires, interview, observe, or otherwise obtain personal information about other people, they need to obtain ethical approval.
- With the support of their supervisor, a student must complete the online FEDU Ethics Application and submit it to the Division of Education Ethics Committee. The student needs to be fully enrolled in EDUCA593 or EDUCA594 before they can submit their application for ethical approval. The Division of Education Ethics Committee Administrator ([fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz)) can advise about the research ethics approval process.
- The initial review of an application for ethical approval takes approximately three weeks. The student should be aware that the reviewers frequently require modifications to be made to the application, and that the time taken to make the modifications and obtain final approval could take a further three weeks or longer.
- If the student's project focuses on involving participants with regard to any one or more issues of physical health, mental health, disability or wellbeing, or involves employees of the District Health Board, they need to apply for ethical approval to the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Committee, not to the Division of Education Ethics Committee. For further information about the application process they should contact [humanethics@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@waikato.ac.nz)

## Code of conduct for research

Students at the University of Waikato must be committed to the highest standards of professional conduct when undertaking research and only participate in work which conforms to agreed ethical standards. For further details see the University of Waikato Calendar - Student Research Regulations: <https://calendar.waikato.ac.nz/research-assessment-graduation/student-research>

## Presentation and submission

### Presentation

The Library guidelines set out the requirements for and give advice on the presentation of the thesis: <https://www.waikato.ac.nz/library/guidance/guides/thesis-writing>

### Submission

The student should submit their thesis on or before the submission date in accordance with the University guidelines:

<https://www.waikato.ac.nz/students/examinations/assessment/masters-theses-and-dissertations>

## Examination

Theses are examined by both an internal examiner (a staff member from the Division of Education or wider University) and an external examiner (generally a staff member from another academic institution with research expertise in a discipline relevant to the research). Examiners normally hold at least a Masters degree or have equivalent qualifications or experience.

## Nomination of examiners

The supervisor fills out the Nomination of Examiners Form. This is available from the postgraduate administrator at [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz) to whom the supervisor submits the completed form. The Director of Postgraduate Research and Programmes makes the final decision on the suitability of the nominated examiners.

Nominated examiners should not normally be:

- directly connected with the thesis student or their research;
- associated with any organisation contractually involved with the thesis research; or
- inactive in the field of the thesis research.

## Final grade

- The postgraduate administrator sends a digital copy of the thesis to the examiners and requests they submit their reports in a timely manner. The suggested timeframe is six weeks.
- Each examiner submits a report and a recommended mark and grade. The Programme Leader confirms the final mark and grade. In keeping with best international practice, greater weight may be given to the external examiner's report.
- If there are discrepant grades, the examiners may be further consulted in order to reach an agreed mark and grade. If agreement cannot be reached, a third examiner may be sought and a final mark and grade decided by the Director of Postgraduate Research and Programmes.
- Once a final mark and grade have been confirmed, the postgraduate administrator will inform the student of their final mark and grade, and provide the student with copies of the examiners' reports.

## Final submission

The student is given three weeks to make minor editorial changes in consultation with their supervisor before submitting their final thesis. The student should submit their final thesis on or before the due date in accordance with the University guidelines at this link:

<https://www.waikato.ac.nz/students/examinations/assessment/masters-theses-and-dissertations>

## **Change of conditions of enrolment**

### **Extension**

#### **21 day grace period**

A student who expects their thesis will not be ready for submission by the due date may apply for a 21 day grace period for submission or an extension by re-enrolment. It is not possible to suspend a thesis enrolment.

A grace period for submission of 21 days does not require re-enrolment or payment of additional fees. To request a 21 day grace period a student should:

- confirm the 21 day grace period with their supervisor; and
- ask their supervisor to contact the postgraduate administrator at [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz) to request the grace period.
- The postgraduate administrator will notify the student and the supervisor of the new submission date when the grace period has been granted.

#### **Extension with fees**

Extensions of over 21 days require re-enrolment and incur additional fees. To apply for an extension of longer than 21 days, a student completes the Application for Change of Conditions of Enrolment form available from the postgraduate administrator at [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz). If the extension is approved, the fees will be calculated from the end date of the original enrolment and will include any previously approved 21 day grace period.

#### **Extension with a fee waiver on medical/compassionate grounds**

If a student is unable to complete their thesis on time due to circumstances outside their control, they should contact the postgraduate administrator at [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz) who will advise on how to apply for an extension with a fee waiver. Applications for an extension with a fee waiver on medical/compassionate grounds are decided by the University's Associate Director Student Administration, not by the School of Education.

## Change of status

A student wishing to change from full-time enrolment to part-time or vice versa should:

- consult with their supervisor; and
- apply for approval by completing the Application for Change of Conditions of Enrolment form available from the postgraduate administrator at [educ\\_grad@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:educ_grad@waikato.ac.nz).

## Withdrawal

A student wishing to withdraw from EDUCA593 or EDUCA594 should do so prior to the end of the enrolment period by:

- consulting with their supervisor; and
- withdrawing through MyWaikato. Failure to do this may result in an Incomplete Grade (IC) on the student's academic record once the enrolment period is complete, which may prevent the student from re-enrolling in their degree. In the absence of medical or compassionate circumstances, a refund of fees will be given only if the withdrawal is made within the free withdrawal period.
- If a student is unable to complete their thesis due to circumstances outside their control, they should make an application to withdraw through MyWaikato on medical/compassionate grounds. Applications to withdrawal on medical/compassionate grounds are decided by the University's Associate Director Student Administration, not by the School of Education.

## Important advice for the student and supervisor

While each student's journey through their thesis will be different, there are some general ideas to keep in mind.

### Initial considerations

This is a relatively substantial research project and the student should be required to display competence in conceiving and conducting a clearly defined study. However, it is important that both the supervisor and student do not become overly ambitious and exceed the boundaries of the thesis.

When designing the research project, they should keep in mind the time and length limitations. For example, it might not be appropriate for the student to design their own questionnaire or other instrument, or interview more than two or three people. The study may replicate an existing study in a new context rather than designing a new or innovative research project.

### Meetings between the supervisor and the student

From the beginning, it is important to map out the trajectory for the thesis. The student and supervisor should agree in the early stages on ways of working by setting up timelines and a schedule for meetings. This helps clarify expectations and keep the research and thesis writing on track.

It is important that the supervisor and student maintain regular meetings (suggested to be monthly) to monitor progress and ensure timely completion of the thesis. Students should audio record these meetings with permission. They should also create a written summary and email this to the supervisor 1-3 days after the meeting. This ensures that the student has understood the supervisor's guidance and expectations, and that the student and supervisor are both monitoring progress.

## **Writing drafts**

An important part of any research process is writing, and students should expect to write several drafts before their research is ready to be presented for examination. They may find that writing the thesis requires a higher level of information literacy skills and the development of a more sustained argument than in their previous study. Supervisors should direct students to the [Academic Liaison Librarians](#) and [Student Learning](#) for additional help.

## **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism whether intentional or unintentional is viewed as serious misconduct and may result in disciplinary action. It is defined in the Student Research Regulations:

<https://calendar.waikato.ac.nz/assessment/studentresearch.html>

## **Reading drafts**

While supervisors will guide students and assist them to structure their research report in a coherent manner, it is not the supervisor's responsibility to write the thesis for them. Supervising postgraduate students is only one part of a supervisor's workload and students should provide, as far as possible, well organised and grammatically accurate written drafts with correct referencing. In this way supervisors can concentrate on the content which is their major area of focus and support.

It is important for students to be aware of how much time is required to comment on a draft and to take this into account when submitting drafts and waiting for feedback. Students may point out specific aspects that they would like supervisors to comment on with their drafts. Drafts should normally be presented at least seven days before a meeting.

## **Research environment**

For many students the thesis provides initial experience in the research environment and students should take every opportunity to participate in the wider intellectual life of the University. Supervisors will encourage students to attend seminars and conferences, present aspects of their work if there is an opportunity, attend workshops that help them to develop necessary research skills, and where applicable, suggest publication in appropriate journals.

## **Weekly workload**

The anticipated workload for a full-time postgraduate student is 40 hours a week and a part-time postgraduate student 20 hours a week. This means that students are expected to devote an appropriate amount of time to their thesis. It is recognised that this workload may fluctuate in relation to other demands on a student's time.

## Issues of concern

- If the student has any problems which may be interfering with their study or research, these should be shared in the first instance with their supervisor. It is important that the student keeps their supervisor informed about any issues that may interfere with their progress.
- If issues arise in the relationship between student and supervisor that cannot be resolved, the student should contact their Programme Leader. The Programme Leader may choose to involve the Head of School and Director of Postgraduate Research and Programmes.
- Likewise, if the supervisor has concerns about the student they should contact the relevant Programme Leader and if deemed necessary, involve the Head of School and Director of Postgraduate Research and Programmes.

## Assessing the thesis

The examiners' reports will generally comment on the areas listed below (where appropriate). Examiners will not give equal weight to each of these areas. Their judgment will be based on the quality of the completed research and where relevant, the integrity of the methodology used, and the student's ability to critically evaluate their research in relation to key literature and relevant contexts.

- abstract;
- introduction, conceptual framework and literature review;
- exposition of the research goals or questions, and significance of the research;
- methodology, design, and methods;
- presentation of findings;
- interpretation of findings, discussion and implications;
- academic conventions of the thesis (e.g. structure, referencing, grammar, clarity of writing); and
- coherence of the work as a whole and contribution to the field.

## Marking criteria

These marking criteria can be used for a thesis that takes the usual form of a research report for a project.

Grade Range	Description
A	<p>A thesis in the A range is an <b>excellent and coherent</b> piece of work that includes all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a coherent and succinct abstract that clearly summarizes the major aspects of the study including the overall purpose of the study, problem or question; the methodology and methods; setting and participant; major findings; and a brief summary of interpretations and conclusions</li> <li>a well-articulated explanation of the issue, problem, or topic</li> <li>an excellent critique of the issue, problem, or topic that includes any current debates</li> <li>a sound academic justification for the study</li> <li>a critical and comprehensive literature review and synthesis of relevant national and international research, including any seminal studies as well as current work in relation to the issue, problem, or topic</li> <li>a well justified and appropriate methodology that demonstrates coherence between a theoretical position and research question</li> <li>a thorough investigative approach that includes a well-described research design and critical approach to methods and/or data generating sources</li> <li>appropriate and accurate data analyses</li> <li>findings clearly presented and interpreted</li> <li>findings considered through critical discussion and critique in relation to the existing body of research</li> <li>well-formulated conclusion and if appropriate identifies implications for practice and/or poses research question(s) to address any identified gap(s) in the field</li> <li>a consistently high level of academic writing including a sound and logical structure, few errors in spelling and grammar, correct use of citations and referencing, and adherence to the latest APA writing conventions</li> </ul> <p>Additionally, the student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrates capacity for doctoral research and would be a likely scholarship candidate; and</li> </ul>

	might also demonstrate a scholarly stance that includes independent thought or creative ideas.
B	<p>A thesis in the B range is a <b>sound</b> piece of work that includes all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a clear and succinct abstract that summarizes the major aspects of the study</li> <li>a clear explanation of the issue, problem, or topic</li> <li>a justification for the study</li> <li>a reasonably comprehensive literature review and synthesis of relevant national and international research, including any seminal studies as well as current work in relation to the issue, problem, or topic</li> <li>an appropriate methodology that demonstrates a link between a theoretical position and research question</li> <li>a suitable investigative approach that includes a description of the research methods</li> <li>careful and coherent data analysis</li> <li>findings presented clearly with some interpretation</li> <li>discussion of findings mostly descriptive and tentatively linked to the existing body of literature</li> <li>a conclusion that shows some appreciation of the importance of the findings</li> <li>a very good level of academic writing with a clear structure, a low proportion of errors in spelling and grammar, correct use of citations and referencing, and adherence to the latest APA writing conventions</li> </ul>
C	<p>A thesis in the C range is an <b>adequate</b> piece of work that includes most of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a clear abstract that summarizes the study</li> <li>an adequate explanation of the issue, problem, or topic</li> <li>a justification for the study</li> <li>a good literature review and synthesis of relevant national and international research in relation to the issue, problem, or topic</li> <li>a suitable methodology that demonstrates a link between a theoretical position and research question</li> </ul>

	<p>a clear description of the research methods</p> <p>evidence of data analysis</p> <p>an adequate presentation of findings with little interpretation</p> <p>discussion is mostly descriptive with some links made to the existing body of literature</p> <p>a conclusion that shows some appreciation of the importance of the findings</p> <p>a good level of academic writing but may contain weaknesses in structure, and noticeable errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, or referencing</p>
D	A thesis in the D range demonstrates major <b>deficiencies</b> in some, or deficiencies in many of the expectations outlined above.